

THE  
H I S T O R Y  
OF THE  
P O O R :

*THEIR RIGHTS, DUTIES,*  
AND  
THE LAWS RESPECTING THEM:  
*IN A SERIES OF LETTERS.*

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A NEW EDITION CORRECTED, AND CONTINUED TO THE PRESENT TIME.

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## TO THE PUBLIC.

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WHEN I at first determined to revise the following Letters, and to publish them in a volume distinct from that useful Agricultural Register\* wherein they first appeared, it was my intention to address them to Mr. Pitt, under an absurd persuasion that a minister of state is expected, as it were, *ex officio*, to read those treatises which are, through the medium of the press, directed for his perusal; and also from a belief that, if he did peruse, he might, from the detail of what has been done by the legislature for the poor, has been written by those whose observations on the subject have been preserved in print, or from the hints and observations scattered throughout the publication itself, find somewhat upon the subject, which, when improved by his solid judgement, matured by long experience, might, in the form of an act of the legislature, meliorate and improve.

\* The Annals of Agriculture, by A. Young, Esq.

the situation of the poor, and diminish the expenses of their maintenance.

But reflection soon cured me of that presumption: a minister of state is the last person in the kingdom who can be expected to read books; he has more upon his hands, to read men, than he can easily get over in the daily routine of business. In the mean time, with respect to the *ardua regni*, he cannot possibly attend to a more irresistible monitor than the public voice; by which expression neither the howling of a savage and licentious mob, or the cries of pretended patriotism, are intended; but the voice of that general opinion, which arises from general knowledge of the subject, that speaks always in a tone, and with an authority, which is irresistible, and then truly is not the *vox populi* alone, it is the *vox Dei*.

To the Public, therefore, this history of, and these observations on, the police respecting the poor, are properly dedicated. If any part of the detail contained in the following pages, if any of the observations, are worth the attention of the Public; if any of the hints here thrown out tend, in the least degree, to meliorate the condition of the poor themselves, or to save the Public any part of the vast expense which lies so heavy on the shoulders of the landed interest, consistent with the general comfort of the society at large, their discernment will see it, their good sense will apply it, and their voice will  
speak,

peak, with irresistible persuasion, to our rulers, that it may be done.

If nothing in these pages is worthy their attention, if no ideas can be collected from the variety of matter treated of which tend to throw light on this subject of so great consequence to us and to our posterity, the contrary presumption will be properly punished by the public neglect, and the insignificance of the publication will doom it to that oblivion in which many other tracts on the same topic are buried.

In such a case, the writer would have offended still more against the public advantage, had he, by an address to the minister, taken up any of his valuable time; but yet he wished, through the medium of the press, to talk with him on the subject; to ask him whether that vast increase of the poor's rate, which became known to the public by the means of the returns from the overseers in the year 1787, is not worth his notice? Whether the subject itself is of so trifling an import as to be always left to the determination of a number of members of the House of Commons, scarcely greater than would meet as a committee on a private bill? Or, whether he receives any satisfaction from a conduct similar to that of the dog in the manger; doing nothing himself, and not permitting any other person to be active on the subject?

The fate of Mr. Gilbert's bill and Sir William Young's plan shews somewhat of this disposition: the first probably fell,



fell, like other mishapen and disproportionate buildings, *mole ruit sua*; the last certainly contained some good regulations, was calculated to give a spur to our activity in the administration of the poor-laws, and to recast into the execution of them somewhat of their original intent; the promotion of industry, and the encouragement of labour.

But public rumour then reported that the minister intended to take the business under his own inspection, and, for that reason, he discountenanced the indigested schemes of private individuals; we know not, indeed, but at this instant he may be employed in digesting a code which shall comprehend in its scope every thing that can be expected from the union of great ability with an intimate knowledge of the subject; or, possibly, his mind may be made up, and, after much investigation of and attention to the matter, he may have come to this prudent resolution: I will do nothing; least done, like least said, is soonest mended. But yet this important business presses; the poor-rates are still rising throughout that part of the kingdom which cannot employ its poor in manufactures, and manufactures are by no means general, but local: besides, while not one quarter of the island receives any immediate benefit from the very flourishing state of our trade and manufactures, the three-fourths which are in still water feel themselves in danger from the very cause which creates the calm, and, oppressed with an additional weight by the surges which  
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circle round the pool, find it is with difficulty they can keep the head above water.

While the distant rumour of large wages makes the poor dissatisfied with those which agriculture can afford, it creates a dislike to that labour which in their opinion, judging by comparison from vague report, how manufacture pays its workmen, is so poorly recompensed: this gives rise to idleness, which creates a call on the fund raised for their support; hence arise rates to which a four shilling land-tax is a trifling object; hence we know of instances where the poor-rates amount to the annual rent of lands. Is not this a fact? Is it not a grievance? If this is not corrected in time of peace, where will the financier find the dividends in any future war to pay the interest of an increased debt? Does not the subject, therefore, on this account, demand the attention of a minister during the halcyon days of peace?

The natural and political liberty of the mass of the people is clogged and diminished by the law of settlements; and, in the opinion of some of the best writers and strongest reasoners on this important topic, it is unnecessarily and unwisely abridged. Do not the poor-laws on this account, also, demand the attention of the state? Is it not just that every individual of the kingdom should enjoy as much freedom as is consistent with the safety of the whole? But it may possibly be replied in the language of state-prudence, This is not the time; see what the cry of liberty and the ~~cry~~ for

for freedom have done upon the Continent! The answer is obvious; the cases are widely different; the one is a temporary anarchy arising from the abolition of all government, the other would be a recovery from a restraint inimical to the interests of labour and industry, flowing from the power and enlightened mind of the legislature itself: the one *would be* legal liberty, the other *is* excessive licentiousness; therefore, let us not, by such a superabundant caution, suffer state-prudence to rivet our fetters closer, in proportion as our neighbours acquire a freedom, which they have not yet learned how to use with propriety or to exercise with dignity.

This language proceeds on the presumption, that it is a point proved in the following sheets, that a partial repeal of the law of settlement, or such a modification of it as would permit the poor man to go where he could best find employment, would be beneficial to the interest of the state as well as favourable to the liberty of the subject; and surely the point is fully and satisfactorily proved, if the united opinion of men of the most enlightened minds and most instructed judgment does, in any case, amount to proof; or if the wealth and prosperity of a kingdom increases in a ratio with the aggregate of the money earned within the kingdom by the labour and employment of its inhabitants.

But while this claim for a greater degree of freedom is made for the poor, and a melioration of their condition is proposed in this respect, care has been taken to point out the

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the means of preventing such a degree of liberty, generating licentiousness; by recommending the erection of schools of industry, on the basis of the power given by the statute of Elizabeth, to raise by assessment a sum of money to purchase a stock of wool, hemp, flax, &c. for their employment; an object which seems scarcely attended to by those who now carry into execution the poor-laws, as appears by the very trifling total returned to the House of Commons by the overseers, as expended on that account throughout the kingdom. This surely is another object worthy the attention of a great minister, and it is an object that cannot generally be enforced without the assistance of the legislature; none of the subsisting statutes pointing out the means of doing it, distinct from those pells to the morals, health, industry, and activity, of the rising generation, --- work-houses; which are horrible, although, as the police respecting the poor is at present regulated, necessary evils.

The claims of the poor on society have also been glanced at in the following pages. By this expression, no abstract ideas of a claim to equality, either in legislation or property, has been canvassed; but simply that claim to a fair retribution for their strength and ability to labour, which is their only birth-right; for, it is a principle arising from necessity, that, in all civilized societies, there must be hewers of wood and drawers of water; but those who fill up the lower, though useful, rank of our fellow-subjects, infinitely exceed in number and in actual utility all the other classes

of society put together; their claims are, therefore, as serious rights, and they demand from the state full as serious a consideration as any other claim upon it, for security of political liberty or private property; the right to receive a compensation for their labour, adequate to their necessary wants, while they have a capability of labour, is certainly due to them, and the right of maintenance from the more opulent classes of society, when that capability to labour is passed, is another debt which society owes them.

In the discharge of this demand, has arisen that burthen which the landed interest in particular have great cause to complain of, the poor's rates; which, in many districts, when united with the land-tax and tithes, amount almost to a disinherison; for, although the occupier or tenant nominally pays the tithes and poor-rates, the land in fact bears the weight, and the total is taken from the landlord's pocket; therefore, while we are sinking under this treble load, is it not natural, is it not just, that we should inquire into the transactions of past times, and search the records of antiquity, to explore on what principle of legislation, from what consent, virtual or implied, of our forefathers, from what system of laws, human or divine, this ruinous fact, though apparent paradox, should happen? That, from the same circle of land, the ecclesiastics claim a tenth of the produce, in most instances equal to a half of the rent; the state one-fifth; and the remainder of the reserved rent will not always



ways satisfy the demand of the poor's rate. In the following pages, that inquiry has been made, and the mystery has been, in some degree, developed.

