

is a sentiment that surely none would wish to see eradicated; though the parish law of England, it must be confessed, is a system of all others the most calculated gradually to weaken this sentiment, and in the end will probably destroy it completely.

The servants who live in the families of the rich, have restraints yet stronger to break through in venturing upon marriage. They possess the necessaries, and even the comforts, of life, almost in as great plenty as their masters. Their work is easy, and their food luxurious, compared with the work and food of the class of labourers; and their sense of dependence is weakened by the conscious power of changing their masters, if they feel themselves offended. Thus comfortably situated at present, what are their prospects if they marry. Without knowledge, or capital, either for business, or farming, and unused, and therefore unable, to earn a subsistence by daily labour, their only refuge seems to be a miserable alehouse, which certainly offers no very enchanting prospect of a happy evening to their lives. The greater number of them, therefore, deterred by this uninviting view of their future situation, content themselves with remaining single where they are.

If this sketch of the state of society in England be near the truth, it will be allowed, that the preventive check to population operates with considerable force throughout all the classes of the community. And this observation is further confirmed by the abstracts from the registers returned in consequence of the late Population Act. The results of these abstracts shew, that the annual marriages in England and Wales, are to the whole population as 1 to  $123\frac{1}{5}$ <sup>a</sup>, a smaller proportion of marriages than obtains in any of the countries which have been examined, except Norway and Switzerland.

In

<sup>a</sup> Observ. on the Results of the Population Act, p. 11. The answers to the Population Act, have at length happily rescued the question of the population of this country from the obscurity in which it has been so long involved, and have afforded some very valuable data to the political calculator. At the same time, it must be confessed, that they are not so complete, as entirely to exclude reasonings and conjectures, respecting the inferences which

In the earlier part of the last century, Dr. Short estimated this proportion at about 1 to 115<sup>a</sup>. It is probable that this calculation was then correct, and the present diminution in the proportion of marriages notwithstanding an increase of population more rapid than formerly, owing to the more rapid progress of commerce and agriculture, is partly a cause, and partly a consequence, of the diminished mortality that has been observed of late years.

The returns of the marriages, pursuant to the late act, are supposed to be less liable to the suspicion of inaccuracy, than any other parts of the registers.

Dr. Short in his *New Observations on Town and Country Bills of Mortality*, says, he will "conclude with the observation of an eminent Judge of this nation, that the growth and increase of mankind is more stunted from the cautious difficulty people make to enter on marriage, from the prospect of the trouble and expences in providing for a family, than from any thing in the nature of the species." And, in conformity to this idea, Dr. Short proposes to lay heavy taxes and fines, on those who live single, for the support of the married poor<sup>b</sup>.

The observation of the eminent Judge is, with regard to the numbers which are prevented from being born, perfectly just; but the inference that the unmarried ought to be punished, does not appear to be equally so. It will not, I believe, be very far from the truth, to say, that, in this country, not more than half of the prolific power of nature is called into action, and yet, that there are more children born than the country can properly support.

If we suppose that the yearly births were  $\frac{1}{10}$  part of the population,

which are to be drawn from them. It is earnestly to be hoped, that the subject may not be suffered to drop after the present effort. Now that the first difficulty is removed, an enumeration, every ten years, might be rendered easy and familiar; and the registers of births, deaths, and marriages, might be received every year, or at least, every five years. I am persuaded that more inferences are to be drawn, respecting the internal state of a country, from such registers, than we have yet been in the habit of supposing.

<sup>a</sup> New Observ. on Bills of Mortality, p. 265. 8vo. 1750.

<sup>b</sup> Id. p. 247.

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a proportion, which, for short periods, obtains frequently on the continent<sup>a</sup>, and constantly, perhaps, in many parts of America; and allowing one third for the mortality under 20, which is a moderate supposition, as, according to Dr. Short, this mortality, in some places, is only one fifth or one fourth<sup>b</sup>; then if all were to marry at 20, which is by no means so early an age as is possible,  $\frac{1}{10}$ th part of the population would, in that case, marry annually; that is, there would be one annual marriage out of 60 persons, instead of one marriage out of 123 persons, as is the case at present. It may fairly be said, therefore, that not more than one half of the prolific power of nature is called into action in this country. And yet, when we contemplate the insufficiency of the price of labour to maintain a large family, and the quantum of mortality which arises directly and indirectly from poverty; and add to this, the crowds of children, which are cut off prematurely in our great towns, our manufactories, and our workhouses, we shall be compelled to acknowledge, that if the number born annually, were not greatly thinned by this premature mortality, the funds for the maintenance of labour must increase with much greater rapidity than they have ever done hitherto in this country, in order to find work and food for the additional numbers that would then grow up to manhood.

Those, therefore, who live single, or marry late, do not, by such conduct, contribute, in any degree, to diminish the actual population; but merely to diminish the proportion of premature mortality which would otherwise be excessive; and consequently in this point of view do not seem to deserve any very severe reprobation or punishment.

The returns of the births and deaths are supposed, on good grounds,

<sup>a</sup> On an average of five years, after the plague in Prussia, rejecting the first extraordinary year, the proportion of births to the whole population was above 1 to 18, (table iv. page 253). In New Jersey, according to Dr. Price (Observ. on Reverf. Paym. vol. i. p. 283.) it was 1 to 18, and in the back settlements probably 1 to 15. <sup>b</sup> New Observ. on Bills of Mortality, p. 59.

to be deficient, and it will therefore be difficult to estimate, with any degree of accuracy, the proportion which they bear to the whole population.

If we divide the existing population of England and Wales, by the average of burials for the five years ending in 1800, it would appear, that the mortality was only 1 in 49<sup>a</sup>; but this is a proportion so extraordinarily small, considering the number of our great towns and manufactories, that it cannot be considered as approaching to the truth.

Whatever may be the exact proportion of the inhabitants of the towns to the inhabitants of the country, the southern part of this island certainly ranks in that class of states, where this proportion is greater than 1 to 3; indeed, there is ample reason to believe, that it is greater than 1 to 2. According to the rule laid down by Crome, the mortality ought, consequently, to be above 1 in 30<sup>b</sup>; according to Sufmilch, above 1 in 33<sup>c</sup>. In the *Observations on the Results of the Population Act*<sup>d</sup>, many probable causes of deficiency in the registry of the burials, are pointed out; but no calculation is offered respecting the sum of these deficiencies, and I have no data whatever to supply such a calculation. I will only observe, therefore, that if we suppose them altogether to amount to such a number, as will make the present annual mortality about 1 in 40, this must appear to be the lowest proportion of deaths that can well be supposed, considering the circumstances of the country; and if true, would indicate a most astonishing superiority over the generality of other states, either in the habits of the people with respect to prudence and cleanliness, or in natural healthiness of situation<sup>e</sup>. Indeed, it seems to be nearly ascertained, that both these causes,

<sup>a</sup> The population is taken at 9,168,000, and the annual deaths at 186,000. (Obs. on the Results of Pop. Act. p. 6 & 9.) <sup>b</sup> *Über die Bevölkerung der Europäischen Staaten*, p. 127. <sup>c</sup> Sufmilch, *Göttliche Ordnung*, vol. iii. p. 60. <sup>d</sup> P. 6;

<sup>e</sup> It is by no means surprising that our population should have been under-rated formerly,

causes, which tend to diminish mortality, operate in this country to a considerable degree. The small proportion of annual marriages mentioned before, indicates, that habits of prudence, extremely favourable to happiness, prevail through a large part of the community, in spite of the poor-laws; and it appears from the clearest evidence, that the generality of our country parishes are very healthy. Dr. Price quotes an account of Dr. Percival, collected from the ministers of different parishes, and taken from positive enumerations, according to which, in some villages, only a 45th, a 50th, a 60th, a 66th, and even a 75th part, dies annually. In many of these parishes the births are to the deaths above 2 to 1, and in a single parish above 3 to 1<sup>a</sup>. These, however, are particular instances, and cannot be applied to the agricultural part of the country in general. In some of the flat situations, and particularly those near marshes, the proportions are found very different, and in a few, the deaths exceed the births. In the 54 country parishes, the registers of which, Dr. Short collected, choosing them purposely in a great variety of situations, the average mortality was as high as 1 in 37<sup>b</sup>. This is certainly much above the present mortality of our agricultural parishes, in general. The period which Dr. Short took, included some considerable epidemics, which may possibly have been

merly, at least by any person who attempted to estimate it from the proportion of births or deaths. Till the late Population Act, no one would have imagined, that the actual returns of annual deaths, which might naturally have been expected to be as accurate in this country as in others, would turn out to be less than a 49th part of the population. If the actual returns for France, even so long ago as the ten years ending with 1780, had been multiplied by 49, she would have appeared at that time to have a population of above 40 millions. The average of annual deaths, was 818,491. Necker, de l'Administration des Finances, tom. i. c. ix. p. 255. 12mo. 1785.

<sup>a</sup> Price's Observ. on Reverf. Paym. vol. ii. note, p. 10. First additional Essay. In particular parishes, private communications are perhaps more to be depended upon than public returns; because in general those clergymen only are applied to, who are in some degree interested in the subject, and of course take more pains to be accurate.

<sup>b</sup> New Observations on bills of Mortality, table ix. p. 133.

above

above the usual proportion. But sickly seasons should always be included, or we shall fall into great errors. In 1056 villages of Brandenburg, which Susmilch examined, the mortality for 6 good years, was 1 in 43; for 10 mixed years, about 1 in 38<sup>1/2</sup><sup>a</sup>. In the villages of England, which Sir F. M. Eden mentions, the mortality seems to be about 1 in 47 or 48<sup>b</sup>; and in the late returns pursuant to the Population Act, a still greater degree of healthiness appears. Combining these observations together, if we take 1 in 46, or 1 in 48, as the average mortality of the agricultural part of the country including sickly seasons, this will be the lowest that can be supposed with any degree of probability. But this proportion will certainly be raised to 1 in 40, when we blend it with the mortality of the towns, and the manufacturing part of the community, in order to obtain the average for the whole kingdom.

The mortality in London, which includes so considerable a part of the inhabitants of this country, was, according to Dr. Price, at the time he made his calculations, 1 in 20<sup>1/2</sup>; in Norwich 1 in 24<sup>1/2</sup>; in Northampton 1 in 26<sup>1/2</sup>; in Newbury 1 in 27<sup>1/2</sup><sup>c</sup>; in Manchester 1 in 28; in Liverpool 1 in 27<sup>1/2</sup><sup>d</sup>, &c. He observes, that the number dying annually in towns is seldom so low as 1 in 28, except in consequence of a rapid increase produced by an influx of people at those periods of life when the fewest die, which is the case with Manchester and Liverpool<sup>e</sup>, and other very flourishing manufacturing towns. In general he thinks, that the mortality in great towns may be stated at from 1 in 19<sup>f</sup> to 1 in 22 and 23; in moderate towns, from 1 in 24 to 1 in 28; and, in country villages, from 1 in 40, to 1 in 50<sup>g</sup>.

The tendency of Dr. Price to exaggerate the unhealthiness of towns may justly be objected to these statements; but the objection seems

<sup>a</sup> Gottliche Ordnung, vol. i. c. ii. f. xxi. p. 74.

<sup>b</sup> Estimate of the number

of Inhabitants in G. Britain.

<sup>c</sup> Price's Observ. on Reverf. Paym. vol. i. note

p. 272.

<sup>d</sup> Id. vol. ii. First additional Essay, note, p. 4.

<sup>e</sup> Ibid.

<sup>f</sup> The Mortality at Stockholm was, according to Wargentín, 1 in 19.

<sup>g</sup> Observ. on Reverf. Paym. vol. ii. First additional Essay, p. 4.

to be only of weight with regard to London. The accounts from the other towns which are given, are from documents which his particular opinions could not influence. It should be remarked, however, that there is good reason to believe, that not only London, but the other towns in England, and probably also country villages, were, at the time of these calculations, less healthy than at present. Dr. William Heberden remarks, that the registers of the ten years from 1759 to 1768<sup>a</sup>, from which Dr. Price calculated the probabilities of life in London, indicate a much greater degree of unhealthiness than the registers of late years. And the returns pursuant to the population act, even after allowing for great omissions in the burials, exhibit in all our provincial towns, and in the country, a degree of healthiness much greater than had before been calculated. At the same time I cannot but think, that 1 in 31, the proportion of mortality for London, mentioned in the *Observations on the Results of the Population Act*<sup>b</sup>, is smaller than the truth. Five thousand may not, perhaps, be enough to allow for the omissions in the burials; or, perhaps, the absentees in the employments of war and commerce, may not be included in these omissions. In estimating the proportional mortality the resident population alone should be considered.

There certainly seems to be something in great towns, and even in moderate towns, peculiarly unfavourable to the very early stages of life; and the part of the community on which the mortality principally falls, seems to indicate, that it arises more from the closeness and foulness of the air, which may be supposed to be unfavourable to the tender lungs of children, and the greater confinement, which they almost necessarily experience, than from the superior degree of luxury and debauchery, usually, and justly, attributed to towns. A married pair, with the best constitutions, who lead the most regu-

<sup>a</sup> Increase and Decrease of Diseases, p. 32. 4to. 1801.      <sup>b</sup> P. 13.

lar

lar and quiet life, seldom find that their children enjoy the same health in towns as in the country.

In London, according to former calculations, one half of the born died under three years of age; in Vienna and Stockholm under two; in Manchester, under five; in Norwich, under five; in Northampton, under ten<sup>a</sup>. In country villages, on the contrary, half of the born live till thirty, thirty-five, forty, forty-six, and above. In the parish of Ackworth, in Yorkshire, it appears, from a very exact account kept by Dr. Lee of the ages at which all died there for 20 years, that half of the inhabitants live to the age of 46<sup>b</sup>, and there is little doubt, that, if the same kind of account had been kept in some of those parishes before mentioned, in which the mortality is so small as 1 in 60, 1 in 66, and even 1 in 75, half of the born would be found to have lived till 50 or 55.

As the calculations respecting the ages to which half of the born live in towns, depend more upon the births and deaths which appear in the registers, than upon any estimates of the number of people, they are on this account less liable to uncertainty, than the calculations respecting the proportion of the inhabitants of any place which dies annually.

To fill up the void occasioned by this mortality in towns, and to answer all further demands for population, it is evident, that a constant supply of recruits from the country is necessary, and this supply appears, in fact, to be always flowing in from the redundant births of the country. Even in those towns, where the births exceed the deaths, this effect is produced by the marriages of persons not born in the place. At a time when our provincial towns were increasing much less rapidly than at present, Dr. Short calculated that  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the married were strangers<sup>c</sup>. Of 1618 married men, and 1618

<sup>a</sup> Price's Observ. on Revers. Paym. vol. i. p. 264—266.      <sup>b</sup> Id. vol. i. p. 268.

<sup>c</sup> New Observations on bills of Mortality, p. 76.

married

married women, examined at the Westminster Infirmary, only 329 of the men, and 495 of the women, had been born in London<sup>a</sup>.

Dr. Price supposes, that London, with its neighbouring parishes, where the deaths exceed the births, requires a supply of 10,000 persons annually. Graunt, in his time, estimated this supply for London alone at 6000<sup>b</sup>; and he further observes, that let the mortality of the city be what it will, arising from plague, or any other great cause of destruction, that it always fully repairs its loss in two years<sup>c</sup>.

As all these demands, therefore, are supplied from the country, it is evident, that we should fall into a very great error, if we were to estimate the proportion of births to deaths for the whole kingdom, by the proportion observed in country parishes, from which there must be such numerous emigrations.

We need not, however, accompany Dr. Price in his apprehensions, that the country will be depopulated by these emigrations, at least, as long as the funds for the maintenance of agricultural labour remain unimpaired. The proportion of births, as well as the proportion of marriages, clearly proves, that in spite of our increasing towns and manufactories, the demand on the country for people is by no means very pressing.

If we divide the present population of England and Wales, by the average number of baptisms for the last five years, it will appear, that the baptisms are to the population, as 1 to very nearly 36<sup>d</sup>; but it is supposed, with reason, that there are great omissions in the baptisms; and it is conjectured, that these omissions are greater than in the burials. On this point, however, I should be inclined to think differently, at least, with respect to the last twenty years,

<sup>a</sup> Price's Observ. on Revers. Paym. vol. ii. p. 17.

Abstract from Graunt, p. 277.

baptisms for the last five years 255,426. Pop. 9,168,000.

<sup>b</sup> Short's New Observ.

<sup>c</sup> Id. p. 276.

<sup>d</sup> Average medium of

(Observ. on Results, p. 9.)

though

though probably it was the case formerly. It would appear, by the present proportion of marriages, that the more rapid increase of population, supposed to have taken place since the year 1780, has arisen more from the diminution of deaths, than the increase of the births.

Dr. Short estimated the proportion of births to the population of England as 1 to 28<sup>a</sup>. In the agricultural report of Suffolk, the proportion of births to the population was calculated at 1 to 30. For the whole of Suffolk, according to the late returns, this proportion is not much less than 1 to 33<sup>b</sup>. According to a correct account of thirteen villages from actual enumerations, produced by Sir F. M. Eden, the proportion of births to the population was as 1 to 33; and from another account, on the same authority, taken from towns and manufacturing parishes, as 1 to 27  $\frac{1}{4}$ <sup>c</sup>. If, combining all these circumstances, and adverting, at the same time, to the acknowledged deficiency in the registry of births, and the known increase of our population of late years, we suppose the true proportion of the births to the population to be as 1 to 30; then, assuming the present mortality to be 1 in 40, as before suggested, we shall nearly keep the proportion of baptisms to burials, which appears in the late returns. The births will be to the deaths as 4 to 3 or 13  $\frac{1}{3}$  to 10, a proportion more than sufficient to account for the increase of population which has taken place since the American war, after allowing, for those who may be supposed to have died abroad, and for a greater general mortality, in the earlier part of this period.

In the *Observations on the Results of the Population Act*, it is remarked, that the average duration of life in England appears to

<sup>a</sup> New Observ. p. 267.

<sup>b</sup> In private inquiries, dissenters, and those who do not christen their children, will not of course be reckoned in the population, and consequently such inquiries, as far as they extend, will more accurately express the true proportion of births; and we are fairly justified in making use of them, in order to estimate the acknowledged deficiency of births in the public returns.

<sup>c</sup> Estimate of the number of Inhabitants in G. Britain, &c. p. 27.

have

have increased in the proportion of 117 to 100<sup>a</sup>, since the year 1780. So great a change, in so short a time, if true, would be a most striking phenomenon. But I am inclined to suspect, that the whole of this proportional diminution of burials does not arise from increased healthiness, but is occasioned, in part, by the greater number of deaths which must necessarily have taken place abroad, owing to the very rapid increase of our foreign commerce since this period; and to the great number of persons absent in naval and military employments, during the late war, and the constant supply of fresh recruits necessary to maintain undiminished so great a force. A perpetual drain of this kind, would certainly have a tendency to produce the effect observed in the returns, and might keep the burials stationary, while the births and marriages were increasing with some rapidity. At the same time, as the increase of population since 1780 is incontrovertible, and the present mortality extraordinarily small, I should still be disposed to believe, that the greater part of the effect is to be attributed to increased healthiness.

If we suppose, that the mortality about the year 1780 was 1 in 36, instead of 1 in 40, as at present, this will be making a great allowance for increased healthiness, though not so much as the proportion of 117 to 100; and assuming the proportion of births to have been nearly the same as at present, the births about the year 1780, will appear to have been to the deaths, as 36 to 30, or 12 to 10; a proportion, which, calculated on a mortality of 1 in 36, doubles the population of a country, in 125 years<sup>b</sup>; and is, therefore, as great a proportion, as can be true for the average of the whole century. The highest estimates of our population do not make it double of what it was at the revolution.

We must not suppose, however, that this proportion of births to deaths, or of births and deaths to the whole population, continued uniform before 1780. It appears from the registers of every country

<sup>a</sup> P. 6.<sup>b</sup> See table ii. p. 238.

which

which have been kept for any length of time, that considerable variations occur at different periods. Dr. Short, about the middle of the century, estimated the proportion of births to deaths at 11 to 10<sup>a</sup>; and if the births were at the same time a twenty-eighth part of the population, the mortality was then as high as 1 in 30<sup>‡</sup>. We now suppose that the proportion of births to deaths is above 13 to 10; but if we were to assume this proportion as a criterion by which to estimate the increase of population for the next thirty or forty years, we should probably fall into a very gross error. The effects of the late war are strongly marked, in the returns of the *Population Act*, by a decrease of births, and an increase of burials, and should such seasons frequently recur, they would soon destroy the great excess of births which has been observed during the last twenty years; and indeed we cannot reasonably suppose, that the resources of this country should increase, for any long continuance, with such rapidity, as to allow of a permanent proportion of births to deaths as 13 to 10, unless, indeed, this proportion were principally caused by great foreign drains.

From all the data that could be collected, the proportion of births, to the whole population of England and Wales, has been assumed to be as 1 to 30; but this is a smaller proportion of births than has appeared, in the course of this review, to take place in any other country, except Norway and Switzerland; and it has been hitherto usual with political calculators to consider a great proportion of births, as the surest sign of a vigorous and flourishing state. It is to be hoped, however, that this prejudice will not last long. In countries circumstanced like America or Russia, or in other countries after any great mortality, a large proportion of births may be a favourable symptom; but in the average state of a well-peopled territory, there

<sup>a</sup> New Observ. tables ii. & iii. p. 22 & 44. Price's Observ. on Revers. Paym. vol. ii. p. 311.

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cannot

cannot well be a worse sign than a large proportion of births, nor can there well be a better sign than a small proportion.

Sir Francis D'Ivernois very justly observes, that "if the various states of Europe kept and published annually an exact account of their population, noting carefully in a second column the exact age at which the children die, this second column would shew the relative merit of the governments, and the comparative happiness of their subjects. A simple arithmetical statement would then, perhaps, be more conclusive, than all the arguments that could be adduced." In the importance of the inferences to be drawn from such tables, I fully agree with him: and to make these inferences, it is evident, that we should attend less to the column expressing the number of children born, than to the column expressing the number which survived the age of infancy and reached manhood; and this number will, almost invariably, be the greatest, where the proportion of the births to the whole population is the least. In this point, we rank next after Norway and Switzerland, which, considering the number of our great towns and manufactories, is certainly a very extraordinary fact. As nothing can be more clear, than that all our demands for population are fully supplied, if this be done with a small proportion of births, it is a decided proof of a very small mortality, a distinction on which we may justly pride ourselves. Should it appear from future investigations, that I have made too great an allowance for omissions, both in the births and in the burials, I shall be extremely happy to find, that this distinction which, other circumstances being the same, I consider as the surest test of happiness and good government, is even greater than I have supposed it to be. In despotic, miserable, or naturally unhealthy countries, the proportion of births to the whole population will generally be found very great.

According to one of Sir F. M. Eden's calculations, taken from

<sup>a</sup> Tableau des Pertes, &c. c.ii. p.16.

towns

towns and manufacturing parishes, the annual births are to the annual marriages as 3 to 1<sup>a</sup>. In 111 agricultural parishes for 12 years, ending in 1799, the annual births are to the annual marriages in the proportion of above 4 to 1<sup>b</sup>. From which it might appear, that, in our towns, more than half of the born live to be married, and in the country less. But for the reasons mentioned in page 234, the contrary is probably true. In our towns, from the mortality that takes place in the early stages of life, it is not to be doubted that less than half of the born live to be married, and the great proportion of marriages is occasioned merely by new settlers. In the country, on account of the emigrants that marry in other places, more than half of the born live to be married, though, allowing for second and third marriages, probably not much more. But from what was said in page 262, the degree in which the preventive check operates cannot be determined by the proportion of the born which lives to be married; but depends upon the proportion of annual marriages, and the proportion of annual births to the whole population; and till the first of these proportions rises from 1 in 123 to 1 in 80, or 1 in 70, and the second from 1 in 30 to 1 in 24, 22 or 20, it cannot be said, that the towns draw hard upon the country for population.

If taking the towns and country together, and rejecting at present second and third marriages and illegitimate children, we suppose, that accurately half of the born live to be married, then, according to table i. page 231, each marriage must yield five births, in order to produce a proportion of births to deaths, as  $12\frac{1}{2}$  to 10. And if the proportion of our births to deaths be above this, or  $13\frac{1}{2}$  to 10, then, including all circumstances, it does not appear that we can allow less than  $5\frac{1}{2}$  births to each marriage.

In judging of the proportion of the born which lives to be married, by the proportion of annual births to annual marriages, the number of second and third marriages, and the number of illegiti-

<sup>a</sup> Estimate of the Number of Inhabitants in Great Britain, p. 10. <sup>b</sup> Id. p. 79.

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mate

mate children, tend to correct each other. The second and third marriages tend to give the proportion which lives to be married too great, and the illegitimate children too small. It must depend on the particular circumstances of the country, which of these two causes of irregularity preponderates.

According to the late returns, it would appear, that, in this country, considerably more than half of the born live to be married; but when the deficiency in the births is assumed to be such as is suggested in this chapter, the result is rather on the contrary side.

On an average of the five years ending in 1780, the proportion of births to marriages is 350 to 100. In 1760, it was 362 to 100, from which, an inference is drawn, that the registers of births, however deficient, were certainly not more deficient formerly, than at present<sup>a</sup>. But a change of this nature, in the appearance of the registers, might arise from a cause totally unconnected with deficiencies. If from the acknowledged greater healthiness of the latter part of the century, compared with the middle of it, a greater number of children survived the age of infancy, a greater proportion of the born would of course live to marry; and this circumstance would produce exactly the effect observed in the registers. From what has already been said on this subject, the reader will be aware, that this change may take place without diminishing the operation of the preventive check. If half of the born live to 40 instead of 30, it is evident, that a greater proportion might live to marry, and yet the marriages be later.

It has been made a question, whether we have just grounds for supposing, that the registry of births and deaths was in general more deficient in the former part of the century, than in the latter part. It appears to me, that the late returns tend to confirm the suspicion of former inaccuracy, and to shew that the registers of the earlier part of the century, in every point of view, afford very uncertain data

<sup>a</sup> Observations on the Results of the Population Act, p. 8.

on which to ground any estimates of past population. In the years 1710, 1720, and 1730, it appears from the returns, that the deaths exceeded the births; and taking the six periods ending in 1750<sup>a</sup>, including the first half of the century, if we compare the sum of the births with the sum of the deaths, the excess of the births is so small, as to be perfectly inadequate to account for the increase of a million, which, upon a calculation from the births alone, is supposed to have taken place in that time<sup>b</sup>. Consequently, either the registers are very inaccurate, and the deficiencies in the births greater than in the deaths; or these periods, each at the distance of ten years, do not express the just average. These particular years may have been more unfavourable with respect to the proportion of births to deaths than the rest; indeed one of them, 1710, is known to have been a year of great scarcity and distress. But if this suspicion, which is very probable, be admitted, so as to affect the six first periods, we may justly suspect the contrary accident to have happened with regard to the three following periods ending with 1780, in which thirty years, it would seem by the same mode of calculation, that an increase of a million and an half had taken place<sup>c</sup>. At any rate it must be allowed that the three separate years, taken in this manner, can by no means be considered as sufficient to establish a just average; and what rather encourages the suspicion that these particular years might be more than usually favourable with regard to births, is, that the increase of births from 1780 to 1785, is unusually small<sup>d</sup>, which would naturally take place, without supposing a slower progress than before, if the births in 1780 had been accidentally above the average.

On the whole, therefore, considering the probable inaccuracy of the earlier registers, and the very great danger of fallacy, in draw-

<sup>a</sup> Population Abstract Parish Registers. Final Summary, p. 455.

<sup>b</sup> Observations on the Results of the Population Act, p. 9.

<sup>c</sup> Ibid.

<sup>d</sup> Ibid.



ing general inferences from a few detached years, I do not think that we can depend upon any estimates of past population, founded on a calculation from the births, till after the year 1780, when every following year is given, and a just average of the births may be obtained. As a further confirmation of this remark, I will just observe, that in the final summary of the abstracts from the registers of England and Wales, it appears, that in the year 1790, the total number of births was 248,774, in the year 1795, 247,218, and in 1800, 247,147<sup>a</sup>. Consequently, if we had been estimating the population from the births, taken at three separate periods of five years, it would have appeared that the population during the last ten years, had been regularly decreasing, though we have very good reason to believe, that it has increased considerably.

In the *Observations on the Results of the Population Act*<sup>b</sup>, a table is given of the population of England and Wales throughout the last century calculated from the births; but, for the reasons given above, little reliance can be placed on it, and for an estimate of the population at the revolution, I should be inclined to place more dependence on the old calculations from the number of houses.

It must, indeed, have appeared to the reader, in the course of this work, that registers of births or deaths, excluding any suspicion of deficiencies, must at all times afford very uncertain data for an estimate of population. On account of the varying circumstances of every country, they are both very precarious guides in this respect; but of the two, perhaps, the births still more so, than the deaths; though from the greater apparent regularity of the former, political calculators have generally adopted them as the ground of their estimates, in preference to the latter. Necker, in estimating the population of France, observes, that an epidemick disease, or an emigration, may occasion temporary differences in the deaths, and that

<sup>a</sup> Population Abstract Parish Registers, p. 455.

