

badges, which, as we have seen, were about this time enforced by parliament.

It appears, from this pamphlet, that the poor's rates for the county of Devon amounted, in the year 1698, to 38,991*l.* 13*s.* 5*d.* a year; which is asserted to be 30,000*l.* a year more than they were fifty or sixty years before; and that the whole amount of the poor's rates in the kingdom was then above twenty-one times as much, or more than 819,000*l.* a year; that, as *one age* had given a *fourfold advance* in Devonshire, it is worth consideration whether or not the public be in danger: for, if the rates of the whole kingdom increase proportionably, they will amount in another age to 3,276,000*l.*—Such is the reasoning in this pamphlet; let us now examine the fact.

About the middle of the 17th century, the assessment

for the poor, in the county of Devon, was annually

about	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8,291
In the year 1698, about	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	38,991
In the year 1785, by the return of the overseers	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	85,492

Therefore the gradual rise in this county was, in the first fifty years, about 30,000*l.*; in the next eighty-seven years 46,501*l.*

Taking the same dates for the poor's rates of the whole kingdom, the account will stand:

About the year 1650, at	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	£. 188,811
In the year 1698, about	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	819,000
In the year 1785, by the overseers returns	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2,184,904

In the first fifty years the rise is 730,189*l.*;—in the next eighty-seven years 1,265,904*l.*

The fact does not turn out quite so destructive to the interests of the public as the writer of this pamphlet prognosticated; but it presents a tremendous advancing increase, as well in an individual county, as throughout the kingdom.

Let

Let us now examine the prices of wheat at these three separate periods. The table of the price of wheat at Windsor-market, in vol. xiv. p. 227, of the Annals of Agriculture, will enable us to do it accurately.

					£. s. d.		
Average-prices of wheat, from 1630 to 1654, by the							
quarter	-	-	-	-	2	9	10
Ditto, from 1687 to 1711	-	-	-	-	2	4	2
Ditto, from 1765 to 1789	-	-	-	-	2	6	11

The expense attending the maintenance of the poor does not, therefore, arise from the increased price of wheat; because, by this table, wheat is cheaper on the average of the last twenty-five years, ending in 1789, than in that of the first, ending in 1654; and but a little dearer than that ending in 1711.

The astonishing increase towards the close of the last century can be accounted for much more reasonably than that which has arisen in this. When the first estimate was taken, towards the middle of the century, the civil war, and its consequential depredations, found employment and sustenance for a very considerable body of the poor. The soldier is not maintained by the poor's rate; and the wages of those who remained to till the lands, or were employed in our then-mouldering manufactures, were probably raised on account of the want of hands. No such cause existed in 1698 or in 1785; and the price of wheat in 1698, referring to the same table, was 3*l.* 0*s.* 9*d.* a quarter; and, in 1785, 1*l.* 16*s.* 11*d.* a quarter. It appears, therefore, that the price of wheat has no effect on the expense attending the maintenance of the poor; and wheaten bread is, and long has been, the principal part of their food: this, although it appears a paradox, is a truth. When wheat was 3*l.* 0*s.* 9*d.* a quarter, the expenses of the poor amounted to but little more than one-third as much as in 1785, when the price of wheat was only 1*l.* 16*s.* 11*d.* a quarter.

As,

As, by this statement, it appears that the price of bread has no effect on the poor's rate; and it is believed that, all things considered, the expense of *necessary* clothing is not more increased than the last article (an assertion, the proof of which shall not now be entered on); and the article of firing remains also nearly at the same price it was a hundred years ago, theft supplying (in woodland-countries particularly) an ample succedaneum for price; it follows, that we should find out the probable cause of this alarming fact: alas! a superficial observer may read it as he runs, that indolence and luxury are the too-obvious causes: indolence forces numbers on our rates, which industry would maintain; luxury uses profusely what economic temperance would save: the one adds a million paupers to be maintained by us; the other expends, in the maintenance of that million, what ought to maintain double the number: the one, brings the multitude; the other, imaginary wants.\*

Juvenal exclaims, when contemplating the decadency of the Roman empire, strongly typified by Britain, in its profuse extravagance,

———Sævior armis

Luxuria incubuit, victumque ulciscitur orbem.

The fact comes home to us, in every class and description of people; as well poor as rich, the governors and the governed. The consequence is also approaching; and our duty will be to submit, with resignation to that catastrophe, which we cannot sufficiently rouse our energy to oppose.

\* The reader should be reminded, that this calculation, and the conclusion resulting from it, was written before the extreme high price of wheat, and a proportional dearth of every other grain, together with meat, had reduced the poor to extremity of distress, in the years 1795 and 1796. The various consequences resulting to the nation, from that most grievous affliction, will be observed upon, in its proper place, in the continuation of this history to the present day.

## L E T T E R   XIV.

**N**EXT, in order of time to this publication, follows an Essay towards regulating the Trade, and employing the Poor of this Kingdom; written, about the year 1700, by John Cary, Esq.; an abstract from which may be seen in Dr. Burn's History of the Poor-Laws; a publication which, had it been in my possession when this inquiry was first instituted, would have diverted me from the investigation; as I should have scarcely chosen to have gone over that ground, which so able a writer had beaten before me.

Mr. Cary attributes the burthen of the poor's rates to idleness; and inquires,

1. What hath been the cause of this idleness; and how hath it crept in upon us?
2. What must be done to restrain its going farther?
3. What methods are proper to be used to make provision for those who are past their labour?

The cause of idleness, he says, is the abuse of the poor-laws we have, and want of better; the encouragement of ale-houses, on account of the revenue; but, above all, our laws to set the poor at work are short and defective, tending rather to maintain them as poor, than to raise them to a better way of living; rendering the poor more bold, by their knowing that the parish-officers *must either find them work or give them maintenance.*

Nothing but good laws can restrain idleness; such as may provide work for those that are willing, and force those to work who are able. For this purpose work-houses are recommended, where the poor may be employed in manufactures.

The poor should also be employed in navigation, husbandry, and handicrafts.

The



The justices of peace should have power to assign youth to artificers, husbandry, manufacturers, and to bind them apprentice.

As to those of elder years, who will rather beg than work, let them be forced to serve the king in his fleet, or the merchants on board their ships.

Young people should be prohibited from hawking and singing ballads about the streets; stage-plays, *lotteries*, and *gaming-houses*, should be strictly looked after.

Alms-houses are recommended for those who are not able to work, or whose work is not sufficient for their maintenance. Poor's rates should be assessed with greater equality in cities and manufacturing-towns, where the poor are serviceable to the rich manufacturers, by carrying on their trade; yet, when age, sickness, or a numerous family, make them desire relief, their chief dependence must be on those who are but a step above their own condition.

Mr. Cary speaks, with praise, of an act of parliament which passed in the 7th and 8th year of William and Mary, for establishing a work-house at Bristol; which, he says, was pretty much on the plan proposed by Sir Josiah Child for the cities of London and Westminster; but, as this act is calculated for cities and great towns only, and cannot be a model for counties, he subjoins the following proposal, to carry this design on throughout the kingdom:

That power be given, by act of parliament, for parishes to incorporate ~~for~~ building hospitals, work-houses, and houses of correction, for employing the poor, under the management of guardians of the poor: the incorporation to be by hundreds.

The guardians to be the justices of the peace within the district, together with a number of the inhabitants, chosen out of each parish, in proportion to the assessment the parishes respectively pay.

The election of guardians to be every year, or two years.

The

works, and particularly attended to those tracts which he wrote on lowering the interest of money, and raising its value; a speculation which occupied the attention of the nation towards the close of the last century; but the actual situation of the poor not coming under his consideration, nothing very applicable to the subject is to be found; although a confused recollection strikes me, that some modern pamphlet on the poor-laws, or their regulation, had stated Mr. Locke's ideas on the subject as erroneous: whether so or not, it became me, while in pursuit of this inquiry, to know what those ideas were, which, had they been found among his works, whether wrong or right, demanded, on account of his great name, that they should be noticed; for such a mind as his, on every topic which may have been the object of its disquisition, is a polar star to the ignorant wanderer: although nothing directly applicable to the police of the poor is found, yet a comparison which he makes between a kingdom and a farmer is so much in point with their present profligate situation, the careless conduct of their overseers, and that spirit which has unhappily got head among our rulers, of encouraging the commercial world, at the expense of agriculture, and every principle of internal economy; while, at the same time, it so strongly authenticates the alarming prognostics of our decadency, alluded to a few pages back; that the whole passage, falling from the height of that great name, must make an impression, and occasion it to be worth transcribing.\*

"A kingdom grows rich just as a farmer, and no otherwise. Let us suppose the whole island of Portland one farm; that the owner, besides what serves his family, carries to market, to Weymouth and Dorchester, &c. cattle, corn, butter, cheese, wool, or

\* Again it should be recalled to the mind of the reader at what time these letters were written. No Board of Agriculture was then instituted; the labours of my friend, to whom they are addressed, laudable and persevering as those labours were in that best of national causes, the improvement of agriculture, had then received no national encouragement.

cloth, lead, and tin, all commodities produced within his farm of Portland, to the value of 1000*l.* yearly; and, for this, brings home in salt, wine, oil, spice, linen, and silks, to the value of 900*l.* and the remaining 100*l.* in money. It is evident he grows every year 100*l.* richer, and so at the end of ten years will have clearly got 1000*l.*—If the owner be a better husband, and, contenting himself with his native commodities, buy less wine, spice, and silk at market, and so bring home 500*l.* in money yearly, instead of 1000*l.* at the end of ten years, he will have 5000*l.* by him, and be so much richer; he dies, and his son succeeds, a fashionable young gentleman, that cannot dine without Champaigne and Burgundy, nor sleep but in a damask bed, whose wife must spread a long train of brocade, and his children be always in the newest French cut and stuff; he, being come to the estate, keeps on a very busy family, the markets are weekly frequented, and the commodities of his farm carried out, and sold as formerly; but the returns are made somewhat different, the fashionable way of eating, drinking, furniture, and clothing for himself and family, requires more sugar and spice, wine and fruit, silk and ribbons, than in his father's time; so that instead of 900*l.* per annum, he now brings home, of consumable commodity, 1100*l.* yearly. What comes of this?—He lives in splendour it is true; but this unavoidably carries away the money his father got, and he is every year 100*l.* poorer. To his expenses, beyond his income, add debauchery, idleness, and quarrels among his servants; whereby his business is disturbed, his farm neglected, and a general disorder and confusion prevail through his whole family: this will tumble him down the hill the faster, and the stock, which the industry, frugality, and good order, of his father laid up, will be quickly brought to an end, and he fast in prison; a farm and a kingdom, in this respect, differ no more than as greater and less. We may trade, and be busy, and grow poor by it, unless we regulate our expenses; if to this we are idle, negligent, dishonest, malicious, and disturb the sober and

and industrious in their business, let it be upon what pretence it it will, we shall ruin the faster."