Another object worth the attention of the minister of a great nation has been comprehended in this inquiry; an object not confined solely to any particular code of laws, but embracing all legislative acts whatsoever; the whole force and the energy of which lie entirely in the means provided for insuring their exact and uniform execution. What are all acts of parliament, which profess to comprehend every rank and denomination of subjects, but a rule of municipal conduct which *all* are to guide themselves by? and the vindictory sanction contained in them is the compelling power. Now, if that sanction is such, as when called into use, indicates a presupposed depravity in those who are to be governed, an injury is done in the very prelude; and the test of the ordinance is vitiated *ab initio*, because the moral delinquency of the society is prejudged. Such is the sanction which is expected to enforce the execution, not only of the poor-laws, but of most of the penal clauses in the Statutes at Large; they are to be enforced by penalties, on the information of fellow-subjects, who the legislature supposes will degrade themselves to become informers; not for the good of the public, not from patriotic, moral, or religious motives, but from the vilest of all, from the sordid motive of gain, it is supposed that a subject of the state will place his neighbour under the correction of the law.

This general idea disgraces the nation, and the principle is proved by experience to be ineffectual.

The manufacturing and commercial interests of the nation seem to have understood mankind better than the statesman, or at least they have formed a better opinion of their neighbours; for, in the acts of parliament to prevent frauds and abuses amongst the manufacturers and artizans, they have modelled the penal sanction on a different principle; the whole penalty is given to the poor, and they are, in a committee, empowered to appoint an inspector, whose duty it is to go his rounds, to see the regulations enforced, lay his informations, and see the penalty distributed according to the act. The strict execution of these acts of the legislature is a proof of the efficacy of the means used; for, the penal sanction of laws is not intended, like cobwebs, to catch flies only, and suffer the larger insects to break through the web; it is a net for all, and equally intended as a compulsive regulation to the *poor* as to the *rich*, to the *overseer* as to the *magistrate*: a hint, therefore, from these regulating statutes, might give energy to the poor-laws and vigour to the execution of them, or at least would increase the revenue for their maintenance from the proper sources, --- the pockets of those who undertake an office, but neglect the duties annexed to it.

On the whole, the public will read, in the following pages, a summary history of the duties of the poor to, and their claims from, society, throughout that part of this kingdom



kingdom subject to the poor-laws, traced from the earliest times in which the poor, and their interests, have been considered by the legislature, and continued to the close of the last parliament; together with a transient view of the thoughts and opinions of those whose writings on the subject have been handed down to us; interspersed with observations as the subject gave rise to them; together with such reflections as have arisen from an attention to the whole of the evidence here submitted to the public, compared with the opinions of those men, eminent for their abilities and the purity of their intentions, who have made this inquiry an object of their contemplation.

The present critical situation of this kingdom, so different from that peaceful and prosperous state which it occupied during the period through which much the greatest part of the following treatise was written, calls upon every man, whatever may be his class or condition of life, to support, by all the means in his power, the constituted government of his country, which can no way be so effectually done as by promoting industry, economy, and good morals, among the poor. If, in times of peace and prosperity, this is the more particular duty of the magistrate, in the commencement of a war, the principle of which is as novel as its event is uncertain, it becomes a crime to neglect that which, in times of peace, would be thought no immaterial obligation; and, if the duty of a minister should impel him, in those times, to  
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make such regulations in the internal police of the kingdom as to call forth the greatest possible production of its industry, with which the prosperity and happiness of all ranks in the state must be connected, much stronger should he feel that impulse in the beginning of such a war as the present, the consequences of which to our religion, our morals, our laws and constitution, no human eye can foresee; but the immediate effect of which on our trade, our commerce, our estates, and our property, we must all soon feel: therefore, there can be no time or situation more proper than the present for an inquiry of the kind here offered to the public; although there may be many enlightened minds in this kingdom whose abilities and means of information may qualify them to offer a more satisfactory treatise.

T. R.

CLARE,  
*March 12, 1793.*



P R E F A C E

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P R E F A C E

T O T H E

S E C O N D E D I T I O N .

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SOME reason may be expected by the public for the alterations contained in this Second Edition of the History of the Poor, &c. and, probably, some account of the motive which influenced the author to its continuation. The first is, undoubtedly, due to his readers as a matter of right : the second he rather considers as an act of choice, on his part, with which he can have no objection to comply.

The course of inquiry which the investigation of this subject naturally pointed out brought me to the knowledge of the ancient mode of distributing the revenues of the church. This branch of the history of elder times caught my attention by bringing to view an obsolete

sole claim, on a certain part of the ecclesiastical revenues, towards the maintenance of the poor; and, although many generations are passed away since such a claim was exemplified by the practice of the age, yet it struck me as sufficient to found an equitable expectation of the assistance of the parochial clergy in the management and regulation of the domestic habits of that class of our fellow-subjects to whom they were, in remote days, not only spiritual pastors, but distributors of relief in times of distress.

The office which is intended to be trusted to the clergy in the management of the poor, if the Bill now before the House of Commons, or any other on a similar principle, should pass into a law, renders it unnecessary to dwell on this subject, as it will be a proof that the expectation of parliament fixes itself on the parochial clergy, as gentlemen eminently qualified by situation, education, and principle, to take some share in that most necessary and important point of our internal police, to which we ought all to pay our most active attention;--- the regulation of the poor. And, as there exists no doubt but that the clergy, on their parts, are as *willing* as they are *able* to give their assistance, the pressing for it, on the principle of an equitable right or duty, is become an ungenerous surplussage: besides, the attempt to fix this claim, in order to engraft a duty, has been thought by many, to whose opinions I pay much deference, a topic more replete with harm

harm than good, and has occasioned a publication which, probably, ~~would~~ otherwise have been more honourably noticed, to be passed over almost in silence, although by no means in contempt; while the principles of its author, as a friend to the hierarchy, have been somewhat called in question.

That part of the Inquiry into the History of the Poor, their Rights and Duties, is, therefore, in this Edition, omitted.

With respect to the author's motive for the continuation of his History to the present day, he candidly confesses two *impelling* reasons. The first, he hopes, will be allowed, as founded on public principle; to give more light on this important subject than was in his power at the time of his writing the Letters contained in the former Edition. This country has now experienced the effect of the present system, through a time of scarcity, till lately unfelt; it has seen, that, as the skin of the infant expands itself to the stature of the man, so does the principle of charity, which now has, for near two centuries, become, to the immortal honour of this nation, the law of the land, expand itself to those stretches of imperious necessity which admit of the expenditure of additional millions to preserve our poor countrymen from want; and that at a time while the political necessities of the state press upon all ranks of people with a force hitherto incredible, and have, unitedly, occasioned a magnitude

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nitude of expense, which all the abilities of an able financier can scarcely provide ways and means to answer. But, at the same time that *humanity* feels gratified, our *prudence* should also be able to concur in approbation of the vast expenditure which has been, and may continue in a certain degree to be, incurred in the maintenance of the poor. This will not be the case until, by some actively-efficient measure, the industry of the lower classes is called out to do its best, before the pockets of the next class of useful subjects of the state are emptied to the relief of their poorer neighbours.

The writer must also confess a tacit pleasure in committing to the press the last sheets of the continuation of his History, as it will appear from them that the first edition of this tract has not been written in vain, but that our countrymen will probably reap some advantage from this employment of his hours of leisure, as it may have been the means of exciting the first abilities in the nation to an investigation of the subject, and occasioned Desire to be united with Power in the service of the cause. And although the present Bill, which is now before the House, the first public result of that union, may not meet the ideas and expectations of all parts of the kingdom subject to the poor-laws, which cannot be a matter of our wonder, the intricacy of the subject, the wide extent of its operations, the number of interests any rule which regulates the conduct of so many millions



millions of people, in different situations, must clash with, and the little pains which is taken by people in general to understand an act of parliament of some intricacy, being considered; yet we may, with confidence, trust that the measure is now in good hands; because this nation, after the lapse of near two hundred years, has again seen, in The Bill, for the better Support and Maintenance of the Poor, now before the House of Commons, an instance of a minister of state, in the midst of innumerable difficulties attendant on our present arduous political situation, taking upon himself the burthen of a measure of the first importance to the internal happiness of the nation, which has been from that remote time till now left to the straggling attention of any member of parliament; and, when this fact recalls to our memory the wisdom which characterized the ministers of the reign of Elizabeth, (and the parliamentary journals of those times inform us that the famous forty-third statute of her reign, the present corner-stone of our poor-laws, was not the produce of one session, but the collected valuable remnants of many bills on the subject, which had been, in the parliamentary language of the day, *dashed*,) let us not despair of the best consequences arising from the present united application of abilities, knowledge, and perseverance, to the better support, maintenance, and education, of the poor.



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## L E T T E R S

On the Poor;

THEIR

R I G H T S, D U T I E S,

AND THE

L A W S R E S P E C T I N G T H E M.

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### L E T T E R I.

DEAR SIR,

*Clare, 1791.*

**H**EREWITH you receive the first letter of a series, which shall comprehend an investigation of the causes that produce so much misery and distress among our poor; which will be accompanied, during the continuation of the subject, with hints tending to a plan, that, it is imagined, may render their situation more comfortable, and lessen that heavy burthen of rates, which impoverish the landed interest, and, in fact, anticipate the source of our political expenditure.