<sup>b</sup> P. 9.

therefore

therefore the number of births is the most certain criterion<sup>a</sup>. But the very circumstance of the apparent regularity of the births in the registers will now and then lead into the grossest errors. If in any country we can obtain registers of burials for two or three years together, a plague or mortal epidemick will always shew itself, from the very sudden increase of the deaths during its operation, and the still greater diminution of them afterwards. From these appearances we should of course be directed not to include the whole of a great mortality, in any very short term of years. But there would be nothing of this kind to guide us in the registers of births; and, after a country had lost an eighth part of its population by a plague, an average of the five or six subsequent years would probably shew an increase in the number of births, and our calculations would give the population the highest at the very time that it was the lowest. This appears very strikingly, in many of Susmilch's tables, and most particularly in the table for Prussia and Lithuania, which I have inserted in chap. vi. of this book, where, in the year subsequent to the loss of one third of the population, the births were considerably increased, and in an average of five years, but very little diminished; and this, at a time, when, of course, the country could have made but a very small progress towards recovering its former population.

We do not know indeed of any extraordinary mortality which has occurred in England since 1700; and there are reasons for supposing that the proportions of the births and deaths to the population during the last century, have not experienced such great variations as in many countries on the continent; at the same time it is certain, that the sickly seasons which are known to have occurred, would, in proportion to the degree of their fatality, produce similar effects; and the change which has been observed in the mortality of late

<sup>a</sup> De l'Administration des Finances, tom. i. c. ix. p. 252. 12mo. 1785.

years, should dispose us to believe that similar changes might formerly have taken place respecting the births, and should instruct us to be extremely cautious in applying any proportions which are observed to be true at present, to past or future periods.

CHAP.

## C H A P. X.

*Of the Checks to Population in Scotland and Ireland.*

AN examination, in detail, of the statistical account of Scotland, would furnish numerous illustrations of the principle of population; but I have already extended this part of the work so much, that I am fearful of tiring the patience of my readers; and shall therefore confine my remarks in the present instance to a few circumstances which have happened to strike me.

On account of the acknowledged omissions in the registers of births, deaths, and marriages, in most of the parishes of Scotland, few just inferences can be drawn from them. Many give extraordinary results. In the parish of Crofsmichael<sup>a</sup> in Kircudbright, the mortality appears to be only 1 in 98, and the yearly marriages 1 in 192. These proportions would imply the most unheard-of healthiness, and the most extraordinary operation of the preventive check; but there can be little doubt, that they are principally occasioned by omissions in the registry of burials, and the celebration of a part of the marriages in other parishes.

In general, however, it appears from registers that are supposed to be accurate, that in the country parishes the mortality is small; and that the proportions of 1 in 45, 1 in 50, and 1 in 55, are not uncommon. According to a table of the probabilities of life, calculated from the bills of mortality in the parish of Kettle, by Mr. Wilkie;

<sup>a</sup> Statistical Account of Scotland, vol. i. p. 167.

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the expectation of an infant's life is 46.6<sup>a</sup>, which is very high, and the proportion which dies in the first year is only  $\frac{1}{10}$ . Mr. Wilkie further adds, that, from 36 parish accounts, published in the first volume, the expectation of an infant's life appears to be 40.3. But in a table, which he has produced in the last volume, calculated for the whole of Scotland from Dr. Webster's survey, the expectation at birth appears to be only 31 years<sup>b</sup>. This, however, he thinks, must be too low, as it exceeds but little the calculations for the town of Edinburgh.

The Scotch registers appeared to be, in general, so incomplete, that the returns of 99 parishes only, are published in the Population Abstract; and, if any judgment can be formed from these, they shew a very extraordinary degree of healthiness, and a very small proportion of births. The sum of the population of these parishes in 1801, was 217,873<sup>c</sup>; the average of burials for 5 years ending in 1800, was about 3815; and of births, 4928<sup>d</sup>: from which it would appear that the mortality in these parishes was only 1 in 56, and the proportion of births 1 in 44. But these proportions are so extraordinary, that it is difficult to conceive, that they approach near the truth. Combining them with the calculations of Mr. Wilkie, it will not appear probable, that the proportion of deaths and births in Scotland, should be smaller than what has been allowed for England and Wales; namely, 1 in 40 for the deaths, and 1 in 30 for the births; and it seems to be generally agreed that the proportion of births to deaths is 4 to 3<sup>e</sup>.

With respect to the marriages, it will be still more difficult to form a conjecture. They are registered so irregularly, that no returns of them are given in the Population Abstract. I should naturally have thought, from the Statistical Account, that the tendency

<sup>a</sup> Statistical Account of Scotland, vol. ii. p. 407.

<sup>c</sup> Population Abstract, Parish Registers, p. 459.

<sup>e</sup> Statistical Account of Scotland, vol. xxi. p. 383.

<sup>b</sup> Id. vol. xxi. p. 383.

<sup>d</sup> Id. p. 458.

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to marriage in Scotland, was, upon the whole, greater than in England; but if it be true, that the births and deaths bear the same proportion to each other, and to the whole population, in both countries, the proportion of marriages cannot be very different. It should be remarked, however, that, supposing the operation of the preventive check to be exactly the same, in both countries, and the climates to be equally salubrious, a greater degree of want and poverty would take place in Scotland, before the same mortality was produced as in England, owing to the smaller proportion of towns and manufactories in the former country than in the latter.

From a general view of the statistical accounts, the result seems clearly to be, that the condition of the lower classes of people in Scotland, has been considerably improved of late years. The price of provisions has risen; but, almost, invariably, the price of labour has risen in a greater proportion; and it is remarked in most parishes, that more butcher's meat is consumed among the common people than formerly; that they are both better lodged and better clothed; and that their habits, with respect to cleanliness, are decidedly improved.

A part of this improvement is probably to be attributed to the increase of the preventive check. In some parishes, a habit of later marriages is noticed, and in many places, where it is not mentioned, it may be fairly inferred, from the proportions of births and marriages, and other circumstances. The writer of the account of the parish of Elgin<sup>a</sup>, in enumerating the general causes of depopulation in Scotland, speaks of the discouragement to marriage from the union of farms, and the consequent emigration of the flower of their young men of every class and description, very few of whom ever return. Another cause that he mentions, is, the discouragement to marriage from luxury; at least, he observes, till people are advanced in years, and then a puny race of children are produced. "Hence, how

<sup>a</sup> Vol. v. p. 1.

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“ many men of every description remain single, and how many young women of every rank are never married, who, in the beginning of this century, or even so late as 1745, would have been the parents of a numerous and healthy progeny.”

In those parts of the country where the population has been rather diminished, by the introduction of grazing, or an improved system of husbandry which requires fewer hands, this effect has chiefly taken place; and I have little doubt, that, in estimating the decrease of their population, since the end of the last, or the beginning of the present century, by the proportion of births at the different periods, they have fallen into the error which has been particularly noticed, with regard to Switzerland, and have, in consequence, made the difference greater than it really is<sup>a</sup>.

The general inference on this subject, which I should draw from the different accounts is, that the marriages are rather later than formerly. There are, however, some decided exceptions. In those parishes where manufactures have been introduced, which afford employment to children as soon as they have reached their 6th or 7th year, a habit of marrying early naturally follows; and while the manufacture continues to flourish and increase, the evil arising from it is not very perceptible; though humanity must confess with a sigh, that one of the reasons why it is not so perceptible, is, that room is made for fresh families, by the unnatural mortality which takes place among the children so employed.

There are other parts of Scotland, however, particularly the Western Isles, and some parts of the Highlands, where population has considerably increased from the subdivision of possessions, and where, perhaps, the marriages may be earlier than they were formerly, though not caused by the introduction of manufactures. Here, the

<sup>a</sup> One writer takes notice of this circumstance, and observes, that formerly the births seem to have born a greater proportion to the whole population than at present. Probably, he says, more were born, and there was a greater mortality. Parish of Montquitter, vol. vi. p. 121.

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poverty which follows is but too conspicuous. In the account of Delting in Shetland<sup>a</sup>, it is remarked, that the people marry very young, and are encouraged to this by their landlords, who wish to have as many men on their grounds as possible to prosecute the ling fishery; but that they generally involve themselves in debt and large families. The writer further observes, that formerly there were some old regulations called country acts, by one of which, it was enacted, that no pair should marry unless possessed of 40l. Scots, of free gear. This regulation is not now enforced. It is said that these regulations were approved and confirmed by the parliament of Scotland, in the reign of Queen Mary, or James VI.

In the account of Bressay Burra and Quarff in Shetland<sup>b</sup>, it is observed, that the farms are very small, and few have a plough. The object of the proprietors is to have as many fishermen on their lands as possible—a great obstacle to improvements in agriculture. They fish for their masters, who either give them a fee totally inadequate, or take their fish at a low rate. The writer remarks, that, “ in most countries the increase of population is reckoned an advantage, and justly. It is, however, the reverse, in the present state of Shetland. The farms are split. The young men are encouraged to marry without having any stock. The consequence is poverty and distress. It is believed that there is at present in these islands, double the number of people that they can properly maintain.”

The writer of the account of Auchterderran<sup>c</sup>, in the county of Fife, says, that the meagre food of the labouring man is unequal to oppose the effects of incessant hard labour upon his constitution, and by this means his frame is worn down before the time of nature's appointment, and adds, “ That people continue voluntarily to enter upon such a hard situation by marrying, shews how far the union of the sexes, and the love of independence, are principles of human nature.” In this observation, perhaps, the love of independence had better have been changed for the love of a progeny.

<sup>a</sup> Vol. i. p. 385.

<sup>b</sup> Vol. x. p. 194.

<sup>c</sup> Vol. i. p. 449.

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The island of Jura<sup>a</sup> appears to be absolutely overflowing with inhabitants in spite of constant and numerous emigrations. There are sometimes 50 or 60 on a farm. The writer observes, that such a swarm of inhabitants, where manufactures and many other branches of industry are unknown, are a very great load upon the proprietors, and useless to the state.

Another writer<sup>b</sup> is astonished at the rapid increase of population, in spite of a considerable emigration to America in 1770, and a large drain of young men during the late war. He thinks it difficult to assign adequate causes for it, and observes, that if the population continue to increase, in this manner, unless some employment be found for the people, the country will soon be unable to support them. And in the account of the parish of Callander<sup>c</sup>, the writer says, that the villages of this place, and other villages in similar situations, are filled with naked and starving crowds of people, who are pouring down for shelter or for bread; and then observes that whenever the population of a town or village exceeds the industry of its inhabitants, from that moment the place must decline.

A very extraordinary instance of a tendency to rapid increase, occurs in the register of the parish of Duthil<sup>d</sup>, in the county of Elgin; and as errors of excess are not so probable, as errors of omission, it seems to be worthy of attention. The proportion of annual births to the whole population is as 1 to 12; of marriages, as 1 to 55; and of deaths the same. The births are to the deaths as 70 to 15, or  $4\frac{2}{3}$  to 1. We may suppose some inaccuracy respecting the number of deaths, which seems to err on the side of defect; but the very extraordinary proportion of the annual births, amounting to  $\frac{1}{7}$  of the whole population, does not seem to be easily liable to error; and the other circumstances respecting the parish, tend to confirm the statement. Out of a population of 830, there were only 3 bachelors, and

<sup>a</sup> Vol. xii. p. 317.

<sup>b</sup> Parish of Lochalsh, county of Ross, vol. xi. p. 422.

<sup>c</sup> Vol. xi. p. 574.

<sup>d</sup> Vol. iv. p. 308.

each

each marriage yielded 7 children. Yet with all this, the population is supposed to have decreased considerably since 1745; and it appears, that this excessive tendency to increase, had been occasioned by an excessive tendency to emigrate. The writer mentions very great emigrations; and observes, that whole tribes who enjoyed the comforts of life in a reasonable degree, had of late years emigrated from different parts of Scotland, from mere humour, and a fantastical idea of becoming their own masters and freeholders.

Such an extraordinary proportion of births caused evidently by habits of emigration, shews the extreme difficulty of depopulating a country merely by taking away its people. Take but away its industry, and the sources of its subsistence, and it is done at once.

It may be observed, that in this parish, the average number of children to a marriage is said to be 7, though, from the proportion of annual births to annual marriages, it would appear to be only  $4\frac{2}{3}$ . This difference occurs in many other parishes, from which we may conclude, that the writers of these accounts very judiciously adopted some other mode of calculation, than the proportion of annual births and marriages; and probably founded the results they give, either on personal inquiries, or researches into their registers, to find the number of children which had been born to each mother in the course of her marriage.

The women of Scotland appear to be prolific. The average of 6 children to a marriage is frequent; and of 7, and even  $7\frac{1}{2}$ , not very uncommon. One instance is very curious, as it appears as if this number was actually living to each marriage, which would of course imply, that a much greater number had been, and would be, born. In the parish of Nigg<sup>e</sup>, in the county of Kincardine, the account says, that there are 57 land families, and 405 children; which gives nearly  $7\frac{1}{2}$  each; 42 fisher families, and 314 children; nearly  $7\frac{1}{2}$  each. Of the land families, which have had no chil-

<sup>e</sup> Vol. vii. p. 194.

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dren, there were 7; of the fishers, none. If this statement be just, I should conceive that each marriage must have yielded, or would yield, in the course of its duration, as many as 9 or 10 births.

When, from any actual survey, it appears, that there is about 3 living children to each marriage, or 5 persons, or only  $4\frac{1}{2}$  to a house, which are very common proportions, we must not infer that the average number of births to a marriage is not much above 3. We must recollect that all the marriages, or establishments, of the present year, are of course without children; all of the year before, have only one; all of the year before that, can hardly be expected to have as many as two, and all of the fourth year preceding will certainly, in the natural course of things, have less than three. One out of five children is a very unusually small proportion to lose in the course of ten years; and after ten years, it may be supposed that the eldest begin to leave their parents; so that if each marriage be supposed accurately to yield 5 births in the course of its duration, the families which had increased to their full complement would only have 4 children, and a very large proportion of those which were in the stages of increase would have less than three<sup>a</sup>; and consequently, taking into consideration the number of families where one of the parents may be supposed to be dead, I much doubt, whether in this case, a survey would give  $4\frac{1}{2}$  to a family. In the parish of Duthil<sup>b</sup>, already noticed, the number of children to a marriage is mentioned as 7, and the number of persons to a house, as only 5.

I have taken notice of this circumstance, to obviate an objection which might perhaps appear to arise from the result of such surveys, to the proofs which have been adduced, that marriages are in general more prolific than they have been usually supposed to be. The accounts of many of the parishes in Scotland, which mention 6, 7, and  $7\frac{1}{2}$ , as the average number of children to a marriage tend very

<sup>a</sup> It has been calculated that, on an average, the difference of age in the children of the same family is about two years.

<sup>b</sup> Vol. iv. p. 308.

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strongly to confirm this supposition; and as in these same parishes, the proportion of annual births to annual marriages, is seldom above  $3\frac{1}{2}$ , 4, or  $4\frac{1}{2}$ , to 1; they prove at the same time the fallacy of this mode of estimating the fruitfulness of marriages. In those parishes where the authors have adopted this mode, they generally mention, as might be expected, 3,  $3\frac{1}{2}$ , 4, and  $4\frac{1}{2}$ , as the average number of children to a marriage.

The poor of Scotland are in general supported by voluntary contributions, distributed under the inspection of the minister of the parish; and it appears, upon the whole, that they have been conducted with considerable judgment. Having no claim of right to relief, and the supplies, from the mode of their collection, being necessarily uncertain, and never abundant, the poor have considered them merely as a last resource in cases of extreme distress, and not as a fund on which they might safely rely, and an adequate portion of which belonged to them by the laws of their country, in all difficulties.

The consequence of this is, that the common people make very considerable exertions to avoid the necessity of applying for such a scanty and precarious relief. It is observed, in many of the accounts, that they seldom fail of making a provision for sickness and for age; and in general, the grown-up children and relations of persons, who are in danger of falling upon the parish, step forward, if they be in any way able, to prevent such a degradation, which is universally considered as a disgrace to the family.

The writers of the accounts of the different parishes, frequently reprobate, in very strong terms, the system of English assessments for the poor, and give a decided preference to the Scotch mode of relief. In the account of Paisley<sup>a</sup>, though a manufacturing town, and with a numerous poor, the author still reprobates the English system, and makes an observation on this subject, in which, perhaps, he goes too

<sup>a</sup> Vol. vii. p. 74.

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far. He says, that though there are in no country such large contributions for the poor as in England, yet there is no where so great a number of them; and their condition, in comparison of *the poor of other countries, is truly most miserable.*

In the account of Caerlaverock<sup>a</sup>, in answer to the question, How ought the poor to be supplied? it is most judiciously remarked, "that distress and poverty multiply in proportion to the funds created to relieve them; that the measures of charity ought to remain invisible, till the moment when it is necessary that they should be distributed; that in the country parishes of Scotland, in general, small occasional voluntary collections are sufficient; that the legislature has no occasion to interfere to augment the stream which is already copious enough; in fine, that the establishment of a poor rate would not only be unnecessary, but hurtful, as it would tend to oppress the landholder; without bringing relief on the poor."

These, upon the whole, appear to be the prevailing opinions of the clergy of Scotland. There are, however, some exceptions; and the system of assessments is sometimes approved, and the establishment of it proposed. But this is not to be wondered at. In many of these parishes, the experiment had never been made; and without being thoroughly aware of the principle of population, from theory, or having fully seen the evils of poor laws, in practice, nothing seems, on a first view of the subject, more natural, than the proposal of an assessment, to which the uncharitable, as well as the charitable, should be made to contribute, according to their abilities, and which might be increased or diminished, according to the wants of the moment.

The endemick and epidemick diseases in Scotland, fall chiefly, as is usual, on the poor. The scurvy is in some places extremely troublesome and inveterate; and in others it arises to a contagious leprosy,

<sup>a</sup> Vol. vi. p. 21.

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the effects of which are always dreadful, and not unfrequently mortal. One writer calls it the scourge and bane of human nature<sup>a</sup>. It is generally attributed to cold and wet situations, meagre and unwholesome food, impure air from damp and crowded houses, indolent habits, and the want of attention to cleanliness.

To the same causes, in great measure, are attributed the rheumatisms which are general, and the consumptions which are frequent among the common people. Whenever, in any place, from particular circumstances, the condition of the poor has been rendered worse, these disorders, particularly the latter, have been observed to prevail with greater force.

Low nervous fevers, and others of a more violent and fatal nature, are frequently epidemick, and sometimes take off considerable numbers; but the most fatal epidemick, since the extinction of the plague, which formerly visited Scotland, is the small-pox, the returns of which, are, in many places, at regular intervals; in others, irregular, but seldom at a greater distance than 7 or 8 years. Its ravages are dreadful, though in some parishes not so fatal as they were some time ago. The prejudices against inoculation are still great; and as the mode of treatment must almost necessarily be bad, in small and crowded houses, and the custom of visiting each other during the disorder still subsists in many places, it may be imagined that the mortality must be considerable, and the children of the poor the principal sufferers. In some parishes of the Western Isles, and the Highlands, the number of persons to a house has increased from 4½, and 5, to 6½, and 7. It is evident, that if such a considerable increase, without the proper accommodations for it, do not absolutely generate the disease, it must give to its devastations tenfold force when it arrives.

Scotland has at all times been subject to years of scarcity, and occasionally even to dreadful famines. The years 1635, 1680, 1688,

<sup>a</sup> Parishes of Forbes and Kearn, County of Aberdeen, vol. xi. p. 189.

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the concluding years of the last century, the years 1740, 1756, 1766, 1778, 1782, and 1783, are all mentioned in different places, as years of very great sufferings from want. In the year 1680, so many families perished from this cause, that, for six miles, in a well-inhabited extent, there was not a smoke remaining<sup>a</sup>. The seven years at the end of the last century were called the ill years. The writer of the account of the parish of Montquhitter<sup>b</sup>, says, that of 16 families on a farm in that neighbourhood, 13 were extinguished; and on another, out of 169 individuals, only 3 families, the proprietors included, survived. Extensive farms, now containing a hundred souls, being entirely desolated, were converted into a sheep walk. The inhabitants of the parish in general were diminished by death to one half, or as some affirm to one fourth, of the preceding number. Until 1709 many farms were waste. In 1740, another season of scarcity occurred, and the utmost misery was felt by the poor, though it fell short of death. Many offered in vain to serve for their bread. Stout men accepted thankfully twopence a day in full for their work. Great distress was also suffered in 1782 and 1783, but none died. "If, at this critical period," the author says, "the American war had not ceased; if the copious magazines, particularly of pease, provided for the navy, had not been brought to sale, what a scene of desolation and horror would have been exhibited in this country!"

Many similar descriptions occur in different parts of the Statistical Account; but these will be sufficient to shew the nature and intensity of the distress which has been occasionally felt from want.

The year 1783 depopulated some parts of the Highlands, and is mentioned as the reason why in these places the number of people was found to have diminished since Dr. Webster's survey. Most of the small farmers in general, as might be expected, were absolutely ruined by the scarcity; and those of this description, in the Highlands, were obliged to emigrate to the Lowlands as common

<sup>a</sup> Parish of Duthil, vol. iv. p. 368.

<sup>b</sup> Vol. vi. p. 121.

labourers,

labourers<sup>c</sup>; in search of a precarious support. In some parishes at the time of the last survey, the effect of the ruin of the farmers during this bad year, was still visible in their depressed condition, and the increased poverty and misery of the common people which is a necessary consequence of it.

In the account of the parish of Grange<sup>b</sup>, in the county of Banff, it is observed, that the year 1783 put a stop to all improvements by green crops, and made the farmers think of nothing but raising grain. Tenants were most of them ruined. Before this period, consumptions were not near so frequent as they have been since. This may be justly attributed to the effects of the scarcity and bad victual in the year 1783, to the long inclement harvests in 1782 and 1787, in both which seasons, the labourers were exposed to much cold and wet during the three months that the harvests continued; but principally to the change that has of late taken place in the manner of living among the lower ranks. Formerly every householder could command a draught of small beer, and killed a sheep now and then, out of his own little flock; but now the case is different. The frequent want of the necessaries of life among the poor, their damp and stinking houses, and dejection of mind among the middling classes, appear to be the principal causes of the prevailing distempers, and mortality of this parish. Young people are cut off by consumptions, and the more advanced by dropsies and nervous fevers.

The state of this parish, which, though there are others like it, may be considered as an exception to the average state of Scotland, was, without doubt, occasioned by the ruin of the tenants; and the effect is not to be wondered at, as no greater evil can easily happen to a country, than the loss of agricultural stock and capital.

We may observe, that the diseases of this parish are said to have increased, in consequence of the scarcity and bad victual of 1783. The same circumstance is noticed in many other parishes, and it is

<sup>c</sup> Parish of Kincardine, County of Ross, vol. iii. p. 505.

<sup>b</sup> Vol. ix. p. 550.  
remarked,



remarked, that though few people died of absolute famine, yet that mortal diseases almost universally followed.

It is remarked, also, in some parishes, that the number of births and marriages are affected by years of scarcity and plenty.

Of the parish of Dingwall<sup>a</sup>, in the county of Ross, it is observed, that, after the scarcity of 1783, the births were 16 below the average, and 14 below the lowest number of late years. The year 1787 was a year of plenty, and the following year the births increased in a similar proportion, and were 17 above the average, and 11 above the highest of the other years.

In the account of Dunroßness<sup>b</sup>, in Orkney, the writer says, that the annual number of marriages depends much on the seasons. In good years they may amount to thirty or upwards; but when crops fail, will hardly come up to the half of that number.

The whole increase of Scotland since the time of Dr. Webster's survey in 1755, is about 260,000<sup>c</sup>, for which a proportionate provision has been made in the improved state of agriculture and manufactures, and in the increased cultivation of potatoes, which in some places form two-thirds of the diet of the common people. It has been calculated that the half of the surplus of births in Scotland is drawn off in emigrations; and it cannot be doubted that this drain tends greatly to relieve the country, and to improve the condition of those which remain. Scotland is certainly still overpeopled, but not so much as it was a century or half a century ago, when it contained fewer inhabitants.

The details of the population of Ireland are but little known. I shall only observe, therefore, that the extended use of potatoes, has allowed of a very rapid increase of it during the last century. But the cheapness of this nourishing root, and the small piece of ground,

<sup>a</sup> Vol. iii. p. 1.

<sup>b</sup> Vol. vii. p. 391.

<sup>c</sup> According to the returns in the late estimate, the whole population of Scotland is above 1,590,000, and therefore the increase up to the present time is above 320,000.

which, under this kind of cultivation, will, in average years, produce the food for a family, joined to the ignorance and barbarism of the people, which have prompted them to follow their inclinations with no other prospect than an immediate bare subsistence, have encouraged marriage to such a degree, that the population is pushed much beyond the industry and present resources of the country; and the consequence naturally is, that the lower classes of people are in the most depressed and miserable state. The checks to the population are of course chiefly of the positive kind, and arise from the diseases occasioned by squalid poverty, by damp and wretched cabins, by bad and insufficient clothing, by the filth of their persons, and occasional want. To these positive checks, have, of late years, been added the vice and misery of intestine commotion, of civil war, and of martial law.

All the checks to population which have been observed to prevail in society, in the course of this review of it, are clearly referable into moral restraint, vice, and misery.

## C H A P. XI.

*General deductions from the preceding view of Society.*

THAT the checks, which have been mentioned, are the true causes of the slow increase of population, and that these checks result principally from an insufficiency of subsistence, will be evident from the comparatively rapid increase, which has invariably taken place, whenever, by some sudden enlargement in the means of subsistence, these checks have been in any considerable degree removed.

It has been universally remarked, that all new colonies, settled in healthy countries, where room and food were abundant, have constantly made a rapid progress in population. Many of the colonies from ancient Greece, in the course of one or two centuries, appear to have rivalled, and even surpassed, their mother cities. Syracuse and Agrigentum in Sicily; Tarentum and Locri in Italy; Ephesus and Miletus in Lesser Asia; were, by all accounts, at least equal to any of the cities of ancient Greece<sup>a</sup>. All these colonies had established themselves in countries inhabited by savage and barbarous nations, which easily gave place to the new settlers, who had of course plenty of good land. It is calculated that the Israelites, though they increased very slowly, while they were wandering in the land of Canaan, on settling in a fertile district of Egypt, doubled their numbers every fifteen years during the whole period of their stay<sup>b</sup>. But not to dwell on remote instances, the European settlements in America,

<sup>a</sup> Smith's Wealth of Nations, vol. ii. p. 360.

<sup>b</sup> Short's New Observ. on Bills of Mortality, p. 259, 8vo. 1750.

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bear ample testimony to the truth of a remark, that has never, I believe, been doubted. Plenty of rich land, to be had for little or nothing, is so powerful a cause of population, as generally to overcome all obstacles.

No settlements could easily have been worse managed than those of Spain, in Mexico, Peru, and Quito. The tyranny, superstition, and vices, of the mother country, were introduced in ample quantities among her children. Exorbitant taxes were exacted by the crown; the most arbitrary restrictions were imposed on their trade; and the governors were not behind hand, in rapacity and extortion for themselves as well as their master. Yet under all these difficulties, the colonies made a quick progress in population. The city of Quito, which was but a hamlet of Indians, is represented by Ulloa as containing fifty or sixty thousand inhabitants above fifty years ago<sup>a</sup>. Lima, which was founded since the conquest, is mentioned by the same author, as equally or more populous, before the fatal earthquake in 1746. Mexico is said to contain a hundred thousand inhabitants, which, notwithstanding the exaggerations of the Spanish writers, is supposed to be five times greater than what it contained in the time of Montezuma<sup>b</sup>.

In the Portuguese colony of Brazil, governed with almost equal tyranny, there were supposed to be, above thirty years ago, six hundred thousand inhabitants of European extraction<sup>c</sup>.

The Dutch and French colonies, though under the government of exclusive companies of merchants, which, as Dr. Smith justly observes, is the worst of all possible governments, still persisted in thriving under every disadvantage<sup>d</sup>.

But the English North American colonies, now the powerful people of the United States of America, far outstripped all the others, in the progress of their population. To the quantity of rich land,

<sup>a</sup> Voy. d'Ulloa, tom. i. liv. v. ch. v. p. 229. 4to. 1752.

<sup>b</sup> Smith's Wealth of Nations, vol. ii. b. iv. ch. vii. p. 363.

<sup>c</sup> Id. p. 365.

<sup>d</sup> Id. p. 368, 369.

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which they possessed in common with the Spanish and Portuguese colonies, they added a greater degree of liberty and equality. Though not without some restrictions on their foreign commerce, they were allowed the liberty of managing their own internal affairs. The political institutions which prevailed, were favourable to the alienation and division of property. Lands, which were not cultivated by the proprietor within a limited time, were declared grantable to any other person. In Pennsylvania, there was no right of primogeniture; and, in the provinces of New England, the eldest son had only a double share. There were no tythes in any of the States, and scarcely any taxes. And an account of the extreme cheapness of good land, a capital could not be more advantageously employed than in agriculture, which, at the same time that it affords the greatest quantity of healthy work, supplies the most valuable produce to the society.