This comparison of Mr. Locke's runs on all-fours, as well with the actual state of the property, applied to the use of the poor in this kingdom, as with the situation of the finances belonging to the state itself. The reign of Elizabeth made the maintenance of the poor *compulsive*, with respect to the laity, which was in remoter times *voluntary*; what might, in those days of frugality, be taken from the pockets of her subjects by poor-rates, we know not; but we know, that, about the middle of the last century, the cattle, corn, butter, cheese, wool, yarn, consumed by this large family, cost about 118,000*l.* more than the produce of their industry amounted to; fifty years afterwards their expenses out-ran their income annually 819,000*l.*; in 1785, the surplus of their expenses, above their income, or the produce of their industry, gradually had increased to the enormous sum of 2,184,904*l.* annually. Here you see plainly the effects of the change of manners and living, so forcibly instanced in Mr. Locke's comparison; in the eating, drinking, furniture, clothing, sugar, spice, wine, and fruit, *otherwise tea and gin*; to which may be added, the debauchery, idleness, and quarrels of the individuals, which compose the bulk of this numerous family: to examine the comparison, with respect to the kingdom at large, is not the business of this tract.

The reign of Queen Anne is not so memorable for any laws regulating the internal police of the kingdom, as for the many blows which the ambitious spirit of Louis the Fourteenth received from the arms of the allies: nothing of material consequence was done with respect to the poor. By the 33d chapter of the fifth parliament, the vagrant-act of the last reign was continued, with some farther directions; as was, by the following chapter, an act made in the 13th and 14th year of Charles II. for the better relief of the poor, and continued by the legislature at different times since, and which was ultimately made perpetual by chapter the 18th of the

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the 12th year of this reign ; and, by chapter 23d, all the laws relating to rogues, vagabonds, sturdy beggars, and vagrants, were also reduced into one act of parliament.

Neither does the subject seem, throughout this reign of war and conquest, to have occupied the attention of individuals ; no publication of any account having lived to the present day, except a letter to the parliament by the author of Robinson Crusoe, one of those very few books which the late Dr. Johnson said he had been able to read *without skipping*. Daniel Defoe, in 1704, chose to publish a declamatory epistle, addressed to the parliament, with the following title, *Giving Alms no Charity, and employing the Poor a Grievance to the Nation*.

In this publication he informs his readers, that Queen Elizabeth, in her progress through the kingdom, observing the vast throngs of poor flocking to see and bless her, being struck with the multitude, frequently exclaimed, *Pauper ubique jacet* ; and this truth, so tersely expressed by her, occasioned a continual study in her mind how to recover her people from poverty, and make their labour more profitable to themselves in particular, and the nation in general.

He lays down the following as fundamental maxims :

1. There is in England more labour than hands to perform it, and consequently a want of people, not of employment.

2. No man in England, of sound limbs and senses, can be poor merely from want of work.

3. All our work-houses, corporations, and charities, for employing the poor, and setting them to work, as now they are employed, or any acts of parliament to empower overseers of parishes, or parishes themselves, to employ the poor, except, as shall be hereafter excepted, are and will be public nuisances, mischiefs to the nation, which serve to the ruin of families, and the increase of the poor.

4. That



4. That it is a regulation of the poor that is wanted in England, not a setting them to work.

These maxims he professes to demonstrate, but does not entirely succeed in the attempt, although he makes some very sensible observations in the course of his argument on each of the heads.

Dearness of labour he advances as a proof of the first maxim; and gives due praise to Elizabeth for what she did for the poor, particularly by encouraging the French manufactories, when the persecution under the Duke d'Alva drove them from the Netherlands; and also by that excellent act of parliament, in the 43d year of her reign, so often alluded to.

The stress of his argument lies against employing the poor in work-houses, corporations, houses of correction, and the like; because the method proposed to employ them is by spinning, weaving, and manufacturing our English wool; manufactures of which are all exercised in England to their full extent, and rather beyond their vent than under it; he, therefore, is of opinion, that, for every skein of worsted spun in one place, there must be one less spun elsewhere. He supposes a manufactory of baize to be erected in Bishopsgate-street; unless a greater consumption can be found for more baize than were made before, for every piece made in London, there must be one less made at Colchester, and, therefore, this is not increase, but only transposition of manufacture.

The only thing to be done is, to introduce some foreign manufactory; something which was not made here before.

He considers the poverty and exigence of the poor in England to be plainly derived from casualty or crime: by casualty he means sickness, loss of limbs, or sight, and any natural or accidental impotence.

The crimes of the poor, and whence their poverty is derived, as from visible and direct fountains, are luxury, pride, sloth. The pride of good husbandry is no English virtue: it may

may have been imported ; and, in some places, it thrives well enough.

The English labouring-people eat and drink ; but, especially, drink three times as much in value as any foreigners.

He accuses us of being the most lazy *diligent nation* in the world. Among our poor there is a general taint of slothfulness, which distemper he conceives to be so epidemic and deep-rooted, that it is a question whether an act of parliament will reach it. The number of the poor is occasioned by the men *who will not work*, not by those *who can get no work* ; all the work-houses and overseers in England will not reach this case : but if such acts of parliament can be made, as will effectually cure the sloth and luxury of the poor ; will make drunkards take care of their wives and families ; spend-thrifts lay up for a wet day ; lazy fellows diligent ; and thoughtless, sottish, men careful and provident ; if this can be done, they will soon find work enough, and there will be less poverty among us : if it cannot be done, setting the poor to work on woollen manufactures, and thereby encroaching on those who now work at them, will ruin our trade, and increase the number of poor.

A bill, brought into parliament by Sir Humphry Mackworth, for employing the poor, which had passed the Commons with great approbation, gave rise to this tract. By this bill it was intended, as Mr. Chalmers, in his *Life of Defoe*, tells us, to support work-houses, in every parish, with parochial capitals, for carrying on parochial manufactures : but it was thrown out by the Peers ; to which, it is probable, this sensible pamphlet very much conduced ; in which he pretends, that he *could* propose a regulation of the poor, which would *put a stop to poverty, beggary, parish-charges, assessments, and the like* ; and promises to do so, when he has gone through the proof of his maxims ; but waves the performance, for this very *inadequate* reason, — because he will not presume to lead a body so *august*, so wise, and so capable, as the honourable assembly to whom the tract is dedicated.

There are, in this tract, many excellent observations, expressed with great dignity. That part, which tends to prove that giving alms is no charity, lays down some sensible maxims, on which he rests the strength of his argument, which tends to prove that parochial work-houses should not be encouraged for the purpose of parochial manufactures. After having proved that there is more work in the kingdom than hands to perform it, he asserts, that begging is a mere scandal: in the able, it is a scandal on their industry; in the impotent, upon their country. The poverty of England does not lie among craving beggars, but among poor families, where the children are numerous, and where death, or sickness, has deprived them of the labour of their father. An alms, ill-directed, may be charity to a particular person, but becomes an injury to the public.

That Mr. Defoe is right in these principles, there surely can be no doubt; and the truth, that we have *more work in the kingdom than hands to perform it*, comes home to, and establishes, another principle, — that the poor *should be trained to do all the work that the nation can find them*. Early habits of industry are most likely to effect this end; schools of industry must, therefore, be the means.

It surely is no despotic or slavish maxim, that the children of individuals are, in some respect, the children of the state. Republics, renowned for the freedom of their government, acted on this principle: *à fortiori*, the children of those who receive their maintenance, or any part of it, from the property of their fellow-citizens, by virtue of the ordinances of the state, are the children of the state; which, consequently, has a right to superintend their education.

Apply this principle to every individual who does not maintain his family, but has relief from the overseer: his children belong to the state: it is the duty of the state to take care that they turn out industrious subjects; and I am sure interest here well coalesces with duty; schools of industry are the means. The first section of 43d Elizabeth provides for their support. The end will

will be an industrious, moral, poor: a blessed contrast to the laziness and dissoluteness so much and so universally complained of.

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LETTER XVI.

**I**N the fifth year of George the First, the parliament empowered the church-wardens and overseers, by warrant from two justices, to seize so much of the goods and chattels, and receive so much of the annual rents and profits of the lands and tenements, of such husband, father, or mother, as shall run away, leaving their wives and children a burthen upon the parish, as the said two justices shall direct, towards the disburſing the parish where such wife and child shall be left, and also for their future maintenance: this warrant to be confirmed at the quarter-sessions, where a warrant, also, for the sale of the goods, &c. must be obtained, before they can be disposed of; and to which sessions the officers are to be accountable for the money raised.

Two years after this, it was the opinion of parliament, as declared in the preamble to an act for encouraging the woollen and silk manufactures, and more effectually employing the poor, "That it is most evident, the wearing of printed, painted, stained, and dyed, callicoes, in apparel, household-stuff, furniture, and otherwise, does manifestly tend to the detriment of the woollen and silk manufactures of this kingdom, and to the excessive increase of the poor; and, if not effectually prevented, may be the utter ruin and destruction of the said manufactures, and of many thousands of his Majesty's subjects, and their families, whose livelihoods do entirely depend thereupon." It is therefore enacted, in the year 1720, that none shall wear any garment of printed callico, or any stuff made of cotton, or mixed therewith, which shall be painted,

under the penalty of 5*l.*; or use it in any household stuff or furniture, under the penalty of 20*l.*; and that no tradesman shall make up such furniture, under the same penalty.

This act is not taken notice of, on account of any effect it has at present in the management of the poor, but as introductory of an observation, necessary to be attended to, by those who would wish our statute-book to be a collection of efficient and practical regulations of police; and not, as it in fact is, an immense collection of contradictory, heterogeneous, ordinances, militating, in many instances, with each other; in many, with the principles of sound policy; and, in some, with the actual habit and practice of all his majesty's subjects, of which this statute is a remarkable, but no uncommon, instance.