I began the inquiry during the former part of the winter, with the intent of sending it to the Editor of the *Annals of Agriculture*; but doubted with respect to the propriety of the subject for that compilation; until, having the pleasure of your company at Clare, you indicated a wish that it might be sent you.

B

It

**It** very forcibly struck me, that, during the solitude of a long winter, spent in the country, in the lapse of time which daily passes away between the hours allotted to refreshment and repose; that mind must be torpid and inactive, in which many ideas do not arise that cannot be referred to personal views or selfish considerations, and which are not occasioned by objects of business or pleasure, but take their origin from better motives, and impulses of a higher nature; from reflections on the relative state our happiness is placed in, with respect to that of our friends and more immediate neighbours, in the first place; of our countrymen, in the next; and, ultimately, not only of the human race, but of the whole animal creation.

One serious cause must, therefore, arise from this source, to taint the happiness of a life passed in retirement; as our ideas take their colour from the more immediate objects of our observation, it is impossible but that something of a sombrous and unpleasant hue must tinge the mind, while it attends to what passes in that class of society which is more immediately subject to our observation; and while we perceive and feel, as it were, the sordid misery and distress of our near, though humble, neighbours, it is impossible that a mind, rightly disposed, whose best energy is to be alive to the woes of others, can enjoy uninterrupted ease, while so much misery is so near the threshold; charity can do much, but cannot do every thing, nor for every body, although seconded by the best intentions and most liberal purse; objects of misery, like mountain above mountain to the weary traveller, arise to the view; creating despair of attaining to the end of their wishes, even in those who possess the strongest and most liberal minds, and recalling necessary and honest Prudence to her seat. But still one source of beneficence may be opened without fear of impoverishment, and the powers of the mind may be called to the aid of charity. Is it impossible to explore the causes of that misery which we discern among our poor neighbours? And, the causes being explored, may not a remedy be pointed

pointed out? The attempt is worth the labour, although the event should not be successful; this one fact being too glaring for humanity to be blind to, that, while a tenth part of our countrymen enjoy the comforts or revel in the luxuries of life, the patient and industrious multitude are sinking beneath a load of poverty and wretchedness.

Reflections, such as the preceding, gave rise to this inquiry; I thought that a few of the leisure hours of a country life could not be better employed than in an attempt to investigate the causes of that misery which we see among our working poor, and to point out some probable and practicable means of relief and amendment of their condition; conceiving, also, that the ideas and hints, which might arise from such an inquiry, could not make their appearance with so much propriety in any publication as in the *Annals of Agriculture*; because the object of it respects the happiness of a class of our fellow-creatures, without whose manual labour the fruits of the earth could neither be sowed or reaped; and also recollecting, that, if a ray of reason is elicited in the progress of the inquiry, it is due to the shrine of Agriculture, which, if not Wisdom herself, bears a strong resemblance of her divine original: I therefore dedicate the following pages, on this too-much-neglected subject, to your service, and your reader's patient candour.

The page of history reveals to us this melancholy and awful truth, that the happiness of millions has, in all ages, been at the beck and in the power of units, and those often the meanest and worst of mankind; myriads have fallen by the sword, disease, and famine, the victims of war, led on to their destruction by wretches who have disgraced the human race; but our inquiry has nothing to do with the dire effects of zeal, despotism, or political revolution; our employment lies in the vales of peace and plenty; our purpose is to investigate this problem, Why our laborious poor are so wretched? Does the complaint arise from physical causes, or from the regulations of society? Can society, by laws, regulations,

example, or by any and what means, meliorate their condition?

The unceasing laws of nature must, in every climate, have their energy; effects must every where be analogous to, and flowing from, their cause; gradations of comfort arise in civilized society in due proportion to the degree of civilization; the squalid inhabitant of Magellan's Straights, although so wretched and negatived in appearance, in all that makes life supportable, shares, doubtless, a degree of happiness in proportion to his capacity of enjoyment; that capacity enlarges as civilization prevails, and means of obtaining the objects of our wishes also increase. In this island, a disposition to relish the comforts of life, the meanest of us equally possesses with the greatest; surely, therefore, those comforts correspondent with our situation, should not be removed at such a distance from the grasp of any of us, as to be attainable only by a breach of the laws of society. — In some climes, favoured by a more direct approach of the solar ray, the various articles of dress are an incumbrance, and the native has no care what raiment he shall clothe himself with: in such climate he may, literally, imitate the lilies of the field, which neither toil nor spin, and are clothed only in the attire Nature prepared for them. How different is the necessity in this higher latitude; scarce a natural day passes away, even during the summer solstice, but our comfort and health require that clothing, to obtain which the price of many days' labour must be paid. How much stronger does urgent necessity require warmth of clothing in the dreary leafless winter, when every gale wafts rheumatism and ague; and what is essential to the health and preservation of the parent, is surely not less so for the child. Hence, in this country, arises one unceasing call for no inconsiderable share of the price of labour; a call sanctioned as well by an attention to the preservation of life as by the dictates of decency, the result of ideas connected with civilization.

Another

Another strong and urgent demand on the scanty revenue of the poor man, is the expense of fire. In more southern latitudes, the whole year may be passed, and it may not be an article essential to the life or health of the inhabitant: possibly, in climates included in ninety of the one hundred and eighty degrees of north and south latitude, the lower classes of society see not the blazing hearth, or have no occasion for it in their domiciles throughout the year: their habits of life are different; their simple food, consisting principally of the fruits of the earth, requires not much assistance from fire to make it suitable to the palate or proper for digestion; we read that the inhabitants of the islands in the South Sea\* knew not the use of hot water; but, in this island, fire is necessary, at times, throughout the whole year; in summer, for preparing the food, and in spring, autumn, and winter, for the comfort also, if not for the preservation, of the cottager.

Our climate also occasions another demand to screen the poor man from its rigours. Throughout a considerable part of the habitable world, the genial warmth of the atmosphere is such, that the human race requires scarce any protection from the common air and sky: in those climes, man may wander with man, joint tenants of the shade; but here, a domicil is necessary; although the hardy aborigines of the island might not require such a shelter, yet man, tamed and made tender by the arts of civilization, demands a threshold, within whose sacred bounds the domestic hearth may be sheltered, as well from the assaults of the weather, as those of his boisterous or impertinent neighbour; hence, therefore, arises another call on his slender income, an income earned by the labour of his hands and the sweat of his brow.

These three necessary and unavoidable calls on the finances of the poor have been already stated, in the articles of clothing, fire, and dwelling: but a much larger and more important de-

\* Cook's Voyage.



mand remains to be mentioned,—the daily supply of food; the supply of such meat and drink, as shall enable him, day after day and year after year, to pass through a life of hard labour and constant fatigue; a degree of labour which the strongest of us, whose muscles have not been trained to the purpose, would shrink from in the experiment of a day, perhaps of an hour; and the produce of this labour, the reward of these toils, to be expended, not on himself only, but frequently to be divided with a wife and family of children, who often have no honest means of increasing their husband's and parent's income.

But this is not all: the occupation of the labourer, as well as the nature of his being, subjects him to acute illnesses, to chronic disorders, and at length to old age, decrepitude, and impotence; the instant any of these unavoidable misfortunes of life attack him, the source of every comfort is stopped, and without the aid of his more opulent neighbours, or, what is infinitely to the credit of this nation, without the interference of the godlike laws of his country, this useful class of our countrymen would sink in the arms of famine or despair.

These, I apprehend, are the physical causes of that depth of wretchedness and misery which we too often see in the cottages of the poor; not to mention the wayward nature of the human disposition; the example and prevalence of vicious habits; the fascinating charms of intoxication; the consequential habits, idleness and dissipation; the indolence which is concomitant with a broken spirit; and that carelessness and indifference to what may happen in future, which is too apt to arise in the mind that cannot see its way through present difficulties: these are frailties inseparable from the nature of human beings, which increase and aggravate their distress, and which nothing but a proper sense of religion can remove; and neither the power of the legislature or the wisdom of the philosopher can teach to alleviate.

But

But it is not from climate, it is not from the frailties of human nature alone, or the necessary wants and demands which the preservation of life and health inculcates to the mind of man, and the insufficiency of the earnings of bodily labour to attain the gratification of them, that the appearance of the labourer indicates such wretchedness; the laws, the customs, and habits of society, are all contributory to this effect; and the excess of civilization occasions distresses superior, yet similar, to what the savage experiences in his state of nature; superior, because *his* distress is not aggravated by a near view of the tantalizing contrast, the enjoyments of opulence and luxury; similar in the effects, which are, cold, hunger, and disease; in the one instance, the savage must be satisfied with the order of nature, which establishes no law of appropriation, but occupancy; he, consequently, cannot blame the laws and habits of society, which aggravate, if they do not, in fact, give rise to, the misfortunes of the English labourer: this is an assertion which demands an inquiry; and, if the principle is established by such an investigation, should not those laws, habits, and customs, be modified, to correspond with the feelings of humanity?