The consequence of these favourable circumstances united, was, a rapidity of increase almost without parallel in history. Throughout all the northern provinces the population was found to double itself in 25 years. The original number of persons which had settled in the four provinces of New England in 1643 was 21,200. Afterwards, it was calculated, that more left them than went to them. In the year 1760, they were increased to half a million. They had, therefore, all along, doubled their number in 25 years. In New Jersey, the period of doubling appeared to be 22 years; and in Rhode Island still less. In the back settlements, where the inhabitants applied themselves solely to agriculture, and luxury was not known, they were supposed to double their number in fifteen years. Along the sea-coast, which would naturally be first inhabited, the period of doubling was about 35 years, and in some of the maritime towns the population was absolutely at a stand<sup>a</sup>. From the late census made

<sup>a</sup> Price's Observ. on Revers. Paym. vol. i. p. 282, 283, and vol. ii. p. 260. I have lately had an opportunity of seeing some extracts from the sermon of Dr. Styles, from

made in America, it appears, that, taking all the States together, they have still continued to double their numbers every 25 years; and, as the whole population is now so great, as not to be materially affected by the emigrations from Europe; and as it is known, that in some of the towns, and districts near the sea-coast, the progress of population has been comparatively slow; it is evident, that in the interior of the country, in general, the period of doubling from procreation only, must have been considerably less than 25 years.

The population of the United States of America, according to the late census, is 5,172,312<sup>a</sup>. We have no reason to believe that Great Britain is less populous, at present, for the emigration of the small

from which Dr. Price has taken these facts. Speaking of Rhode Island, Dr. Styles says, that though the period of doubling for the whole colony is 25 years, yet that it is different in different parts, and within land is 20 and 15 years. The five towns of Gloucester, Situate, Coventry, Westgreenwich, and Exeter, were 5033, A.D. 1748, and 6986 A.D. 1755; which implies a period of doubling of 15 years only. He mentions afterwards that the county of Kent doubles in 20 years; and the county of Providence in 18 years.

I have also lately seen a paper of *Facts and calculations respecting the population of the United States*, which makes the period of doubling for the whole of the States, since their first settlement, only 20 years. I know not of what authority this paper is; but, far as it goes upon public facts and enumerations, I should think, that it must be to be depended on. One period is very striking. From a return to Congress in 1782, the population appeared to be 2,389,300, and in the census of 1790, 4,000,000: increase in 9 years, 1,610,700: from which deduct ten thousand per annum for European settlers, which will be 90,000; and allow for their increase at 5 per cent. for 4½ years, which will be 20,250: the remaining increase during these 9 years, from procreation only, will be 1,500,450, which is very nearly 7 per cent.; and consequently the period of doubling at this rate would be less than 16 years.

If this calculation for the whole population of the States be in any degree near the truth, it cannot be doubted, that, in particular districts, the period of doubling from procreation only, has often been less than 15 years. The period immediately succeeding the war was likely to be a period of very rapid increase.

<sup>a</sup> One small State is mentioned as being omitted in the census; and I understand that the population is generally considered at above this number. It is said to approach towards 6,000,000. But such vague opinions cannot of course be much relied on.

parent stock which produced these numbers. On the contrary, a certain degree of emigration is known to be favourable to the population of the mother country. It has been particularly remarked that the two Spanish provinces from which the greatest number of people emigrated to America, became in consequence more populous.

Whatever was the original number of British emigrants which increased so fast in North America; let us ask, Why does not an equal number produce an equal increase in the same time in Great Britain? The obvious reason to be assigned is, the want of food; and that this want is the most efficient cause of the three great checks to population, which have been observed to prevail in all societies, is evident, from the rapidity with which even old states recover the desolations of war, pestilence, famine, and the convulsions of nature. They are then, for a short time, placed a little in the situation of new colonies, and the effect is always answerable to what might be expected. If the industry of the inhabitants be not destroyed, subsistence will soon increase beyond the wants of the reduced numbers; and the invariable consequence will be, that population, which before, perhaps, was nearly stationary, will begin immediately to increase, and will continue its progress till the former population is recovered.

The fertile province of Flanders, which has been so often the seat of the most destructive wars, after a respite of a few years, has always appeared as rich and as populous as ever. The undiminished population of France, which has before been noticed, is an instance very strongly in point. The tables of Susmilch afford continual proofs of a very rapid increase, after great mortalities; and the table for Prussia and Lithuania, which I have inserted<sup>a</sup>, is particularly striking in this respect. The effects of the dreadful plague in London, in 1666, were not perceptible 15 or 20 years afterwards.

<sup>a</sup> See p. 253.

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It may even be doubted, whether Turkey and Egypt are, upon an average, much less populous for the plagues which periodically lay them waste. If the number of people which they contain be considerably less now, than formerly, it is rather to be attributed to the tyranny and oppression of the governments under which they groan, and the consequent discouragements to agriculture, than to the losses which they sustain by the plague. The traces of the most destructive famines in China, Indostan, Egypt, and other countries, are by all accounts very soon obliterated; and the most tremendous convulsions of nature, such as volcanic eruptions and earthquakes, if they do not happen so frequently as to drive away the inhabitants, or destroy their spirit of industry, have been found to produce but a trifling effect on the average population of any state.

It has appeared from the registers of different countries which have already been produced, that the progress of their population is checked by the periodical, though irregular, returns of plagues and sickly seasons. Dr. Short, in his curious researches into bills of mortality, often uses the expression of "terrible correctives of the redundance of mankind;" and in a table of all the plagues, pestilences, and famines, of which he could collect accounts, shews the constancy and universality of their operation.

The epidemical years in his table, or the years in which the plague or some great and wasting epidemick prevailed, for smaller sickly seasons, seem not to be included, are 431<sup>b</sup>, of which 32 were before the Christian æra<sup>c</sup>. If we divide, therefore, the years of the present æra by 399, it will appear, that the periodical returns of such epidemics, to some country that we are acquainted with, have been on an average only at the interval of about 4½ years.

Of the 254 great famines and dearths, enumerated in the table, 15 were before the Christian æra<sup>d</sup>, beginning with that which occurred in Palestine, in the time of Abraham. If, subtracting these

<sup>a</sup> New Observ. on Bills of Mortality, p. 96.  
vol. ii. p. 366.

<sup>c</sup> Id. vol. ii. p. 202.

<sup>b</sup> Hist. of Air, Seasons, &c.

<sup>d</sup> Id. vol. ii. p. 206.

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15, we divide the years of the present æra by the remainder, it will appear that the average interval between the visits of this dreadful scourge has been only about  $7\frac{1}{2}$  years.

How far these "terrible correctives to the redundance of mankind," have been occasioned by the too rapid increase of population, is a point which it would be very difficult to determine with any degree of precision. The causes of most of our diseases appear to us to be so mysterious, and probably are really so various, that it would be rashness to lay too much stress on any single one: but it will not, perhaps, be too much to say, that, among these causes, we ought certainly to rank crowded houses, and insufficient or unwholesome food, which are the natural consequences of an increase of population, faster, than the accommodations of a country, with respect to habitations and food, will allow.

Almost all the histories of epidemics which we have, tend to confirm this supposition, by describing them in general as making their principal ravages among the lower classes of people. In Dr. Short's tables, this circumstance is frequently mentioned<sup>a</sup>; and it further appears, that a very considerable proportion of the epidemick years, either followed, or were accompanied by seasons of dearth and bad food<sup>b</sup>. In other places he also mentions great plagues as diminishing particularly the numbers of the lower or servile sort of people<sup>c</sup>; and, in speaking of different diseases, he observes, that those which are occasioned by bad and unwholesome food, generally last the longest<sup>d</sup>.

We know, from constant experience, that fevers are generated in our jails, our manufactories, our crowded workhouses, and in the narrow and close streets of our large towns; all which situations appear to be similar in their effects to squalid poverty: and we cannot doubt that causes of this kind, aggravated in degree, contributed to the production and prevalence of those great and wasting plagues

<sup>a</sup> Hist. of Air, Seasons, &c. vol. ii. p. 206. et seq.

<sup>b</sup> Ibid. and p. 366.

<sup>c</sup> New Observ. p. 125.

<sup>d</sup> Id. p. 108.

formerly

formerly so common in Europe, but which now, from the mitigation of these causes, are every where considerably abated, and in many places appear to be completely extirpated.

Of the other great scourge of mankind, famine, it may be observed, that it is not in the nature of things, that the increase of population should absolutely produce one. This increase, though rapid, is necessarily gradual; and as the human frame cannot be supported, even for a very short time, without food, it is evident, that no more human beings can grow up, than there is provision to maintain. But though the principle of population cannot absolutely produce a famine, it prepares the way for one in the most complete manner; and, by obliging all the lower classes of people to subsist nearly on the smallest quantity of food that will support life, turns even a slight deficiency from the failure of the seasons into a severe dearth; and may be fairly said, therefore, to be one of the principal causes of famine. Among the signs of an approaching dearth, Dr. Short mentions one or more years of luxuriant crops together<sup>a</sup>; and this observation is probably just, as we know that the general effect of years of cheapness and abundance is to dispose a greater number of persons to marry, and under such circumstances, the return to a year, merely of an average crop, might produce a scarcity.

The small-pox, which at present may be considered as the most prevalent and fatal epidemick in Europe, is of all others, perhaps, the most difficult to account for, though the periods of its return are in many places regular<sup>b</sup>. Dr. Short observes, that from the histories of this disorder, it seems to have very little dependence upon the past or present constitution of the weather or seasons, and that it appears epidemically at all times, and in all states of the air, though not so frequently in a hard frost. We know of no instances, I believe, of its being clearly generated under any circumstances of situation. I do not mean, therefore, to insinuate, that poverty and crowded houses

<sup>a</sup> Hist. of Air, Season, &c. vol. ii. p. 367.

<sup>b</sup> Id. vol. ii. p. 411.

ever

ever absolutely produced it; but I may be allowed to remark, that in those places where its returns are regular, and its ravages among children, particularly among those of the lower class, are considerable, it necessarily follows, that these circumstances, in a greater degree than usual, must always precede and accompany its appearance; that is, from the time of its last visit, the average number of children will be increasing, the people will, in consequence, be growing poorer, and the houses will be more crowded, till another visit removes this superabundant population.

In all these cases, how little soever force we may be disposed to attribute to the effects of the principle of population in the actual production of disorders, we cannot avoid allowing their force as predisposing causes to the reception of contagion, and as giving very great additional force to the extensiveness and fatality of its ravages.

It is observed by Dr. Short, that a severe mortal epidemick is generally succeeded by an uncommon healthiness, from the late distemper having carried off most of the declining worn-out constitutions<sup>a</sup>. It is probable, also, that another cause of it, may be, the greater plenty of room and food, and the consequently ameliorated condition of the lower classes of the people. Sometimes, according to Dr. Short, a very fruitful year is followed by a very mortal and sickly one, and mortal ones often succeeded by very fruitful, as though Nature fought either to prevent or quickly repair the loss by death. In general the next year after sickly and mortal ones is prolifick in proportion to the breeders left<sup>b</sup>.

This last effect we have seen most strikingly exemplified in the table for Prussia and Lithuania<sup>c</sup>. And from this and other tables of Susmilch, it also appears, that when the increasing produce of a country and the increasing demand for labour, so far ameliorate the condition of the labourer, as greatly to encourage marriage, the custom of early marriages, is generally continued, till the population has gone beyond the increased produce, and sickly seasons appear to be

<sup>a</sup> Hist. of Air, Weather, &c. vol. ii. p. 344. <sup>b</sup> New Observ. p. 191. <sup>c</sup> p. 253.  
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the natural and necessary consequence. The continental registers exhibit many instances of rapid increase, interrupted in this manner by mortal diseases, and the inference seems to be, that those countries where subsistence is increasing sufficiently to encourage population, but not to answer all its demands, will be more subject to periodical epidemics, than those where the increase of population is more nearly accommodated to the average produce.

The converse of this will of course be true. In those countries which are subject to periodical sicknesses, the increase of population, or the excess of births above the deaths, will be greater, in the intervals of these periods, than is usual in countries not so much subject to these diseases. If Turkey and Egypt have been nearly stationary in their average population for the last century, in the intervals of their periodical plagues, the births must have exceeded the deaths in a much greater proportion than in such countries as France and England.

It is for these reasons, that no estimates of future population or depopulation, formed from any existing rate of increase or decrease, can be depended upon. Sir William Petty calculated that, in the year 1800, the city of London would contain 5,359,000<sup>a</sup> inhabitants, instead of which, it does not now contain a fifth part of that number. And Mr. Eton has lately prophesied the extinction of the population of the Turkish empire in another century<sup>b</sup>; an event which will, as certainly, fail of taking place. If America were to continue increasing at the same rate as at present, for the next 150 years, her population would exceed the population of China; but though prophecies are dangerous, I will venture to say, that such an increase will not take place in that time, though it may perhaps in five or six hundred years.

Europe was, without doubt, formerly more subject to plagues and wasting epidemics than at present, and this will account, in great

<sup>a</sup> Political Arithmetick, p. 17.

<sup>b</sup> Survey of the Turkish Empire, c. vii. p. 281.

measure, for the greater proportion of births to deaths in former times, mentioned by many authors, as it has always been a common practice, to estimate these proportions from too short periods, and generally to reject the years of plague as accidental.

The highest average proportion of births to deaths in England may be considered as about 12 to 10, or 120 to 100. The proportion in France for ten years, ending in 1780, was about 115 to 100<sup>a</sup>. Though these proportions have undoubtedly varied, at different periods, during the last century, yet we have reason to think that they have not varied in any very considerable degree; and it will appear, therefore, that the population of France and England has accommodated itself more nearly to the average produce of each country than many other states. The operation of the preventive check, vicious manners, wars, the silent, though certain, destruction of life in large towns and manufactories, and the close habitations and insufficient food of many of the poor, prevent population from outrunning the means of subsistence; and if I may use an expression, which certainly at first appears strange, supersede the necessity of great and ravaging epidemics to destroy what is redundant. If a wasting plague were to sweep off two millions in England, and six millions in France, it cannot be doubted, that after the inhabitants had recovered from the dreadful shock, the proportion of births to deaths would rise much above the usual average in either country during the last century<sup>b</sup>.

In New Jersey the proportion of births to deaths, on an average of 7 years, ending 1743, was 300 to 100. In France and England, the highest average proportion cannot be reckoned at more than 120 to 100. Great and astonishing as this difference is, we ought not to be so wonder-struck at it, as to attribute it to the miraculous interposition of heaven. The causes of it are not remote, latent, and

<sup>a</sup> Necker de l'Administration des Finances, tom. i. c. ix. p. 255.

<sup>b</sup> This remark has been, to a certain degree, verified of late in France, by the increase of births which has taken place since the revolution.

mysterious,

mysterious, but near us, round about us, and open to the investigation of every inquiring mind. It accords with the most liberal spirit of philosophy to believe, that not a stone can fall, or plant rise, without the immediate agency of divine power. But we know, from experience, that these operations of what we call nature, have been conducted almost invariably according to fixed laws. And since the world began, the causes of population and depopulation have been probably as constant as any of the laws of nature with which we are acquainted.

The passion between the sexes has appeared in every age to be so nearly the same, that it may always be considered, in algebraic language, as a given quantity. The great law of necessity, which prevents population from increasing in any country beyond the food which it can either produce or acquire, is a law, so open to our view, so obvious and evident to our understandings, that we cannot for a moment doubt it. The different modes which nature takes to repress a redundant population, do not appear indeed to us so certain and regular; but though we cannot always predict the mode, we may with certainty predict the fact. If the proportion of the births to the deaths for a few years, indicate an increase of numbers much beyond the proportional increased or acquired food of the country, we may be perfectly certain, that unless an emigration take place, the deaths will shortly exceed the births, and that the increase that had been observed for a few years, cannot be the real average increase of the population of the country. If there were no other depopulating causes, and if the preventive check did not operate very strongly, every country would, without doubt, be subject to periodical plagues or famines.

The only true criterion of a real and permanent increase in the population of any country, is the increase of the means of subsistence. But even this criterion is subject to some slight variations, which however are completely open to our observation. In some countries population seems to have been forced; that is, the people have been

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habituated,

habituated, by degrees, to live almost upon the smallest possible quantity of food. There must have been periods in such countries when population increased permanently without an increase in the means of subsistence. China, India, and the countries possessed by the Bedoween Arabs, as we have seen in the former part of this work, appear to answer to this description. The average produce of these countries seems to be but barely sufficient to support the lives of the inhabitants, and of course any deficiency from the badness of the seasons must be fatal. Nations in this state must necessarily be subject to famines.

In America, where the reward of labour is at present so liberal, the lower classes might retrench very considerably in a year of scarcity, without materially distressing themselves. A famine, therefore, seems to be almost impossible. It may be expected, that in the progress of the population of America, the labourers will in time be much less liberally rewarded. The numbers will in this case permanently increase without a proportional increase in the means of subsistence.

In the different countries of Europe, there must be some variations in the proportion of the number of inhabitants, and the quantity of food consumed, arising from the different habits of living which prevail in each state. The labourers of the South of England are so accustomed to eat fine wheaten bread, that they will suffer themselves to be half-starved, before they will submit to live like the Scotch peasants. They might, perhaps, in time, by the constant operation of the hard law of necessity, be reduced to live, even like the lower classes of the Chinese, and the country would then, with the same quantity of food, support a greater population. But to effect this, must always be a difficult, and every friend to humanity will hope, an abortive attempt.

I have mentioned some cases where population may permanently increase, without a proportional increase in the means of subsistence. But it is evident, that the variation in different states, between the food, and the numbers supported by it, is restricted to a limit

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beyond

beyond which it cannot pass. In every country, the population of which is not absolutely decreasing, the food must be necessarily sufficient to support and to continue the race of labourers.

Other circumstances being the same, it may be affirmed, that countries are populous according to the quantity of human food which they produce, or can acquire; and happy, according to the liberality with which this food is divided, or the quantity which a day's labour will purchase. Corn countries are more populous than pasture countries; and rice countries more populous than corn countries. But their happiness does not depend either upon their being thinly or fully inhabited, upon their poverty or their riches, their youth or their age; but on the proportion which the population and the food bear to each other. This proportion is generally the most favourable in new colonies, where the knowledge and industry of an old state, operate on the fertile unappropriated land of a new one. In other cases the youth, or the age, of a state is not, in this respect, of great importance. It is probable that the food of Great Britain is divided in more liberal shares to her inhabitants at the present period, than it was, two thousand, three thousand, or four thousand years ago. And it has appeared that the poor and thinly-inhabited tracts of the Scotch Highlands are more distressed by a redundant population, than the most populous parts of Europe.

If a country were never to be over-run by a people more advanced in arts, but left to its own natural progress in civilization; from the time that its produce might be considered as an unit, to the time that it might be considered as a million, during the lapse of many thousand years, there would not be a single period, when the mass of the people could be said to be free from distress, either directly or indirectly, for want of food. In every state in Europe, since we have first had accounts of it, millions and millions of human existences have been repressed from this simple cause, though perhaps, in some of these states, an absolute famine may never have been known.

Famine



Famine seems to be the last, the most dreadful resource of nature. The power of population is so superior to the power in the earth to produce subsistence for man, that, unless arrested by the preventive check, premature death must in some shape or other visit the human race. The vices of mankind are active and able ministers of depopulation. They are the precursors in the great army of destruction, and often finish the dreadful work themselves. But should they fail in this war of extermination, sickly seasons, epidemics, pestilence, and plague, advance in terrific array, and sweep off their thousands and ten thousands. Should success be still incomplete, gigantic inevitable famine stalks in the rear, and, with one mighty blow, levels the population with the food of the world.

Must it not then be acknowledged, by an attentive examiner of the histories of mankind, that, in every age, and in every state, in which man has existed, or does now exist,

The increase of population is necessarily limited by the means of subsistence.

Population invariably increases when the means of subsistence increase, unless prevented by powerful and obvious checks.

These checks, and the checks which keep the population down to the level of the means of subsistence, are, moral restraint, vice, and misery.

In comparing the state of society which has been considered in this second book with that which formed the subject of the first, I think it appears, that in modern Europe the positive checks to population prevail less, and the preventive checks more, than in past times, and in the more uncivilized parts of the world.

War, the predominant check to the population of savage nations, has certainly abated, even including the late unhappy revolutionary contests: and since the prevalence of a greater degree of personal cleanliness, of better modes of clearing and building towns, and of a more equable distribution of the products of the soil from improving knowledge in political economy, plagues, violent diseases,

and famines, have been certainly mitigated, and have become less frequent.

With regard to the preventive checks to population, though it must be acknowledged, that moral restraint does not at present prevail much among the male part of society; yet I am strongly disposed to believe that it prevails more than in those states which were first considered; and it can scarcely be doubted, that in modern Europe, a much larger proportion of women pass a considerable part of their lives in the exercise of this virtue, than in past times and among uncivilized nations. But however this may be, taking the preventive check in its general acceptation, as implying an infrequency of the marriage union from the fear of a family, without reference to its producing vice, it may be considered, in this light, as the most powerful of the checks, which in modern Europe keep down the population to the level of the means of subsistence.

THE HISTORY OF THE PEOPLE OF ENGLAND

IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

BY JOHN ECCLES

ESSAY, &c.

OF THE DIFFERENT SYSTEMS OR EXPEDIENTS WHICH HAVE BEEN PROPOSED OR HAVE PREVAILED IN SOCIETY, AS THEY AFFECT THE EVILS ARISING FROM THE PRINCIPLE OF POPULATION.

BOOK III.

OF THE DIFFERENT SYSTEMS OR EXPEDIENTS WHICH HAVE BEEN PROPOSED OR HAVE PREVAILED IN SOCIETY, AS THEY AFFECT THE EVILS ARISING FROM THE PRINCIPLE OF POPULATION.

CHAP. I.

*Of Systems of Equality. Wallace. Condorcet.*

To a person who views the past and present states of mankind in the light in which they have appeared in the two preceding books, it cannot but be a matter of astonishment, that all the writers on the perfectibility of man and of society, who have noticed the argument of the principle of population, treat it always very slightly, and invariably represent the difficulties arising from it, as at a great, and almost immeasurable distance. Even Mr. Wallace, who thought the argument itself of so much weight, as to destroy his whole system of equality, did not seem to be aware that any difficulty would arise from this cause, till the whole earth had been cultivated like a garden, and was incapable of any further increase of produce. Were this really the case, and were a beautiful system of equality in other respects practicable, I cannot think that our ardour in the pursuit of such a scheme ought to be damped by the contemplation

of so remote a difficulty. An event at such a distance might fairly be left to providence. But the truth is, that if the view of the argument given in this essay be just, the difficulty, so far from being remote, would be imminent and immediate. At every period during the progress of cultivation, from the present moment to the time when the whole earth was become like a garden, the distresses for want of food would be constantly pressing on all mankind, if they were equal. Though the produce of the earth would be increasing every year, population would be increasing much faster, and the redundancy must necessarily be checked by the periodical, or constant action, of moral restraint, vice, or misery.

M. Condorcet's *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain*, was written, it is said, under the pressure of that cruel prostration which terminated in his death. If he had no hopes of its being seen during his life, and of its interesting France in his favour, it is a singular instance of the attachment of a man to principles, which every day's experience was, so fatally for himself, contradicting. To see the human mind, in one of the most enlightened nations of the world, debased by such a fermentation of disgusting passions, of fear, cruelty, malice, revenge, ambition, madness, and folly, as would have disgraced the most savage nations in the most barbarous age; must have been such a tremendous shock to his ideas of the necessary and inevitable progress of the human mind, that nothing but the firmest conviction of the truth of his principles, in spite of all appearances, could have withstood.

This posthumous publication is only a sketch of a much larger work which he proposed should be executed. It necessarily wants, therefore, that detail and application, which can alone prove the truth of any theory. A few observations will be sufficient to shew how completely this theory is contradicted, when it is applied to the real and not to an imaginary state of things.

In the last division of the work, which treats of the future progress of man towards perfection, M. Condorcet says, that, comparing  
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in the different civilized nations of Europe, the actual population with the extent of territory; and observing their cultivation, their industry, their divisions of labour, and their means of subsistence, we shall see, that it would be impossible to preserve the same means of subsistence, and consequently the same population, without a number of individuals who have no other means of supplying their wants than their industry.

Having allowed the necessity of such a class of men, and adverting afterwards to the precarious revenue of those families that would depend so entirely on the life and health of their chief<sup>a</sup>, he says very justly, "There exists then a necessary cause of inequality, of dependence, and even of misery, which menaces, without ceasing, "the most numerous and active class of our societies." The difficulty is just, and well stated; but his mode of removing it, will, I fear, be found totally inefficacious.

By the application of calculations to the probabilities of life, and the interest of money, he proposes that a fund should be established, which should assure to the old an assistance, produced in part by their own former savings, and in part by the savings of individuals, who, in making the same sacrifice, die before they reap the benefit of it. The same, or a similar fund, should give assistance to women and children, who lose their husbands or fathers; and afford a capital to those who were of an age to found a new family, sufficient for the development of their industry. These establishments, he observes, might be made in the name, and under the protection, of the society. Going still further, he says, that by the just application of calculations, means might be found of more completely preserving a state of equality, by preventing credit from being the exclusive privilege of great fortunes, and yet giving it a basis equally solid, and by

<sup>a</sup> To save time and long quotations, I shall here give the substance of some of M. Condorcet's sentiments, and I hope that I shall not misrepresent them; but I refer the reader to the work itself, which will amuse if it do not convince him.

rendering the progress of industry and the activity of commerce, less dependent on great capitalists.

Such establishments and calculations may appear very promising upon paper; but when applied to real life, they will be found to be absolutely nugatory. M. Condorcet allows, that a class of people which maintains itself entirely by industry is necessary to every state. Why does he allow this? No other reason can well be assigned, than because he conceives, that the labour necessary to procure subsistence for an extended population, will not be performed without the goad of necessity. If by establishments, upon the plans that have been mentioned, this spur to industry be removed; if the idle and negligent be placed upon the same footing with regard to their credit, and the future support of their wives and families, as the active and industrious, can we expect to see men exert that animated activity in bettering their condition, which now forms the master-spring of public prosperity. If an inquisition were to be established to examine the claims of each individual, and to determine whether he had, or had not, exerted himself to the utmost, and to grant or refuse assistance accordingly, this would be little else than a repetition upon a larger scale, of the English poor laws, and would be completely destructive of the true principles of liberty and equality.

But independently of this great objection to these establishments, and supposing, for a moment, that they would give no check to production, the greatest difficulty remains yet behind.

Were every man sure of a comfortable provision for a family, almost every man would have one; and were the rising generation free from the "killing frost" of misery, population must increase with unusual rapidity. Of this, M. Condorcet seems to be fully aware himself; and, after having described further improvements, he says,

"But in this progress of industry and happiness, each generation  
"will be called to more extended enjoyments, and, in consequence,  
"by the physical constitution of the human frame, to an increase in  
"the

"the number of individuals. Must not there arrive a period then,  
"when these laws, equally necessary, shall counteract each other?  
"when the increase of the number of men surpassing their means of  
"subsistence, the necessary result must be, either a continual dimi-  
"nution of happiness, and population—a movement truly retro-  
"grade; or, at least, a kind of oscillation between good and evil?  
"In societies arrived at this term, will not this oscillation be a con-  
"stantly subsisting cause of periodical misery? Will it not mark the  
"limit when all further amelioration will become impossible, and  
"point out that term to the perfectibility of the human race, which  
"it may reach in the course of ages, but can never pass?" He  
then adds,

"There is no person who does not see how very distant such a  
"period is from us. But shall we ever arrive at it? It is equally  
"impossible to pronounce for, or against, the future realization of  
"an event, which cannot take place but at an æra, when the  
"human race will have attained improvements of which we can, at  
"present, scarcely form a conception."

M. Condorcet's picture of what may be expected to happen, when the number of men shall surpass their means of subsistence, is justly drawn. The oscillation which he describes will certainly take place, and will, without doubt, be a constantly subsisting cause of periodical misery. The only point in which I differ from M. Condorcet in this description, is, with regard to the period when it may be applied to the human race. M. Condorcet thinks that it cannot possibly be applicable, but at an æra extremely distant. If the proportion between the natural increase of population and food, which was stated in the beginning of this essay, and which has received considerable confirmation from the poverty that has been found to prevail in every stage and department of human society, be in any degree near the truth, it will appear, on the contrary, that the period when the number of men surpass their means of subsistence, has long since arrived; and that this necessary oscillation, this constantly subsisting cause of periodical misery, has existed ever since we have had any histories.

histories of mankind, does exist at present, and will for ever continue to exist, unless some decided change take place in the physical constitution of our nature.