No longer ago than the year 1720, this prohibition of calicoes and stuff, made of cotton, or mixed therewith, passed into a law; and, in 1790, and many years before, every woman in the kingdom is clothed in these very fabrics; most of our household-furniture is made of them; this prohibition still remaining the law of the land.

The woollen manufactures of this kingdom certainly deserve greater encouragement than either linen or cotton; because wool, the staple-commodity of England, is the produce of our own agriculture; hemp, flax, and cotton, are, at present, generally the product of *foreign* agriculture; and also because the fabric of the woollen manufacture is strong and warm, suited therefore to the use of the bulk of the people: that of cotton and linen, weak and thin, improper for labour and a northern climate. Woollen clothing does not require so much washing as our printed linens and white stockings, an article of great expense in poor families; but *the revenue* is thought to be a sufficient reason for these paradoxical absurdities; and, that the public treasury may abound, drunkenness, gaming, luxury, and ostentatious clothing, are encouraged, in open defiance of the laws of the land. Those magistrates would  
be



be very coolly thanked for a conscientious discharge of their duty, who, to promote sobriety, should lessen the number of ale-houses; to discourage gaming, should authorize the parish-officers to refuse relief to those who singly, or in clubs, buy lottery-chances; or, to promote the manufacture of wool, should encourage informations upon the act of parliament just alluded to; the prevailing and general maxim of financiers, in all times, is *rem facias*; the means are but a secondary object of their attention.

In the ninth year of this reign, the poor-laws again were an object of parliamentary attention, and an act for amending the laws relating to their settlements, employments, and relief, passed; which enacted, that no poor should be relieved, until an oath be made, before *one justice*, of a reasonable cause, and that the person hath applied to a vestry, or to two of the overseers, and been refused relief; a summons is also directed to the overseers, to shew cause why such relief should not be granted, before it is ordered; and, when ordered, the person's name is to be entered in a book to be kept for that purpose, as one who is to receive relief as long as the cause continues, and no longer; and no officer of any parish shall bring to account (except on sudden and emergent occasions) any money he shall have given to any poor person, who is not registered in such book, under the penalty of five pounds.

It has been suggested that one cause of the bad execution of the poor-laws is the constant superintending authority that the legislature has delegated to justices of the peace. Men eminent for their wisdom, and respectable for their opinions, have attributed much of the mischief experienced from this code of laws to the conduct of those who are the supervisors of their execution; nor is the complaint new: the great Sir Francis Bacon, it may be remembered, in the very infancy of the code, threw out an idea to this effect, when he made the distinction between *what was* done by the *distracted* government of justices of the peace, and *what might* be done by a settled ordinance; yet, *whatever* of ill may have accrued in

in general from the superintending authority of magistrates, it has rather arisen from the *not using* their powers, than from either the *abuse* or *misuse* of them. In this particular instance, which respects the pecuniary assistance the poor are entitled to receive from the overseers, the interference of a magistrate appears peculiarly proper, when called to action by the complaint of the poor themselves; because the nearest magistrate has it in his power to inform himself of the real circumstances of the case, and, from his situation in life, is a proper check to any partiality, or improper, although natural, bias, the overseer who lives more immediately in the midst of the poor, and being frequently connected with them, by the different degrees of relationship, and generally as their immediate employer, may be influenced by; which motives operate to a greater degree in the distribution of assistance to the poor, than at first sight might be imagined, and which gave rise to objections of the most serious nature to Mr. Gilbert's Bill, and would have caused an opposition of the most obstinate kind from the yeomanry of this kingdom, had that bill passed into a law; which struck at the root of this power, to give away the money taken, in a great measure, immediately from the pockets of this large and valuable class of our countrymen.

Besides, it will be found, on inquiry, that the money distributed in the weekly list forms no very material proportion of the expenses of a parish;\* and in the distribution of money there is no room for lucrative jobs, no knavish contracts for furnishing the various articles of consumption; and the overseer keeping a fair account can have no profit; and possibly as money is the common representative of all necessities of life, so it is the greatest, most convenient, and best appropriated, relief to the individual. It somewhat,

\* This observation, I fear, ceases, from the pressure of the times, to be in general true at present, although it might be so in 1791.

in its universality of use, resembles Boniface's ale, — "A poor man and his family may eat it, drink it, and sleep upon it."

Church-wardens and overseers, with the consent of the major part of the parishioners in vestry assembled, are also, by this act, empowered to purchase or hire houses to lodge and employ the poor in, and there to keep, maintain, and employ, them: and such poor as refuse to be lodged, maintained, and employed, there, shall not be entitled to relief; parishes are also empowered to join in such purchase, and the officers of one parish may, for that purpose, contract with those of another; but the *settlement* of the poor is not to be affected by their removal to another parish, in consequence of this act.

The acquisition of settlement by purchase is regulated by another section of the act, which directs, that the purchase-money must not be less than thirty pounds *bona fide* paid for the estate, by which a person shall gain a settlement; and that no person, paying to the scavengers or highway rates, shall, on that account, be deemed to gain a settlement: the other sections regulate the notices necessary on appeals, and the relief the appellant shall receive on undue removals.

I have not been able to obtain any tract on the subject written during this reign; nor have I seen any referred to, or quoted, by those which have been since written; the conclusion which follows is, that none of sufficient merit, to escape oblivion, were published; and indeed the little that was done by the legislature is a proof that the subject did not much attract the attention of the nation; that venerable fabric, the 43d of Elizabeth, received a little addition and repairs only, but no material alteration was made.

## LETTER XVII.

**I**T is with great satisfaction, that the opinion of Mr. Locke on this subject, alluded to a few pages back, has been perused; by which it appears, that about the year 1696, the clamour, with regard to the poor, and the burthen of the poor's rate, having attracted the notice of the Commons, they referred it to the Board of Trade to consider the fact, and to report the remedy: on which occasion Mr. Locke, who was one of the commissioners, delivers the following opinion in the report made by the board: \* — “ The multiplicity of the poor, and the increase of the tax for their maintenance, is so general an observation and complaint, that it cannot be doubted of; nor has it been only since the last war that this evil has come upon us, it has been a growing burthen on the kingdom these many years, and the two last reigns felt the increase of it as well as the present. If the causes of this evil be looked into, we humbly conceive it will be found to have proceeded, *not from the scarcity of provisions,† nor want of employment for the poor*, since the goodness of God has blessed these times with plenty no less than the former, and a long peace, during three reigns, gave us as plentiful a trade as ever. The growth of the poor must therefore have some other cause; and it can be nothing else but *the relaxation of discipline and corruption; virtue and industry* being as constant companions on the one side, as *vice and idleness* are on the other. On this first principle, thus clearly expressed by Mr. Locke, whose strong intellectual faculties were employed in the exact situation, to obtain ample intelligence, on the subject he

\* Mr. Chalmers's Estimate, &c.

† By the Windfor-table, the price of wheat, in the years 1696, 1697, 1698, was 3*l.* 3*s.* 1*d.* — 2*l.* 13*s.* 4*d.* — 3*l.* 9*s.*

has thrown such a blaze of light over, one must rest with confidence; in fact, this truth has often discovered itself to us, in faint glimmerings, during the investigation of this subject; and the reader may have perceived how often this sentiment has obtruded itself on the pen. That it meets with such honourable confirmation from Mr. Locke's authority, near a hundred years ago, stamps a signal mark of propriety on the ideas which have been hitherto suggested; and firmly establishes the following assertion, that, unless vice and idleness among our poor are *decreased* since this opinion was given, the multiplicity of the poor, and the still increasing burthen of tax for their maintenance, arises at the end of the eighteenth century, not from scarcity of provisions, and want of employment for the poor, but from relaxation of discipline and corruption of morals.

As it is possible that the remedy for the disease may be discovered by pursuing the inquiry, with equal clearness, as the cause has been pointed out; we shall proceed in the same manner to relate what the legislature has done, and individuals have written, on the subject to the close of the last parliament.

The law, with respect to natural children, remained on the footing the acts of the 18th of Elizabeth and the 7th of James the First had left the subject; until the sixth year of the reign of George the Second, when, it having been found by long experience that the security of parishes was not sufficiently provided for, the legislature, by a statute then passed, in the 31st chapter, enacted, that the person charged on oath of being the father of a bastard-child, by any single woman who shall be delivered, or shall declare herself to be pregnant, and that the child is likely to become chargeable to the parish, shall be immediately apprehended and committed to prison, unless he gives security to indemnify the parish; but that he shall be discharged on the miscarriage of the woman, or if no order be made in pursuance of the 18th of Elizabeth within six weeks after the woman's delivery; and that no



woman shall *involuntarily* be obliged to filiate the child of which she is pregnant, before delivery.

It seems also to have been a doubt, whether justices of the peace could legally act in any case relating to parishes where such justices have property ; from this, some inconvenience arose in the administration of the common business of a magistrate : the 18th chapter of the 16th statute of this reign, therefore, clears up the subject, and empowers them to enforce the laws, with respect to the maintenance, relief, and settlement, of poor persons ; those also with respect to passing vagrants, repairs of highways, and any other laws concerning parochial taxes or rates ; notwithstanding they themselves may be chargeable to such rates.

The following year produces an instance of the attention the legislature paid to the conduct of the overseers of the poor ; who, according to the preamble of the act of the 17th Geo. II. cap. 3. “ on frivolous pretences, and private ends, frequently make unjust and illegal rates, in a secret and clandestine manner :” and the preamble to the 38th chapter of the same statute states, “ that the money raised for the relief of the poor is liable to be misapplied, after it is, with great difficulty and delay, raised.” To obviate these inconveniences, the first act directs, that public notice shall be given in the church of every rate, for the relief of the poor, the next Sunday after the same shall be allowed by the justices ; and that the overseers shall permit such rates to be inspected at all reasonable times, on payment of 1s. for the same, and copies shall, on demand, be given, allowing 6d. for every twenty-four names ; the rate to be void if no such notice be given, and a penalty of 20s. on refusal of such inspection, or copy ; and the 38th chapter directs “ that the church-wardens ~~and~~ overseers of the poor shall yearly, within fourteen days after other overseers shall be appointed, deliver a just, true, and perfect account, in writing, fairly entered in a book to be kept for ~~that purpose~~, and signed by the said church-wardens and overseers, of all the sums of money received, or rated  
and

and not received; and also of all goods, chattels, stock, and materials, that shall be in their hands, or in the hands of the poor, in order to be wrought; and of all moneys paid by such church-wardens and overseers, and of all other things concerning the said office; and shall pay and deliver over all sums of money, goods and chattels, and other things, as shall be in their hands, unto the succeeding overseers; and that this account shall be verified on oath before one or more magistrates, who shall also sign the said account, without fee; and this book shall be carefully preserved; and all persons liable to be assessed shall be permitted to inspect it, on payment of 6d. and copies shall be given also on demand, on payment of 6d. for every 300 words. In case of the death of an overseer, two justices are to choose another; if an overseer remove from the parish, his account, testified as above, shall be delivered to the remaining overseer or church-warden; and the representatives of an overseer shall account within forty days after his decease. Appeals to any rates or assessments, reasonable notice being given, lie to the next general or quarter sessions of the peace; where, if the whole rate be appealed to, the justices may quash it, and order the church-wardens and overseers to make a new one; but, where just cause is seen, to give relief only, by altering the rate, the justices are empowered to amend the rate, in such a manner as shall be necessary to such relief only.