In the first place, it is apparent that bodily strength is the only patrimony the labourer enjoys; this is to supply him and his family with the necessities of life: the same patrimony, in conjunction with the opportunity of exerting the faculties of the mind, the inhabitant of an uncivilized country possesses; the first is restrained by the laws from trespassing on *appropriated* property; and, in this country, all that can be called property, is *appropriated*; the other has ample scope for the exercise of his faculties, both of body and mind; the gifts of nature lying open to the first man who has strength or dexterity sufficient to occupy them. Here is a manifest advantage which the savage possesses, and the laws of his country have taken from the English labourer: but have not the laws, the maxims, or the benevolence, of society, given to the poor some equivalent,



equivalent, instead of the opportunity of obtaining property by occupancy? the objects of which being, in every instance, already occupied, he is reduced to the sole means of bartering the sweat of his brow for the necessaries of life; they surely have, and an attempt shall be made to point out the substitutes.

The labourer is worthy of his *bire*, because he gives for it his sole property, his strength and his time, reserving to himself only sufficient intervals for refreshment and repose: what ought therefore to be his *bire*? The answer is obvious: the necessaries and comforts of life, equal to the reasonable wants of that class of society among which he ranks. Does he receive recompense for his labour equivalent to such a reasonable expectation? The examination of the fact shall be the answer to the question; and, that the inquiry may be as close to the point as possible, let us examine, in the first place, how the retributions for labour were paid in days of yore; whether they then stood in the same proportion with the necessaries of life, in times when luxury was not so universally diffused, and the cottager, not having the sight of the rich man's enjoyments so immediately under his eye, might be supposed to be better contented with his homely fare, than in these days, when the strong expressions of the poet are verified in every village:

— Sævior armis

*Luxuria incubuit, victumque ulciscitur orbem.*

## E T T E R II.

**F**LEETWOOD'S *Chronicon Pretiosum* will assist us in this inquiry; and, that the conclusion of the argument may not be supposed to rest on the foundations of fancy, some extracts from that useful compilation shall be produced.

The

The intention of the author was not much dissimilar to that of the present tract, except that he had a point to prove, we have only a subject to examine; and, to prove his point, he has searched not only all the publications then extant on the subject, but also many manuscript accounts of different monasteries, where the prices of the different articles of life were regularly inserted, and in some instances where the prices of labour formed also part of the account. But no certain comparative view can be formed on this head until about the middle of the fourteenth century; when, by an act of parliament passed in the 23d year of Edward the Third, the wages of the labourers were regulated, on account, as the preamble of the statute recites, of the great increase of wages occasioned by the plague:\* by the first chapter, every person able of body, and under the age of sixty, not having means of maintaining himself, is bound to serve those who are willing to employ him, at the wages which were usually given six years before the plague, and stated to be,

	s.	d.
To haymakers and weeders, by the day - - -	0	1
Mowing meadows, by the acre or day - - -	0	5
Reapers of corn, in the first week in August, by the day,	0	2
In the second week, and to the end of the month -	0	3
Threshing a quarter of wheat or rye - - -	0	2½
Threshing a quarter of barley, beans, pease, or oats -	0	1½

That excellent model for all parochial antiquities, Sir John Cullum's History and Antiquities of Hawstead, will also assist in forming a more accurate idea of the proportional prices of labour and provisions in Suffolk throughout some part of this century:

\* This preamble indicates the cause of the advance in the price of labour, a decrease of the number of hands, and proves the policy of the act to decrease, not increase, wages.

				<i>d.</i>
1387.	Wheat threshed, per quarter	-	-	0 4
	Other grain	-	-	0 2
	A reaper, per day	-	-	0 4
	Man filling dung-cart three days	-	-	0 10½
1389.	Wheat reaping, per acre	-	-	0 7
	Mowing an acre of grass	-	-	0 6

These prices are without meat, drink, or other courtesy demanded.\*

The prices of provisions, and the necessaries and comforts of life, were, during the same century, as follow :

A. D.				<i>£.</i>	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>
1309.	A pair of shoes	-	-	0	0	4
1314.	A stalled, or corn-fed, ox	-	-	1	4	0
1314.	A grass-fed ox	-	-	0	16	0
	A fat stalled cow	-	-	0	12	0
	A fat sheep unshorn	-	-	0	1	8
	A fat sheep shorn	-	-	0	1	2
	A fat hog, two years old	-	-	0	3	4
	A fat goose	-	-	0	0	2½
	Ale regulated by proclamation, in respect to price,					
	a gallon	-	-	0	0	1
1338.	Wheat, a quarter	-	-	0	3	4
	Barley, a quarter	-	-	0	0	10
	Pease and beans, a quarter	-	-	0	1	0
	Oats, a quarter	-	-	0	0	10
	White wine, a gallon	-	-	0	0	6
	Red wine, a gallon	-	-	0	0	4
1387.	Barley, at Leicester, a quarter	-	-	0	2	0
1388.	Lactage of a cow with its calf, one year, and a hen,	-	-	0	6	8

\* History and Antiquities of Hawstead, p. 188, 190.

# LETTER II.

11

				£.	s.	d.
1388.	Wheat, per quarter	-	-	0	4	0
	Oats, per quarter	-	-	0	2	0
	An ox	-	-	0	13	6
	A boar	-	-	0	1	8*

It is not an easy matter to determine, from the prices specified in Fleetwood, what was the average-rate, at which provisions were sold, the year parliament regulated the price of labour; for, about the middle of this century, years of dearth and plenty almost alternately follow each other, and the pestilence also occasioned a considerable difference; but the articles extracted are in those years, when none of these causes affected the price of provisions, and may therefore be esteemed a tolerable exact average for the fourteenth century.

In the beginning of the next century in the year 1404, the pay of a labourer was sometimes two-pence, sometimes three-pence, as appears from a computus of the Prior and Canons of Burchester; and in

				£.	s.	d.
1446.	Labourers without diet	-	-	0	0	3½
	From Michaelmas to Easter, 1d. less.					
	A mower in harvest, without diet	-	-	0	0	6
	A reaper and carter, without diet	-	-	0	0	5

The prices of necessaries and provisions from the same computus:

				s.	d.
1407.	A cow	-	-	7	0
	Two bushels of wheat	-	-	0	10
	Five bushels and a half of salt	-	-	3	4½
1425.	Pease, per quarter	-	-	2	2
	Gallon of ale, from 1d. to	-	-	0	1½

\* Fleetwood's Chron. Pret.

	s.	d.
1425. Gallon of red wine - -	0	8
Gallon of sweet wine - -	1	4
Two yards of ruslet cloth for the shepherd -	2	2
Thirty pair of winter gloves for the servants -	4	0

The following from other computus's:

1444. Wheat, a quarter - - -	4	4
Malt, a quarter - - -	4	0
Oats, a quarter - - -	1	8
Flich bacon - - -	1	8
1445. Wheat, a quarter - - -	4	6
Oats, a quarter - - -	2	0
Gallon of ale - - -	0	1½
1447. Wheat, a quarter - - -	8	0
Oats, a quarter - - -	2	1½
1448. Wheat, a quarter - - -	6	8
Oats, a quarter - - -	2	0
1449. Wheat, a quarter - - -	5	0
1450. Wheat, a quarter - - -	8	0
Oats, a quarter - - -	2	0
Gallon of ale - - -	0	1
1463. Wheat, a quarter - - -	2	0*

In the sixteenth century, only two instances are to be found of the wages of a labourer, one in 1514, the other in 1557.

A. D.	s.	d.
1514. Labourers from Easter to Michaelmas, except in harvest,	0	4
Ditto from Michaelmas to Easter - - -	0	3
A mower in harvest, with diet, 4d. without - -	0	6
A reaper and carter in harvest, with diet, 3d. without,	0	5

\* Fleetwood's Chron. Proc.

1514. A

# LETTER II.

13

				s.	d.
1514.	A woman-labourer, and other labourers, with diet,				
	2½d. without	-	-	0	4½
1557.	Threshing a quarter of wheat	-	-	1	1
	Ditto of rye	-	-	0	10
	Ditto of barley	-	-	0	5

Prices of provisions, &c. in the 16th century:

				£.	s.	d.
1512.	Oats, a quarter	-	-	0	2	0
	Beans, a quarter	-	-	0	4	0
1513.	Oats, a quarter	-	-	0	2	4
	Beans, a quarter	-	-	0	4	2
1515.	Beans, a quarter	-	-	0	4	2
1533.	Fat oxen	-	-	1	6	8
	Fat wethers	-	-	0	3	4
	Fat calves	-	-	0	3	4
	Fat lambs	-	-	0	1	0
	Beef in London 2½lb. or 3lb.	-	-	0	0	1
	Mutton, per quarter, in London	-	-	0	0	8
1557.	Wheat, a quarter before harvest	-	-	0	8	0
	Wheat, a quarter after harvest	-	-	0	4	0
	Malt, a quarter before harvest	-	-	0	5	0
	Malt, a quarter after harvest	-	-	0	4	8
1558.	A good sheep	-	-	0	2	10

In this inquiry there is no occasion to enter into an explanation of the comparative value of money in the three centuries, through a great part of which these notices have been taken, because the prices of labour and provisions have been valued by the same species of real or imaginary coin, and therefore the value of each, although very different from what bears the same denominations in this century, is quite competent to illustrate the ratio the prices of labour bore at these periods to the prices of the necessities of life.