M. Condorcet, however, goes on to say, that should the period which he conceives to be so distant ever arrive, the human race, and the advocates of the perfectibility of man, need not be alarmed at it. He then proceeds to remove the difficulty in a manner which I profess not to understand. Having observed, that the ridiculous prejudices of superstition would by that time have ceased to throw over morals a corrupt and degrading austerity, he alludes either to a promiscuous concubinage, which would prevent breeding, or to something else as unnatural. To remove the difficulty in this way, will surely, in the opinion of most men, be, to destroy that virtue and purity of manners, which the advocates of equality, and of the perfectibility of man, profess to be the end and object of their views.

The last question which M. Condorcet proposes for examination, is, the organic perfectibility of man. He observes, that if the proofs which have been already given, and which, in their development, will receive greater force in the work itself, are sufficient to establish the indefinite perfectibility of man, upon the supposition, of the same natural faculties, and the same organization which he has at present; what will be the certainty, what the extent of our hopes, if this organization, these natural faculties themselves, be susceptible of amelioration?

From the improvement of medicine; from the use of more wholesome food, and habitations; from a manner of living, which will improve the strength of the body by exercise, without impairing it by excess; from the destruction of the two great causes of the degradation of man, misery, and too great riches; from the gradual removal of transmissible and contagious disorders, by the improvement of physical knowledge, rendered more efficacious, by the progress of reason and of social order; he infers, that though man will not absolutely become immortal, yet that the duration between his birth,  
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and natural death, will increase without ceasing, will have no assignable term, and may properly be expressed by the word indefinite. He then defines this word to mean, either a constant approach to an unlimited extent, without ever reaching it; or, an increase in the immensity of ages to an extent greater than any assignable quantity.

But surely the application of this term in either of these senses, to the duration of human life, is in the highest degree unphilosophical, and totally unwarranted by any appearances in the laws of nature. Variations from different causes are essentially distinct from a regular and unretrograde increase. The average duration of human life will, to a certain degree, vary, from healthy or unhealthy climates, from wholesome or unwholesome food, from virtuous or vicious manners, and other causes; but it may be fairly doubted, whether there has been really the smallest perceptible advance in the natural duration of human life, since first we had any authentic history of man. The prejudices of all ages have, indeed, been directly contrary to this supposition; and though I would not lay much stress upon these prejudices, they will in some measure tend to prove, that there has been no marked advance in an opposite direction.

It may perhaps be said, that the world is yet so young, so completely in its infancy, that it ought not to be expected that any difference should appear so soon.

If this be the case, there is at once an end of all human science. The whole train of reasonings from effects to causes will be destroyed. We may shut our eyes to the book of nature, as it will no longer be of any use to read it. The wildest and most improbable conjectures may be advanced with as much certainty as the most just and sublime theories, founded on careful and reiterated experiments. We may return again to the old mode of philosophising, and make facts bend to systems, instead of establishing systems upon facts. The grand and consistent theory of Newton, will be placed upon the same footing as the wild and eccentric hypotheses of Descartes. In short, if the laws of nature be thus fickle and inconstant; if it  
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can be affirmed, and be believed, that they will change, when for ages and ages they have appeared immutable, the human mind will no longer have any incitements to inquiry, but must remain fixed in inactive torpor, or amuse itself only in bewildering dreams, and extravagant fancies.

The constancy of the laws of nature, and of effects and causes, is the foundation of all human knowledge; and, if without any previous observable symptoms or indications of a change, we can infer that a change will take place, we may as well make any assertion whatever, and think it as unreasonable to be contradicted, in affirming that the moon will come in contact with the earth to-morrow, as in saying, that the sun will rise at its appointed time.

With regard to the duration of human life, there does not appear to have existed, from the earliest ages of the world, to the present moment, the smallest permanent symptom, or indication, of increasing prolongation. The observable effects of climate, habit, diet, and other causes, on length of life, have furnished the pretext for asserting its indefinite extension; and the sandy foundation on which the argument rests, is, that because the limit of human life is undefined; because you cannot mark its precise term, and say so far exactly shall it go, and no further; that therefore its extent may increase for ever, and be properly termed, indefinite or unlimited. But the fallacy and absurdity of this argument will sufficiently appear from a slight examination of what M. Condorcet calls the organic perfectibility, or degeneration, of the race of plants and animals, which, he says, may be regarded as one of the general laws of nature.

I am told, that it is a maxim among the improvers of cattle, that you may breed to any degree of nicety you please; and they found this maxim upon another, which is, that some of the offspring will possess the desirable qualities of the parents in a greater degree. In the famous Leicestershire breed of sheep, the object is to procure them with small heads and small legs. Proceeding upon these breed-

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ing maxims, it is evident, that we might go on till the heads and legs were evanescent quantities; but this is so palpable an absurdity, that we may be quite sure that the premises are not just, and that there really is a limit, though we cannot see it, or say exactly where it is. In this case, the point of the greatest degree of improvement, or the smallest size of the head and legs, may be said to be undefined; but this is very different from unlimited, or from indefinite, in M. Condorcet's acceptance of the term. Though I may not be able, in the present instance, to mark the limit, at which further improvement will stop, I can very easily mention a point at which it will not arrive. I should not scruple to assert, that were the breeding to continue for ever, the heads and legs of these sheep would never be so small as the head and legs of a rat.

It cannot be true, therefore, that among animals, some of the offspring will possess the desirable qualities of the parents in a greater degree; or that animals are indefinitely perfectible.

The progress of a wild plant, to a beautiful garden flower, is perhaps more marked and striking, than any thing that takes place among animals; yet even here, it would be the height of absurdity to assert, that the progress was unlimited or indefinite. One of the most obvious features of the improvement is the increase of size. The flower has grown gradually larger by cultivation. If the progress were really unlimited, it might be increased ad infinitum; but this is so gross an absurdity, that we may be quite sure, that among plants, as well as among animals, there is a limit to improvement, though we do not exactly know where it is. It is probable that the gardeners who contend for flower prizes have often applied stronger dressing without success. At the same time, it would be highly presumptuous in any man to say, that he had seen the finest carnation or anemone that could ever be made to grow. He might however assert without the smallest chance of being contradicted by a future fact, that no carnation or anemone could ever by cultivation be increased to the size of a large cabbage; and yet there are assignable

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quantities

quantities greater than a cabbage. No man can say that he has seen the largest ear of wheat, or the largest oak that could ever grow; but he might easily, and with perfect certainty, name a point of magnitude, at which they would not arrive. In all these cases, therefore, a careful distinction should be made, between an unlimited progress, and a progress where the limit is merely undefined.

It will be said, perhaps, that the reason why plants and animals cannot increase indefinitely in size, is, that they would fall by their own weight. I answer, how do we know this but from experience? from experience of the degree of strength with which these bodies are formed. I know that a carnation, long before it reached the size of a cabbage, would not be supported by its stalk; but I only know this from my experience of the weakness, and want of tenacity in the materials of a carnation stalk. There are many substances in nature, of the same size, that would support as large a head as a cabbage.

The reasons of the mortality of plants are at present perfectly unknown to us. No man can say why such a plant is annual, another biennial, and another endures for ages. The whole affair in all these cases, in plants, animals, and in the human race, is an affair of experience; and I only conclude that man is mortal, because the invariable experience of all ages has proved the mortality of those materials of which his visible body is made.

“What can we reason but from what we know.”

Sound philosophy will not authorize me to alter this opinion of the mortality of man on earth, till it can be clearly proved, that the human race has made, and is making, a decided progress towards an illimitable extent of life. And the chief reason why I adduced the two particular instances from animals and plants, was, to expose, and illustrate, if I could, the fallacy of that argument, which infers an unlimited progress, merely because some partial improvement has  
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taken place, and that the limit of this improvement cannot be precisely ascertained.

The capacity of improvement in plants and animals, to a certain degree, no person can possibly doubt. A clear and decided progress has already been made; and yet, I think it appears, that it would be highly absurd to say, that this progress has no limits. In human life, though there are great variations from different causes, it may be doubted, whether, since the world began, any organic improvement whatever of the human frame can be clearly ascertained. The foundations, therefore, on which the arguments for the organic perfectibility of man rest, are unusually weak, and can only be considered as mere conjectures. It does not, however, by any means, seem impossible, that by an attention to breed, a certain degree of improvement, similar to that among animals, might take place among men. Whether intellect could be communicated may be a matter of doubt: but size, strength, beauty, complexion, and perhaps even longevity, are in a degree transmissible. The error does not seem to lie, in supposing a small degree of improvement possible, but in not discriminating between a small improvement, the limit of which is undefined, and an improvement really unlimited. As the human race, however, could not be improved in this way, without condemning all the bad specimens to celibacy, it is not probable, that an attention to breed should ever become general; indeed, I know of no well-directed attempts of the kind, except in the ancient family of the Bickerstaffs, who are said to have been very successful in whitening the skins, and increasing the height of their race by prudent marriages, particularly by that very judicious cross with Maud the milk-maid, by which some capital defects in the constitutions of the family were corrected.

It will not be necessary, I think, in order more completely to shew the improbability of any approach in man towards immortality on earth, to urge the very great additional weight that an increase in the duration of life would give to the argument of population.

M. Condorcet's book may be considered, not only as a sketch of the opinions of a celebrated individual, but of many of the literary men in France, at the beginning of the revolution. As such, though merely a sketch, it seems worthy of attention.

Many, I doubt not, will think that the attempting gravely to controvert so absurd a paradox, as the immortality of man on earth, or indeed, even the perfectibility of man and society, is a waste of time and words; and that such unfounded conjectures are best answered by neglect. I profess, however, to be of a different opinion. When paradoxes of this kind are advanced by ingenious and able men, neglect has no tendency to convince them of their mistakes. Priding themselves on what they conceive to be a mark of the reach and size of their own understandings, of the extent and comprehensiveness of their views; they will look upon this neglect merely as an indication of poverty, and narrowness, in the mental exertions of their contemporaries; and only think, that the world is not yet prepared to receive their sublime truths.

On the contrary, a candid investigation of these subjects, accompanied with a perfect readiness to adopt any theory, warranted by sound philosophy, may have a tendency to convince them, that, in forming improbable and unfounded hypotheses, so far from enlarging the bounds of human science, they are contracting it; so far from promoting the improvement of the human mind, they are obstructing it: they are throwing us back again almost into the infancy of knowledge; and weakening the foundations of that mode of philosophizing, under the auspices of which, science has of late made such rapid advances. The late rage for wide and unrestrained speculation, seems to have been a kind of mental intoxication, arising, perhaps, from the great and unexpected discoveries which had been made in various branches of science. To men, elate and giddy with such successes, every thing appeared to be within the grasp of human powers; and, under this illusion, they confounded subjects where

no real progress could be proved, with those, where the progress had been marked, certain, and acknowledged. Could they be persuaded to sober themselves with a little severe and chastized thinking, they would see, that the cause of truth, and of sound philosophy, cannot but suffer, by substituting wild flights and unsupported assertions, for patient investigation, and well authenticated proofs.



## C H A P. II.

*Of Systems of Equality. Godwin.*

IN reading Mr. Godwin's ingenious work on political justice, it is impossible not to be struck with the spirit and energy of his style, the force and precision of some of his reasonings, the ardent tone of his thoughts, and particularly with that impressive earnestness of manner, which gives an air of truth to the whole. At the same time it must be confessed, that he has not proceeded in his inquiries with the caution that sound philosophy requires. His conclusions are often unwarranted by his premises. He fails sometimes in removing objections which he himself brings forward. He relies too much on general and abstract propositions which will not admit of application. And his conjectures certainly far outstrip the modesty of nature.

The system of equality which Mr. Godwin proposes, is, on a first view, the most beautiful and engaging of any that has yet appeared. An amelioration of society to be produced merely by reason and conviction, gives more promise of permanence, than any change effected, and maintained by force. The unlimited exercise of private judgment, is a doctrine grand and captivating, and has a vast superiority over those systems, where every individual is in a manner the slave of the publick. The substitution of benevolence, as the masterspring and moving principle of society, instead of self-love, appears, at first sight, to be a consummation devoutly to be wished. In short, it is impossible to contemplate the whole of this fair picture without emotions of delight and admiration, accompanied with an ardent  
longing

longing for the period of its accomplishment. But alas! that moment can never arrive. The whole is little better than a dream—a phantom of the imagination. These “gorgeous palaces” of happiness and immortality, these “solemn temples” of truth and virtue, will dissolve, “like the baseless fabric of a vision,” when we awaken to real life, and contemplate the genuine situation of man on earth.

Mr. Godwin, at the conclusion of the third chapter of his eighth book, speaking of population, says, “There is a principle in human society, by which population is perpetually kept down to the level “of the means of subsistence. Thus, among the wandering tribes “of America and Asia, we never find, through the lapse of ages, that “population has so increased as to render necessary the cultivation “of the earth.” This principle, which Mr. Godwin thus mentions as some mysterious and occult cause, and which he does not attempt to investigate, has appeared to be the grinding law of necessity—misery, and the fear of misery.

The great error under which Mr. Godwin labours, throughout his whole work, is, the attributing of almost all the vices and misery that prevail in civil society to human institutions. Political regulations, and the established administration of property, are, with him, the fruitful sources of all evil, the hotbeds of all the crimes that degrade mankind. Were this really a true state of the case, it would not seem an absolutely hopeless task, to remove evil completely from the world; and reason seems to be the proper and adequate instrument, for effecting so great a purpose. But the truth is, that, though human institutions appear to be the obvious and obtrusive causes of much mischief to mankind, they are, in reality, light and superficial, in comparison with those deeper-seated causes of evil which result from the laws of nature.

In a chapter on the benefits attendant upon a system of equality, Mr. Godwin says, “The spirit of oppression, the spirit of servility,

*enferable*  
 " and the spirit of fraud, these are the immediate growth of the  
 " established administration of property. They are alike hostile to  
 " intellectual improvement. The other vices of envy, malice, and  
 " revenge, are their insuperable companions. In a state of society  
 " where men lived in the midst of plenty, and where all shared  
 " alike the bounties of nature, these sentiments would inevitably  
 " expire. The narrow principle of selfishness would vanish. No  
 " man being obliged to guard his little store, or provide with anxiety  
 " and pain for his restless wants, each would lose his individual  
 " existence in the thought of the general good. No man would be  
 " an enemy to his neighbours, for they would have no subject of  
 " contention; and of consequence philanthropy would resume the  
 " empire which reason assigns her. Mind would be delivered from  
 " her perpetual anxiety about corporal support, and free to expa-  
 " tiate in the field of thought which is congenial to her. Each  
 " would assist the inquiries of all."

This would indeed be a happy state. But that it is merely an imaginary picture, with scarcely a feature near the truth, the reader, I am afraid, is already too well convinced.

Man cannot live in the midst of plenty. All cannot share alike the bounties of nature. Were there no established administration of property, every man would be obliged to guard with force his little store. Selfishness would be triumphant. The subjects of contention would be perpetual. Every individual would be under a constant anxiety about corporal support, and not a single intellect would be left free to expatiate in the field of thought.

How little Mr. Godwin has turned his attention to the real state of human society, will sufficiently appear from the manner in which he endeavours to remove the difficulty of an overcharged population. He says, " The obvious answer to this objection is, that to reason  
 " thus, is to foresee difficulties at a great distance. Three-fourths of

<sup>a</sup> Political Justice, b. viii. c. iii. p. 458.

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" the habitable globe is now uncultivated. The parts already culti-  
 " vated are capable of immeasurable improvement. Myriads of cen-  
 " turies of still increasing population may pass away, and the earth  
 " be still found sufficient for the subsistence of its inhabitants."

I have already pointed out the error of supposing that no distress or difficulty would arise from a redundant population, before the earth absolutely refused to produce any more. But let us imagine, for a moment, Mr. Godwin's system of equality realized in its utmost extent, and see how soon this difficulty might be expected to press, under so perfect a form of society. A theory that will not admit of application cannot possibly be just.

Let us suppose all the causes of vice and misery in this island removed. War and contention cease. Unwholesome trades and manufactories do not exist. Crowds no longer collect together in great and pestilent cities, for purposes of court intrigue, of commerce, and vicious gratification. Simple, healthy, and rational amusements, take place of drinking, gaming, and debauchery. There are no towns sufficiently large, to have any prejudicial effects on the human constitution. The greater part of the happy inhabitants of this terrestrial paradise live in hamlets and farm houses, scattered over the face of the country. All men are equal. The labours of luxury are at an end; and the necessary labours of agriculture are shared amicably among all. The number of persons and the produce of the island we suppose to be the same as at present. The spirit of benevolence guided by impartial justice, will divide this produce among all the members of society according to their wants. Though it would be impossible that they should all have animal food every day, yet vegetable food, with meat occasionally, would satisfy the desires of a frugal people, and would be sufficient to preserve them in health, strength, and spirits.

Mr. Godwin considers marriage as a fraud, and a monopoly<sup>b</sup>. Let

<sup>a</sup> Polit. Justice, b. viii. c. ix. p. 510.

<sup>b</sup> Id. b. viii. c. viii. p. 498. et seq.

us suppose the commerce of the sexes established upon principles of the most perfect freedom. Mr. Godwin does not think himself, that this freedom would lead to a promiscuous intercourse; and in this, I perfectly agree with him. The love of variety is a vicious, corrupt, and unnatural taste, and could not prevail, in any great degree, in a simple and virtuous state of society. Each man would probably select for himself a partner, to whom he would adhere, as long as that adherence continued to be the choice of both parties. It would be of little consequence; according to Mr. Godwin, how many children a woman had, or to whom they belonged. Provisions and assistance would spontaneously flow from the quarter in which they abounded, to the quarter in which they were deficient<sup>a</sup>. And every man, according to his capacity, would be ready to furnish instruction to the rising generation.

I cannot conceive a form of society so favourable, upon the whole, to population. The irremediableness of marriage, as it is at present constituted, undoubtedly deters many from entering into this state. An unshackled intercourse, on the contrary, would be a most powerful incitement to early attachments: and as we are supposing no anxiety about the future support of children to exist, I do not conceive that there would be one woman in a hundred, of twenty-three years of age, without a family.

With these extraordinary encouragements to population, and every cause of depopulation, as we have supposed, removed, the numbers would necessarily increase faster than in any society that has ever yet been known. I have before mentioned, that the inhabitants of the back settlements of America appear to double their numbers in fifteen years. England is certainly a more healthy country than the back settlements of America; and as we have supposed every house in the island to be airy and wholesome, and the encouragements to have a family, greater even than in America, no pro-

<sup>a</sup> Political Justice, b. viii. c. viii. p. 504.

bable

bable reason can be assigned, why the population should not double itself, in less, if possible, than fifteen years. But to be quite sure that we do not go beyond the truth, we will only suppose the period of doubling to be twenty-five years; a ratio of increase which is well known to have taken place throughout all the northern states of America.

There can be little doubt, that the equalization of property which we have supposed, added to the circumstance of the labour of the whole community being directed chiefly to agriculture, would tend greatly to augment the produce of the country. But to answer the demands of a population increasing so rapidly, Mr. Godwin's calculation of half an hour a day would certainly not be sufficient. It is probable, that the half of every man's time must be employed for this purpose. Yet with such, or much greater exertions, a person who is acquainted with the nature of the soil in this country, and who reflects on the fertility of the lands already in cultivation, and the barrenness of those that are not cultivated, will be very much disposed to doubt, whether the whole average produce could possibly be doubled in twenty-five years from the present period. The only chance of success would be from the ploughing up most of the grazing countries, and putting an end almost entirely to animal food. Yet this scheme would probably defeat itself. The soil of England will not produce much without dressing; and cattle seem to be necessary to make that species of manure which best suits the land.

Difficult, however, as it might be, to double the average produce of the island in twenty-five years, let us suppose it effected. At the expiration of the first period, therefore, the food, though almost entirely vegetable, would be sufficient to support in health the doubled population of 22 millions.

During the next period, where will the food be found to satisfy the importunate demands of the increasing numbers? Where is the fresh land to turn up? Where is the dressing necessary to improve that which is already in cultivation? There is no person with the

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smallest

smallest knowledge of land, but would say, that it was impossible that the average produce of the country could be increased during the second twenty-five years, by a quantity equal to what it at present yields. Yet we will suppose this increase, however improbable, to take place. The exuberant strength of the argument allows of almost any concession. Even with this concession, however, there would be eleven millions at the expiration of the second term unprovided for. A quantity equal to the frugal support of 33 millions would be to be divided among 44 millions.

Alas! what becomes of the picture, where men lived in the midst of plenty, where no man was obliged to provide with anxiety and pain for his restless wants; where the narrow principle of selfishness did not exist; where the mind was delivered from her perpetual anxiety about corporeal support, and free to expatiate in the field of thought which is congenial to her. This beautiful fabric of the imagination vanishes at the severe touch of truth. The spirit of benevolence, cherished and invigorated by plenty, is repressed by the chilling breath of want. The hateful passions that had vanished reappear. The mighty law of self-preservation expels all the softer, and more exalted emotions of the soul. The temptations to evil are too strong for human nature to resist. The corn is plucked before it is ripe, or secreted in unfair proportions; and the whole black train of vices that belong to falsehood are immediately generated. Provisions no longer flow in for the support of a mother with a large family. The children are sickly from insufficient food. The rosy flush of health gives place to the pallid cheek, and hollow eye of misery. Benevolence, yet lingering in a few bosoms, makes some faint expiring struggles, till at length self-love resumes his wonted empire, and lords it triumphant over the world.

No human institutions here existed, to the perverseness of which Mr. Godwin ascribes the original sin of the worst men<sup>a</sup>. No op-

<sup>a</sup> Polit. Justice, b. viii. c. iii. p. 340.

position

position had been produced by them between publick and private good. No monopoly had been created of those advantages which reason directs to be left in common. No man had been goaded to the breach of order by unjust laws. Benevolence had established her reign in all hearts. And yet in so short a period as fifty years, violence, oppression, falsehood, misery, every hateful vice, and every form of distress, which degrade and sadden the present state of society, seem to have been generated by the most imperious circumstances, by laws inherent in the nature of man, and absolutely independent of all human regulations.

If we be not yet too well convinced of the reality of this melancholy picture, let us but look for a moment into the next period of twenty-five years, and we shall see 44 millions of human beings without the means of support: and at the conclusion of the first century, the population would be 176 millions, and the food only sufficient for 55 millions, leaving 121 millions unprovided for. In these ages, want, indeed, would be triumphant, and rapine and murder must reign at large: and yet all this time we are supposing the produce of the earth absolutely unlimited, and the yearly increase greater than the boldest speculator can imagine.

This is undoubtedly a very different view of the difficulty arising from the principle of population, from that which Mr. Godwin gives; when he says, "Myriads of centuries of still increasing population may pass away, and the earth be still found sufficient for the subsistence of its inhabitants."

I am sufficiently aware, that the redundant millions, which I have mentioned, could never have existed. It is a perfectly just observation of Mr. Godwin, that, "there is a principle in human society by which population is perpetually kept down to the level of the means of subsistence." The sole question is, what is this principle? Is it some obscure and occult cause? Is it some mysterious interference of heaven, which at a certain period strikes the men with impotence, and the women with barrenness? Or is it a cause,

cause, open to our researches, within our view; a cause, which has constantly been observed to operate, though with varied force, in every state in which man has been placed. Is it not misery, and the fear of misery, the necessary and inevitable results of the laws of nature, which human institutions, so far from aggravating, have tended considerably to mitigate, though they can never remove.

It may be curious to observe, in the case that we have been supposing, how some of the principal laws which at present govern civilized society, would be successively dictated by the most imperious necessity. As man, according to Mr. Godwin, is the creature of the impressions to which he is subject, the goadings of want could not continue long, before some violations of publick or private stock would necessarily take place. As these violations increased in number and extent, the more active and comprehensive intellects of the society would soon perceive, that, while population was fast increasing, the yearly produce of the country would shortly begin to diminish. The urgency of the case would suggest the necessity of some immediate measures being taken for the general safety. Some kind of convention would then be called, and the dangerous situation of the country stated in the strongest terms. It would be observed, that while they lived in the midst of plenty, it was of little consequence who laboured the least, or who possessed the least, as every man was perfectly willing and ready to supply the wants of his neighbour. But, that the question was no longer, whether one man should give to another, that which he did not use himself; but whether he should give to his neighbour the food which was absolutely necessary to his own existence. It would be represented, that the number of those which were in want, very greatly exceeded the number and means of those who should supply them; that these pressing wants, which, from the state of the produce of the country, could not all be gratified, had occasioned some flagrant violations of justice; that these violations had already checked the increase of food, and would, if they were not by some means or other prevented, throw the whole community into confusion; that imperious necessity seemed to dictate,

dictate, that a yearly increase of produce should, if possible, be obtained at all events; that, in order to effect this first great and indispensable purpose, it would be advisable to make a more complete division of land, and to secure every man's property against violation, by the most powerful sanctions.

It might be urged, perhaps, by some objectors, that, as the fertility of the land increased, and various accidents occurred, the shares of some men might be much more than sufficient for their support; and that, when the reign of self-love was once established, they would not distribute their surplus produce without some compensation in return. It would be observed, in answer, that this was an inconvenience greatly to be lamented; but that it was an evil, which would bear no comparison to the black train of distresses which would inevitably be occasioned by the insecurity of property; that the quantity of food which one man could consume, was necessarily limited by the narrow capacity of the human stomach; that it was not certainly probable that he should throw away the rest; and if he exchanged his surplus produce for the labour of others, this would be better than that these others should absolutely starve.

It seems highly probable, therefore, that an administration of property, not very different from that which prevails in civilized states at present, would be established, as the best, though inadequate, remedy, for the evils which were pressing on the society.

The next subject which would come under discussion, intimately connected with the preceding, is, the commerce of the sexes. It would be urged by those who had turned their attention to the true cause of the difficulties under which the community laboured, that while every man felt secure that all his children would be well provided for by general benevolence, the powers of the earth would be absolutely inadequate to produce food for the population, which would inevitably ensue; that, even if the whole attention and labour of the society were directed to this sole point, and if, by the most perfect security of property, and every other encouragement

that could be thought of, the greatest possible increase of produce were yearly obtained; yet still, the increase of food would by no means keep pace with the much more rapid increase of population; that some check to population, therefore, was imperiously called for; that the most natural and obvious check seemed to be, to make every man provide for his own children; that this would operate in some respect as a measure and a guide in the increase of population, as it might be expected that no man would bring beings into the world, for whom he could not find the means of support; that, where this, notwithstanding, was the case, it seemed necessary, for the example of others, that the disgrace and inconvenience attending such a conduct, should fall upon that individual, who had thus inconsiderately plunged himself and his innocent children into want and misery.

The institution of marriage, or at least of some express or implied obligation on every man to support his own children, seems to be the natural result of these reasonings; in a community under the difficulties that we have supposed.

The view of these difficulties, presents us with a very natural reason why the disgrace which attends a breach of chastity, should be greater in a woman than in a man. It could not be expected that women should have resources sufficient to support their own children. When, therefore, a woman had lived with a man, who had entered into no compact to maintain her children; and aware of the inconveniences that he might bring upon himself, had deserted her, these children must necessarily fall upon the society for support, or starve. And to prevent the frequent recurrence of such an inconvenience, as it would be highly unjust to punish so natural a fault by personal restraint or infliction, the men might agree to punish it with disgrace. The offence is, besides, more obvious and conspicuous in the woman, and less liable to any mistake. The father of a child may not always be known; but the same uncertainty cannot easily exist with regard to the mother. Where the evidence of the  
offence

offence was most complete, and the inconvenience to the society, at the same time, the greatest; there, it was agreed, that the largest share of blame should fall. The obligation on every man to support his children, the society would enforce by positive laws; and the greater degree of inconvenience or labour to which a family would necessarily subject him, added to some portion of disgrace, which every human being must incur, who leads another into unhappiness, might be considered as a sufficient punishment for the man.

That a woman should, at present, be almost driven from society, for an offence which men commit nearly with impunity, seems to be, undoubtedly, a breach of natural justice. But the origin of the custom, as the most obvious and effectual method of preventing the frequent recurrence of a serious inconvenience to a community, appears to be natural, though not perhaps, perfectly justifiable. This origin, however, is now lost in the new train of ideas, that the custom has since generated. What at first might be dictated by state necessity, is now supported by female delicacy; and operates with the greatest force on that part of the society; where, if the original intention of the custom were preserved, there is the least real occasion for it.