As great care is taken by this act, that the rates shall be fair and equal, and that the parish-officers shall discharge their respective offices honestly; so does it provide against any vexatious actions being brought against them, by declaring that no want of form, either in the appointment of overseers, the rate or assessment, or in the distress, shall render them unlawful; nor shall the parties distraining be accounted trespassers, *ab initio*, on account of any irregularity in their proceedings, but the parties aggrieved shall recover for the special damage sustained by such irregularity.

Succeeding overseers are also enabled to levy any arrears due to former overseers; and, in case of persons removing out of parishes, and others coming in, they shall pay their rates in proportion to the time they have respectively occupied; the proportion to be ascertained by two or more magistrates, and recovered by distress.

Copies of the assessments are also directed to be entered in a book, to be kept for public perusal; the entry to be made within fourteen days after the appeal is determined; and all the regulations in the act are enforced by a penalty not exceeding 5*l.*; and the power of overseers, in places where there are no church-wardens, is declared to be the same, as where they are both church-wardens and overseers; and they are subjected to the same penalties.

The section of this act, which directs the overseers account to be verified on oath before a magistrate, seems not sufficiently to have explained, whether the magistrate is to examine ~~the~~ accounts, article by article; or whether the overseer is to swear to the whole account only, by the lump, and is not obliged to go through an examination, with respect to the articles of his account, on an oath *voir dire*: if this is the case, the magistrate acts officially only, and the oath is but of little service, as an appeal lies to the quarter-sessions.

The 11th chapter of the 31st statute of this reign makes some regulations in the settlement of apprentices; and enacts, that a person bound apprentice, by any deed, writing, or contract, duly stamped, shall be entitled to a settlement where he is so bound and has served: the other section of the act relates to the power given to justices, in settling disputes between master and servants, and consequently comes not under the scope of our present disquisition.

The last act of parliament in this reign, which respects the poor, is statute 32, chapter 22, which provides for the maintenance of the wives and families of militia-men, when in actual service, by directing that the overseers ~~shall~~ pay from the poor's rate, by order of one justice of the peace, a weekly allowance to the distressed families

families of militia-men, embodied, and called out into actual service, according to the usual price of labour in husbandry within the county or district, by the following rule: for one child, under ten years, one day's labour; for two, under the same age, two days labour; for three children, three days labour; for five, or more, four days labour; and for the wife, one day's labour: but that the families of those, only, chosen by *lot*, and not *substitutes*, shall be entitled to this allowance; for which payment the overseers are to be reimbursed out of the county-stock.

To pass over the statute-book of this reign, without mentioning the vagrant-act, the 17th Geo. II. cap. 5. would appear an instance of inattention to the general design of these papers; although much the greatest part of it affords no insight to the subject, because it in general respects the treatment of those who have *forfeited the protection of society*, and are to be considered as its *outcasts*: but if, through the fault of an improper system of legislation, or through the mal-administration of the laws which are in force respecting the poor, the number of those, who come under the description of vagrants, is increased; the laws themselves, or the execution of them, have thrown out of the protection of society a number of people who are not vagrants from their own fault; and, so far, the laws themselves are accountable for the mischief which they have occasioned; while the punishment, severe to excess, falls on unoffending individuals. In enumerating the particular offences which occasion persons to be classed under the description of *idle and disorderly* persons, whom one justice may commit to the house of correction, to hard labour, for a month, are those who *threaten* to run away, and leave their wives and children to the parish. This is a *curious* offence, certainly not a *heinous* one, for it may consist in words only, unaccompanied with acts or intentions; but for this they may be committed; and, if they resist the commitment, or escape, are instantly to be classed among rogues and ~~abonds~~ *rebonds*.

All persons who return to the parish whence they have been removed, without a certificate, stand in the same predicament: the law of settlements, therefore, tends to increase the number of rogues and vagabonds.

All persons who have not wherewithal to live idle, without employment, and refuse to work at the common usual wages given to other labourers, in the like work, in the parish wherein they then live, are also liable to the same punishments, and to become vagrants.

An industrious handicraftsman, who has maintained his wife and family creditably and honestly, by his industry, if removed, from the town where his trade is carried on, to his place of settlement, a village, where there is no employment but in husbandry, must, of necessity, fall under this description; because, not being able, from different habits to those of a labourer, to do a fair day's work, he will not easily find employment. A man does not give up a portion of his natural liberty, and his only property, his ability to earn his bread, for this kind of protection from the social compact. This also arises, in a great measure, from the law of settlements.

All persons who run away, and leave their wives and families, whereby they become chargeable to any parish, are, *ipso facto*, to be deemed rogues and vagabonds; whose punishment is immediate commitment, until the quarter-sessions: then they are liable to be committed to hard labour, for a time not exceeding six months; and, during their confinement, to be corrected by whipping.

In this instance, also, the crime against society may not be sufficiently serious to deserve so severe a punishment. Until a poor person, his wife, or family, has become chargeable to a parish, the restraining him from leaving his home, by the fear of so rigorous a sentence, does not arise absolutely from necessity, and therefore the restraint is not justifiable, on principles of common justice.

The



The *possible* event, which may come to pass from his leaving them, should not, therefore, in the first instance, class him among rogues and vagabonds. He should not be deemed an outcast of society, by anticipation of evil: he should have first been a *pensioner* on the public fund of charity, before he should, by so severe a law, be restrained of his liberty. This description of the crime, therefore, is too comprehensive, and occasions many innocent subjects to be classed with, and be subjected to, the punishment appropriated to rogues and vagabonds.

With but a superficial knowledge of the subject, were these strictures, on the situation of our poor, at first undertaken. The purpose was, to investigate, and point out, the cause of that vast expense, which every rank of society, with reason, complains of, in maintaining this numerous class of our fellow-subjects; and to explain the true foundation of that very wretched situation in which we see too many of them; in fact, to account for this striking paradox, — that, while millions sterling are expended in their relief, millions of the poor still stand in need of more relief than they receive. A distant gleam of hope occurred, also, to the mind, that, by investigating the cause of the evil, possibly the remedy might also be discovered. The method chosen was that of fixing a foundation, in the first principles of society, and proceeding by an historical analysis: this has laid me open to some apparent contradictions and mistakes; these letters being sent to the press, as fresh information gave fresh matter, and enabled the writer to proceed in developing the history of the poor, the laws respecting them, and the opinions of those who have turned their attention to the subject; which mistakes might have been avoided by a different mode of proceeding: but then the communication could not have been prepared for that very useful periodical magazine of agricultural intelligence in which it first appeared: besides, probably, by this means of treating the subject, dogmatic principles or preconceived opinions are avoided; they, at least, have less time to establish themselves.

themselves. The mind, which confesses itself to be employed in obtaining information, is not likely to deal in dogmas; and, when the professed purpose is to digest annals, as a means of arriving at a truth, it would be an aberration, indeed, to attempt the establishment of a system.

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## L E T T E R XVIII.

UNTIL the establishment of literary reviews, the writer of the fugitive piece of the day possessed but little chance of posthumous reputation. His fame resembled the life of the ephemeron in duration, as did the production of his ingenuity that insect by insignificance; both soon perished, and were alike forgotten: unless extraordinary merit, or chance, preserved the one, in the libraries of the learned; and scarcity, or beauty, the other, in the collections of the naturalist.

But few treatises on this subject, written in the early part of the late reign, are now to be found in the shops of the booksellers. Mr. Hay,\* a member of the House of Commons, published, in 1735, some remarks on the laws relating to the poor, with proposals for their better relief and employment. These proposals were reduced into the form of an act, and brought into the House the same year the pamphlet appeared, but did not pass into a law. Among other remarks may be found, in his publication, the following judicious observations:

“ It is certain, that the obligation on each parish to maintain its own poor, and the consequence of that, a distinct interest, are the roots from which every evil relating to the poor hath sprung, and

\* Of Glynd, in Suffex, author of an agreeable Essay on Deformity,

which

which ever must grow up until they are eradicated. Every parish is in a state of expensive war with all the rest of the nation, regards the poor of all other places as aliens, and cares not what becomes of them, if it can but banish them from its own society. No good, therefore, is ever to be expected till parochial interest is destroyed, till the poor are taken out of the hands of the overseers, and put under the management of persons wiser and more disinterested, and until they be set to work on a *national*, or at least a *provincial*, fund, to arise from benefactions, and the labour of the poor, as far as they will go; and what more is wanting to be levied by an equal tax."

On this principle, he proposes, that every person be deemed legally settled in the parish where he has continued a year, without being chargeable; and, if he has gained no such settlement, then at the place of his birth; and, if not born in the kingdom, then where he should want relief.

The heads of the bill, which was rejected, proceeded principally on this idea, and consisted chiefly of a plan for a county or district work-house, if the county should be too large; to be maintained by an equal rate throughout the county, to be governed by twelve persons residing in each district, possessed of a certain estate in land, to be drawn by lot at the quarter-sessions, and incorporated by the name of the guardians of the poor within the district; six of them annually to go out, and six new ones to be chosen in the same manner; benefactors to be guardians for the time being, in proportion to the sum given. They should be enabled to purchase lands, in fee, near the middle of the county or district, thereon to erect buildings for the use of the poor; to furnish and provide stock to set the poor at work. To this plan many regulations are annexed, which, as it never passed into a law, it is unnecessary to transcribe them, or any of his reasons for them.