LETTER



## LETTER III.

**I**NSTANCES of the prices of labour, and the cotemporary prices of provisions have been continued, by the assistance of the *Chronicon Pretiosum*, to a later æra than that in our ecclesiastical history; when the 31st statute of Henry VIII. ch. 13. laid the axe to the root of all monastic possessions in this kingdom, and transferred their estates and rights to the crown. The effect this total change of property had on the situation of the poor remains to be considered.

It will, at first sight, be thought, and is indeed believed to be the fact, by those who have superficially investigated the history of this period, that this act, at once, struck off many of their comforts, and deprived them of many sources of assistance, which are supposed to have flowed to the poor in numberless streams, from the kitchens, refectories, stores, and cellars, of the monasteries; and that the different acts of parliament for their relief, which reflect honour on the annals of our history, towards the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the ensuing century, arose from a necessity, occasioned by this capital stroke of the 8th Henry's despotic authority; but the history of the times does not authorize the conclusion.

It rather appears that what streams did, in fact, flow from these ecclesiastical fraternities, to the poor of the kingdom, were shallow and penurious; at the best, the coarse offal of a homely board; indeed, if the mode of life which was pursued by the nobility and gentry of this age be considered, if we recollect, that the metropolis was not then, and, indeed, has not been till lately, that overgrown monster, which engulphs within its maw, a property that, spread on the humble bench of the cottager, would feed millions; but, on the contrary, almost every village then boasted, as its constant inhabitant, one, or more, substantial, if not ennobled, landlord,

whose



whose hospitable seat bore a semblance, according to the riches and rank of the owner, to that economic profusion, which, by the instance so happily preserved for the information of posterity, by Dr. Percy,\* appears to have graced the character of the fifth Earl of Northumberland, who lived near the beginning of this century; we shall not, if similar instances, in proportion to rank and fortune be supposed to be prevalent, imagine the poor to have much felt the want of such assistance, as the heads of monasteries permitted to be given away at their gates; which, from the relations of modern travellers, who have lately visited those countries on the continent, where monastic institutions are still in full force, and especially from the observations of Dr. Ducarel, in his tour through Normandy, where the customs, endowments, and charitable donations, of the monasteries and priories may be supposed, from their former connection with, to be similar to, what was experienced in this country, appear to be insignificant and trifling, always excepting those instances where the particular motive of the endowment was to ensure a hospitable reception to the traveller. Tanner also, by a note in the preface to *Notitia Monastica*, appears to be of opinion, that it cannot be attributed to what the poor received from the religious houses, that no parochial assessments for their relief were found necessary during the prevalence of the monastic institutions; although it appears that some of the larger priories dignified one of their officers with the name of almoner.

But, be this fact as it may, it is to be presumed, that, if the poor did not sustain any great loss from the abolition of the monasteries, in the article of any considerable relief, they might have received from them, in provision or alms; they certainly felt one great inconvenience from the number of the necessitous being con-

\* The Regulations and Establishment of the Household of Henry Algernon Percy, 1512. Printed for Dr. Percy, the present Bishop of Dromore, but not published.

siderably increased; because, on the dissolution of the smaller monasteries, in the year 1535, whose revenues did not exceed two hundred pounds a year, it is said, that not less than ten thousand persons were sent to seek their fortunes in the wide world, without any other allowance than forty shillings and a new gown; and a revenue of thirty or thirty-two thousand pounds a year was vested in the crown; and, when the greater monasteries were dissolved, in the year 1539, and a revenue of one hundred and four thousand nine hundred and nineteen pounds was diverted from the maintenance of people in idleness, and began to flow in different channels,\* if the number of the poor, thrown upon the public by the dissolution of the lesser monasteries, be added to the number which may also be supposed to have become a burthen to the public by the dissolution of the greater monasteries, computing that number by the proportional revenue vested in the crown by the latter event to the revenue also vested in the crown by the former, amounting to a total of near forty-three thousand persons, who in the lapse of a few years had become additional objects of charity; for, although many of the members of the greater monasteries were allowed pensions, yet, if it be considered that they now enjoyed the liberty of becoming fathers of families, such a calculation will not appear to be extravagant; it will then not occasion our surprise, that a few years after this event, the legislature should find occasion to interfere in their behalf, when probably not less than a hundred thousand persons, who had no visible means of maintenance, pressed on the distribution of the charitable fund vested in trust with the ecclesiastics, now in part wrested from their gripe; and also became importunate sisters to the desultory feelings of charitable individuals, who might naturally be moved with compassion at the sight of their father-confessors now become needy fathers of a young offspring.

\* *Notitia Monastica*, Preface.

Besides,

Besides, the wars, which, from the conquest, had kept our population thin; a number of lives having been thrown away in the different contests, within the kingdom, for the sceptre; on the continent of Europe, for foreign possessions; and in Asia, on romantic principles of religious chivalry; had now, for a considerable period, ceased; and near a century had elapsed since the battle of Bosworth had seated Henry the Seventh on the throne, who, by his marriage with Elizabeth, the heiress of the York family, had united the claims of the two houses in his person; and no internal commotion having, since that event, occasioned any considerable waste of blood; and, except at the battle of Flodden-Field, which seems, for a time, to have quelled the animosity of our northern neighbours, the nation having suffered no loss of inhabitants from foreign wars; peace, of course, and its concomitant, population, had increased the riches of those who possessed the opportunity of acquiring, and, at the same time, the number of those, whose humble situation precluded them from such attempts; the number of inhabitants, therefore, who had no means of support, except from their labour, consequently was considerably increased,\* and, most probably, among the crowd which pressed on the public from the dissolved monasteries, few were there who could handle the plough, the flail, or the spade; but many, who, if they could not dig, were not ashamed to beg; a privilege which different acts of parliament had already laid under certain restrictions.

\* In 1377, the number of inhabitants in England and Wales amounted to 2,092,978. In 1583, to 4,688,000.

CHALMERS'S ESTIMATE.

## L E T T E R IV.

**T**HE situation of the poor, with respect to the price of labour and the necessities of life, their claims also on the charity of those in whose possession was centred the property of this kingdom, having been considered; it will now be a topic worthy our attention to relate, briefly as possible, the notice the legislature of the kingdom has taken of them, from the period when they first became objects of legislation, unto the present time when they participate of a revenue amounting to near three millions sterling per annum, raised for their employment and relief by the authority of the state.

This inquiry may, with great propriety, pass over that distant æra, the transactions of which history has preserved in very faint and doubtful records; and, indeed, it is not probable that, in times when this island enjoyed not any regular form of government, a great attention should be paid by our governors to the welfare of the poor; nor is it matter of wonder that while the petty reguli of the heptarchy were contesting the boundaries of their insignificant dominions; or while a foreign family, attended by a swarm of martial and needy followers, were contending for the throne of England, or disputing among themselves for the prize they had obtained; that any humane or wise regulations should take place with respect to the poor, who were then only considered as the means by which the claims of their respective lords might either be enforced or defended; and, viewed in that light, they rank in a different class of citizens, and are distinguished by epithets different from, but not more respectable in society, than that of husbandmen.

After the family of William, the Norman, had been established on the throne for several generations, and Edward the First, having

having made the conquest of North Wales, turned his attention to the defenceless situation of the lower class of his Welch subjects, and produced, with the assistance of his parliament, that code of laws known in our statute-books by the name of *Statutum Walliæ*; in which were regulated the modes by which they might obtain redress of private and public wrongs; and in which it is enacted, that a poor man, instead of putting in pledges to prosecute a suit, on suing out a writ, should only pledge his faith: from the date of this statute, which was passed in 1284, no mention appears of the poor in the acts of parliament until 1349, when the statute of labourers regulated their wages, as has been already mentioned, and in strong language declared that their labour, while they were able to work, should be their only resource, by the following words: "That no one, under pain of imprisonment, by pretence of piety or charity, should presume to give any thing to those who were able to labour, to encourage them in idleness and sloth, that by those means they might be compelled to work for the necessaries of life." Another statute passed in the same reign, which gave the poor the right of an attain in pleas, real and personal, without fine, and the statute of labourers, also, was confirmed, and the observance of it enforced by an imprisonment of fifteen days, and also by the punishment of burning them in the forehead, with an iron in the form of the letter F, if they left their work and went away into different towns, or into another country; and also obliged the officers of cities or boroughs, in which they might reside, to deliver them up.