When these two fundamental laws of society, the security of property, and the institution of marriage, were once established, inequality of conditions must necessarily follow. Those who were born, after the division of property, would come into a world already possessed. If their parents, from having too large a family, were unable to give them sufficient for their support, what could they do in a world where every thing was appropriated. We have seen the fatal effects that would result to society, if every man had a valid claim to an equal share of the produce of the earth. The members of a family which was grown too large for the original division of land appropriated to it, could not then demand a part of the surplus produce of others as a debt of justice. It has appeared, that, from the inevitable laws of human nature, some human beings will be

exposed to want. These are the unhappy persons who in the great lottery of life have drawn a blank. The number of these persons would soon exceed the ability of the surplus produce to supply. Moral merit is a very difficult criterion, except in extreme cases. The owners of surplus produce would, in general, seek some more obvious mark of distinction; and it seems to be both natural and just, that, except upon particular occasions, their choice should fall upon those, who were able, and professed themselves willing, to exert their strength in procuring a further surplus produce, which would at once benefit the community, and enable the proprietors to afford assistance to greater numbers. All who were in want of food, would be urged by imperious necessity to offer their labour in exchange for this article, so absolutely necessary to existence. The fund appropriated to the maintenance of labour, would be the aggregate quantity of food possessed by the owners of land beyond their own consumption. When the demands upon this fund were great and numerous, it would naturally be divided into very small shares. Labour would be ill paid. Men would offer to work for a bare subsistence; and the rearing of families would be checked by sickness and misery. On the contrary, when this fund was increasing fast; when it was great in proportion to the number of claimants, it would be divided in much larger shares. No man would exchange his labour without receiving an ample quantity of food in return. Labourers would live in ease and comfort, and would consequently be able to rear a numerous and vigorous offspring.

On the state of this fund, the happiness, or the degree of misery, prevailing among the lower classes of people, in every known state, at present chiefly depends; and on this happiness, or degree of misery, depends principally the increase, stationariness, or decrease, of population.

And thus, it appears, that a society constituted according to the most beautiful form that imagination can conceive, with benevolence

for its moving principle, instead of self-love, and with every evil disposition in all its members corrected by reason, not force, would, from the inevitable laws of nature, and not from any original depravity of man, or of human institutions, degenerate, in a very short period, into a society, constructed upon a plan, not essentially different from that which prevails in every known state at present; a society, divided into a class of proprietors and a class of labourers, and with self-love for the mainspring of the great machine.

In the supposition which I have made, I have undoubtedly taken the increase of population smaller, and the increase of produce greater, than they really would be. No reason can be assigned why, under the circumstances supposed, population should not increase faster than in any known instance. If, then, we were to take the period of doubling at fifteen years, instead of twenty-five years, and reflect upon the labour necessary to double the produce in so short a time, even if we allow it possible; we may venture to pronounce with certainty, that, if Mr. Godwin's system of society were established in its utmost perfection, instead of myriads of centuries, not thirty years could elapse, before its utter destruction from the simple principle of population.

I have taken no notice of emigration in this place, for obvious reasons. If such societies were instituted in other parts of Europe, these countries would be under the same difficulties, with regard to population, and could admit no fresh members into their bosoms. If this beautiful society were confined to this island, it must have degenerated strangely from its original purity, and administer but a very small portion of the happiness it proposed, before any of its members would voluntarily consent to leave it, and live under such governments as at present exist in Europe, or submit to the extreme hardships of first settlers in new regions.

## C H A P. III.

*Observations on the Reply of Mr. Godwin.*

MR. Godwin, in a late publication, has replied to those parts of the *Essay on the Principle of Population*, which he thinks bear the hardest on his system. A few remarks on this reply will be sufficient.

In a note to an early part of his pamphlet, he observes, that the main attack of the essay, is not directed against the principles of his work, but its conclusion<sup>a</sup>. It may be true, indeed, that, as Mr. Godwin had dedicated one particular chapter towards the conclusion of his work, to the consideration of the objections to his system, from the principle of population, this particular chapter is most frequently alluded to: but certainly, if the great principle of the essay be admitted, it affects his whole work, and essentially alters the foundations of political justice. A great part of Mr. Godwin's book consists of an abuse of human institutions, as productive of all, or most of, the evils which afflict society. The acknowledgment of a new and totally unconsidered cause of misery, would evidently alter the state of these arguments, and make it absolutely necessary that they should be either newly modified, or entirely rejected:

In the first book of *Political Justice*, chap. iii. entitled, "The Spirit of Political Institutions," Mr. Godwin observes, that "Two of the greatest abuses relative to the interior policy of nations

<sup>a</sup> Reply to the attacks of Dr. Parr, Mr. Mackintosh, the author of an *Essay on Population*, and others, p. 10.

" which

" which at this time prevail in the world, consist in the irregular transfer of property, either first, by violence, or secondly, by fraud." And he goes on to say, that if there existed no desire in individuals to possess themselves of the substance of others, and if every man could, with perfect facility, obtain the necessaries of life, civil society might become what poetry has feigned of the golden age. Let us inquire, he says, into the principles to which these evils are indebted for existence. After acknowledging the truth of the principal argument in the essay on population, I do not think that he could stop in this inquiry at mere human institutions. Many other parts of his work would be affected by this consideration in a similar manner.

As Mr. Godwin seems disposed to understand, and candidly to admit the truth of, the principal argument in the essay, I feel the more mortified, that he should think it a fair inference from my positions, that the political superintendents of a community are bound to exercise a paternal vigilance and care over the two great means of advantage and safety to mankind, misery and vice; and that no evil is more to be dreaded than that we should have too little of them in the world, to confine the principle of population within its proper sphere<sup>a</sup>. I am at a loss to conceive what class of evils Mr. Godwin imagines is yet behind, which these salutary checks are to prevent. For my own part, I know of no stronger or more general terms than vice and misery; and the sole question is, respecting a greater or less degree of them. The only reason why I object to Mr. Godwin's system, is, my full conviction that an attempt to execute it, would very greatly increase the quantity of vice and misery in society. If Mr. Godwin will undo this conviction, and prove to me, though it be only in theory, provided that theory be consistent, and founded on a knowledge of human nature, that his system will

<sup>a</sup> Reply, &c. p. 60.

really



really tend to drive vice and misery from the earth, he may depend upon having me one of its steadiest and warmest advocates.

Mr. Godwin observes, that he should naturally be disposed to pronounce that man strangely indifferent to schemes of extraordinary improvement in society, who made it a conclusive argument against them, that, when they were realized, they might peradventure be of no permanence and duration. And yet, what is morality, individual or political, according to Mr. Godwin's own definition of it, but a calculation of consequences? Is the physician the patron of pain, who advises his patient to bear a present evil, rather than betake himself to a remedy, which, though it might give momentary relief, would afterwards greatly aggravate all the symptoms? Is the moralist to be called an enemy to pleasure, because he recommends to a young man just entering into life, not to ruin his health and patrimony in a few years, by an excess of present gratifications, but to economize his enjoyments, that he may spread them over a longer period? Of Mr. Godwin's system, according to the present arguments by which it is supported, it is not enough to say, *peradventure* it will be of no permanence; but we can pronounce with *certainty* that it will be of no permanence: and under such circumstances an attempt to execute it would unquestionably be a great political immorality.

Mr. Godwin observes, that after recovering from the first impression made by the Essay on Population, the first thing that is apt to strike every reflecting mind, is, that the excess of power in the principle of population over the principle of subsistence, has never, in any past instance, in any quarter, or age, of the world, produced those great and astonishing effects, that total breaking-up of all the structures and maxims of society, which the essay lead us to expect from it in certain cases in future<sup>a</sup>. This is undoubtedly true; and the reason is, that, in no past instance, nor in any quarter, or age, of

<sup>a</sup> Reply, p. 70.

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the world, has an attempt been made to establish such a system as Mr. Godwin's, and without an attempt of this nature, none of these great effects will follow. The convulsions of the social system, described in the last chapter, appeared by a kind of irresistible necessity, to terminate in the establishment of the laws of property and marriage; but in countries, where these laws are already established, as they are in all the common constitutions of society, with which we are acquainted, the operation of the principle of population will always be silent and gradual, and not different to what we daily see in our own country. Other persons, besides Mr. Godwin, have imagined, that I looked to certain periods in future, when population would exceed the means of subsistence in a much greater degree than at present, and that the evils arising from the principle of population were rather in contemplation, than in existence; but this is a total misconception of the argument<sup>a</sup>. Poverty, and not absolute famine, is the specific effect of the principle of population, as I have before endeavoured to shew. Many countries are now suffering all the evils that can ever be expected to flow from this principle, and even, if we were arrived at the absolute limit to all further increase of produce, a point, which we shall certainly never reach, I should by no means expect that these evils would be in any marked manner aggravated. The increase of produce in most European countries is so very slow, compared with what would be required to support an unrestricted increase of people, that the checks which are constantly in action to repress the population to the level of a produce increasing so slowly, would have very little more to do in wearing it down to a produce absolutely stationary.

But Mr. Godwin says, that if he looks into the past history of the world; he does not see that increasing population has been controlled and confined by vice and misery alone. In this observation I cannot agree with him. I will thank Mr. Godwin to name to me any check,

<sup>a</sup> In other parts of his Reply, Mr. Godwin does not fall into this error.

which

which in past ages has contributed to keep down the population to the level of the means of subsistence, that does not fairly come under some form of vice or misery; except indeed the check of moral restraint, which I have mentioned in the course of this work; and which, to say the truth, whatever hopes we may entertain of its prevalence in future, has undoubtedly in past ages operated with very inconsiderable force.

I do not think that I should find it difficult to justify myself in the eyes of my readers from the imputation of being the patron of vice and misery; but I am not clear, that Mr. Godwin would find such a justification so easy. For though he has positively declared that he does not "regard them with complacency;" and "hopes that it may not be considered as a taste absolutely singular in him that he should entertain no vehement partialities for vice and misery<sup>a</sup>;" yet he has certainly exposed himself to the suspicion of having this singular taste, by suggesting the organization of a very large portion of them for the benefit of society in general. On this subject I need only observe, that I have always ranked the two checks<sup>b</sup> which he first mentions, among the worst forms of vice and misery.

<sup>a</sup> Reply, p. 76.

<sup>b</sup> Mr. Godwin does not acknowledge the justice of Hume's observation respecting infanticide; and yet the extreme population and poverty in China, where this custom prevails, tends strongly to confirm the observation. It is still, however, true, as Mr. Godwin observes, that the expedient is, in its own nature, adequate to the end for which it was cited, (p. 66.); but, to make it so in fact, it must be done by the magistrate, and not left to the parents. The almost invariable tendency of this custom to increase population, when it depends entirely on the parents, shews the extreme pain which they must feel, in making such a sacrifice, even when the distress arising from excessive poverty may be supposed to have deadened in great measure their sensibility. What must this pain be then, upon the supposition of the interference of a magistrate or of a positive law, to make parents destroy a child, which they feel the desire, and think they possess the power, of supporting? The permission of infanticide is bad enough, and cannot but have a bad effect on the moral sensibility of a nation; but, I cannot conceive any thing much more detestable, or shocking to the feelings, than any direct regulation of this kind, although sanctioned by the names of Plato and Aristotle.

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In one part of his Reply, Mr. Godwin makes a supposition respecting the number of children that might be allowed to each prolific marriage; but as he has not entered into the detail of the mode by which a greater number might be prevented, I shall not notice it further, than merely to observe, that although he professes to acknowledge the geometrical and arithmetical ratios of population and food, yet in this place he appears to think that, practically applied, these different ratios of increase, are not of a nature to make the evil resulting from them urgent, or alarmingly to confine the natural progress of population<sup>a</sup>. This observation seems to contradict his former acknowledgment.

The last check which Mr. Godwin mentions, and which, I am persuaded, is the only one which he would seriously recommend, is, "that sentiment, whether virtue, prudence, or pride, which continually restrains the universality and frequent repetition of the marriage contract<sup>b</sup>." On this sentiment, which I have already noticed under the name of moral restraint, and of the more comprehensive title, the preventive check, it will appear, that in the sequel of this work I shall lay considerable stress. Of this check therefore itself, I entirely approve; but I do not think that Mr. Godwin's system of political justice is by any means favourable to its prevalence. The tendency to early marriages is so strong that we want every possible help that we can get to counteract it; and a system which in any way whatever tends to weaken the foundation of private property, and to lessen in any degree the full advantage and superiority which each individual may derive from his prudence, must remove the only counteracting weight to the passion of love, that can be depended upon for any essential effect. Mr. Godwin acknowledges that in his system, "the ill consequences of a numerous family will not come so coarsely home to each man's individual interest as they do at present<sup>c</sup>." But I am sorry to

<sup>a</sup> Reply, p. 70.

<sup>b</sup> Id. p. 72.

<sup>c</sup> Id. p. 74.

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say that, from what we know hitherto of the human character, we can have no rational hopes of success, without this coarse application to individual interest, which Mr. Godwin rejects. If the whole effect were to depend merely on a sense of duty, considering the powerful antagonist that is to be contended with, in the present case, I confess that I should absolutely despair. At the same time, I am strongly of opinion that a sense of duty, superadded to a sense of interest, would by no means be without its effect. There are many noble and disinterested spirits, who, though aware of the inconveniences which they may bring upon themselves by the indulgence of an early and virtuous passion, feel a kind of repugnance to listen to the dictates of mere worldly prudence, and a pride in rejecting these low considerations. There is a kind of romantick gallantry in sacrificing all for love, naturally fascinating to a young mind; and, to say the truth, if all is to be sacrificed, I do not know, in what better cause it can be done. But if a strong sense of duty could, in these instances, be added to prudential suggestions, the whole question might wear a different colour. In delaying the gratification of passion, from a sense of duty, the most disinterested spirit, the most delicate honour, might be satisfied. The romantick pride might take a different direction, and the dictates of worldly prudence might be followed with the cheerful consciousness of making a virtuous sacrifice.

If we were to remove or weaken the motive of interest, which would be the case in Mr. Godwin's system, I fear we should have but a weak substitute in a sense of duty. But if to the present beneficial effects, known to result from a sense of interest, we could superadd a sense of duty, which is the object of the latter part of this work, it does not seem absolutely hopeless that some partial improvement in society should result from it.

## C H A P. IV.

*Of Emigration.*

ALTHOUGH the resource of emigration seems to be excluded from such a society as Mr. Godwin has imagined; yet in that partial degree of improvement which alone can rationally be expected, it may fairly enter into our consideration. And as it is not probable, that human industry should begin to receive its best direction, throughout all the nations of the earth at the same time, it may be said, that in the case of a redundant population in the more cultivated parts of the world, the natural and obvious remedy that presents itself, is, emigration to those parts that are uncultivated. As these parts are of great extent, and very thinly peopled, this resource might appear, on a first view of the subject, an adequate remedy, or at least of a nature to remove the evil to a distant period: but, when we advert to experience, and to the actual state of the uncivilized parts of the globe, instead of any thing like an adequate remedy, it will appear but a very weak palliative.

In the accounts which we have of the peopling of new countries, the dangers, difficulties, and hardships, that the first settlers have had to struggle with, appear to be even greater, than we can well imagine that they could be exposed to, in their parent state. The endeavour to avoid that degree of unhappiness arising from the difficulty of supporting a family, might long have left the new world of America unpeopled by Europeans, if those more powerful passions, the thirst of gain, the spirit of adventure, and religious enthusiasm, had

not directed and animated the enterprize. These passions enabled the first adventurers to triumph over every obstacle; but in many instances in a way to make humanity shudder, and to defeat the true end of emigration. Whatever may be the character of the Spanish inhabitants of Mexico and Peru at the present moment, we cannot read the accounts of the first conquests of these countries, without feeling strongly, that the race destroyed, was, in moral worth, as well as members, highly superior to the race of their destroyers.

The parts of America settled by the English, from being thinly peopled, were better adapted to the establishment of new colonies; yet even here, the most formidable difficulties presented themselves. In the settlement of Virginia, begun by Sir Walter Raleigh, and established by Lord Delaware, three attempts completely failed. Nearly half of the first colony was destroyed by the savages, and the rest consumed and worn down by fatigue and famine, deserted the country, and returned home in despair. The second colony was cut off to a man, in a manner unknown; but they were supposed to be destroyed by the Indians. The third experienced the same dismal fate; and the remains of the fourth, after it had been reduced by famine and disease, in the course of six months from 500 to 60 persons, were returning in a famishing and desperate condition to England, when they were met in the mouth of the Chesapeake bay, by Lord Delaware, with a squadron loaded with provisions, and every thing for their relief and defence<sup>a</sup>.

The first puritan settlers in New England were few in number. They landed in a bad season, and they were only supported by their private funds. The winter was premature, and terribly cold; the country was covered with wood, and afforded very little for the refreshment of persons, sickly with such a voyage, or for the sustenance of an infant people. Nearly half of them perished by the scurvy, by want, and the severity of the climate; but they who sur-

<sup>a</sup> Burke's America, vol. ii. p. 219. Robertson, b. ix. p. 83. 86.

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vived were not dispirited by their hardships; but, supported by their energy of character, and the satisfaction of finding themselves out of the reach of the spiritual arm, reduced this savage country, by degrees, to yield them a comfortable subsistence<sup>a</sup>.

Even the plantation of Barbadoes, which increased afterwards with such extraordinary rapidity, had at first to contend with a country utterly desolate, an extreme want of provisions, a difficulty in clearing the ground unusually great, from the uncommon size and hardness of the trees, a most disheartening scantiness and poverty in their first crops, and a slow and precarious supply of provisions from England<sup>b</sup>.

The attempt of the French, in 1663, to form at once a powerful colony in Guiana, was attended with the most disastrous consequences. Twelve thousand men were landed in the rainy season, and placed under tents and miserable sheds. In this situation, inactive, weary of existence, and in want of all necessaries, exposed to contagious distempers, which are always occasioned by bad provisions, and to all the irregularities which idleness produces among the lower classes of society, almost the whole of them ended their lives in all the horrors of despair. The attempt was completely abortive. Two thousand men, whose robust constitutions had enabled them to resist the inclemency of the climate, and the miseries to which they had been exposed, were brought back to France; and the 25,000,000 of livres which had been expended in the expedition were totally lost<sup>c</sup>.

In the last settlement at Port Jackson, in New Holland, a melancholy and affecting picture is drawn by Collins, of the extreme hardships which, for some years, the infant colony had to struggle with, before the produce was equal to its support. These distresses were undoubtedly aggravated by the character of the settlers; but those which were caused by the unhealthiness of a newly-cleared country, the failure of first crops, and the uncertainty of supplies from so

<sup>a</sup> Burke's America, vol. ii. p. 144.

<sup>b</sup> Id. p. 85.

<sup>c</sup> Raynal, Hist. des Indes, tom. vii. liv. xiii. p. 43. 10 vols 8vo. 1795.

distant a mother country, were of themselves sufficiently disheartening, to place in a strong point of view, the necessity of great resources, as well as unconquerable perseverance, in the colonization of savage countries.

The establishment of colonies, in the more thinly peopled regions of Europe and Asia would evidently require still greater resources. From the power, and warlike character, of the inhabitants of these countries, a considerable military force would be necessary to prevent their utter and immediate destruction. Even the frontier provinces of the most powerful states, are defended with considerable difficulty from such restless neighbours; and the peaceful labours of the cultivator, are continually interrupted by their predatory incursions. The late Empress Catharine of Russia found it necessary to protect, by regular fortresses, the colonies which she had established in the districts near the Wolga; and the calamities which her subjects suffered by the incursions of the Crim Tartars furnished a pretext, and perhaps a just one, for taking possession of the whole of the Crimea, and expelling the greatest part of these turbulent neighbours, and reducing the rest to a more tranquil mode of life.

The difficulties attending a first establishment, from soil, climate, and the want of proper conveniences, are of course nearly the same in these regions as in America. Mr. Eton, in his account of the Turkish Empire, says, that 75,000 Christians were obliged by Russia to emigrate from the Crimea, and sent to inhabit the country abandoned by the Nogai Tartars; but the winter coming on before the houses built for them were ready, a great part of them had no other shelter from the cold, than what was afforded them by holes dug in the ground, covered with what they could procure, and the greatest part of them perished. Only seven thousand remained a few years afterwards. Another colony from Italy to the banks of the Borysthene, had, he says, no better fate, owing to the bad management of those who were commissioned to provide for them.

It is needless to add to these instances, as the accounts given of the

difficulties experienced in new settlements are all nearly similar. It has been justly observed, by a correspondent of Dr. Franklin, that one of the reasons why we have seen so many fruitless attempts to settle colonies at an immense publick and private expence, by several of the powers of Europe, is, that the moral and mechanical habits adapted to the mother country are frequently not so, to the new-settled one, and to external events, many of which are unforeseen; and that it is to be remarked, that none of the English colonies became any way considerable, till the necessary manners were born and grew up in the country. Pallas particularly notices the want of proper habits in the colonies, established by Russia, as one of the causes why they did not increase so fast as might have been expected.

In addition to this, it may be observed, that the first establishment of a new colony, generally presents an instance of a country, peopled considerably beyond its actual produce; and the natural consequence seems to be, that this population, if not amply supplied by the mother country, should, at the beginning, be diminished to the level of the first scanty productions, and not begin permanently to increase till the remaining numbers had so far cultivated the soil, as to make it yield a quantity of food, more than sufficient for their own support; and which consequently they could divide with a family. The frequent failures in the establishment of new colonies tend strongly to show the order of precedence between food and population.

It must be acknowledged then, that the class of people on whom the distress arising from a too rapidly increasing population would principally fall, could not possibly begin a new colony in a distant country. From the nature of their situation, they must necessarily be deficient in those resources, which alone could ensure success: and unless they could find leaders among the higher classes, urged by the spirit of avarice or enterprize; or of religious or political discontent; or were furnished with means and support by government; whatever degree of misery they might suffer in their own country, from the scarcity of subsistence, they would be absolutely unable to

take possession of any of those uncultivated regions, of which there is yet such an extent on the earth.

When new colonies have been once securely established, the difficulty of emigration is, indeed, very considerably diminished; yet, even then, some resources are necessary to provide vessels for the voyage, and support and assistance till the emigrants can settle themselves, and find employment in their adopted country. How far it is incumbent upon a government to furnish these resources, may be a question; but whatever be its duty in this particular, perhaps it is too much to expect, that except where any particular colonial advantages are proposed, emigration should be actively assisted.

The necessary resources for transport and maintenance, are, however, frequently furnished by individuals, or private companies. For many years before the American war, and for some few since, the facilities of emigration to this new world, and the probable advantages in view, were unusually great; and it must be considered undoubtedly as a very happy circumstance for any country, to have so comfortable an asylum for its redundant population. But I would ask, whether, even during these periods, the distress among the common people in this country was little or nothing, and whether every man felt secure before he ventured on marriage, that however large his family might be, he should find no difficulty in supporting it without parish assistance? The answer, I fear, could not be in the affirmative.

It will be said, that when an opportunity of advantageous emigration is offered, it is the fault of the people themselves, if, instead of accepting it, they prefer a life of celibacy, or extreme poverty in their own country. Is it then a fault for a man to feel an attachment to his native soil, to love the parents that nurtured him, his kindred, his friends, and the companions of his early years? or is it no evil that he suffers, because he consents to bear it, rather than snap these cords which nature has wound in close and intricate folds round the human heart? The great plan of providence seems to require, indeed, that

that these ties should sometimes be broken; but the separation does not, on that account, give less pain; and, though the general good may be promoted by it, it does not cease to be an individual evil. Besides, doubts and uncertainty must ever attend all distant emigrations, particularly in the apprehensions of the lower classes of people. They cannot feel quite secure, that the representations made to them of the high price of labour, or the cheapness of land, are accurately true. They are placing themselves in the power of the persons who are to furnish them with the means of transport and maintenance, who may perhaps have an interest in deceiving them; and the sea which they are to pass, appears to them like the separation of death from all their former connexions, and in a manner to preclude the possibility of return in case of failure, as they cannot expect the offer of the same means to bring them back. We cannot be surprised then, that, except where a spirit of enterprise is added to the uneasiness of poverty, the consideration of these circumstances, should frequently,

“ Make them rather bear the ills they suffer,  
“ Than fly to others which they know not of.”

If a tract of rich land as large as this island were suddenly annexed to it, and sold in small lots, or let out in small farms, the case would be very different, and the amelioration of the state of the common people would be sudden and striking; though the rich would be continually complaining of the high price of labour, the pride of the lower classes, and the difficulty of getting work done. These, I understand, are not unfrequent complaints among the men of property in America.

Every resource, however, from emigration, if used effectually, as this would be, must be of short duration. There is scarcely a state in Europe, except perhaps Russia, the inhabitants of which do not often endeavour to better their condition by removing to other countries. As these states therefore have nearly all rather a redun-

dant, than deficient population, in proportion to their produce, they cannot be supposed to afford any effectual resources of emigration to each other. Let us suppose, for a moment, that in this more enlightened part of the globe, the internal economy of each state were so admirably regulated, that no checks existed to population, and the different governments provided every facility for emigration. Taking the population of Europe, excluding Russia, at a hundred millions, and allowing a greater increase of produce than is probable, or even possible, in the mother countries, the redundancy of parent stock in a single century, would be eleven hundred millions, which, added to the natural increase of the colonies, during the same time, would be more than double what has been supposed to be the present population of the whole earth.

Can we imagine, that in the uncultivated parts of Asia, Africa, or America, the greatest exertions, and the best directed endeavours, could in so short a period, prepare a quantity of land, sufficient for the support of such a population. If any sanguine person should feel a doubt upon the subject, let him only add 25 or 50 years more, and every doubt must be crushed in overwhelming conviction.

It is evident, therefore, that the reason why the resource of emigration has so long continued to be held out as a remedy to redundant population, is, because, from the natural unwillingness of people to desert their native country, and the difficulty of clearing and cultivating fresh soil, it never is, nor can be, adequately adopted. If this remedy were indeed really effectual, and had power so far to relieve the disorders of vice and misery in old states, as to place them in the condition of the most prosperous new colonies, we should soon see the phial exhausted, and when the disorders returned with increased virulence, every hope from that quarter would be for ever closed.

It is clear, therefore, that with any view of making room for an unrestricted increase of population, emigration is perfectly inadequate; but as a partial and temporary expedient, and with a view to the more general cultivation of the earth, and the wider spread of civilization,

zation, it seems to be both useful and proper; and if it cannot be proved that governments are bound actively to encourage it, it is not only strikingly unjust, but in the highest degree impolitick, in them to prevent it. There are no fears so totally ill-grounded, as the fears of depopulation from emigration. The *vis inertiae* of people in general, and their attachment to their homes, are qualities so strong, and general, that we may rest assured that they will not emigrate, unless, from political discontents, or extreme poverty, they are in such a state, as will make it as much for the advantage of their country as of themselves that they should go out of it. The complaints of high wages in consequence of emigrations are, of all others, the most unreasonable, and ought the least to be attended to. If the wages of labour in any country be such, as to enable the lower classes of people to live with tolerable comfort, we may be quite certain, that they will not emigrate; and if they be not such, it is cruelty and injustice to detain them.

## C H A P. V.

*Of the English Poor Laws.*

To remedy the frequent distresses of the poor, laws to enforce their relief have been instituted; and in the establishment of a general system of this kind, England has particularly distinguished herself. But it is to be feared, that though it may have alleviated a little the intensity of individual misfortune, it has spread the evil over a much larger surface.

It is a subject often started in conversation, and mentioned always as a matter of great surprise, that, notwithstanding the immense sum which is annually collected for the poor in this country, there is still so much distress among them. Some think that the money must be embezzled for private use; others, that the churchwardens and overseers consume the greatest part of it in feasting. All agree, that somehow or other, it must be very ill managed. In short, the fact, that, even before the late scarcities, three millions were collected annually for the poor, and yet that their distresses were not removed, is the subject of continual astonishment. But a man who looks a little below the surface of things, would be much more astonished, if the fact were otherwise than it is observed to be; or even if a collection universally of eighteen shillings in the pound, instead of four, were materially to alter it.

Suppose, that by a subscription of the rich, the eighteen-pence, or two shillings, which men earn now, were made up five shillings, it might be imagined, perhaps, that they would then be able to live  
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comfortably, and have a piece of meat every day for their dinner. But this would be a very false conclusion. The transfer of three additional shillings a day to each labourer would not increase the quantity of meat in the country. There is not at present enough for all to have a moderate share. What would then be the consequence? The competition among the buyers in the market of meat, would rapidly raise the price from eight pence or nine pence, to two or three shillings in the pound, and the commodity would not be divided among many more than it is at present. When an article is scarce, and cannot be distributed to all, he that can shew the most valid patent, that is, he that offers the most money, becomes the possessor. If we can suppose the competition among the buyers of meat, to continue long enough for a greater number of cattle to be reared annually, this could only be done at the expence of the corn, which would be a very disadvantageous exchange; for it is well known, that the country could not then support the same population; and when subsistence is scarce in proportion to the number of people, it is of little consequence, whether the lowest members of the society possess two shillings or five. They must, at all events, be reduced to live upon the hardest fare, and in the smallest quantity.

It might be said, perhaps, that the increased number of purchasers in every article would give a spur to productive industry, and that the whole produce of the island would be increased. But the spur that these fancied riches would give to population, would more than counterbalance it; and the increased produce would be to be divided among a more than proportionably increased number of people.

A collection from the rich, of eighteen shillings in the pound, even if distributed in the most judicious manner, would have an effect similar to that resulting from the supposition which I have just made; and no possible sacrifices of the rich, particularly in money, could, for any time, prevent the recurrence of distress among the lower members of society, who ever they were. Great changes might indeed be made. The rich might become poor, and some of the  
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poor rich; but, while the present proportion between population and food continues, a part of society must necessarily find it difficult to support a family, and this difficulty will naturally fall on the least fortunate members.