From this period until 1751, no other publication on this subject ~~came~~ come to hand; and, in that year, Mr. Henry Fielding, as

well known to us in these days for his excellent novels, replete with nature, mirth, and pathos, as he was in those for his excellence as a magistrate, published "An Inquiry into the Cause of the late Increase of Robbers, &c. with some Proposals for remedying the growing Evil." This treatise is full of observations, worthy a man of his abilities and intimate knowledge, from extensive experience, as a Middlesex magistrate, of this important subject; a few of his leading principles, as far as they relate to our present inquiry, shall be given.

After having investigated the nature of the *constitution* of his country, as far it relates to the subject-matter, and explained what he intends by the word *constitution*, he divides the subjects of the realm into three orders, — the nobility, the gentry, and the commonalty: the last division he asserts to be vastly changed from what they were in the days of vassalage, and conceives this change to have arisen chiefly from commerce, which has superinduced an almost unbounded liberty or licentiousness, and a vast addition of power, to that class of people; while, in the mean time, the civil power having decreased in the same proportion, the *laws, as at present administered*, are not able to govern them.

The subject of the first section is, the too frequent and expensive diversions of which the lower class of people partake; this, he says, is one cause of thefts and robberies.

In the second section, he considers drunkenness as a vice which the legislature has been particularly careful to suppress, and that the only blame in this case rests in the remissness with which these wholesome laws have been executed; and adds, "Although I will not undertake to defend the magistrates of former days, who have surely been guilty of some neglect of their duty, yet, in behalf of the present commissioners of the peace, the case is different; they are very different offices, to execute a new or a well-known law, or to revive one which is obsolete. In the case of a known law, custom brings men to submission; and in all new provisions, the ill-will,

ill-will, if any, is levelled at the legislature, who are much more able to support it than a few magistrates." He then expatiates on the terrible consequences arising from drunkenness, acquired by drinking the strongest intoxicating liquors, and particularly gin; and, in a fine spirit of prophecy, foretels the fatal consequences flowing to posterity from this pernicious practice. "Doth not this polluted source, instead of producing servants for the husbandman and artificer, instead of providing recruits for the sea or the field, promise only to fill alms-houses and hospitals, and to infect the streets with stench and diseases?"

The third section is on gaming; but as this vice has not, at present, been so directly the cause of the increase of the poor's rates, as it has of thefts and robberies, and is not, except in the shape of an annual lottery, so likely to tempt the inhabitants of the country as of crowded cities, our author's observations on this vice need not be recapitulated.

The fourth section contains a review of the laws relating to the poor; and, having before run over the consequences of luxury among the lower classes of people, in the instances of diversions, drunkenness, and gaming, as tending to promote their distresses, he considers the improper regulation of the poor as a second cause of thefts and robberies; this, he thinks, proceeds from three sources,—the abuse of some laws, the total neglect of others, and somewhat from a defect in the laws themselves. He adds, that it must be matter of astonishment to any man to reflect, that, in a country where the poor are, beyond all comparison, more liberally provided for than in any other part of the world, there should be found more beggars, more miserable distressed objects, than are to be seen throughout all the states of Europe.

The other sections in this tract relating only to the subject immediately under his consideration, and not affecting our present inquiry, no farther extracts shall be given of the publication.

We



We now proceed to a name known to all the civilized world, and the particular boast of this island; not as a legislator, not as a magistrate, but as a poet and a pleasant moralist.

A pamphlet, entitled, "A compendious or briefe Examination of certaine ordinary Complaints of diverse of our Countrymen in these our Dayes, by William Shakespeare, Gentleman," imprinted in 1581, was reprinted in 1751 in London.

The Monthly Review, a valuable collection of criticism on and repository of most that is worth notice in the literary productions of the last forty years, preserved the republication of this pamphlet to my notice, which certainly, with respect to the remote date of its original publication, should have stood foremost in the list of tracts on the poor; it being written anterior to the great corner-stone of the poor-laws, the 43d of Elizabeth, and to the principle of which it might have afforded a valuable hint.

Although in 1751, when this tract was reprinted, the fame of Shakespeare had not risen to that stupendous height in the opinion of mankind it now possesses; nor had the anecdotes of his life, and criticism on his beauties and defects, swelled to such a bulk as they have since arrived at, through the ingenious comments of Johnson, Farmer, Stephens, Malone, and others; yet one should have imagined that enough had been known of the poet, from Rowe's life of him, to have precluded a possibility of mistaking William Shakespeare, the author of this tract, for our renowned poet: this pamphlet being printed in 1581, when, by the parish-register of Stratford, Shakespeare was not above seventeen years of age, and more probably engaged in the truant pleasures of youth than in writing a serious dialogue between a doctor of divinity, a merchant, a husbandman, and a capper,\* in the handling of which, the reviewers say, the author discovers a much greater knowledge of trade and commerce than people would be apt to expect from a

\* Capper, one who galls and fell caps. JOHNSON.

poet. The depth of observation and knowledge of mankind, as well as of trade and commerce, which was possessed by the writer of this tract, whoever he may have been, may be conceived from the following quotation from it, which appears to strike deeper at the principle of the poor-laws, as far as it respects *compulsive* industry, than any other argument which has fallen under my recollection.

“ It is an old saying in Latin, *bonos alit artes*, that is to say, profit or advancement nourisheth every faculty; which saying is so true, that it is allowed by the common judgement of all men. We must understand also, that all things that should be done in a commonwealth be not to be constrained by the straight penalties of the law; but some so, and some either by allurements, and rewardes rather. For what law can compel men to be industrious in travayle, or labour of body; or studious to learne any science or knowledge of the minde: to these things they may well be provoked, encouraged, and allured, if they that be industrious and painful be rewarded well for their paines, and be suffered to take gaynes and wealth as rewardes of their labours, and so, likewise, they, that be learned, be advanced, and honoured, according to their forwardness in learning; every body will then study to be industrious in bodily labour, or studious in things that pertain to knowledge. Take these rewardes away from them, and go about to compel them by laws thereto, what man will plough or dig the ground, or exercise any manual arte, wherein is any paine?”

As every act of parliament, respecting the poor, proceeds on a principle of compulsion *only*, and is not intermixed with rewards or encouragement incitive to industry, the present system of laws militates with this humane and sensible observation of Mr. William Shakespeare; and it may be the price of our labour, in a future part of this inquiry, to consider whether the principle of the poor-laws would not be meliorated by intermixing allurements to industry with compulsion; but, ~~as this is not the scope~~ in this pamphlet

was

was to recommend the manufacturing our own wearing-apparel, instead of going to a foreign market, for our own materials worked up by foreigners; a question which seems to have excited the attention of the sensible part of the nation, a few years after the Duke d'Alva's severities had driven manufactures and commerce from the Spanish Netherlands into this island; the tract itself contains little more on our subject worth transcribing.

Towards the end of 1751, an anonymous publication made its appearance, entitled, "Considerations on several Proposals for the better Maintenance of the Poor:" the author's design is, to prove that the present system is sufficient, if properly executed; and with great reason is he averse to leaving the poor to be maintained by voluntary contribution, or accidental charity only; because they, having now, for near two hundred years, been maintained by a regular system of laws, enforcing contribution, thousands would perish, trade would greatly suffer, and much confusion would arise from such a total change of system; he thinks, that the division into parishes is sufficiently large; because a multitude can be best governed by a division into subordinate parts; and conceives, that the internal police was better regulated when the counties were divided into hundreds, these hundreds into decennaries, and each man of the decennary was answerable for the rest; he proposes a more strict inspection into the conduct of the poor, and of ale-houses, by the constables of the district, who should make regular weekly returns to the high-constables, and these to make monthly returns to the justices at their petty sessions: on the whole, there appears to be much good sense, knowledge of, and attention to, the principles of the constitution in this tract.

## L E T T E R   XIX.

**E**ARLY in the year 1752, Thomas Alcock, A. M. gives his opinion on the subject, and professes himself highly dissatisfied with the manner of providing for the poor : he dislikes *compulsive relief*, and thinks it hath a tendency to hurt industry, care, and frugality ; the sluggard, on the presumption that he hath a right to relief, is tempted to continue in sloth ; and the glutton as he receives his gains eats them, and the drunkard drinks them ; in short, men labour less, and spend more ; and the very law that provides for the poor increases the number of the poor : compulsion to relieve, he says, is contrary to the principle of charity, and destroys gratitude in the receivers, creates ill blood, murmuring, and indignation, on the side of the contributor : “ it must be allowed, therefore, that the poor-law tends to destroy charity, especially when the legal exaction is so very high, that no less a sum than *three millions yearly*, at a medium, is levied for this purpose, which is equal to a land-tax at six shillings in the pound ; add to this, that the *chameleons*, the impudent, the idle, and least deserving, run away with this vast sum ; while the modest, the bashful, and really indigent, are suffered to languish in the most distressful circumstances imaginable.”

It is impossible in this place to avoid observing upon the fact stated, that *three millions were raised by legal exaction yearly, about the year 1751*, for the poor ; or, in other words, that the poor's rate at that time amounted to three millions yearly ; the fact appears to be questionable ; but, as the account of the poor's rates, returned by the different parishes throughout the kingdom, does not go back to this period, and no other proof to the contrary can be at present advanced, Mr. Alcock must be allowed credit for the assertion, that three millions were raised by the poor's rate annually,  
about

about the year 1751; because, the nature of his argument, as well as the pointed expression, *legal exaction*, preclude the idea of his mixing the numerous charitable funds and contributions throughout the kingdom to swell the produce to that enormous sum.