From this period, until the 2d of Richard the Second, the statute-book is silent with respect to them; the parliament, then, 1378, confirmed the statute of the 23d of Edward the Third, and the other statutes of labourers, and ten years afterwards repeated the confirmation; and farther directed that no servant or labourer should depart from one hundred, rape, or wapentake, to another,



to serve, or live elsewhere, or under pretence of going a pilgrimage, without a letter patent, containing the cause of his going, and the time of his return, on pain of being put in the stocks until he finds surety for his return. This act of parliament also regulated the wages of yearly servants, in husbandry, allowing to the bailiff 13s. 4d. and clothing once a year; to the master-hind, 10s.; the carter, 10s.; shepherd, 10s.; oxherd, 6s. 8d.; the deye, 6s.; plough-driver 7s.: their wages were enforced, and the people were restrained from giving *more* by pecuniary penalties: for the first transgression, forfeiture of the overplus; second transgression, double the overplus; third offence, treble the overplus, or imprisonment of forty days. By the same statute, those who had served in any agricultural occupation, until they were twelve years of age, were restrained from being put out to any trade or mystery, on penalty of the indenture, or covenant, being void; and all servants in husbandry, and labourers, were prohibited to wear any sword, buckler, or dagger, except for defence of the realm in the time of war; but they were permitted to have bows and arrows, and to use them on Sundays and feast-days: all unlawful games were also prohibited: the seventh chapter of this statute also directed, that impotent beggars should live in the cities and villages where they were resident at the time of passing the act, and if the inhabitants of the said cities and villages *ne voilent ou ne poient suffir de les trover*, i. e. were not willing or able to maintain them,\* they should be taken to other towns in the hundred, rapé, or wapentake, or to the towns where they were born, within forty days after proclamation of the act, where they should continue for life.

Three years after the date of this act, the legislature made a laudable provision for the poor, from the appropriations of bene-

This translation may possibly be inaccurate.—I have searched the French dictionaries and glossaries in my possession, and confess I cannot find such a meaning affixed to the verb *trouver*, but know of none so proper.



fices, which was confirmed in the beginning of the reign of Henry the IVth; at which time it was enacted, that no labourer should be retained to work by the week; but for what reason it is not easy, at this distance of time, to conjecture.

The legislature remained silent on the subject from this period until 1414, when, by the second statute of Henry the Vth, justices of the peace are directed to send their writs for fugitive labourers and servants to every sheriff in England, and are also empowered to examine labourers, servants, and their masters, on their oaths, of all things done by them contrary to the ordinances and statutes, and to punish them, on their confession, as though they were convicted by inquest; which power is also recognized in the second year of Henry the VIth, with respect to those who take wages *superior* to what are allowed by statute; and, in the sixth year of the same reign, it is enacted, that justices of peace, in their counties, and the mayors and bailiffs, in every city, borough, and town, shall have power to make proclamation in every county, city, borough, and town, in full session, once a year, how much every servant, in husbandry, should take for his service for the year ensuing; and that two proclamations should be made between the feasts of Easter and Michaelmas for that purpose; which act is confirmed in the eighth year of the same reign.

In the year 1436, wheat and barley, being at a small price, (that is to say, wheat at 6s. 8d. and barley at 3s. per quarter,) are permitted, by a statute of the same date, to be exported without licence. Six years afterwards this statute is confirmed for ten years; and, in 1444, it is made perpetual; and, in this year, the legislature also enacted, that the wages of husbandmen, in harvest-time, should not exceed the following rates: a reaper, 4d. a day with board; without board, 6d.: a harvest-man, or driver, 3d. with board; without, 5d.: women-labourers, 2½d. with board; without, 4½d.: and that the wages of servants in husbandry, by the year, should not exceed the following prices; a bailiff, 23s. 4d. with board,

board, and 5s. for cloths; a chief hind, <sup>carter</sup> or shepherd, 20s. with board, and 4s. for clothes; a common servant, 15s. a year, board, and 3s. 4d. for clothes; a woman-servant, 10s. board, and 4s. for clothes; a child, under 14 years of age, 6s. with board, and 3s. for clothes; and also directed that a servant, in husbandry, purporting to depart from his master at the end of the year, should give him half a year's warning, or else serve him the year following.

From this time, no notice is taken of the agricultural poor, and no new regulations which could affect them are to be found in the statutes at large, until the eleventh of Henry the VIIth, 1494, except an act which passed three years before, prohibiting pulling down, or suffering to decay, houses of husbandry; by which means, the preamble to the act says, in some towns, where upwards of two hundred persons *were* occupied, and lived by their lawful labour, *now* only two or three herdsmen are employed, and the rest fall into idleness.\* By the second chapter of the eleventh of Henry the VIIth, vagabonds, and idle and suspected persons, shall be set in the stocks three days and three nights, and have no other sustenance but bread and water, and be then put out of the town; and every beggar, not able to work, shall resort to the hundred where he last dwelt, is best known, or was born, and there remain, on pain of like punishment: and no artificer, or labourer, shall play at any unlawful games, except during Christmas. Two justices are also, by the same act, empowered to restrain the common selling of ale. It is curious to see how early, after the relief of the poor became an object of the legislature, the regu-

The legislature, <sup>then</sup> two centuries ago, seems to have been aware of the bad consequences, to population and industry, that arise from the consolidation of small farms, which, where general, is a measure which strikes at the root of every stimulus to agricultural industry among the poor, by excluding all prospect of using the plough and sickle for themselves.

lation

lation of alehouses was also a subject of their attention, and with what an equal step the laws respecting vagabonds and alehouses proceed together.

The parliament also, in the same year, enabled poor persons to sue out writs of subpœna against those that may give them cause of complaint, and counsel shall be appointed them, taking nothing for the same, at the discretion of the chancellor. The prices of labour were again regulated by the same parliament.

In the 6th year of Henry the VIIIth, the wages of servants, in husbandry, are again regulated, as are the hours they shall work, have for their meals, and sleep; and, by the twenty-second of the same reign, justices of the peace are empowered to licence, under their seals, such poor, aged, and impotent persons, to beg within a certain precinct, as they shall think to have most need; and if any beg, without such licence, he shall be whipped, or else set in the stocks; and a vagabond taken begging shall be whipped, and then sworn to return to the place where he was born, or last dwelt, for the space of three years, and there put himself to labour.

All the other parliamentary regulations which respect the poor labourers, between the interval of this last-mentioned act and those of the 28th and the 31st years of the same reign; the first of which vested the smaller monasteries, and the last dissolved the whole structure of monastic institution, and vested all their estates in the crown; may be found in a capitular of statute 27th, Henry VIII. cap. 25, which directed, that all governors of shires, cities, hamlets, parishes, &c. shall find and keep every aged, poor, and impotent person, who was born or dwelt three years within the same limit, by way of voluntary and charitable alms, in every of the same cities, parishes, &c. with such convenient alms as shall be thought meet by their discretion, so as none of them shall be compelled to go openly begging: and also shall compel every sturdy vagabond to be kept in continual labour. Children under

14 years of age, and above five, that live in idleness, and are taken begging, may be put to service by the governors of cities, towns, &c. to husbandry, or other crafts or labours. A vagabond shall, the first time, be whipped, and sent to the place where he was born, or last dwelled, by the space of three years, there to get his living; and, if he continue his roguish life, he shall have the upper part of the gristle of his right ear cut off; and if, after that, he is taken wandering in idleness, or doth not apply to his labour, or is not in service with any master, he shall be adjudged and executed as a felon. No person shall make any open or common dole, nor shall give any money in alms, but to the common boxes and common gatherings, in every parish, on pain of forfeiting ten times as much. Unlawful games are also prohibited.

These, as far as they respect the subject of this inquiry, are the leading points, in which the legislature of other times interfered in the regulations of the rights, claims, and conduct, of that class of the community, whose only property is their personal strength, and whose sole employment through life is hard labour: but there also existed a description of fellow-subjects, whose rights were still more circumscribed, and the existence of which class of men in this island is, much to the honour of the present age, proved at this day only by the page of history, and such notices as are preserved in the black-lettered law-books of past times.

They were called villains. The word has respect to the nature of the tenure and the locality of their services, rather than to any particular ideas of disgrace which were attached to their person; *villani quia villa adscripti*, says Lord Coke: they were in some instances the property of the lord, were transferred like other property, and that particular description of them, called villains in gross, were in many respects in a similar situation to those Africans, who are objects of our commerce, and transported to the West Indies; but it appears, from Littleton's Tenures, that their personal safety was guarded, and no instances are to be found where they were ex-  
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empted from the general benefit of the laws of their country, unless where the laws and customs, of a particular tenure, interfered, and reduced them, in those instances, almost to a state of slavery. It may be presumed, therefore, that in all other respects they had an equal claim, with the rest of our fellow-subjects, to a compensation for their labour, while they were able to do any; and, when they were incapacitated, they then claimed from the hand of charity equally with their neighbours.

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## LETTER V.

AT this period, so interesting to the feelings of all English Protestants, when that vast superstructure of Papal influence and grandeur, reared on the foundation of fear and superstition, which had existed so many centuries, fell, as it were, by the magic touch of Henry VIII. to the ground, and an edifice more consonant to the principles of sober piety and good sense arose in its stead; let us pause awhile, and reflect on the different situations the poor were in, both with respect to their wants and demands on society *then*, and that station which they *now* hold: the contrast will appear striking, and some useful reflections may arise from it.

Their wages had uniformly hitherto borne a proportion to the necessities of life; and, that such proportion might be preserved, independent of the capricious or selfish will of an interested master, and the imposing demands of sturdy laziness, the price of labour had frequently been regulated by the legislature, which had also paid a constant attention to the prices of provisions; and all the necessities of life had been attainable hitherto, throughout the whole period which has been subject to our review, (except



in times of casual dearth,) by a proportion of labour which left a surplus for accidents or illness; but, at the same time that the legislature had this equitable attention to their interests, it enforced the necessity of labour and employment, by corporal punishments of the idle and wanderer, and by restraining the hand of charity from giving persons of such description any assistance.