It may at first appear strange, but I believe it is true, that I cannot by means of money, raise the condition of a poor man, and enable him to live much better than he did before, without proportionably depressing others in the same class. If I retrench the quantity of food consumed in my house, and give him what I have cut off, I then benefit him without depressing any but myself and family, who perhaps may be well able to bear it. If I turn up a piece of uncultivated land, and give him the produce, I then benefit both him and all the members of society, because what he before consumed is thrown into the common stock, and, probably, some of the new produce with it. But if I only give him money, supposing the produce of the country to remain the same, I give him a title to a larger share of that produce than formerly, which share he cannot receive without diminishing the shares of others. It is evident, that this effect in individual instances must be so small as to be totally imperceptible; but still it must exist, as many other effects do, which, like some of the insects that people the air, elude our grosser perceptions.

Supposing the quantity of food in any country, to remain the same for many years together, it is evident, that this food must be divided according to the value of each man's patent, or the sum of money which he can afford to spend in this commodity so universally in request. It is a demonstrative truth, therefore, that the patents of one set of men could not be increased in value, without diminishing the value of the patents of some other set of men. If the rich were to subscribe, and give five shillings a day to five hundred thousand men, without retrenching their own tables, no doubt can exist that as these men would live more at their ease, and consume a greater quantity of provisions, there would be less food remaining to divide among the rest; and consequently, each man's patent would be diminished

diminished in value, or the same number of pieces of silver would purchase a smaller quantity of subsistence, and the price of provisions would universally rise.

These general reasonings have been strikingly confirmed during the late scarcities. The supposition which I have made of a collection from the rich of eighteen shillings in the pound, has been nearly realized; and the effect has been such as might have been expected. If the same distribution had been made, when no scarcity existed, a considerable advance in the price of provisions would have been a necessary consequence; but following as it did a scarcity, its effect must have been doubly powerful. No person, I believe, will venture to doubt, that, if we were to give three additional shillings a day to every labouring man in the kingdom, as I before supposed, in order that he might have meat for his dinner, the price of meat would rise in the most rapid and unexampled manner. But surely, in a deficiency of corn, which renders it impossible for every man to have his usual share, if we still continue to furnish each person with the means of purchasing the same quantity as before, the effect must be in every respect similar.

It seems in great measure to have escaped observation, that the price of corn in a scarcity, will depend much more upon the obstinacy with which the same degree of consumption is persevered in, than on the degree of the actual deficiency. A deficiency of one half of a crop, if the people could immediately consent to consume only one half of what they did before, would produce little or no effect on the price of corn. A deficiency of one twelfth, if exactly the same consumption were to continue for ten or eleven months, might raise the price of corn to almost any height. The more is given in parish assistance, the more power is furnished of persevering in the same consumption, and of course the higher will the price rise before the necessary diminution of consumption is effected.

It has been asserted by some people that high prices do not diminish consumption. If this were really true, we should see the price

of a bushel of corn at a hundred pounds or more, in every deficiency, which could not be fully and completely remedied by importation. But the fact is, that high prices do ultimately diminish consumption; but, on account of the riches of the country, the unwillingness of the people to resort to substitutes, and the immense sums, which are distributed by parishes, this object cannot be attained till the prices become excessive, and force even the middle classes of society, or at least those immediately above the poor, to save in the article of bread from the actual inability of purchasing it in the usual quantity. The poor who were assisted by their parishes had no reason whatever to complain of the high price of grain; because it was the excessiveness of this price, and this alone, which, by enforcing such a saving, left a greater quantity of corn, for the consumption of the lowest classes, which corn, the parish allowances enabled them to command. The greatest sufferers in the scarcity were undoubtedly the classes immediately above the poor; and these were in the most marked manner depressed by the excessive bounties given to those below them. Almost all poverty is relative; and I much doubt, whether these people would have been rendered so poor, if a sum equal to half of these bounties had been taken directly out of their pockets, as they were, by that new distribution of the money of the society which actually took place<sup>a</sup>. This distribution

<sup>a</sup> Supposing the lower classes to earn on an average ten shillings a week, and the classes just above them, twenty, it is not to be doubted, that, in a scarcity, these latter would be more straightened in their power of commanding the necessaries of life, by a donation of ten shillings a week to those below them, than by the subtraction of five shillings a week from their own earnings. In the one case, they would be all reduced to a level; the price of provisions would rise in an extraordinary manner from the greatness of the competition; and all would be straightened for subsistence. In the other case, the classes above the poor would still maintain a considerable part of their relative superiority; the price of provisions would by no means rise in the same degree; and their remaining fifteen shillings would purchase much more than their twenty shillings in the former case.

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by giving to the poorer classes a command of food, so much greater than their degree of skill and industry entitled them to, in the actual circumstances of the country, diminished, exactly in the same proportion, that command over the necessaries of life, which the classes above them, by their superior skill and industry, would naturally possess; and it may be a question, whether the degree of assistance which the poor received, and which prevented them from resorting to the use of those substitutes, which, in every other country, on such occasions, the great law of necessity teaches, was not more than overbalanced by the severity of the pressure on so large a body of people from the extreme high prices, and the permanent evil which must result from forcing so many persons on the parish, who before thought themselves almost out of the reach of want.

If we were to double the fortunes of all those who possess above a hundred a year, the effect on the price of grain would be slow and inconsiderable; but if we were to double the price of labour throughout the kingdom, the effect, in raising the price of grain, would be rapid and great. The general principles on this subject will not admit of dispute; and that in the particular case which we have been considering, the bounties to the poor were of a magnitude to operate very powerfully in this manner, will sufficiently appear, if we recollect, that, before the late scarcities, the sum collected for the poor was estimated at three millions, and that during the year 1801 it was said to be ten millions. An additional seven millions acting at the bottom of the scale<sup>a</sup>, and employed exclusively in the purchase of provisions, joined to a considerable advance in the price of wages in many parts of the kingdom, and increased by a prodigious sum expended in

<sup>a</sup> See a small pamphlet published in November 1800, entitled, *An investigation of the cause of the present high price of provisions*. This pamphlet was mistaken by some for an inquiry into the cause of the scarcity, and as such, it would naturally appear to be incomplete, adverting, as it does, principally to a single cause. But the sole object of the pamphlet was, to give the principal reason for the extreme high price of provisions, in proportion to the degree of the scarcity, admitting the deficiency of one fourth, as stated in the Duke of Portland's letter, which, I am much inclined to think, was very near the truth.

voluntary charity, must have had a most powerful effect in raising the price of the necessaries of life, if any reliance can be placed on the clearest general principles, confirmed as much as possible by appearances. A man with a family, has received, to my knowledge, fourteen shillings a week from the parish. His common earnings were ten shillings a week, and his weekly revenue, therefore, twenty-four. Before the scarcity, he had been in the habit of purchasing a bushel of flour a week with eight shillings perhaps, and consequently had two shillings out of his ten, to spare for other necessaries. During the scarcity, he was enabled to purchase the same quantity at nearly three times the price. He paid twenty-two shillings for his bushel of flour, and had, as before, two shillings remaining for other wants. Such instances could not possibly have been universal, without raising the price of wheat very much higher than it really was during any part of the dearth. But similar instances were by no means infrequent, and the system itself, of measuring the relief given by the price of grain, was general.

If the circulation of the country had consisted entirely of specie, which could not have been immediately increased, it would have been impossible to give such an additional sum as seven millions to the poor, without embarrassing, to a great degree, the operations of commerce. On the commencement, therefore, of this extensive relief, which would necessarily occasion a proportionate expediture in provisions throughout all the ranks of society, a great demand would be felt for an increased circulating medium. The nature of the medium then principally in use, was such, that it could be created immediately on demand. From the accounts of the bank of England, as laid before Parliament, it appeared that no very great additional issues of paper took place from this quarter. The three millions and a half added to its former average issues, were not probably much above what was sufficient to supply the quantity of specie that had been withdrawn from the circulation. If this supposition be true, and the small quantity of gold which made its appearance

appearance at that time, furnishes the strongest reason for believing that as much as this must have been been withdrawn, it would follow, that the part of the circulation originating in the bank of England, though changed in its nature, had not been increased in its quantity; and with regard to the effect of the circulating medium on the price of all commodities, it cannot be doubted that it would be precisely the same, whether it were made up principally of guineas, or of pound notes and shillings, which would pass current for guineas.

The demand, therefore, for an increased circulating medium was left to be supplied by the country banks, and it could not be expected that they should hesitate in taking advantage of so profitable an opportunity. The paper issues of a country bank are, as I conceive, measured by the quantity of its notes which will remain in circulation; and this quantity is again measured, supposing a confidence to be established, by the sum of what is wanted to carry on all the money transactions of the neighbourhood. From the high price of provisions, all these transactions became more expensive. In the single article of the weekly payment of labourers' wages, including the parish allowances, it is evident, that a very great addition to the circulating medium of the neighbourhood would be wanted<sup>a</sup>. Had the country banks attempted to issue the same quantity of paper without such a particular demand for it, they would quickly have been admonished of their error by its rapid and pressing return upon them; but at this time, it was wanted for immediate and daily use, and was therefore eagerly absorbed into the circulation.

It may even admit of a question, whether, under similar circum-

<sup>a</sup> A rise of wages, or of parish allowances, amounting to any particular sum, would occasion a much greater demand for the current circulating medium, than an increase of commercial transactions to the same amount; because, in the first case, it is the common currency alone which can be used; in the latter, much is done by the bills of exchange, &c.; in the first also, much money is actually wanted, in proportion to the amount of the increased payments; in the latter, a little will go a great way.

stances, the country banks would not have issued nearly the same quantity of paper, if the bank of England had not been restricted from payment in specie. Before this event, the issues of the country banks in paper were regulated by the quantity that the circulation would take up, and after, as well as before, they were obliged to pay the notes which returned upon them in bank of England circulation. The difference in the two cases, would arise principally from the pernicious custom, adopted since the restriction of the bank, of issuing one and two pound notes, and from the little preference that many people might feel, if they could not get gold, between country bank paper, and bank of England paper.

The very great issue of country bank paper during the years 1800 and 1801 was evidently, therefore, in its origin rather a consequence than a cause of the high price of provisions; but being once absorbed into the circulation, it must necessarily affect the price of all commodities, and throw very great obstacles in the way of returning cheapness<sup>a</sup>. This is the great mischief of the system. During the scarcity itself, it is not to be doubted, that the increased circulation, by preventing the embarrassments which commerce and speculation must otherwise have felt, enabled the country to continue all the branches of its trade with less interruption, and to import a much greater quantity of grain, than it could have done otherwise; but to overbalance these temporary advantages, a lasting evil might be entailed upon the community, and the prices of a time of scarcity might become permanent, from the difficulty of re-absorbing this increased circulation.

In this respect, however, it is much better that the great issue of paper should have come from the country banks, than from the

<sup>a</sup> It does not appear to me that Mr. Thornton in his valuable publication on paper credit, has taken sufficient notice of the effects of the great paper issues of the country banks, in raising the price of commodities, and producing an unfavourable state of exchange with foreigners.

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bank of England. During the restriction of payment in specie, there is no possibility of forcing the bank to retake its notes, when too abundant; but with regard to the country banks, as soon as their notes are not wanted in the circulation, they will be returned; and if the bank of England notes be not increased, which they probably will not be, the whole circulating medium will thus be diminished.

We may consider ourselves as peculiarly fortunate that the two years of scarcity were succeeded by two events the best calculated to restore plenty and cheapness—an abundant harvest, and a peace; which, together, produced a general conviction of plenty, in the minds both of buyers and sellers; and, by rendering the first slow to purchase, and the others eager to sell, occasioned a glut in the market, and a consequent rapid fall of price, which has enabled parishes to take off their allowances to the poor, and thus to prevent a return of high prices when the alarm among the sellers was over.

If the two years of scarcity had been succeeded merely by years of average crops, I am strongly disposed to believe, that as no glut would have taken place in the market, the price of grain would have fallen only in an inconsiderable degree, the parish allowances could not have been resumed, the increased quantity of paper would still have been wanted, and the prices of all commodities might by degrees have been regulated, permanently, according to the increased circulating medium.

If instead of giving the temporary assistance of parish allowances, which might be withdrawn on the first fall of price, we had raised universally the wages of labour, it is evident, that the obstacles to a diminution of the circulation, and to returning cheapness, would have been still further increased; and the high price of labour would have become permanent, without any advantage whatever to the labourer.

There is no one that more ardently desires to see a real advance in the price of labour than myself; but the attempt to effect this object by forcibly raising the nominal price, which was practised to a certain degree,

degree, and recommended almost universally during the late scarcities, every thinking man must reprobate as puerile and ineffectual.

The price of labour, when left to find its natural level, is a most important political barometer, expressing the relation between the supply of provisions, and the demand for them; between the quantity to be consumed, and the number of consumers; and taken on the average, independently of accidental circumstances, it further expresses, clearly, the wants of the society respecting population; that is, whatever may be the number of children to a marriage necessary to maintain exactly the present population, the price of labour will be just sufficient to support this number, or be above it, or below it, according to the state of the real funds for the maintenance of labour, whether stationary, progressive, or retrograde. Instead, however, of considering it in this light, we consider it as something which we may raise or depress at pleasure, something which depends principally upon his majesty's justices of the peace. When an advance in the price of provisions already expresses that the demand is too great for the supply, in order to put the labourer in the same condition as before, we raise the price of labour, that is, we increase the demand, and are then much surprised that the price of provisions continues rising. In this, we act much in the same manner, as if, when the quicksilver in the common weather-glass stood at *stormy*, we were to raise it by some forcible pressure to *settled fair*, and then be greatly astonished that it continued raining.

Dr. Smith has clearly shewn, that the natural tendency of a year of scarcity, is, either to throw a number of labourers out of employment, or to oblige them to work for less than they did before, from the inability of masters to employ the same number at the same price. The raising of the price of wages tends necessarily to throw more out of employment, and completely to prevent the good effects which, he says, sometimes arise from a year of moderate scarcity, that of making the lower classes of people do more work,  
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and become more careful and industrious. The number of servants out of place, and of manufacturers wanting employment during the late scarcities, were melancholy proofs of the truth of these reasonings. If a general rise in the wages of labour had taken place proportioned to the price of provisions, none but farmers and a few gentlemen could have afforded to employ the same number of workmen as before. Additional crowds of servants and manufacturers would have been turned off; and those who were thus thrown out of employment, would, of course, have no other refuge than the parish. In the natural order of things, a scarcity must tend to lower, instead of to raise, the price of labour.

After the publication, and general circulation of such a work as Dr. Smith's, I confess, that it appears to me strange, that so many men who would yet aspire to be thought political economists, should still think, that it is in the power of the justices of the peace, or even of the omnipotence of parliament, to alter by a *fiat* the whole circumstances of the country; and when the demand for provisions is greater than the supply, by publishing a particular edict, to make the supply at once equal to, or greater, than the demand. Many men who would shrink at the proposal of a maximum, would propose themselves, that the price of labour should be proportioned to the price of provisions, and do not seem to be aware, that the two proposals are very nearly of the same nature, and that both tend directly to famine. It matters not, whether we enable the labourer to purchase the same quantity of provisions which he did before, by fixing their price, or by raising in proportion the price of labour. The only advantage on the side of raising the price of labour, is, that the rise in the price of provisions which necessarily follows it, encourages importation: but putting importation out of the question, which might possibly be prevented by war, or other circumstances, a universal rise of wages in proportion to the price of provisions, aided by adequate parish allowances to those who were thrown out of work, would, by preventing any kind of saving, in the same manner

as a maximum, cause the whole crop to be consumed in nine months, which ought to have lasted twelve, and thus produce a famine.

As the inefficacy of poor laws, and of attempts forcibly to raise the price of labour, are most conspicuous in a scarcity, I have thought myself justified in considering them under this view; and as these causes of increased price received great additional force during the late scarcity from the increase of the circulating medium, I trust that the few observations which I have made on this subject, will be considered as an allowable digression.

## C H A P. VI.

*Subject of Poor Laws continued.*

INDEPENDENTLY of any considerations respecting a year of deficient crops, it is evident, that an increase of population, without a proportional increase of food, must lower the value of each man's earnings. The food must necessarily be distributed in smaller quantities, and consequently, a day's labour will purchase a smaller quantity of provisions. An increase in the price of provisions will arise, either from an increase of population faster than the means of subsistence, or from a different distribution of the money of the society. The food of a country which has been long peopled, if it be increasing, increases slowly and regularly, and cannot be made to answer any sudden demands; but variations in the distribution of the money of the society, are not unfrequently occurring, and are undoubtedly among the causes which occasion the continual variations in the prices of provisions.

The poor laws of England tend to depress the general condition of the poor in these two ways. Their first obvious tendency is to increase population without increasing the food for its support. A poor man may marry with little or no prospect of being able to support a family without parish assistance. They may be said, therefore, to create the poor which they maintain; and as the provisions of the country must, in consequence of the increased population, be distributed to every man in smaller proportions, it is evident, that the labour of those who are not supported by parish assistance,

assistance, will purchase a smaller quantity of provisions than before, and consequently more of them must be driven to apply for assistance.

Secondly, the quantity of provisions consumed in workhouses, upon a part of the society, that cannot in general be considered as the most valuable part, diminishes the shares that would otherwise belong to more industrious and more worthy members, and thus, in the same manner, forces more to become dependent. If the poor in the workhouses were to live better than they do now, this new distribution of the money of the society, would tend more conspicuously to depress the condition of those out of the workhouses by occasioning an advance in the price of provisions.

Fortunately for England, a spirit of independence still remains among the peasantry. The poor laws are strongly calculated to eradicate this spirit. They have succeeded in part; but had they succeeded as completely as might have been expected, their pernicious tendency would not have been so long concealed.

Hard as it may appear in individual instances, dependent poverty ought to be held disgraceful. Such a stimulus seems to be absolutely necessary to promote the happiness of the great mass of mankind; and every general attempt to weaken this stimulus, however benevolent its apparent intention, will always defeat its own purpose. If men be induced to marry from the mere prospect of parish provision, they are not only unjustly tempted to bring unhappiness and dependence upon themselves and children, but they are tempted, without knowing it, to injure all in the same class with themselves.

The parish laws of England appear to have contributed to raise the price of provisions, and to lower the real price of labour. They have therefore contributed to impoverish that class of people whose only possession is their labour. It is also difficult to suppose, that they have not powerfully contributed to generate that carelessness and want of frugality observable among the poor, so contrary to the disposition generally to be remarked among petty tradesmen and

small farmers. The labouring poor, to use a vulgar expression, seem always to live from hand to mouth. Their present wants employ their whole attention; and they seldom think of the future. Even when they have an opportunity of saving, they seldom exercise it; but all that they earn beyond their present necessities, goes, generally speaking, to the alehouse. The poor laws may, therefore, be said to diminish both the power, and the will, to save, among the common people, and thus to weaken one of the strongest incentives to sobriety and industry, and consequently to happiness.

It is a general complaint among master manufacturers that high wages ruin all their workmen; but it is difficult to conceive that these men would not save a part of their high wages for the future support of their families, instead of spending it in drunkenness and dissipation, if they did not rely on parish assistance for support in case of accidents. And that the poor employed in manufactures consider this assistance as a reason why they may spend all the wages which they earn, and enjoy themselves while they can, appears to be evident, from the number of families that, upon the failure of any great manufactory, immediately fall upon the parish; when, perhaps, the wages earned in this manufactory while it flourished, were sufficiently above the price of common country labour, to have allowed them to save enough for their support, till they could find some other channel for their industry.

A man who might not be deterred from going to the alehouse, from the consideration that, on his death, or sickness, he should leave his wife and family upon the parish, might yet hesitate in thus dissipating his earnings, if he were assured that, in either of these cases, his family must starve, or be left to the support of casual bounty.

The mass of happiness among the common people cannot but be diminished, when one of the strongest checks to idleness and dissipation is thus removed; and positive institutions, which render

dependent poverty so general, weaken that disgrace, which for the best and most humane reasons ought to be attached to it.

The poor laws of England were undoubtedly instituted for the most benevolent purpose; but it is evident, that they have failed in attaining it. They certainly mitigate some cases of severe distress, which might otherwise occur, though the state of the poor who are supported by parishes, considered in all its circumstances, is very miserable. But one of the principal objections to the system, is, that for the assistance which some of the poor receive, in itself almost a doubtful blessing, the whole class of the common people of England is subjected to a set of grating, inconvenient, and tyrannical laws, totally inconsistent with the genuine spirit of the constitution. The whole business of settlements, even in its present amended state, is contradictory to all ideas of freedom. The parish persecution of men whose families are likely to become chargeable, and of poor women who are near lying-in, is a most disgraceful and disgusting tyranny. And the obstructions continually occasioned in the market of labour by these laws, have a constant tendency to add to the difficulties of those who are struggling to support themselves without assistance.

These evils attendant on the poor laws seem to be irremediable. If assistance be to be distributed to a certain class of people, a power must be lodged somewhere of discriminating the proper objects, and of managing the concerns of the institutions that are necessary; but any great interference with the affairs of other people, is a species of tyranny; and, in the common course of things, the exercise of this power may be expected to become grating to those who are driven to ask for support. The tyranny of justices, churchwardens, and overseers, is a common complaint among the poor; but the fault does not lie so much in these persons, who, probably, before they were in power, were not worse than other people, but in the nature of all such institutions.

It

It will scarcely admit of a doubt, that if the poor laws had never existed in this country, though there might have been a few more instances of very severe distress, the aggregate mass of happiness among the common people would have been much greater than it is at present.

The radical defect of all systems of the kind, is, that of tending to increase population, without increasing the means for its support, and, by thus depressing the condition of those that are not relieved by parishes, to create more poor. If, indeed, we examine some of our statutes, strictly, with reference to the principle of population, we shall find that they attempt an absolute impossibility; and we cannot be surprised therefore, that they should constantly fail in the attainment of their object.

The famous 43d of Elizabeth, which has been so often referred to, and admired, enacts, that the overseers of the poor, "shall take order from time to time, by and with the consent of two or more justices, for setting to work the children of all such whose parents shall not, by the said persons, be thought able to keep and maintain their children; and also such persons married or unmarried, as, having no means to maintain them, use no ordinary and daily trade of life to get their living by. And also to raise, weekly or otherwise, by taxation of every inhabitant, and every occupier of lands in the said parish, (in such competent sums as they shall think fit,) a convenient stock of flax, hemp, wool, thread, iron, and other necessary ware and stuff, to set the poor to work."

What is this but saying, that the funds for the maintenance of labour in this country may be increased at will, and without limit, by a *flat* of government, or an assessment of the overseers. Strictly speaking, this clause is as arrogant and as absurd, as if it had enacted that two ears of wheat should in future grow, where one only had grown before. Canute, when he commanded the waves not to wet his princely foot, did not, in reality, assume a greater power over the laws of nature. No directions are given to the overseers how to

increase



increase the funds for the maintenance of labour; the necessity of industry, economy, and enlightened exertion, in the management of agricultural and commercial capital is not insisted on, for this purpose; but it is expected, that a miraculous increase of these funds should immediately follow an edict of the government, used at the discretion of some ignorant parish officers.

If this clause were really, and *bona fide*, put in execution, and the shame attending the receiving of parish assistance worn off, every labouring man might marry as early as he pleased, under the certain prospect of having all his children properly provided for; and as, according to the supposition, there would be no check to population from the consequences of poverty after marriage, the increase of people would be rapid beyond example in old states. After what has been said in the former parts of this work, it is submitted to the reader, whether the utmost exertions of the most enlightened government could, in this case, make the food keep pace with the population, much less a mere arbitrary edict, the tendency of which is certainly rather to diminish than to increase the funds for the maintenance of productive labour.

In the actual circumstances of every country, the principle of population seems to be always ready to exert nearly its full force; but, within the limit of possibility, there is nothing perhaps more improbable, or more out of the power of any government to effect, than the direction of the industry of its subjects in such a manner, as to produce the greatest quantity of human sustenance that the earth could bear. It evidently could not be done without the most complete violation of the law of property, from which every thing that is valuable to man has hitherto arisen. Such is the disposition to marry, particularly in very young people, that, if the difficulties of providing for a family were entirely removed, very few would remain single at twenty-two. But what statesman, or rational government, could propose, that, all animal food should be prohibited, that no horses should be used for business or pleasure, that all the people should

should live upon potatoes, and that the whole industry of the nation should be exerted in the production of them, except what was necessary for the mere necessaries of clothing and houses. Could such a revolution be effected, would it be desirable; particularly, as in a few years, notwithstanding all these exertions, want, with less resource than ever, would inevitably recur.

After a country has once ceased to be in the peculiar situation of a new colony, we shall always find, that, in the actual state of its cultivation, or in that state, which may rationally be expected from the most enlightened government, the increase of its food can never allow, for any length of time, an unrestricted increase of population; and therefore, the due execution of the clause in the 39th of Elizabeth, as a permanent law, is a physical impossibility.

It will be said, perhaps, that the fact contradicts the theory, and that the clause in question has remained in force, and has been executed during the last two hundred years. In answer to this, I should say without hesitation, that it has not really been executed; and that it is merely owing to its incomplete execution, that it remains on our statute book at present.

The scanty relief granted to persons in distress, the capricious and insulting manner in which it is sometimes distributed by the overseers, and the natural and becoming pride not yet quite extinct among the peasantry of England, have deterred the more thinking and virtuous part of them, from venturing on marriage, without some better prospect of maintaining their families, than mere parish assistance. The desire of bettering our condition and the fear of making it worse, like the *vis medicatrix naturæ* in physicks, is the *vis medicatrix reipublicæ* in politicks, and is continually counteracting the disorders arising from narrow human institutions. In spite of the prejudices in favour of population, and the direct encouragements to marriage from the poor laws, it operates as a preventive check to increase; and happy for this country is it that it does so.

Those

Those who are not deterred for a time from marriage, by considerations of this nature, are either relieved very scantily at their own homes, where they suffer all the consequences arising from squalid poverty; or they are crowded together in close and unwholesome workhouses, where a great mortality almost universally takes place, particularly among the young children. The dreadful account given by Jonas Hanway of the treatment of parish children in London, is too well known to need a comment; and it appears from Mr. Howlett, and other writers, that in some parts of the country they are not very much better off. A great part of the redundant population occasioned by the poor laws, is thus taken off by the operation of the laws themselves, or at least by their ill execution. The remaining part which survives, by causing the funds for the maintenance of labour to be divided among a greater number than can be properly maintained by them, and by turning a considerable share from the support of the diligent and careful workman, to the support of the idle and the negligent, depresses the condition of all those who are out of the workhouses, forces more every year into them, and has ultimately produced the enormous evil which we all so justly deplore, that of the great and unnatural proportion of the people which is now become dependent upon charity.

If this be a just representation of the manner in which the clause in question has been executed, and of the effects which it has produced, it must be allowed that we have practised an unpardonable deceit upon the poor, and have promised what we have been very far from performing. It may be asserted, without danger of exaggeration, that the poor laws have destroyed many more lives than they have preserved.

The attempts to employ the poor on any great scale in manufactures have almost invariably failed, and the stock and materials have been wasted. In those few parishes which, by better management, or larger funds, have been enabled to persevere in this system, the effect of these new manufactures in the market, must have been, to throw out of employment many independent workmen who were before

before engaged in fabrications of a similar nature. This effect has been placed in a strong point of view by Daniel de Foe, in an address to parliament, entitled, *Giving alms no charity*. Speaking of the employment of parish children in manufactures, he says, For every skein of worsted these poor children spin, there must be a skein the less spun by some poor family that spun it before; and for every piece of bays so made in London, there must be a piece the less made at Colchester, or somewhere else<sup>a</sup>. Sir F. M. Eden, on the same subject, observes, that whether mops and brooms are made by parish children, or by private workmen, no more can be sold than the publick is in want of<sup>b</sup>.

It will be said, perhaps, that the same reasoning might be applied to any new capital brought into competition in a particular trade or manufacture, which can rarely be done without injuring, in some degree, those that were engaged in it before. But there is a material difference in the two cases. In this, the competition is perfectly fair, and what every man, on entering into business, must lay his account to. He may rest secure that he shall not be supplanted, unless his competitor possess superior skill and industry. In the other case, the competition is supported by a great bounty, by which means, notwithstanding very inferior skill and industry, on the part of his competitors, the independent workman may be underfold, and

<sup>a</sup> See extracts from Daniel de Foe, in Sir F. M. Eden's valuable work on the poor, vol. i. p. 261.