Now, the Windsor-table of the prices of wheat, which has been once before referred to, states the price, in 1750, at 1*l.* 8*s.* 10*d.* a quarter; and, in 1751, at 1*l.* 14*s.* 2*d.*; in 1785, at 1*l.* 16*s.* 11*d.*: but, by the overseers' returns to the House of Commons, the poor's rate, in 1785, amounted only to 2,184,904*l.*: the expenses of the poor were, therefore, less in that year, than in 1750, above 800,000*l.* and wheat 8*s.* a quarter more; another proof that the price of bread increasing has not been the cause of an increase in the poor's rate.\*

It would extend this inquiry to a tedious length, if every scheme which has been offered in print, on the maintenance and employment of the poor, were to be detailed. Mr. Alcock, whose language is rather declamatory than argumentative, likewise offers his plan; the intent of which is, to relieve the indigent, without oppressing the public in such an intolerable manner. He is not for *repealing* the poor-laws, but only for *amending* them; and, among other matters, proposes a plan of hundred work-houses, to consist of three parts; one for the impotent, the able, and the industrious poor; the second for the sick; and the third for the vagrant and idle poor; to be built and furnished at the expense of the several parishes, in proportion to what they paid, at a medium, for maintaining the poor, the last four years. The overseers of the parishes to be governors thereof, annually, by rotation; and all persons that

\* In 1680, a regular estimate was made of the poor's rate, and it amounted to 665,362*l.*; and, in 1772, it amounted to 3,000,000*l.*: in 1680, wheat was 2*l.* a quarter, in 1772, it was 2*l.* 15*s.* 1*d.*: here the price of wheat is increased little more than one-third, and the rates more than quadrupled. ANNUAL REGISTER, 1773.



beg, or ask relief, to be sent to this house, and immediately admitted, on an order signed by the overseers of the respective parishes; and no money, but what passed through this house, to be charged to the parish by the overseers.

The subject seems now to have attracted the attention of some enlightened minds among the higher orders in the state. The Earl of Hillsborough and Sir Richard Lloyd drew up two separate plans into the form of an act of parliament, but neither of them passed into a law.

The Earl, by his plan, printed in 1753, proposes to repeal all the poor-laws, and to destroy every idea of settlements and removals; and to re-enact, with some alterations, the clauses appointing overseers, the mode of levying a rate, the laws respecting bastard-children, binding apprentices, rendering parents and children mutually liable to maintain each other; and proposes, that, in every county, there shall be one corporation, consisting of such persons who shall subscribe, and pay, annually, not less than 5*l.* towards the relief of the poor of the county, who shall be called governors of the poor, and who may purchase lands, make bye-laws, appoint officers, &c. with salaries.

That one or two hospitals be erected in every county: in these hospitals to be three distinct apartments, for the children, the aged, the diseased. The charges of the building, furniture, and materials, to be paid out of the contributions, and out of such money as may be granted for that purpose by parliament, and out of an assessment, for two years, of 3*d.* in the pound, annually, and an assessment of 6*d.* in the pound for maintaining the poor admitted into these hospitals: the profits of any work done in them, also, to be added to the revenue of the hospital.

Many good rules are also given by the Earl for the internal regulation of these hospitals, but of too minute a nature to render a transcription of them necessary.

Sir

Sir Richard Lloyd's plan principally consists of a house of industry for the education of the children of the poor.\* It is astonishing that nearly forty years should have elapsed since a name of some eminence has recommended such an institution, and, except part of Lincolnshire, no other considerable division of the island has carried the idea into execution, although many individuals have shewn that the plan is feasible; and experience has now seconded the strongest convictions of its excellence which human reason alone was able to give. Sunday-schools, which should be, as it were, the apex of the structure, the last finish of the plan, will, it is to be hoped, now be made use of as the ground-work: and, while charity, uniting with religion, influences us to take care of the religious sentiment of the rising generation of the poor, by instructing them in learning and the duties they owe to God and man on a *Sunday*, let the good principles, the patrons of these institutions are actuated by, influence them to attend to the industrious habits of their young pupils through the other days of the week.

This scheme of Sir Richard's recites, that, whereas the education of the children of the poor cannot be so well effected, nor the poor be so comfortably, nor at so easy a price, maintained in small numbers, and in distinct families, as in large and well-ordered houses set apart for that purpose, therefore the justices, in sessions, shall divide the county into as many districts as they shall think proper; and that they, and also other persons of considerable estate shall be chosen as jurors, are, and shall be, guardians of the poor within each district; and persons contributing a certain

\* The Memoir of the Board of Trade, drawn up by Mr. Locke, had not, at this time, fallen into my hands; and, when this was written, it was not generally known that the Memoir existed entire; only detached parts of it had been quoted. The last edition of an Account of the Society for promoting Industry in the County of Lincoln has, by the permission of John Pownall, Esq. been the means of making the whole of this important paper public.

sum shall be also guardians: they shall be a body-corporate, shall make bye-laws, appoint officers and servants, and form themselves into committees; shall purchase land, on which to build a house of industry, and other convenient buildings, for lodging and employing the poor within the district: the expense to be defrayed by a lottery, by voluntary contributors, and by an assessment: the charges, for the relief and employment of the poor, afterwards, to be raised by an assessment on the several parishes, in proportion to the number of poor they send to the house.

No other alteration is proposed to be made in the poor-laws, nor does this plan provide any compulsive means to oblige the poor to send their children to the house of industry: on the whole, it appears a very crude and indigested scheme.

Mr. Fielding, in a pamphlet, entitled, "A Proposal for making an effectual Provision for the Poor," printed in 1753, again offers his advice on the subject, and proposes a scheme, which seems, in Dr. Burn's opinion, as supplementary to the two last-mentioned.

Speaking of the necessity of some regulations, he says, that "the poor are a very great burthen, and even a nuisance, to the kingdom; that the laws for relieving their distresses, and restraining their vices, have not answered their purposes, and, at present, that they are very ill provided for, and worse governed, are truths which every man will acknowledge; and that every man who hath any property must feel the weight of that tax, which is levied for the use of the poor; and every person, who hath any understanding, must see how absurdly it is applied. So very useless, indeed, is this heavy tax, and so wretched its disposition, that it is a question whether the poor or the rich, are actually more dissatisfied, or have indeed greatest reason to be so, since the plunder of the one serves so little to the real advantage of the other. The sufferings of the poor are, indeed, less known than their misdeeds, and therefore we are less apt to pity them! They starve, and

freeze, and rot, among themselves ; but they beg, and steal, and rob, among their betters."

He then proposes a plan for the county of Middlesex, which, if successful, may be followed in other counties ; but gives it, as his opinion, that no division, less than a whole county, will answer the intention. The heads of which are :

That there be a large building erected, consisting of three courts. The two outermost of the courts to be called the *county-house*, and the innermost to be called the *county-house of correction*, with a chapel, and offices.

That, in these houses, the men and women be kept entirely separate from each other.

That the county-house shall consist of lodgings for the officers ; of lodging-rooms, and of working-rooms, for the labourers ; of an infirmary ; of a chapel ; of several large store-rooms, with cellarage.

That the county-house of correction consist of lodging-rooms for the officers ; of lodging-rooms, and working-rooms, for the prisoners ; of an infirmary ; of a *fasting-room* ; of several cells, or dungeons ; of a large room, with iron grates, which shall be contiguous to, and look into, the chapel.

That there shall be a house for the governor, one for the deputy-governor, one for the chaplain, one for the treasurer, and one for the receiver-general of the house ; and that likewise there be built, on each side of the county-house, nine houses, for providing the labourers and prisoners with the necessaries of life.

These, with many other less important, regulations are the whole of Mr. Fielding's plan ; on which, and also on his ideas on the subject of the poor, the following observations shall be ventured :

That they are collected from an intimate knowledge of the wretchedness and villany which prevail among the lowest class of our fellow-creatures, in the purlieus of an overgrown metropolis.

polis. That the picture which he draws of them is too overcharged; the outline too hard; and, it is to be hoped, it is rather a caricature of the sink of wretchedness in London, than a natural representation of country-manners, even in those families where laziness and debauchery are in league with poverty, to render human misery complete. His plan is also of a piece with his picture; therefore, we read of dungeons, cells, iron grates, and fasting-rooms; although he, indeed, apologizes for the last, on the experience of their good effect in bridewells, and other houses of correction; but, besides all this, the expense attending building such large offices, together with houses for about half-a-dozen officers, and consequently salaries, that they may be able to live in their houses, is such an expense as would startle any county, although Middlesex should have set a successful example.

It does not appear that the legislature, in consequence of the reasoning and plans detailed in these ingenious tracts, made any alterations in the statute-law of the kingdom. The arguments, as well as the plan, fell to the ground, not having made a sufficient impression on the mind of parliament to occasion any of them to pass into a law, although seconded by the weight of no mean ability and by the influence of men of considerable consequence, the vagrant-act, and that which respects the regulation of the poor's rate, being the only acts, on this head of internal police, which passed until towards the close of the reign of our late king; and the date of these acts is anterior to the pamphlets which have just been noticed.

The multitude of instances, affecting to humanity and decency, which arose from the depravity and wretchedness of the numerous prostitutes who haunt the streets of the metropolis, occasioned, about the year 1758, some gentlemen, of equal generosity as humanity, to enter into a subscription, which laid the foundation of the Magdalen-House. The subject becoming a fashionable topic of conversation, many arguments on the good which might be expected



to arise from such an institution were held, and many plans were offered; among others, a plan for establishing charity-houses for exposed and deserted women and girls, and for penitent prostitutes; together with considerations, relating to the poor and poor-laws of England, were written, in 1758, by J. Massée, who appears to have been, on other subjects as well as this, a well-meaning and enlightened projector. The principal part of this publication was occupied on these institutions, and consequently not in point with our inquiry; but he also threw out some sensible hints on the subject of the poor and the poor-laws: of these it will be proper to take some notice.

He asserts, that the great increase of unemployed poor is owing to parochial settlements, and that the increase of thieves, beggars, and prostitutes, is immediately caused by want of employment, and, in some measure, by want of proper provision for distressed working-people, when out of the parishes to which they belong; and partly to the severity of our poor-laws, in affixing the same punishment to begging as to stealing.

He apprehends, that monopolizing farms and the inclosure of common lands are among the causes of an increase of the poor.

He attempts also to prove, by authorities, that substantial people have decreased in number; and asserts, that our interior weakness, the precarious state of our trade, and the great increase of the poor, are primarily, or principally, caused by removing multitudes, from our *natural and fixed basis-land*, to the *artificial and fluctuating basis-trade*.

A new system is also proposed by him, for relieving, employing, and ordering, the poor, which he divides into ten propositions; of these only the first three shall be noticed, because these only are properly fundamental, and the rest in the nature of auxiliary regulations.

*First*, That the charge of maintaining the poor shall be equally borne by the wealthy and substantial inhabitants; that the same shall

shall be assessed by the rents of houses and lands, and that each person's quota be determined by a pound-rate on the full annual value or rent.

*Secondly*, That every poor person, wanting relief, shall be equally entitled thereto, in any city, town, parish, or extra-parochial place, without regarding where such person was born or had lived.