Through the same æra we also find that the infirm, the aged, and the impotent, had no claims of assistance from society, except on that portion of the possessions of the ecclesiastics which seems to have been adequate, under the management of the clergy, to the demand on it; and the jealousy of the legislature, left the attempt made by the monasteries on that fund, by the appropriation of the great tithes to themselves, might, in the end, divert it from its proper application, is very apparent, by that act of parliament which passed in the 15th of Richard II. and was confirmed by the 4th of Henry IV.

Another circumstance well deserves our notice:—the luxuries of life were hitherto but little, if at all, in use among the poor; no deleterious snuff or tobacco, no debilitating tea, no liquid fire, commonly called gin, or spirits; those banes of health and morals, those sure destroyers of the constitutions of the present and of the rising generations; and it is late in the period that we find any mention made of ale-houses, receptacles of vice and immorality! from whence the Treasury draws a considerable revenue, and at the same time drains the poor of their property, constitution, and morals.

Manufactures had also made but little progress among us, which, however they may enrich individuals, or increase the sources of our commerce, are, to the labouring poor, when they are the means of congregating them to work in parties, or are introductory of sedentary employment, most serious evils; in as much as they are by long experience found to affect, most materially, the health and morals of those employed in them; and when, which has happened



pened in many places, they leave the parishes which have, for a time, been their residence, (for, manufactures are naturally desultory,) those parishes are left in miserable poverty and hapless wretchedness.

The means of intercourse with popular cities were also less obvious; of consequence, all those crimes, which, being committed in a crowd, may escape censure, were less practised; and that evil example, which is always to be found where many idle people are assembled, was less before their eyes; besides, the moral conduct of the individual was more under the guidance of the ecclesiastical director of his conscience, during the existence of the Roman Catholic persuasion; which circumstance must be allowed to have been a cause of stricter moral conduct among the poor than at present prevails.

It has been already hinted, that the population of the kingdom, particularly among the lower classes of society, has considerably increased since the abolition of monasteries; and that whatever alms the poor then received from those societies of regular clergy, as well as the crumbs which fell from the tables of the opulent, who now expend their incomes in cities and places of public resort, are at present withdrawn; and the very numerous poor of this kingdom are, now, left a very heavy burthen on the landed property alone, while manufactures and commerce enjoy a considerable portion of the benefit arising from their labour.

At the same time, a principle destructive to the rights, and particularly affecting the lower classes of society, seems now to pervade the whole system of the management of the poor; a principle which is inherent to despotic governments, but clashes with the rights of a subject under a limited monarchy, and which has, nevertheless, increased in this country in a direct proportion with the liberality and freedom of our excellent constitution. The principle alluded to is that which leaves a chasm between the different orders of the state, and operates to this effect: that those who are born to hard

labour for their maintenance shall never have an opportunity of emerging from their low condition; the artizan or manufacturer, the farmer or tradesman, may rise to the consequence of a legislator: opulence will raise the possessor to distinctions in society; an individual of every profession may look up with the well-grounded hope of becoming, in maturer age, of more importance among the higher classes of the state than when he began his career; but between the labourer and any superior situation among his countrymen there is now a dreadful gulph, which none, or scarce any, can pass. — During the æra which has been examined, such a principle does not appear to have prevailed, and yet the rights of the subject were not then so well defined as at present; the wages received, under sanction of statute-laws, by the labourer, enabled the prudent to save something; that something might *then* be applied to profit, in small occupations of land; a small business leads the way to a greater: — by these means the door was open to riches and authority; and honest ambition was a spur even to the cottager, of which he is now deprived; for, the industrious man in these days seldom receives any assistance from the overseer, in the casualties to which human nature is subject, until every farthing of his savings is exhausted, and he becomes, with respect to his poverty, on a level with the idle and the drunkard; and if he is fortunate enough, by many years industry and economy, to accumulate a few pounds, no small business, in his line of life, is now open to him; the consolidation of small farms has precluded all hopes of employing his money in that business with which he has had most experience; all, therefore, he can do is to buy a cottage, which the parish-officers too often fix their attention on, as a sufficient reason why he and his family, numerous as they may be, shall not receive relief, because he has visible property. This chasm between the labourer and the other classes in society, it is presumed, may do more mischief to the state, by destroying every stimulus to industry, except dire necessity, and actually become a more serious cause of the

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the surprising increase of the poor's rates than even those inducements to dissipation and enervating luxury, which the policy of finance holds out to them in the shape of tea, spirits, and ale-houses.

No wonder, therefore, that those who lead a life of retirement, far from the haunts of the ambitious or voluptuous, who retreat from business or pleasure, either to cultivate a more intimate knowledge of themselves or to deceive the passing hours by an attention to the improvement or embellishment of their estates, should have their sensibility wounded by being not only hearers, but eye-witnesses, of the misery of their fellow-creatures.—No wonder that those who have been nursed in the lap of luxury should avoid those scenes which otherwise, it is probable, they would embellish by their taste; and desert those mansions, now untenanted and dreary, which, when occupied by the hospitable owners, diffused a gleam of cheerfulness through the country. It surely is not beneath the office of humanity, at times, to hold conversation with the peasant, whose labour improves or embellishes our demesnes; but the topic of such conversation too often distresses humanity, and sends the hearer home dejected and dissatisfied.

Probably some reflections may then arise in his mind not very favourable to the present system of poor-laws: being a witness of their wretched situation, he may reasonably conclude that the sum, immense as it is, which the poor's rate, together with the charitable donations of our ancestors, raises for them, is not sufficient, or that it is much misapplied; for the rate itself is certainly an enormous burthen, rising from two or three shillings in the pound, upon the actual rental, up to sixteen, eighteen, or more, in some parishes; and the whole of this revenue has increased to the present bulk, from nothing, in less than two centuries, and no part of it is mortgaged, but the whole applied, or presumed to be applied, to their maintenance and relief.

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Their wages, it is true, are less in proportion to the value of money or the necessaries of life, than they were in times antecedent to the present system, probably less by one-third; and they also, in those times, received assistance from the clergy, who, by their advice, then regulated their religious and moral principles, which are considerable preservers of industry and good economy; therefore, raising their wages would not alone be of service to them at present, because the religious sentiment seems extinct throughout the multitude, in general, and morality has unawares expired with it; consequently those principles, which, if active, would kindle a spark of honest industry among them, are totally inert; and additional wages, it is feared, would only induce additional excesses.

If education will fix habits unconnected with the moral sentiment; if Mr. Pope's maxim is true, that

Just as the twig is bent, the tree's inclin'd;

an opening is surely left which may be applied to the best of purposes, without raising the wages of the labourer, without calling for assistance from the clerical possessions, or expecting the clergy to attempt again the office of ghostly directors with respect to their poor parishioners.

Industry, early industry, keeps the rising age from present mischief, and fashions the future man to a life of honesty; and, depend on it, the religious principle, together with every respected moral virtue, may be reared on the basis of habitual industry.

"To teach the young idea how to shoot" is among the most pleasing and important offices of life; how excellent must be a plan formed on that sentiment, which would comprehend, and, in a manner, insure, the future well-being of so large a portion of this nation; would deliver them from a childhood and youth, passed in idleness and theft, to a manhood formed from the earliest years to habits of industry; would, in the mean time, render  
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their hours of *formè* value to their parents, which are now an incumbrance to them, and a pest to their neighbours.

Much has been done, it may be said, for the rising generation within these few years, by Sunday-schools; it is very far from my intention to call in question either the principle on which the patrons of Sunday-schools proceed, or to dispute the fact that they have done service; but, as the intention of Sunday-schools is to inculcate a religious principle, to give early habits of religious duties, and to open the mind of the poor to religious instruction, surely those seminaries are at present incomplete. Shall the six days be spent in idleness, perhaps in theft and immorality, while the seventh alone is taken care of? May not the child who is left to itself in a state of idleness, or, possibly, for so we know it too often happens, sent out to steal firing for its parents, or encouraged to pilfer for its sustenance through the other six days in the week, and who attends at the Sunday-schools, where, from superior readiness and regularity of attendance there, and at church, it is praised by the master or mistress for reading and behaving well on the Sunday; may not such a child, from such practice, imbibe habits of hypocrisy, at the same time that it is educated in a regular attendance to religious duties? Surely there is some danger that he may, in mature life, make use of this church-going habit, as a cloak for his conduct the rest of the week; besides, it should be considered that the accomplishments of reading and writing are not essentially necessary for all people; there must always be in all societies of mankind some who are hewers of wood and drawers of waters; to whose sum of happiness, or honest means of getting their bread, these accomplishments will not add an unit; and to all the children of that class in society, *for* whose benefit Sunday-schools have been with so much well-meaning humanity encouraged; six days industrious habits are recommended as a better preparation to a seventh of religious duties and instruction, than six days passed in vice or idleness. But this topic shall be dropped for the present,

and



and the utility of Sunday-schools acknowledged on this general principle,

*Eft quodam prodire tenus, ſi non detur ultra.*

In the mean time, the inquiry into the actual ſtate and ſituation of the poor, as far as they are affected by the prevailing habits of the times, as well as by the laws of their country; together with the opinion which thoſe who have paid any attention to the ſubject, and have laid the reſult of that attention before the public, have formed of the cauſes of their increaſing wretchedneſs and our increaſing expenſes; ſhall be purſued, from the period at which this pauſe has been made, through the ſucceeding years to the preſent time; in full confidence that ſome uſeful knowledge on this important ſubject may be gained; and in hopes that while we are amuſed we may be inſtructed.