<sup>b</sup> Sir F. Eden speaking of the supposed right of the poor to be supplied with employment while able to work, and with a maintenance when incapacitated from labour, very justly remarks, "It may, however, be doubted, whether any right, the gratification of which seems to be impracticable, can be said to exist," vol. i. p. 447. No man has collected so many materials for forming a judgment on the effects of the poor laws as Sir F. Eden, and the result he thus expresses. "Upon the whole, therefore, there seems to be just grounds for concluding that the sum of good to be expected from a compulsory maintenance of the poor, will be far outbalanced by the sum of evil which it will inevitably create," vol. i. p. 467. I am happy to have the sanction of so practical an inquirer to my opinion of the poor laws.

unjustly excluded from the market. He himself, perhaps, is made to contribute to this competition against his own earnings, and the funds for the maintenance of labour are thus turned, from the support of a trade which yields a proper profit, to one which cannot maintain itself without a bounty. It should be observed, in general, that when a fund for the maintenance of labour is raised by assessment, the greatest part of it is not a new capital brought into trade, but an old one, which before was much more profitably employed, turned into a new channel. The farmer pays to the poor's rates, for the encouragement of a bad and unprofitable manufacture, what he would have employed on his land with infinitely more advantage to his country. In the one case, the funds for the maintenance of labour, are daily diminished; in the other, daily increased. And this obvious tendency of assessments for the employment of the poor, to decrease the real funds for the maintenance of labour in any country, aggravates the absurdity of supposing that it is in the power of a government to find employment for all its subjects, however fast they may increase.

It is not intended that these reasonings should be applied against every mode of employing the poor on a limited scale, and with such restrictions, as might not encourage, at the same time, their increase. I would never wish to push general principles too far, though I think that they ought always to be kept in view. In particular cases, the individual good to be obtained may be so great, and the general evil so slight, that the former may clearly overbalance the latter.

The intention is merely to shew, that the poor laws, as a general system, are founded on a gross error; and that the common declamation on the subject of the poor, which we see so often in print, and hear continually in conversation, namely, that the market price of labour ought always to be sufficient decently to support a family, and that employment ought to be found for all those who are willing to work, is in effect to say, that the funds for the maintenance

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nance of labour, in this country, are not only infinite, but might be made to increase with such rapidity, that, supposing us to have at present six millions of labourers, including their families, we might have 96 millions in another century; or if these funds had been properly managed since the beginning of the reign of Edward I. supposing that there were then only two millions of labourers, we might now have possessed above four million millions of labourers, or about four thousand times as many labourers as it has been calculated that there are people now on the face of the earth.

## C H A P. VII.

*Of increasing Wealth as it affects the Condition of the Poor.*

THE professed object of Dr. Smith's inquiry, is, the nature and causes of the wealth of nations. There is another, however, perhaps still more interesting, which he occasionally mixes with it, the causes which affect the happiness and comfort of the lower orders of society, which is the most numerous class in every nation. I am sufficiently aware of the near connexion of these two subjects, and that, generally speaking, the causes which contribute to increase the wealth of a state, tend also to increase the happiness of the lower classes of the people. But perhaps Dr. Smith has considered these two inquiries, as still more nearly connected than they really are; at least, he has not stopped to take notice of those instances, where the wealth of a society may increase, according to his definition of wealth, without having any tendency to increase the comforts of the labouring part of it.

I do not mean to enter into any philosophical discussion of what constitutes the proper happiness of man, but shall merely consider two universally acknowledged ingredients, the command of the necessaries and comforts of life, and the possession of health.

The comforts of the labouring poor must necessarily depend upon the funds destined for the maintenance of labour; and will generally be in proportion to the rapidity of their increase. The demand for labour, which such increase occasions, will of course raise the value of labour; and till the additional number of hands required are reared,

reared, the increased funds will be distributed to the same number of persons as before, and therefore, every labourer will live comparatively at his ease. The error of Dr. Smith lies in representing every increase of the revenue or stock of a society, as an increase of these funds. Such surplus stock or revenue, will indeed always be considered by the individual possessing it, as an additional fund from which he may maintain more labour: but it will not be a real and effectual fund for the maintenance of an additional number of labourers, unless the whole, or at least a great part of it, be convertible into a proportional quantity of provisions; and it will not be so convertible where the increase has arisen merely from the produce of labour, and not from the produce of land. A distinction will in this case occur between the number of hands which the stock of the society could employ, and the number which its territory can maintain.

Dr. Smith defines the wealth of a state to be, the annual produce of its land and labour. This definition evidently includes manufactured produce, as well as the produce of the land. Now, supposing a nation, for a course of years, to add what it saved from its yearly revenue to its manufacturing capital solely, and not to its capital employed upon land, it is evident that it might grow richer according to the above definition, without a power of supporting a greater number of labourers, and therefore, without any increase in the real funds for the maintenance of labour. There would, notwithstanding, be a demand for labour, from the power that each manufacturer would possess, or at least think he possessed, of extending his old stock in trade, or of setting up fresh works. This demand, would of course raise the price of labour; but if the yearly stock of provisions in the country were not increasing, this rise would soon turn out to be merely nominal, as the price of provisions must necessarily rise with it. The demand for manufacturing labourers might, indeed, entice many from agriculture, and thus tend to diminish the annual produce of the land; but we will suppose

suppose any effects of this kind to be compensated by improvements in the instruments, or mode, of agriculture, and the quantity of provisions therefore to remain the same. Improvements in manufacturing machinery would of course take place; and this circumstance, added to the greater number of hands employed in manufactures, would augment considerably the annual produce of the labour of the country. The wealth, therefore, of the country would be increasing annually, according to the definition, and might not be increasing very slowly.

The question is, how far, wealth, increasing in this way, has a tendency to better the condition of the labouring poor. It is a self-evident proposition that any general advance in the price of labour, the stock of provisions remaining the same, can only be a nominal advance, as it must shortly be followed by a proportional rise in provisions. The increase in the price of labour which we have supposed, would have no permanent effect therefore in giving to the labouring poor a greater command over the necessaries of life. In this respect, they would be nearly in the same state as before. In some other respects, they would be in a worse state. A greater proportion of them would be employed in manufactures, and fewer consequently in agriculture. And this exchange of professions will be allowed, I think, by all to be very unfavourable, in respect of health, one essential ingredient of happiness, and also with regard to the greater uncertainty of manufacturing labour, arising from the capricious taste of man, the accidents of war, and other causes, which occasionally produce very severe distress among the lower classes of society. On the state of the poor employed in manufactories, with respect to health and other circumstances which affect their happiness, I will beg leave to quote a passage from Dr. Aikin's description of the country round Manchester.

“ The invention and improvements of machines to shorten labour, have had a surprising influence to extend our trade, and also to  
“ call

“ call in hands from all parts, especially children for the cotton  
“ mills. It is the wise plan of Providence, that in this life there  
“ shall be no good without its attendant inconvenience. There are  
“ many which are too obvious in these cotton mills and similar  
“ factories, which counteract that increase of population usually  
“ consequent on the improved facility of labour. In these, children  
“ of very tender age are employed, many of them collected from  
“ the workhouses in London and Westminster, and transported in  
“ crowds, as apprentices to masters resident many hundred miles  
“ distant, where they serve unknown, unprotected, and forgotten by  
“ those to whose care, nature, or the laws, had consigned them. These  
“ children are usually too long confined to work in close rooms,  
“ often during the whole night. The air they breathe from the  
“ oil, &c. employed in the machinery, and other circumstances, is  
“ injurious; little attention is paid to their cleanliness; and frequent  
“ changes from a warm and dense, to a cold and thin atmosphere,  
“ are predisposing causes to sickness and disability, and particularly  
“ to the epidemick fever which is so generally to be met with in  
“ these factories. It is also much to be questioned, if society does  
“ not receive detriment, from the manner in which children are  
“ thus employed during their early years. They are not generally  
“ strong to labour, or capable of pursuing any other branch of  
“ business when the term of their apprenticeship expires. The  
“ females are wholly uninstructed in sewing, knitting, and other  
“ domestick affairs, requisite to make them notable, and frugal  
“ wives and mothers. This is a very great misfortune to them and  
“ the publick, as is sadly proved by a comparison of the families of  
“ labourers in husbandry, and those of manufacturers in general.  
“ In the former we meet with neatness, cleanliness and comfort;  
“ in the latter, with filth, rags, and poverty, although their wages  
“ may be nearly double to those of the husbandman. It must be  
“ added that the want of early religious instruction and example,  
“ and

“ and the numerous and indiscriminate association in these buildings,  
“ are very unfavourable to their future conduct in life.”

In addition to the evils mentioned in this passage, we all know how subject particular manufactures are to fail, from the caprice of taste, or the accident of war. The weavers of Spitalfields were plunged into the most severe distress by the fashion of muslins instead of silks; and numbers of the workmen in Sheffield and Birmingham were, for a time, thrown out of employment, from the adoption of shoe-strings and covered buttons, instead of buckles and metal buttons. Our manufactures, taken in the mass, have increased with great rapidity, but, in particular places, they have failed, and the parishes, where this has happened, are invariably loaded with a crowd of poor, in the most distressed and miserable condition. In the work of Dr. Aikin just alluded to, it appears that the register for the collegiate church at Manchester, from Christmas 1793 to Christmas 1794, stated a decrease of 168 marriages, 538 christenings, and 250 burials. And in the parish of Rochdale, in the neighbourhood, a still more melancholy reduction, in proportion to the number of people, took place. In 1792, the births were 746, the burials 646, and the marriages 339. In 1794, the births were 373, the burials 671, and the marriages 199. The cause of this sudden check to population, was the commencement of the war, and the failure of commercial credit, which occurred about this time; and such a check could not have taken place, in so sudden a manner, without being occasioned by the most severe distress.

Under such circumstances of situation, unless the increase of the riches of a country from manufactures, give the lower classes of the society, on an average, a decidedly greater command over the

<sup>a</sup> P. 219. Endeavours have been made, Dr. Aikin says, to remedy these evils, and in some factories they have been attended with success. An act of parliament has of late also passed on this subject, from which it is hoped, that much good will result.

necessaries and conveniences of life, it will not appear that their condition is improved.

It will be said, perhaps, that the advance in the price of provisions will immediately turn some additional capital into the channel of agriculture, and thus occasion a much greater produce. But from experience, it appears, that this is an effect which takes place very slowly, particularly when, as in the present instance, an advance in the price of labour had preceded the advance in the price of provisions, and would therefore tend to impede the good effects upon agriculture, which the increased value of the produce of land might otherwise have occasioned.

It may also be said, that the additional capital of the nation would enable it to import provisions, sufficient for the maintenance of those whom its stock could employ. A small country, with a large navy, and great accommodations for inland carriage, may indeed import and distribute an effectual quantity of provisions: but in large landed nations, if they may be so called, an importation adequate at all times to the demand, is scarcely possible. It seems in great measure to have escaped attention, that a nation, which, from its extent of territory and population, must necessarily support the greater part of its people on the produce of its own soil; but which yet, on average years, draws a small portion of its corn from abroad, is in a much more precarious situation with regard to the constancy of its supplies, than such states as draw almost the whole of their provisions from other countries. The demands of Holland and Hamburgh may be known with considerable accuracy by those who supply them. If they increase, they increase gradually, and are not subject, from year to year, to any great and sudden variations. But it is otherwise with such a country as England. Supposing it, in average years, to want about four hundred thousand quarters of wheat. Such a demand will of course be very easily supplied. But a year of deficient crops occurs, and the demand is suddenly two millions of quarters. If

the demand had been, on an average, two millions, it might perhaps have been adequately supplied, from the extended agriculture of those countries which are in the habit of exporting corn: but we cannot expect that it can easily be answered thus suddenly; and indeed, we know from experience, that an unusual demand of this nature, in a nation capable of paying for it, cannot exist, without raising the price of wheat very considerably in all the ports of Europe. Hamburgh, Holland, and the ports of the Baltic, felt very sensibly the high prices of England during the late scarcity; and I have been informed from very good authority, that the price of bread in New York was little inferior to the highest price in London.

A nation, possessed of a large territory, is unavoidably subject to this uncertainty in its means of subsistence, when the commercial part of its population is either equal to, or has increased beyond, the surplus produce of its cultivators. No reserve being, in these cases, left in exportation, the full effect of every deficiency from unfavourable seasons must necessarily be felt; and though the riches of such a country may enable it, for a certain period, to continue raising the nominal price of wages, so as to give the lower classes of the society a power of purchasing imported corn at a high price; yet, as a sudden demand can very seldom be fully answered, the competition in the market will invariably raise the price of provisions, in full proportion to the advance in the price of labour; the lower classes will be but little relieved; and the dearth will operate severely throughout all the ranks of society.

According to the natural order of things, years of scarcity must occasionally recur, in all landed nations. They ought always therefore to enter into our consideration; and the prosperity of any country may justly be considered as precarious, in which the funds for the maintenance of labour are liable to great and sudden fluctuations, from every unfavourable variation in the seasons.

But putting, for the present, years of scarcity out of the question; when the commercial population of any country increases so much

beyond the surplus produce of the cultivators, that the demand for imported corn is not easily supplied, and the price rises in proportion to the price of wages, no further increase of riches will have any tendency to give the labourer a greater command over the necessaries of life. In the progress of wealth, this will naturally take place; either from the largeness of the supply wanted; the increased distance from which it is brought, and consequently the increased expence of importation; the greater consumption of it in the countries in which it is usually purchased; or what must unavoidably happen, the necessity of a greater distance of inland carriage, in these countries. Such a nation, by increasing industry, and increasing ingenuity in the improvement of machinery, may still go on increasing the yearly quantity of its manufactured produce; but its funds for the maintenance of labour, and consequently its population, will be perfectly stationary. This point is the natural limit to the population of all commercial states.\*

That every increase of the stock or revenue of a nation cannot be considered as an increase of the real funds for the maintenance of labour, and therefore, cannot have the same good effect upon the condition of the poor, will appear in a strong light, if the argument be applied to China.

Dr. Smith observes, that China has probably long been as rich as the nature of her laws and institutions will admit; but that, with other laws and institutions, and if foreign commerce were held in honour, she might still be much richer. The question is, would such an increase of wealth, be an increase of the real funds for the maintenance of labour, and consequently tend to place the lower classes of people in China in a state of greater plenty?

If trade and foreign commerce were held in great honour in China, it is evident, that, from the great number of labourers, and the cheapness of labour, she might work up manufactures for foreign sale to an immense amount. It is equally evident, that, from the

\* Sir James Stewart's Political Economy, vol. i. b. i. c. xviii. p. 119.

great bulk of provisions, and the amazing extent of her inland territory, she could not in return import such a quantity, as would be any sensible addition to the annual stock of subsistence in the country. Her immense amount of manufactures, therefore, she would exchange chiefly for luxuries collected from all parts of the world. At present it appears, that no labour whatever is spared in the production of food. The country is rather overpeopled in proportion to what its stock can employ, and labour is therefore so abundant, that no pains are taken to abridge it. The consequence of this is probably the greatest production of food that the soil can possibly afford; for it will be generally observed, that processes for abridging labour, though they may enable a farmer to bring a certain quantity of grain cheaper to market, tend rather to diminish than increase the whole produce. An immense capital could not be employed in China in preparing manufactures for foreign trade, without taking off so many labourers from agriculture, as to alter this state of things, and, in some degree, to diminish the produce of the country. The demand for manufacturing labourers would naturally raise the price of labour; but as the quantity of subsistence would not be increased, the price of provisions would keep pace with it, or even more than keep pace with it, if the quantity of provisions were really decreasing. The country would, however, be evidently advancing in wealth; the exchangeable value of the annual produce of its land and labour would be annually augmented; yet the real funds for the maintenance of labour would be stationary, or even declining; and consequently the increasing wealth of the nation would tend rather to depress than to raise the condition of the poor\*.

\* The condition of the poor in China is, indeed, very miserable at present; but this is not owing to their want of foreign commerce, but to their extreme tendency to marriage and increase; and if this tendency were to continue the same, the only way in which the introduction of a greater number of manufacturers could possibly make the lower classes of people richer, would be, by increasing the mortality amongst them, which is certainly not a very desirable mode of growing rich.

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With regard to the command over the necessaries of life, they would be in the same, or rather worse state, than before; and a great part of them would have exchanged the healthy labours of agriculture for the unhealthy occupations of manufacturing industry.

The argument, perhaps, appears clearer when applied to China, because it is generally allowed, that its wealth has been long stationary, and its soil cultivated nearly to the utmost. With regard to any other country, it might always be a matter of dispute, at which of the two periods compared, wealth was increasing the fastest, as it is upon the rapidity of the increase of wealth, at any particular period, that, Dr. Smith says, the condition of the poor depends. It is evident, however, that two nations might increase exactly with the same rapidity in the exchangeable value of the annual produce of their land and labour; yet, if one had applied itself chiefly to agriculture, and the other chiefly to commerce, the funds for the maintenance of labour, and consequently the effect of the increase of wealth in each nation, would be extremely different. In that, which had applied itself chiefly to agriculture, the poor would live in greater plenty, and population would rapidly increase. In that, which had applied itself chiefly to commerce, the poor would be comparatively but little benefited, and consequently, population would either be stationary, or increase very slowly.

CHAP.



## C H A P. VIII.

*Of the Definitions of Wealth. Agricultural and Commercial Systems.*

A QUESTION seems naturally to arise here, whether the exchangeable value of the annual produce of the land and labour, is the proper definition of the wealth of a country, or whether merely the produce of land, according to the French Economists, may not be a more correct definition. Certain it is, that every increase of wealth, according to this definition, will be an increase of the funds for the maintenance of labour, and consequently will always tend to ameliorate the condition of the labouring poor, and increase population; though an increase of wealth, according to Dr. Smith's definition, will by no means invariably have the same tendency. And yet it may not follow, from this consideration, that Dr. Smith's definition is false.

The Economists consider all labour employed in manufactures as unproductive; and in endeavouring to disprove this position, Dr. Smith has been accused of arguing obscurely and inconclusively. He appears to me, however, only incorrect in applying his own definition to try the reasoning, by which the Economists support theirs; when, in fact, the question was, respecting the truth or falsehood of the definitions themselves; and, of course, one could not be applied as a test to the other. Nothing can be more clear than that manufactures increase the wealth of a state according to Dr. Smith's definition; and it is equally clear, that they do not increase it, according to the definition of the Economists. The question of the productiveness or unproductiveness of manufactures, is allowed by the  
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Economists to be a question respecting net produce; and the determination of this question either way, would not affect Dr. Smith's definition, which includes produce of every kind, whether net, or otherwise. And in the same manner, the proof of a net produce arising to individuals from manufactures, would not really invalidate the definition of the Economists, though they have laid themselves open to objections from this quarter, by the manner in which they have defended their position.

They say, that labour employed upon land is productive, because the produce, over and above completely paying the labourer and the farmer, affords a clear rent to the landlord; and that the labour employed upon a piece of lace is unproductive, because it merely replaces the provisions that the workman had consumed while making it, and the stock of his employer, without affording any clear rent whatever. But supposing the value of the wrought lace to be such, as that besides paying in the most complete manner, the workman and his employer, it could afford a clear rent to a third person, the state of the case would not really be altered. Though, according to this mode of reasoning, the man employed in the manufacture of lace, would, upon the present supposition, appear to be a productive labourer; yet, according to their definition of the wealth of a state, he ought not to be considered in that light. He will have added nothing to the produce of the land. He has consumed a portion of this produce, and has left a piece of lace in return; and though he may sell this piece of lace for three times the quantity of provisions which he consumed while he was making it, and thus be a very productive labourer with regard to himself; yet he has added nothing by his labour to the essential wealth of the state.

Suppose, that two hundred thousand men, who are now employed in producing manufactures, that only tend to gratify the vanity of a few rich people, were to be employed on some barren uncultivated land, and to produce only half of the quantity of food that they  
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themselves consumed, they might still be considered, in some respects, as more productive labourers than they were before. In their former employment, they consumed a certain portion of the food of the country, and left in return some silks and laces. In their latter employment, they consumed the same quantity of food, and left in return, provision for a hundred thousand men. There can be little doubt which of the two legacies would be the most really beneficial to the country, and which, according to the definition of the Economists, would add the most to the wealth of the state.

A capital employed upon land may be unproductive to the individual that employs it, and yet be productive to the society. A capital employed in trade, on the contrary, may be highly productive to the individual, and yet be almost totally unproductive to the society. It is indeed impossible to see the great fortunes that are made in commerce, and, at the same time, the liberality with which so many merchants live, and yet agree in the statement of the Economists, that manufacturers can only grow rich by depriving themselves of the funds destined for their support. In many branches of trade the profits are so great, as would allow of a clear rent to a third person; but as there is no third person in the case, and all the profits centre in the merchant or master manufacturer, he seems to have a fair chance of growing rich without much privation, and we consequently see large fortunes acquired in trade by persons who have not been remarked for their parsimony.

These fortunes, however, by which individuals are greatly enriched, do not enrich proportionally the whole society, and, in some respects, have even a contrary tendency. The home trade of consumption is by far the most important trade of every nation. Putting then, for a moment, foreign trade out of the question, the man who, by an ingenious manufacture, obtains a double portion out of the old stock of provisions, will certainly not be so useful to the state, as the man, who, by his labour, adds a single share to the former stock. And

this view of the subject, shews that manufactures are essentially different from the produce of the land, and that the question respecting their productiveness, or unproductiveness, by no means depends entirely upon the largeness of the profits upon them, or upon their yielding or not yielding a clear rent. If the Economists would allow, which, from the manner in which they express themselves, they might be sometimes supposed to do, that the value yielded by manufacturers was of the same nature as the produce of the land, though it were allowed to be only accurately equal to the value of their consumption, they certainly could not maintain the position that land is the only source of wealth. A marriage which produces two children, though it contain in itself no principle of increase, yet it adds to the sum of the actual population, which would have been less by two persons, if the marriage had been really barren. But the fact is, that though the language of the Economists has fairly warranted this illustration, which Dr. Smith gives; yet the illustration itself is incorrect. In the case of the marriage, the two children are really a new production, a completely new creation. But manufactures, strictly speaking, are no new production, no new creation, but merely a modification of an old one, and when sold must be paid for out of a revenue already in existence, and consequently the gain of the seller is the loss of the buyer. A revenue is transferred, but not created.

If, in asserting the productiveness, of the labour employed upon land, we look only to the clear monied rent yielded to a certain number of proprietors, we undoubtedly consider the subject in a very contracted point of view. The quantity of the surplus produce of the cultivators is, indeed, measured by this clear rent; but its real value consists in its capability of supporting a certain number of people, or millions of people, according to its extent, all exempted from the labour of procuring their own food, and who may, therefore, either live without manual exertions, or employ themselves in modifying the

raw produce of nature into the forms best suited to the gratification of man.

A net monied revenue, arising from manufactures, of the same extent, and to the same number of individuals, would by no means be accompanied by the same circumstances. It would throw the country in which it existed into an absolute dependence upon the surplus produce of others; and if this foreign revenue could not be obtained, the clear monied rent, which we have supposed, would be absolutely of no value to the nation.

As manufactures are not a new production, but the modification of an old one, the most natural and obvious way of estimating them, is by the labour which this modification costs. At the same time, it may be doubted, whether we can say positively, that the price of this labour, added to the price of the raw material, is exactly their real value. The ultimate value of every thing, according to the general reasoning of the Economists, consists in being *propre a la jouissance*. In this view, some manufactures are of very high value; and in general, they may be said to be worth to the purchaser what that purchaser will consent to give. In the actual state of things, from monopolies, from superior machinery, or other causes, they are generally sold a price above what the Economists consider as their real worth; and with regard to a mere monied revenue to an individual, there is no apparent difference, between a manufacture which yields very large profits, and a piece of land which is farmed by the proprietor<sup>a</sup>.

Land, in an enlarged view of the subject, is incontrovertibly the sole source of all riches; but when we take individuals or particular

<sup>a</sup> I do not mean to say that the Economists do not fully comprehend the true distinction between the labour employed upon land, and the labour employed in manufactures, and really understand the value of the surplus produce of the cultivators, as totally distinct from the net monied revenue which it yields; but it appears to me that they have exposed themselves to be misunderstood, in their reasonings respecting the productiveness of land, and the unproductiveness of manufactures, by dwelling too much on the circumstance of a net rent to individuals. In an enlarged sense, it is certainly true, that land is the only source of net rent.

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nations into our view, the state of the question is altered, as both nations and individuals may be enriched by a transfer of revenue, without the creation of a new one.

There are none of the definitions of the wealth of a state that are not liable to some objections. If we take the gross produce of the land, it is evident that the funds for the maintenance of labour, the population, and the wealth, may increase very rapidly, while the nation is apparently poor, and has very little disposable revenue. If we take Dr. Smith's definition, wealth may increase as has before been shewn, without tending to increase the funds for the maintenance of labour and the population. If we take the clear surplus produce of the land, according to most of the Economists; in this case, the funds for the maintenance of labour and the population may increase, without an increase of wealth, as in the instance of the cultivation of new lands, which will pay a profit but not a rent; and, *vice versa*, wealth may increase, without increasing the funds for the maintenance of labour, and the population, as in the instance of improvements in agricultural instruments, and in the mode of agriculture, which may make the land yield the same produce, with fewer persons employed upon it; and consequently the disposable wealth, or revenue, would be increased, without a power of supporting a greater number of people.

The objections, however, to the two last definitions do not prove that they are incorrect; but merely that an increase of wealth, though generally, is not necessarily and invariably accompanied by an increase of the funds for the maintenance of labour; and consequently, by the power of supporting a greater number of people, or of enabling the former number to live in greater plenty and happiness.

Whichever of these two definitions is adopted, as the best criterion of the wealth, power, and prosperity of a state, the great position of the Economists will always remain true, that the surplus produce of the cultivators is the great fund which ultimately pays all those who

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are not employed upon the land. Throughout the whole world, the number of manufacturers, of proprietors, and of persons engaged in the various civil and military professions, must be exactly proportioned to this surplus produce, and cannot in the nature of things increase beyond it. If the earth had been so niggardly of her produce as to oblige all her inhabitants to labour for it, no manufacturers or idle persons could ever have existed. But her first intercourse with man was a voluntary present; not very large indeed, but sufficient as a fund for his subsistence, till by the proper exercise of his faculties he could procure a greater. In proportion as the labour and ingenuity of man, exercised upon the land, have increased this surplus produce, leisure has been given to a greater number of persons to employ themselves in all the inventions which embellish civilized life. And though, in its turn, the desire to profit by these inventions, has greatly contributed to stimulate the cultivators to increase their surplus produce; yet the order of precedence is clearly the surplus produce; because the funds for the subsistence of the manufacturer must be advanced to him, before he can complete his work: and if we were to imagine that we could command this surplus produce, whenever we willed it, by forcing manufactures, we should be quickly admonished of our gross error, by the inadequate support which the workman would receive, in spite of any rise that might take place in his nominal wages.

According to the system of the Economists, manufactures are an object on which revenue is spent, and not any part of the revenue itself<sup>a</sup>. But though from this description of manufactures, and the epithet

<sup>a</sup> Even upon this system, there is one point of view, in which manufactures appear greatly to add to the riches of a state. The use of a revenue, according to the Economists, is to be spent; and a great part of it will of course be spent in manufactures. But if by the judicious employment of manufacturing capital, these commodities grow considerably cheaper, the surplus produce becomes proportionably of so much greater value, and the real revenue of the nation is virtually increased. There is no light, perhaps, in which

epithet sterile sometimes applied to them, they seem rather to be degraded by the terms of the Economists, it is a very great error to suppose that their system is really unfavourable to them. On the contrary, I am disposed to believe, that it is the only system by which commerce and manufactures can prevail to a very great extent, without bringing with them, at the same time, the seeds of their own ruin. Before the late revolution in Holland, the high price of the necessaries of life had destroyed many of its manufactures<sup>a</sup>. Monopolies are always subject to be broken; and even the advantage of capital and machinery, which may yield extraordinary profits for a time, is liable to be greatly lessened by the competition of other nations. In the history of the world, the nations, whose wealth has been derived principally from manufactures and commerce, have been perfectly ephemeral beings, compared with those, the basis of whose wealth has been agriculture. It is in the nature of things, that a state which subsists upon a revenue furnished by other countries, must be infinitely more exposed to all the accidents of time and chance, than one which produces its own.

No error is more frequent, than that of mistaking effects for causes. We are so blinded by the shewiness of commerce and manufactures, as to believe that they are almost the sole cause of the wealth, power, and prosperity of England. But perhaps, they may be more justly considered as the consequences, than the cause of this wealth. According to the definition of the Economists, which considers only the produce of land, England is the richest country in Europe in proportion to her size. Her system of agriculture is beyond comparison better, and consequently her surplus produce is more considerable. France is very greatly superior to England in

we can view manufactures, where they appear to be so productive as in this; and if it do not completely justify Dr. Smith in calling manufacturing labour *productive* in the strict sense of that term; it fully warrants all the pains he has taken in explaining the nature and effects of commercial capital, and of the division of manufacturing labour.