*Thirdly*, That a competent number of houses of maintenance and employ be established for the reception of all poor persons, within each county respectively.

With respect to these three propositions, the first leaves the principle of the poor's rate exactly as it is at present; the second is impracticable in the full extent intended; and the third lays a foundation for an immense expense in buildings.

In 1759, a short anonymous tract appeared, in which the writer gives it as his opinion, that the principles are false on which the poor-laws are founded; particularly this, that it is reasonable *every place* in the kingdom should maintain *its own poor*; and asserts, that they ought to be relieved where they are in want of relief, and be employed where they are most useful; and, to effect this, that the fund to support them be *national*, not *parochial*. This writer offers his plan also, and proposes, that all charities, hospitals, work-houses, &c. be ingrafted into a general plan for the relief of the poor; and the several members thereof be united into a corporate body, to take the appellation Sir Josiah Child gave them, and be called fathers of the poor.

There also were published, about this time, some well-intended tracts, which recommend decreasing the number and regulating the conduct of ale-houses; a very proper, nay a necessary, step towards a well-ordered internal police: ale-houses are undoubtedly at present a principal origin of the evil complained of; but it surely might be possible to restrain their bad tendency, and make them in one respect a convenience to the laborious poor; instead of putting it into the power of licensed ~~ale-houses~~ to draw every  
fixpence

fixpence from their pockets and every good principle from their breasts; if, under the authority of the present subsisting laws, the magistrates would be more strict in restraining them from permitting *tipping*, and not license any ale-house where there was not kept a stock of beer constantly on sale to those, only, who carry it home, of a strength equal to common table-beer, and at a price which would allow of a moderate profit only. The authority of magistrates, over the conduct of those they license to keep ale-houses, is great indeed; and every exertion of their authority to 'preserve sobriety and regularity among the lower classes of the people, who are the principal customers to these shops of drunkenness, is in the strict line of their duty. The leading principle in the Court of King's Bench, which superintends the conduct of the magistracy of the kingdom, is favourable to such a strict discharge of office; and were they, in that discharge, rather to exceed, than fall short, of their legal authority, while the intention was right, that court would hold them blameless. It is only when interested views or selfish principles influence their conduct, that the Court of King's Bench reprimands and punishes magistrates.

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L E T T E R   XX.

**W**E are now arrived at an æra, when the arms of Great Britain were carrying its fame and dominion to the remotest parts of the globe: an æra, when this island, in prosperity, political consequence, and reputation, was, by many of its most sanguine patriots, conceived to have arisen to its acme: and when, by many, also, whose opinions carried weight with them, it was believed to have stretched its credit almost to its destruction; and, while it was rising in fame, to be sinking, in fact,

fact, under the immense load of its national debt : experience has now proved to us, that both these conceptions of our situation, formed at the commencement of the present reign, were equally removed from truth ; our prosperity and political consequence, now that above thirty years of his present Majesty's reign has passed over, continue to increase ; and above a hundred million has also been added to the national debt.

This is a paradox, which politicians may attempt to explain ; it respects our subject no farther, than as the internal happiness of the mass of individuals, who form the population of the kingdom, may be interested. Has *their* prosperity increased progressively with that of the state ? is a question of some importance ; if it has, our wars, our treaties, our taxes, the high political situation this kingdom now fills, have operated to general good ; they have increased the general stock of prosperity and happiness : but, if the reverse is fact ; if, among the mass of our fellow-subjects, more idleness, more dissipation, worse principles, worse habits, and their consequences, greater poverty and distress, prevail among them ; what is all our boasted greatness, our high name for wealth, prosperity, and political consequence, but a splendid pall, to conceal from view the hideous appearance of mortal wretchedness ?

That this is the case ; that the aggregate of misery is greater among the poor than it was ; that the axiom, *it has increased, is increasing, and ought to be diminished*, is to the full as true as ever was the same axiom when applied to the influence of the crown, no one who sees their present wretchedness, and knows the amount of the rates raised for their relief, will hesitate to allow ; and, while this remarkable sentence is applied to their *miserable situation*, with equal force will it apply to the *revenue* raised for their relief. — But what has the legislature done throughout this period to diminish their distress or our expenses ? Nothing, or next to nothing : the legislature has treated the subject as the physician, whose humanity exceeds his skill, treats his patient, whose case he despairs

of : he prescribes narcotic palliatives, and exerts his knowledge to render less painful that catastrophe which he cannot prevent.

That this apathy or inattention of parliament, to the situation of the poor, has not been exaggerated, will clearly appear by the following notices of the statutes which respect them, culled from a farrago of fourteen volumes of public legislative acts, containing above one thousand chapters, passed in thirty-one years of the present reign ; among which, the first fourteen years contain not a syllable upon the subject, except an act passed in the second year, cap. 22, which respects the metropolis only ; being an act for the keeping regular, uniform, and annual, registers of all parish-poor infants under a certain age, within the bills of mortality ; as a means of preserving the lives of infants under the age of four years.

But local inconvenience and distress have nevertheless, during this period, occasioned many districts, hundreds, and parishes, to apply to parliament for assistance, and to be petitioners for acts for the better relief and employment of the poor within the districts respectively applying : among a number of these, we shall find, in the year 1764, acts for the better relief and employment of the poor, within the hundreds of Blything, Bosmere, and Claydon, Samford, Mutford, Lothingland, and Wangford, in the county of Suffolk ; the conveniences and inconveniences, arising from the carrying into execution the acts of parliament, in the several hundreds thus incorporated, at their own request, by parliament, shall be attended to in another place, by a digest of the best information that can be obtained from the incorporated parishes ; but, at present, a detail of what the legislature has done on the general subject shall be pursued.

In 1775, parliament repealed an act of Elizabeth, against erecting and maintaining cottages ; which had restrained the building them, unless four acres of land was laid to each cottage ; and had also restrained the owners from placing more families than one in any cottage, or receiving any inmates ; because it appeared, as stated



stated by the preamble to the act repealing, that it laid the industrious poor under great difficulties, and tended very much to lessen population.

The 16th of Geo. III. cap. 40. in its preamble, states, that the great and increasing expense of maintaining and providing for the poor, and their continual distresses notwithstanding, make it highly expedient for the legislature to take this great subject into their serious consideration. And that information of the *state of the poor* and the nature of those expenses are necessary to be procured, to enable the two houses of parliament to judge of proper remedies to redress those grievances; and that such information cannot be effectually obtained, without the aid and authority of parliament.

Therefore it is enacted, that the overseers of the poor throughout that part of Great Britain, called England and Wales, shall make returns upon oath to certain questions specified in the act, relative to the state of the poor; and that the justices of peace, within their respective divisions, be authorized and requested to take such returns on oath, and to cause them to be transmitted to the clerk in parliament. Then follow the several clauses prescribing the means to effect this end, and also a schedule of the questions to which answers are to be returned.

There now seemed to be a serious intent in the legislature to investigate this important question; and a preamble better adapted to the purpose, and more expressive of the serious magnitude of the subject, the necessity of investigating it, and remedying the evils complained of, could not have been prefixed to the enacting clauses; and these clauses are in general well calculated to obtain the end required; but surely an omission appears in the schedule of questions annexed.

I. What was the amount of the assessments for the relief of the poor in the year ending at Easter, 1776?

II. How much of those assessments was applied for the relief or on account of the poor, and how much for the payment of county-

rates, or any other purposes? distinguishing, also, the amount of what was paid for the rent of work-houses, or paid or allowed for habitations for the poor; and if any poor reside in houses built at the expense of the parish, township, or place, state the total annual value of such houses.

III. What number of poor have received constant relief during that year, and what has been the expense thereof, as near as the same can be estimated?

IV. Is there a work-house in the parish? if so, what number of poor will it accommodate?

V. What was expended in litigations about settlements, removals, appeals, or other disputes, concerning the poor within that year, distinguishing how much of such expenses arose from disputes with parishes, townships, or places, not within the county, riding, division, precinct, soken, franchise, liberty, city, or county corporate, wherein such parish, township, or place, lay?

The return made from the poor-rates to parliament, stated to be from Easter, 1775, to Easter, 1776, in answer to the preceding questions, amounted, as appears in the Annual Register for 1777, to the following total result:

		<i>Money raised.</i>				<i>County-Rates.</i>			
		£.	s.	d.		£.	s.	d.	
England	- - -	1,679,585	0	0	—	131,387	18	11	
Wales	- - -	40,731	14	7	—	6,268	11	9	
		<hr/>				<hr/>			
		1,720,316	14	7	—	137,656	10	8	

<i>Expended on the Poor.</i>				<i>Rents.</i>				<i>Litigation.</i>			
	£.	s.	d.		£.	s.	d.		£.	s.	d.
England,	1,523,163	12	7	—	78,176	4	0	—	33,935	18	0
Wales	- 33,640	13	8	—	2,120	10	7	—	1,136	2	8
	<hr/>				<hr/>				<hr/>		
	1,556,804	6	3	—	80,296	14	7	—	35,072	0	8

The continual distresses of the poor are mentioned, in the *preamble* to the act, as one of the strong inducements to the inquiry; and, also, that information of the *state* of the poor is necessary to be procured. Does any one of these questions in the schedule reach this point? Does any of the questions ask, what are the prevailing distresses among the poor in your parish? Do they arise from their own extravagance, or from the price of labour? Are the necessaries of life risen in price? Has the earnings of the poor risen proportionably? What is the state of their morals? Are they greater drunkards, more lazy, than heretofore? Is the number of ale-houses increased within the last fifty years? Is the produce of excise in your parish more than formerly, and to what amount? These or some similar questions would have exposed the cause of the distresses of the poor, and their *real state*; which, if the overseers could not have answered, the residing clergyman's knowledge of the subject might have been called in aid, and the information, stated as necessary in the preamble, would have been obtained. But all this part of the investigation is forgotten in the act itself; and the inquiry goes solely to the quantum of the rate, and the mode of expenditure.

And what great leading regulation followed from this important inquiry? What was the happy result from this great body of information obtained by all the force and energy of the constitutional legislature? Alas!

Parturiunt montes!