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## LETTER VI.

WHEN I ſent you the laſt letter on this ſubject, the difficulty of meeting with ſufficient information in reſpect to the price of labour, and the neceſſaries of life, from the period which has hitherto been the object of this inquiry, unto the end of the reign of Elizabeth, did not then occur to me; nor did I foreſee that I ſhould be left in the dark on that ſubject, when Fleetwood's *Chronicon* ceaſed to give me any longer its ſteady and faithful light. The record of the prices of wheat at Windſor-market, which has been regularly taken by the Burſer of Eton-College to fix the corn-rents for the year, is the only exact account, ſo far back as it goes, in this kingdom; and that extends only to the year 1595; but, not being able to accompany the price



price of wheat, from that period, which was only nine years anterior to the 43d of Elizabeth, with any certain cotemporary account of the price of labour; although I have taken every means in my power to obtain such information as might be depended on with respect to the concurrent price of labour and provisions to the 43d year of Elizabeth, hitherto without effect; and being fearful that those among your readers, who have paid any attention to what has already been said on the subject, may conceive it is deserted, and my word not intended to be kept with them; I determined to send you a few pages on that part of the inquiry, which my library will enable me to elucidate, and my reason is adequate to explain.

On perusing the English historians of the age antecedent to that when the parliament of Elizabeth interwove the preservation of the poor with the constitution of the kingdom; the assertion, made in a former part of this tract, that the monks, if they could not dig, were not ashamed to beg, is found to be well authorized by history; for, it appears that the multitudes of idle people, which the dissolved monasteries had vomited forth on the public, were become a serious burthen on society, and occasioned the passing an act in the first parliament of Edward the Sixth, which is as curious in the preamble, as it is inconsistent, in the enacting part, with every principle of humanity and justice: the preamble states, that "forasmuch as idleness and vagabondry is the mother and root of all thefts, robberies, evil acts, and other mischiefs, and yet idle and disorderly persons, being unprofitable members, or rather enemies, of the commonwealth, have been suffered to increase, and yet do so, whom if they should be punished with *death*, whipping, imprisonment, and other corporal pain, it were not without their deserts," be it enacted, &c.

In short, this curious piece of legislation makes a man who liveth idly three days, the slave for two years of him who informs against such an idler, he being first branded with a red-hot iron

on the breast with the letter V ; during which two years he shall be fed with bread and water, and *refuse*-meat; and caused to work by beating, chaining, and otherwise, in any work, be it ever so vile ; and, if he runs away from his master for the space of fourteen days, he shall become his *slave* for life ; after being branded on the cheek with the letter S ; and, if he runs away a second time, he shall be adjudged a felon.

This act of parliament, so discreditable even to that age of disorder and despotism, arose, as Rapin says, from the necessity the government experienced of obliging the monks to work, who were little inured to labour, but employed themselves in going from house to house, inspiring people with the spirit of rebellion ; and thus much is certain, let the cause of such severity have been what it may, that the act itself was so diametrically opposite to every just principle of legislation, that it was repealed in the third year of the same reign, and during the administration of those by whose authority it had been passed ; and the poor were then left by the legislature much in the same situation as before the abolition of monasteries ; although certainly deprived of a source of maintenance, and the number of them considerably increased by that dissolution.

Those to whom Henry the Eighth had left the care of his infant son, even when assisted by the council, among whom many names of respectable memory appear, seem to have been as insufficient to that department of government, which respects the interior police of the kingdom, as we may reasonably suppose the minor king could have been, had he himself wielded the sceptre. What else but complete ignorance could have induced them to permit so unpopular and unjust an act to be passed in the first year of their young sovereign's reign, as has been alluded to ? which law they were so soon obliged to repeal ; and, in the year following, the repeal, as an encouragement (as the preamble says) to, and promotion of, industry, an act was passed which obliged servants in  
husbandry

husbandry to serve the whole year, and not by days' wages; the occasion of which curious restraint, it is difficult at this distance of time to guess; the statute-book, as well as history, being silent on the subject.

That the poor were now in a distressed situation throughout the kingdom, is very apparent; they had lost such relief, whatever it might have been, as they had been accustomed to receive from the monasteries; they had also lost a considerable source of employment, by the lands of the monasteries being granted to the nobles and followers of the court; who left the husbandry of their newly-acquired domains to chance and neglect, which had been more attended to, and well cultivated, when under the inspection of the monasteries, and their tenants; and those also, who were lately their confessors and spiritual directors, who, while it was their interest, influenced the poor to a life of industry and content, still retained the same influence over their minds, and made use of it now, to incite them to faction and sedition; certain consequences of that distress, which arises from idleness and dissipation; while the legislature, to mitigate and allay the turbulent and dissatisfied spirit then prevalent among the lower orders of the state, with an absurdity scarcely credible, passed a law, that the poor of every parish shall be relieved, "with that which every parishioner of his charitable devotion *will give*." 5th and 6th Edward VI. cap. 2.

As a top to the climax of their absurdities in legislating for the poor, during this short and unpropitious reign, parliament first instituted licensed ale-houses, and sanctioned them by an act which has the following preamble, as a reason for the statute: "Forasmuch as intolerable hurts and troubles to the commonwealth of this realm doth daily grow and increase, through such abuses and disorders as are had in common ale-houses, and other houses, called tippling-houses." A preamble which should have preceded a prohibition, not a license, or permission.

The short reign of Mary was passed in the regulation of what appeared to her, and her advisers, of much more importance than the feeding of millions; the bending the stubborn opinions of a few, in matters of religious controversy.—And, can it be supposed, that either legislators or ecclesiastics, who were employed in bringing heretics to the stake, could elevate their attention to the divine office of investigating the means to preserve the multitudes of their poor brethren from idleness and want? However, before all the perverted faculties of their minds were totally absorbed in the task of regulating matters of religious opinion, with the accuracy that their cotemporary legislator, Charles the Fifth,\* regulated the motion of time-keepers, they had sufficient leisure to leave matters in the same state, with respect to the poor, as they were in the two last reigns; except that they invented the scheme of exposing those who begged; which, at that time, must, of necessity, have been as well the aged and infirm, as the idle; by obliging them to wear a badge on their breast and back openly, by an act of the second year of the reign of Philip and Mary; but, in these days, when the rights of human nature are so well understood, and, with such merited success, wrested from the strongest gripe of power, it will not strike us with surprise, that, in those times of ignorance, superstition, and despotism, the rights of the many should be but little understood, and less attended to, by the few who held the iron rod of power.

The kingdom felt, during the reigns of these two children of the Eighth Henry, most serious effects from the ignorance of government, or its inattention to, the regulation of the interior police; being, at times, convulsed by intestine commotions, from its centre to its circumference; as the rebellions of Kett, in Norfolk; that of Arundel, in Devonshire; and insurrections in many

\* Robinson's History of the Emperor Charles V. 4to edit. vol. iii. book 12.

counties,

counties, in the year 1549; and those of Wyatt, in Kent and Surrey, and Carew, in Cornwall, in 1554, plainly evidence.

It is no wonder, therefore, that in an early part of the reign of Elizabeth, after the affairs of religion were settled to the general satisfaction of the nation, by the establishment of the Protestant faith, according to the ritual of the church of England; and soon after the Queen had entrusted the affairs of the kingdom to the management of a Bacon and a Cecil; that we find the attention of parliament occupied on the subject of the poor, with a seriousness of application that proved their conception of the importance of the object to the universal welfare of the nation; and which gave rise to three acts, that were passed in the fifth year of her reign; by the first of which, those regulations made in the several parliaments of the fourth of Henry the Seventh, and the seventh and twenty-seventh of Henry the Eighth, for keeping in repair farm-houses, and maintaining of tillage, were enforced; and all that was enacted, during the last two reigns, on this subject, was repealed. By the second act, the poor were to be relieved by what every person gives weekly; and, if any parishioner shall refuse to pay, reasonably, towards the relief of the poor, or shall discourage others, then the justices of the peace, at their quarter-sessions, may tax him a weekly sum; which, if he refuses to pay, they may commit him to prison: and, if any parish has more poor than they are able to relieve, justices of the peace may license so many of them, as they shall think good, to beg within the county.

The next act, which is the 5th of Elizabeth, cap. 4. is in force at this day; and produces many useful regulations, as well in respect to what persons are compellable to serve in any crafts or trades, as in husbandry: the conduct of the master and servant, reciprocally to each other, is regulated; the production of testimonials of a servant's conduct enforced by a penalty; the time during which labourers