But nothing was brought forth. This mass of information, thus constitutionally obtained, has served for nothing but waste-paper: and a necessary solemn inquiry, answered on oath, which cost the nation thousands of pounds, and the magistrates and overseers of the poor, throughout the kingdom, not a little trouble and attention, tended to no one good end whatever. Surely, when these great physicians of the state had felt the pulse of the patient, and weighed,

weighed, with due solemnity, every symptom of internal decay, they found themselves unequal to attempt the cure, and gave up the case as lost.

Two years after the return of the overseers had been received by the clerk in parliament, instead of any code of police, affecting this very important subject, we find a trivial, yet very proper, alteration in one of the sections of the 43d of Eliz. changing the period, to which parish-apprentices shall be bound by indenture, to the age of twenty-one years, instead of twenty-four. This is effected by 17 Geo. III. cap. 48.

Many applications, from particular parishes, districts, and hundreds, still continued to be made to parliament, for acts to relieve, regulate, and maintain, the poor, within their respective local situations; and many acts accordingly passed, much, it is to be hoped, to the general good of the places applying. Amongst others, passed in the 19th of this reign, are two, incorporating the hundreds of Hartsmere, Hoxne, and Thredling, the hundred of Coford, (except the parish of Hadleigh,) and also the parish of Polsted, in Suffolk. The fair conclusion to be drawn from these instances is, that, as the legislature felt the subject at large of too great a magnitude for their attention, those districts, most pressed by the urgency of necessity, found themselves obliged, at their own expense, to apply for leave to take care of themselves.

By stat. 20. Geo. III. cap. 46. it is directed, that *all persons* to whom any children shall be appointed to be bound, in pursuance of any act for the relief of the poor in any particular district in England, *shall be obliged to provide for them*; but that no person shall be compellable to take a poor child apprentice, except he be an inhabitant and occupier of lands, &c. in the parish to which such child shall belong; and that bastards born in houses of industry shall belong to the mother's parish.

In the 22d year of this reign a long act passed, entitled, "An Act for the better Relief and Employment of the Poor;" which, although

though not so expressed in the preamble, appears to be an aggregate of all the best regulations which had been brought before parliament by the multitude of acts which had of late years passed for incorporating parishes, particular districts, and hundreds, and maintaining and employing the poor therein.

The considerable length this act is extended to, comprehending in it all the necessary directions for the proceeding of parishes, where two-thirds of the owners and occupiers of land agree to unite, the mode of appointing the different necessary officers and their duties, the qualification of the voters at their meetings, the application of the poor's rate raised in the different parishes uniting, together with the multifarious directions respecting the internal police of an united house of industry, would render the most concise abridgement of this act too long for the attention of those who may run the eye over these cursory observations. Besides ~~that~~ it would be of no real service, as any parishes wishing to unite, on the power and principles of the act, must have recourse to the act itself, which appears to have thus much use in it, that it renders the expense of obtaining an act of parliament unnecessary, provided the parties agreeing to unite are satisfied with this code of regulations, and can make them coincide well with their own views and intentions.

It is not in my power to assert, positively, but it is believed, that very few parishes have taken the advantage this act has given, and have united for the purpose of relieving and employing their poor, by virtue of the powers, and subject to the regulations, of this statute.

What can have been the reason, that, since the legislature has opened the means to an union of parishes, without the expense of an act of parliament, for those *very purposes*, to obtain which many applications had been made to parliament, at an expense of some hundreds of pounds, in the outset of the scheme, so very few instances



stances should have appeared of parishes uniting by virtue of the powers in this act?

If we suppose experience to have proved, that general good has arisen in those parishes which have been incorporated by different acts of parliament, this is a question which will not soon be resolved; because, it is not easy to suggest a reason for those advantages to be refused, when offered *gratis*, which have, in a great many instances, been obtained at a considerable expense: and, in the *united* parishes in the county of Suffolk, the fact, that the poor-rates have greatly decreased, is generally allowed. Why, then, is not the greatest part of the kingdom incorporated into convenient districts, for the purpose of relieving and maintaining their poor by means of the powers and regulations of this act? Why have we *very few*, if *any*, instances of this act being enforced?

We cannot suppose that the clauses in the act militate, in general, with the regulations those parishes which ~~wish~~ to unite would choose to embrace, because they are a selection of the best general regulations from all the acts applied for by the parishes incorporated. But, does it not arise from the want of a centre of union, a man of consequence and ability, whose influence could render the fluctuating consents of a number of interested people steady, and fix them to the plan they have in agitation, but cannot absolutely resolve on? The attorney who was applied to when a bill in parliament was to be passed is this *kind of person*; he was interested in bringing the determination of the leading men in the different parishes to a point, and fixing them in their resolves. But now no one man takes any more interest in the matter than as an individual among equals; and most men understand, and feel themselves inclined to support, in all its purity, the maxim, — *inter pares, equalis est potestas*.

In the 26th year of this reign, cap. 56. another act passed to oblige the overseers of the poor to make a return, on oath, to certain questions relative to the state of the poor. The preamble

to this act is the same; and the act itself proceeded on much the same plan, and principle, as that which has been mentioned to have passed in the 16th of the king, except that a penalty of 50*l.* for making false returns, is added; and, also, a clause, subjecting persons taking false oaths to the pains and penalties of those convicted of wilful and corrupt perjury: the questions asked are also somewhat different.

And, in the same year, by cap. 58, an act passed, for procuring, on oath, returns of all charitable donations, for the benefit of poor persons, throughout that part of Great Britain called England and Wales. The returns are to be made in writing, on oath, by the minister and church-wardens of each parish. This act gives similar powers, and is armed with similar penalties, as the other.

## L E T T E R XXI.

**T**HE following questions were referred, by the act of parliament which passed in the 26th year of the present reign, to the overseers of the poor, to which they were obliged to make returns upon oath.

*Question I.* What money was raised, by assessments, for the relief of the poor, in the respective years, ending at Easter, 1783, 1784, and 1785?

II. What number of poor received constant, and what number occasional, relief, during each of the said years, as near as you can ascertain the same?

III. How much was paid out of the said money, in each of the said years, for expenses of overseers in journeys, and attendance on magistrates and others; and how much for entertain-

ments at meetings of the inhabitants on affairs relative to the poor?

IV. What payments were made out of the said money for law-business, and for orders, examinations, certificates, and other proceedings, respecting the poor, in each of the said three years?

V. How much of the money collected, under these assessments, was applied for the payment of county-rates, or any other, and what, purposes that did not concern the poor?

VI. How much of the money so raised has been expended in providing materials and utensils for setting the poor to work?

The returns made by the overseers to these questions, in pursuance of the act alluded to, were digested into form, and an abstract printed, containing every parish in England and Wales, reduced, alphabetically, under their respective counties and hundreds, giving an account, under fourteen distinct columns, of the name of the hundred within which the parish is situated; the money raised by assessment for the years 1783, 1784, and 1785, and the medium of those three years; expenses not applicable to the poor; the medium of net-money annually paid for the poor; net-money paid for the poor in 1776, taken from the returns then made to parliament; and heads of particular expenses: the general totals of which, for England and Wales, are as follow:

*Money raised by Assessment.*

			£.	s.	d.
For the year 1783.	—England	- -	2,068,585	7	1
	Wales	- -	63,901	5	1
			<hr/>		
			2,132,486	12	2
			<hr/>		

For

			£.	s.	d.
For the year 1784.—	England	- -	2,117,432	11	0
	Wales	- -	68,456	16	8
			<hr/>		
			2,185,889	7	8
			<hr/>		
For the year 1785.—	England	- -	2,115,775	2	5
	Wales	- -	69,129	16	6
			<hr/>		
			2,184,904	18	11
			<hr/>		
Medium of those years.—	England	- -	2,100,587	16	11
	Wales	- -	67,161	16	9
			<hr/>		
			2,167,749	13	8
			<hr/>		

*Expenses not applicable to the Poor.*

			£.	s.	d.
Medium of money applied for county-purposes, vagrants, militia, bridges, gaols, &c.	England	- -	113,714	15	6
	Wales	- -	5,565	11	4
			<hr/>		
			119,280	6	10
			<hr/>		
Medium of expenses not concerning the poor, re- pairing churches, roads, salaries to ministers, &c.	England	- -	43,223	5	7
	Wales	- -	1,007	15	4
			<hr/>		
			44,231	0	11
			<hr/>		

£. s. d.

Medium of net-money annually paid for the poor.

England	-	-	1,943,649	15	10
Wales	-	-	60,588	10	1

Net-expenses in 1776	-	-	2,004,238	5	11
			1,529,780	0	1

Increase	-	-	474,458	5	10
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Net-expenses for the poor in 1776, taken from the returns then made to parliament.

England	-	-	1,496,129	6	3
Wales	-	-	33,650	13	10

1,529,780 0 1

*Heads of particular Expenses.*

£. s. d.

Medium-expenses of overseers in journeys, attendances on magistrates, &c.—

England	-	23,545	0	10
Wales	-	948	17	8

24,493 18 6

Medium-expenses of entertainments at meetings relative to the poor.—

England	-	11,329	15	11
Wales	-	383	4	10

11,713 0 9

Medium-



		£.	s.	d.
Medium-expenses of law, orders, examinations, and other proceedings, relative to the poor.				
England	-	-	53,757	11 0
Wales	-	-	2,033	11 6
			<hr/>	<hr/>
			55,791	2 6
<hr/>				
Medium of money expended in setting the poor to work.				
England	-	-	15,680	14 9
Wales	-	-	211	14 1
			<hr/>	<hr/>
			15,892	8 10
			<hr/>	<hr/>

The mass of information thus obtained from that part of the nation, subject to the operation of the poor-laws, digested, with great labour, by the committee of the House of Commons, which sat for the purpose, and printed at no inconsiderable expense, must surely have given rise to many useful reflections and observations in the minds of those gentlemen who were on the committee, although their country has not, as yet, reaped any benefit from their very important labours. They must surely have been struck with the alarming increase of the annual net-expenses of the poor since 1776, when they were 1,529,780*l.* to the medium of the years 1783, 1784, and 1785, which is stated to be 2,167,749*l.* a yearly increase of expense amounting to near 500,000*l.* If they, at first sight, might conceive this vast difference to have arisen from any extraordinary scarcity prevailing through the last three years, and examined into the fact, they would have found the average-price of wheat, through this period, to have been 2*l.* 3*s.* 7*d.* and that the average-price, for 1776, was 2*l.* 2*s.* 8*d.* being an excess only of 11*d.* per quarter, or not *el.* 1*os.* per cent. which will,  
by