<sup>a</sup> Smith's Wealth of Nations, vol. iii. b. v. c. ii. p. 392.

extent of territory and population; but when the surplus produce, or disposable revenue of the two nations are compared, the superiority of France almost vanishes. And it is this great surplus produce in England, arising from her agriculture, which enables her to support such a vast body of manufactures, such formidable fleets and armies, such a crowd of persons engaged in the liberal professions, and a proportion of the society living on money rents, very far beyond what has ever been known in any other country of the world. According to the returns lately made of the population of England and Wales, it appears that the number of persons employed in agriculture, is considerably less than a fifth part of the whole. There is reason to believe that the classifications in these returns are incorrect; but making very great allowances for errors of this nature, it can scarcely admit of a doubt, that the number of persons employed in agriculture is very unusually small in proportion to the actual produce. Of late years indeed, the part of the society, not connected with agriculture, has unfortunately increased beyond this produce; but the average importation of corn, as yet, bears but a small proportion to that which is grown in the country, and consequently the power which England possesses of supporting so vast a body of idle consumers must be attributed principally to the greatness of her surplus produce.

It will be said that it was her commerce and manufactures which encouraged her cultivators to obtain this great surplus produce, and therefore indirectly, if not directly, created it. That commerce and manufactures produce this effect in a certain degree, is true; but that they sometimes produce a contrary effect, and generally so, when carried to excess, is equally true. Undoubtedly agriculture cannot flourish without a vent for its commodities, either at home or abroad; but when this want has been adequately supplied, the interests of agriculture demand nothing more. When too great a part of a nation is engaged in commerce and manufactures, it is a clear proof,  
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that, either from undue encouragement, or from other particular causes, a capital is employed in this way to much greater advantage than on land; and under such circumstances, it is impossible, that the land should not be robbed of much of the capital which would naturally have fallen to its share. Dr. Smith justly observes, that the navigation act, and the monopoly of the colony trade, necessarily forced into a particular and not very advantageous channel, a greater proportion of the capital of Great Britain than would otherwise have gone to it; and by thus taking capital from other employments, and at the same time universally raising the rate of British mercantile profit, discouraged the improvement of the land<sup>a</sup>. If the improvement of land, he goes on to say, affords a greater capital than what can be drawn from an equal capital in any mercantile employment, the land will draw capital from mercantile employments. If the profit be less, mercantile employments will draw capital from the improvement of land. The monopoly, therefore, by raising the rate of British mercantile profit, and thus discouraging agricultural improvement, has necessarily retarded the natural increase of a great original source of revenue, the rent of land<sup>b</sup>.

The East and West Indies, are indeed so great an object, and afford employment with high profits, to so great a capital, that it is impossible that they should not draw capital from other employments, and particularly from the cultivation of the soil, the profits upon which, in general, are unfortunately very small.

All corporations, patents, and exclusive privileges of every kind, which abound so much in the mercantile system, have in proportion to their extent the same effect. And the experience of the last twenty years seems to warrant us in concluding, that the high price of provisions arising from the abundance of commercial wealth, accompanied, as it has been, by very great variations, and by a great rise, in the price of labour, does not operate as an encouragement to

<sup>a</sup> Wealth of Nations, vol. ii. b. iv. c. vii. p. 435.

<sup>b</sup> Id. p. 436.

agriculture,

agriculture, sufficient to make it keep pace with the rapid strides of commerce.

It will be said, perhaps, that land is always improved by the redundancy of commercial capital. But this effect is late and slow, and in the nature of things cannot take place till this capital is really redundant, which it never is, while the interest of money and the profits of mercantile stock are high. We cannot look forwards to any considerable effect of this kind till the interest of money sinks to 3 per cent. When men can get 5 or 6 per cent. for their money, without any trouble, they will hardly venture a capital upon land, where, including risks, and the profits upon their own labour and attendance, they may not get much more. Wars and loans, as far as internal circumstances are concerned, impede but little the progress of those branches of commerce where the profits of stock are high; but affect very considerably the increase of that more essential and permanent source of wealth, the improvement of the land. It is in this point, I am inclined to believe, that the national debt of England has been most injurious to her. By absorbing the redundancy of commercial capital, and keeping up the rate of interest, it has prevented this capital from overflowing upon the soil. And a large mortgage<sup>a</sup> has thus been established on the lands of England, the

<sup>a</sup> One of the principal errors of the French Economists appears to be on the subject of taxation. Admitting, as I shall be disposed to do, that the surplus produce of the land is the fund which pays every thing besides the food of the cultivators; yet it seems to be a mistake to suppose, that the owners of land are the sole proprietors of this surplus produce. It appears to me, that every man who has realized a capital in money, on which he can live without labour, has virtually a mortgage on the land for a certain portion of the surplus produce. This mortgage may not indeed be so well secured, as those which usually bear this title, or as the money rent of the land-owner; but while the power of obtaining this monied interest remains, its effect, or command over the surplus produce, is exactly the same. The landholders, therefore, are not the sole proprietors of surplus produce; and their joint proprietors, those who live upon the interest of money, certainly pay a general tax in the same manner as the landholders, and cannot throw it off from their shoulders, like those who live upon the profits of stock, or the wages of labour. Practically,

the interest of which is drawn from the payment of productive labour, and dedicated to the support of idle consumers.

cally, indeed, it cannot be doubted that even the profits of stock and the wages of labour, particularly of professional labour, pay some taxes on necessaries, and many on luxuries, for a very considerable time. The real surplus produce of this country, or all the produce not actually consumed by the cultivators, is a very different thing, and should carefully be distinguished from the sum of the net rents of the landlords. This sum, it is supposed, does not much exceed a fifth part of the gross produce. The remaining four fifths, is certainly not consumed by the labourers and horses employed in agriculture; but a very considerable portion of it is paid by the farmer, in taxes, in the instruments of agriculture, and in the manufactures used in his own family, and in the families of his labourers. It is in this manner that a kind of mortgage is ultimately established on the land, by taxes, and the progress of commercial wealth; and in this sense, all taxes certainly fall upon the land. Before the existence of national debts, and the accumulation of monied capitals, the simple territorial impost would be the fairest and most eligible of all taxes; but when these mortgages alluded to have been actually established, and the interest of them cannot be changed with every new tax, which in many instances is the case, particularly with regard to government annuitants, the mortgagee will really and *bonâ fide* pay a part of the taxes on consumption; and though these taxes may still fall wholly on the land, they will not fall wholly on the landholders. It seems a little hard, therefore, in taxing surplus produce to make the landlords pay for what they do not receive. At the same time, it must be confessed, that, independently of these considerations, which makes a land tax partial, it is the best of all taxes, as it is the only one which does not tend to raise the price of commodities. Taxes on consumption, by which alone monied revenues can be reached, without an income tax, necessarily raise all prices to a degree greatly injurious to the country. A land tax, or tax upon net rent, has little or no effect in discouraging the improvement of land, as many have supposed. It is only a tithe, or a tax, in proportion to the gross produce, which does this. No man in his senses will be deterred from getting a clear profit of 20l. instead of 10l. because he is always to pay a fourth or fifth of his clear gains; but when he is to pay a tax in proportion to his gross produce, which, in the case of capital laid out in improvements, is scarcely ever accompanied with a proportional increase of his clear gains, it is a very different thing, and must necessarily impede, in a great degree, the progress of cultivation. I am astonished that so obvious and easy a commutation for tithes, as a land tax on improved rents, has not been adopted. Such a tax would be paid by the same persons as before, only in a better form; and the change would not be felt, except in the advantage that would accrue to all the parties concerned, the landlord, the tenant, and the clergyman. Tithes undoubtedly operate as a high bounty on pasture, and a great discouragement to tillage, which in the present peculiar circumstances of the country is a very great disadvantage.

It must be allowed, therefore, upon the whole, that our commerce has not done much for our agriculture; but that our agriculture has done a great deal for our commerce; and that the improved system of cultivation which has taken place, in spite of considerable discouragements, creates yearly a surplus produce, which enables the country, with but little assistance, to support so vast a body of people engaged in pursuits unconnected with the land.

## C H A P. IX

*Different Effects of the Agricultural and Commercial Systems.*

ABOUT the middle of the last century, we were genuinely, and in the strict sense of the Economists, an agricultural nation. Our commerce and manufactures were, however, then in a very respectable and thriving state; and if they had continued to bear the same relative proportion to our agriculture, they would evidently have gone on increasing considerably, with the improving cultivation of the country. There is no apparent limit to the quantity of manufactures which might in time be supported in this way. The increasing wealth of a country in such a state, seems to be out of the reach of all common accidents. There is no discoverable germ of decay in the system; and in theory, there is no reason to say, that it might not go on increasing in wealth and prosperity for thousands of years.

We have now, however, stepped out of the agricultural system, into a state, in which the commercial system clearly predominates; and there is but too much reason to fear, that even our commerce and manufactures will ultimately feel the disadvantage of the change. It has been already observed, that we are exactly in that situation, in which a country feels most fully the effect of those common years of deficient crops, which, in the natural course of things, are to be expected. The competition of increasing commercial wealth, operating upon a supply of corn not increasing in the same proportion, must at all times greatly tend to raise the price of labour; but when scarce years are taken into the consideration, its effect in this

way must ultimately be prodigious. We know how extremely difficult it is in England to lower the wages of labour, after they have once been raised. During the late scarcities, the price of labour has been continually rising—not to fall again; the rents of land have been every where advancing—not to fall again; and of course, the price of produce must rise—not to fall again; as, independently of a particular competition from scarcity, or the want of competition from plenty, its price is necessarily regulated by the wages of labour, and the rent of land. We have no reason whatever for supposing that we shall be exempt in future from such scarcities as we have of late experienced. On the contrary, upon our present system, they seem to be unavoidable. And if we go on, as we have done lately, the price of labour and of provisions must soon increase in a manner out of all proportion to their price in the rest of Europe; and it is impossible that this should not ultimately check all our dealings with foreign powers, and give a fatal blow to our commerce and manufactures. The effect of capital, skill, machinery, and establishments, in their full vigour, is great; so great, indeed, that it is difficult to guess at its limit; but still it is not infinite, and without doubt has this limit. The principal states of Europe, except this fortunate island, have of late suffered so much by the actual presence of war, that their commerce and manufactures have been nearly destroyed, and we may be said in a manner to have the monopoly of the trade of Europe. All monopolies yield high profits, and at present, therefore, the trade can be carried on to advantage, in spite of the high price of labour. But when the other nations of Europe shall have had time to recover themselves, and gradually to become our competitors, it would be rash to affirm, that, with the prices of provisions and of labour still going on increasing, from what they are at present, we shall be able to stand the competition. Dr. Smith says, that, in his time, merchants frequently complained of the high price of British labour as the cause of their manufactures being undersold in foreign markets.

markets<sup>a</sup>. If such complaints were in any degree founded at that time, how will they be aggravated twenty years hence! And have we not some reason to fear that our present great commercial prosperity is temporary, and belongs a little to that worst feature of the commercial system, the rising by the depression of others.

When a country, in average years, grows more corn than it consumes, and is in the habit of exporting a part of it, its price, and the price of labour as depending on it, can never rise in any very extraordinary degree above the common price in other commercial countries; and under such circumstances, England would have nothing to fear from the fullest, and most open competition. The increasing prosperity of other countries, would only open to her a more extensive market for her commodities, and give additional spirit to all her commercial transactions.

The high price of corn and of rude produce in general, as far as it is occasioned by the freest competition among the nations of Europe, is a very great advantage, and is the best possible encouragement to agriculture; but when occasioned merely by the competition of monied wealth at home, its effect is totally different. In the one case, a great encouragement is given to production in general, and the more is produced, the better. In the other case, the produce is necessarily confined to the home consumption. The cultivators are justly afraid of growing too much corn, as a considerable loss will be sustained upon that part of it which is sold abroad; and a glut in the home market will universally make the price fall below the fair and proper recompence to the grower. It is impossible that a country, under such circumstances, should not be subject to great and frequent variations in the price of corn, and occasionally to severe scarcities.

If we were to endeavour to lower the price of labour by encouraging the importation of foreign corn, we should probably aggra-

<sup>a</sup> Wealth of Nations, vol. ii. b. iv. c. vii. p. 413.



vate the evil tenfold. Experience warrants us in saying, that, from political fears, or other causes, the fall in the price of labour would be uncertain; but the ruin of our agriculture would be certain. The British grower of corn could not, in his own markets, stand the competition of the foreign grower, in average years. We should be daily thrown more and more into a dependence upon other countries for our support. Arable lands of a moderate quality would not pay the expence of cultivation. Rich soils alone would yield a rent. Round all our towns, the appearances would be the same as usual; but in the interior of the country, half of the lands would be neglected, and almost universally, where it was practicable, pasture would take place of tillage. How dreadfully precarious would our commerce and manufactures, and even our very existence be, under such circumstances! It could hardly be expected that a century should elapse without seeing our population repressed within the limits of our scanty cultivation; and suffering the same melancholy reverse, as the once flourishing population of Spain.

Nothing perhaps will shew more clearly the absurdity of that artificial system, which prompts a country, with a large territory of its own, to depend upon others for its food, than the supposition of the same system being pursued by many other states. If France, Germany, and Prussia, were to become manufacturing nations, and to consider agriculture as a secondary concern, how would their wants, in the indispensable article of food, be supplied. The increasing demand for corn, would tend certainly to encourage the growth of it in Russia and America; but we know that in these countries, at present, particularly in America, the natural progress of population is not very greatly checked; and that, as their towns and manufactories increase, the demand for their own corn will of course increase with them. The Russian nobleman, whose revenue depends upon the number of his boors, will hardly be persuaded to check their increase, in order to accommodate other nations; and the independent cultivator of America will surely feed his

his own family and servants, and probably supply the home market, before he begins to export. But allowing that at first, and for some time, the increasing demands of these manufacturing countries might be adequately supplied; yet this could not in the nature of things last long. The manufacturers, from the decay of agriculture in their own countries, would annually want more; and Russia and America, from their rapidly increasing population, and the gradual establishment of manufactures at home, would annually be able to spare less. From these causes and the necessity of drawing a part of such vast supplies of corn from a much greater distance inland, and loaded perhaps with the expence of land carriage, the price would ultimately rise so extravagantly high, that the poor manufacturers would be totally unable to pay it, and want and famine would convince them too late of the precarious and subordinate nature of their wealth. They would learn by painful experience, that, though agriculture may flourish considerably, and give plenty and happiness to great numbers, without many manufactures; yet, that manufactures cannot stir a single step, without their agricultural pay-masters, either at home or abroad; and that therefore it is the height of folly and imprudence, to have these pay-masters at a great distance, with different interests, and their payments precarious, instead of at home, with the same interests, and their payments always ready and certain. Nothing can be so hateful to a liberal mind, as the idea of being placed in a situation in which the growing prosperity of your neighbours will be the signal of your own approaching ruin. Yet this would be the situation of the principal countries of Europe, if they depended chiefly upon Russia and America, or any other nations for their corn. A system, which, like the present commercial system of England, throws a country into this state, without any physical necessity for it, cannot be founded on the genuine principles of the wealth of nations.

It seems almost impossible, that a country possessed of a considerable territory, should have its means of subsistence well assured, without growing

growing at home more corn than it consumes. Nor can it be exempt from those great and sudden variations of price, which produce such severe distress throughout so large a part of the community, and are often attended with great and lasting disadvantages; unless this superfluity of produce bear some considerable proportion to the common deficiencies of unfavourable years. It has been almost universally acknowledged that there is no branch of trade, more profitable to a country, even in a commercial point of view, than the sale of rude produce. In general, its value bears a much greater proportion to the expence incurred in procuring it, than that of any other commodity whatever, and the national profit on its sale is in consequence greater. This is often noticed by Dr. Smith; but in combating the arguments of the Economists, he seems for a moment to forget it, and to speak of the superior advantage of exporting manufactures.

He observes, that a trading and manufacturing country exports what can subsist and accommodate but very few, and imports the subsistence and accommodation of a great number. The other, exports the subsistence and accommodation of a great number, and imports that of a very few only. The inhabitants of the one must always enjoy a much greater quantity of subsistence, than what their own lands in the actual state of their cultivation could afford. The inhabitants of the other must always enjoy a much smaller quantity<sup>a</sup>.

In this passage he does not seem to argue with his usual accuracy. Though the manufacturing nation may export a commodity which, in its actual shape, can only subsist and accommodate a very few; yet it must be recollected, that, in order to prepare this commodity for exportation, a considerable part of the revenue of the country had been employed in subsisting and accommodating a great number of workmen. And with regard to the subsistence and accommodation which the other nation exports, whether it be of a great or a

<sup>a</sup> Wealth of Nations, vol. iii. b. iv. c. ix. p. 27.

small number, it is certainly no more than sufficient to replace the subsistence that had been consumed in the manufacturing nation, together with the profits of the master manufacturer and merchant, which, probably, are not so great as the profits of the farmer and the merchant in the agricultural nation. And though it may be true, that the inhabitants of the manufacturing nation enjoy a greater quantity of subsistence than what their own lands, in the actual state of their cultivation, could afford; yet an inference in favour of the manufacturing system by no means follows, because the adoption of the one, or the other system, will make the greatest difference in their actual state of cultivation. If, during the course of a century, two landed nations were to pursue these two different systems, that is, if one of them were regularly to export manufactures, and import subsistence; and the other to export subsistence, and import manufactures, there would be no comparison at the end of the period, between the state of cultivation in the two countries; and no doubt could rationally be entertained that the country which exported its raw produce, would be able to subsist and accommodate a much greater population than the other.

In the ordinary course of things, the exportation of raw produce is sufficiently profitable to the individuals concerned in it. But with regard to national profit, it possesses two peculiar and eminent advantages above any other kind of export. In the first place, raw produce, and more particularly corn, pays from its own funds the expences of procuring it, and the whole of what is sold is a clear national profit. If I set up a new manufacture, the persons employed in it must be supported out of the funds of subsistence already existing in the country, the value of which must be deducted from the price for which the commodity is sold, before we can estimate the clear national profit; and of course, this profit can only be the profit of the master manufacturer and the exporting merchant. But if I cultivate fresh land, or employ more men in the improvement of what was before cultivated, I increase the general funds of

subsistence in the country. With a part of this increase I support all the additional persons employed, and the whole of the remainder which is exported and sold, is a clear national gain; besides the advantage to the country, of supporting an additional population equal to the additional number of persons so employed, without the slightest tendency to diminish the plenty of the rest.

Secondly, it is impossible always to be secure of having enough, if we have not, in general, too much; and the habitual exportation of corn, seems to be the only practicable mode of laying by a store of sufficient magnitude to answer the emergencies, that are to be expected. The evil of scarcity is so dreadful, that any branch of commerce, the tendency of which is to prevent it, cannot but be considered, in a national point of view, as pre-eminently beneficial.

These two advantages, added to that which must necessarily accrue to manufactures from the steady and comparatively low price of provisions and of labour, are so striking, that it must be a point of the first consequence to the permanent prosperity of any country, to be able to carry on the export trade of corn, as one considerable branch of its commercial transactions.

But how to give this ability, how to turn a nation from the habit of importing corn, to the habit of exporting it, is the great difficulty. It has been generally acknowledged, and is frequently noticed by Dr. Smith, that the policy of modern Europe has led it to encourage the industry of the towns more than the industry of the country, or, in other words, trade more than agriculture. In this policy, England has certainly not been behind the rest of Europe; perhaps, indeed, except in one instance<sup>a</sup>, it may be said that she has been the foremost. If things had been left to take their natural course, there is no reason to think that the commercial part of the society would have increased beyond the surplus produce of the cultivators; but the high profits of commerce from monopolies, and

<sup>a</sup> The bounty on the exportation of corn.

other

other peculiar encouragements, have altered this natural course of things; and the body politick is in an artificial, and in some degree, diseased state, with one of its principal members out of proportion to the rest. Almost all medicine is in itself bad; and one of the great evils of illness is, the necessity of taking it. No person can well be more averse to medicine in the animal economy, or a system of expedients in political economy, than myself; but in the present state of the country, something of the kind may be necessary to prevent greater evils. It is a matter of very little comparative importance, whether we are fully supplied with broadcloth, linens, and muslins, or even with tea, sugar, and coffee; and no rational politician therefore, would think of proposing a bounty upon such commodities. But it is certainly a matter of the very highest importance, whether we are fully supplied with food; and if a bounty would produce such a supply, the most liberal political economist might be justified in proposing it; considering food as a commodity distinct from all others, and pre-eminently valuable.

## C H A P. X.

*Of Bounties on the Exportation of Corn.*

It is acknowledged by Dr. Smith, that the encouragement given to the industry of the towns has turned more capital into that channel than would otherwise have gone to it; and if this be true, it follows that the land must have had less than its natural share; and under such a discouragement, we cannot reasonably expect that agriculture should be able to keep pace with manufactures. The corn laws, as they were established in 1688 and 1700, did not do more than place them upon an equality.

The regulations respecting importation and exportation adopted in these corn laws, seemed to have the effect of giving that encouragement to agriculture, which it so much wanted, and the apparent result was gradually to produce a growth of corn in the country, considerably above the wants of the actual population, and consequently to lower greatly the prices of it, and give a steadiness to these prices that had never been experienced before.

During the seventeenth century, and indeed the whole period of our history previous to it, the prices of wheat were subject to great fluctuations, and the average price was very high. For fifty years before the year 1700, the average price of wheat per quarter was 3l. 11d. and before 1650 it was 6l. 8s. 10d.<sup>a</sup> From the time of the completion of the corn laws in 1700 and 1706, the

<sup>a</sup> Dirom's Inquiry into the Corn Laws, Appendix, No. I.

prices

prices became extraordinarily steady; and the average price for forty years previous to the year 1750, sunk so low as 1l. 16s. per quarter. This was the period of our greatest exportations. In the year 1757, the laws were suspended, and in the year 1773, they were totally altered. The exports of corn have since been regularly decreasing, and the imports increasing. The average price of wheat for the forty years ending in 1800, was 2l. 9s. 5d; and for the last five years of this period, 3l. 6s. 6d. During this last term, the balance of the imports of all sorts of grain is estimated at 2,938,357<sup>a</sup>, and the dreadful fluctuations of price which have occurred of late years, we are but too well acquainted with.

It is at all times dangerous to be hasty in drawing general inferences from partial experience; but, in the present instance, the period that has been considered is of so considerable an extent, and the changes from fluctuating and high prices, to steady and low prices, with a return to fluctuating and high prices again, correspond so accurately with the establishment and full vigour of the corn laws, and with their subsequent alterations and inefficacy, that it was certainly rather a bold assertion in Dr. Smith to say, that the fall in the price of corn must have happened in spite of the bounty, and could not possibly have happened in consequence of it<sup>b</sup>. We have a right to expect that he should defend a position, so contrary to all apparent experience, by the most powerful arguments. As in the present state of this country, the subject seems to be of the highest importance, it will be worth while to examine the validity of these arguments.

He observes, that both in years of plenty and in years of scarcity, the bounty necessarily tends to raise the money price of corn somewhat higher than it otherwise would be in the home market<sup>c</sup>.

<sup>a</sup> Anderson's Investigation of the Circumstances which led to Scarcity, table, p. 40.

<sup>b</sup> Wealth of Nations, vol. ii. b. iv. c. v. p. 264.

<sup>c</sup> Id. p. 265.

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That it does so, in years of plenty is undoubtedly true; but that it does so in years of scarcity, appears to me as undoubtedly false. The only argument by which Dr. Smith supports this latter position, is, by saying, that the exportation prevents the plenty of one year from relieving the scarcity of another. But this is certainly a very insufficient reason. The scarce year may not immediately follow the most plentiful year; and it is totally contrary to the habits and practice of farmers, to save the superfluity of six or seven years for a contingency of this kind. Great practical inconveniences generally attend the keeping of so large a reserved store. Difficulties often occur from a want of proper accommodations for it. It is at all times liable to damage from vermin, and other causes. When very large, it is apt to be viewed with a jealous and grudging eye by the common people. And in general the farmer may either not be able to remain so long without his returns; or may not be willing to employ so considerable a capital in a way, in which the returns must necessarily be distant and precarious. On the whole, therefore, we cannot reasonably expect, that, upon this plan, the reserved store should in any degree be equal to that, which in a scarce year would be kept at home, in a country which was in the habit of constant exportation to a considerable amount; and we know that even a very little difference in the degree of deficiency, will often make a very great difference in the price.

Dr. Smith then proceeds to state, very justly, that the defenders of the corn laws do not insist so much upon the price of corn in the actual state of tillage, as upon their tendency to improve this actual state, by opening a more extensive foreign market to the corn of the farmer, and securing to him a better price than he could otherwise expect for his commodity: which double encouragement they imagine must, in a long period of years, occasion such an increase in the production of corn, as may lower its price in the home market  
much

much more than the bounty can raise it, in the state of tillage then actually existing<sup>a</sup>.

In answer to this, he observes, that whatever extension of the foreign market can be occasioned by the bounty, must, in every particular year, be altogether at the expence of the home market, as every bushel of corn, which is exported by means of the bounty, and which would not have been exported without the bounty, would have remained in the home market to increase the consumption, and to lower the price of that commodity.

In this observation he appears to me a little to misuse the term market. Because, by selling a commodity below its natural price, it is possible to get rid of a greater quantity of it, in any particular market, than would have gone off otherwise, it cannot justly be said that, by this process, such a market is proportionally extended. Though the removal of the two taxes mentioned by Dr. Smith, as paid on account of the bounty, would certainly rather increase the power of the lower classes to purchase; yet in each particular year the consumption must be ultimately limited by the population; and the increase of consumption from the removal of these taxes, might by no means be sufficient to take off the whole superfluity of the farmers, without lowering the general price of corn, so as to deprive them of their fair recompence.

Suppose, that the cultivators in England had a million quarters of wheat, beyond what would supply the country, at a price, for which they must sell their whole crop, or lose their fair profits. And suppose, at the same time, that, from the high price of land, the great taxes on consumption, and the consequent high price of labour, the British farmer cannot grow corn at the average price in Europe, which is always true when a bounty upon exportation is rendered necessary. Under these circumstances if the cultivators endeavoured to force the additional million of quarters on the home market, it is

<sup>a</sup> Wealth of Nations, vol. ii. b. iv. c. v. p. 265.

perfectly

perfectly clear, that not only the price of this additional million, but the price of their whole crop, would fall very considerably; and, without a bounty, it could not answer to the farmer to export, till the prices in the home market had fallen below the average price in Europe, which we supposed to be lower, than what would properly pay to the British farmer the expences of cultivation. The purchasers in the home market would undoubtedly live for this year in great plenty. They might eat as much bread as they pleased themselves, and perhaps even feed their hogs and their horses on wheat corn; but the farmers in the mean time would be ruined, and would dread, as the greatest of all evils, the growing of too much corn. Finding, therefore, that tillage would not answer to them, they would of course neglect the plough, and gradually lay more of their land into pasture, till the return of scarcity, or at least the total removal of the superfluity, had again raised the prices to such a height as would make it answer to them to grow corn, provided that they never overstocked the home market. An individual farmer cannot know the quantity of corn that is sown by his brother farmers in other counties. The state of the future supply, in proportion to the future demand, remains in a great measure concealed till the harvest; and the cheapness or dearness of the current year can alone regulate the conduct of the farmer in the management of his land for the following year. Under such circumstances, great variations in the supply of corn, and consequently in its price, must necessarily occur.

There cannot be a greater discouragement to the production of any commodity in a large quantity, than the fear of overstocking the market with it<sup>a</sup>. Nor can there be a greater encouragement to such

<sup>a</sup> I am sufficiently aware that, in common years, the farmer is apt to proceed in a regular routine of crops, without much attention to prices; but we cannot doubt for a moment, that this routine will yield to extreme cases. No man in his senses will long go on with any species of cultivation by which he loses.

a production, than the certainty of finding an effectual market for any quantity, however great, that can be obtained. It is obvious, that in the case which we have supposed, nothing but a bounty upon corn can extend the effectual market for it to the British farmer.

Dr. Smith goes on to say, that if the two taxes paid by the people on account of the bounty, namely, the one to the government to pay this bounty, and the other paid in the advanced price of the commodity, in the actual state of the crop, do not raise the price of labour, and thus return upon the farmer; they must reduce the ability of the labouring poor to bring up their children, and, by thus restraining the population and industry of the country, must tend to stunt and restrain the gradual extension of the home market, and thereby, in the long run, rather to diminish than to augment the whole market and consumption of corn<sup>a</sup>.

I think it has been shewn, and indeed it will scarcely admit of a doubt, that the system of exportation arising from the bounty, has an evident tendency in years of scarcity to increase the supplies of corn, or to prevent their being so much diminished as they otherwise would be, which comes to the same thing. Consequently, the labouring poor will be able to live better, and the population will be less checked in these particular years, than they would have been without the system of exportation arising from the bounty. But if the effect of the bounty, in this view of the subject, be only to repress a little the population in years of plenty, while it encourages it comparatively in years of scarcity, its effect is evidently to regulate the population more equally according to that quantity of subsistence, which can permanently, and without occasional defalcations, be supplied. And this effect, I have no hesitation in saying, is one of the greatest advantages which can possibly occur to a society, and contributes more to the happiness of the labouring poor, than can easily be conceived by those who have not deeply considered the

<sup>a</sup> Wealth of Nations, vol. ii. b. iv. c. v. p. 267.

subject. In the whole compass of human events, I doubt if there be a more fruitful source of misery, or one more invariably productive of disastrous consequences, than a sudden start of population from two or three years of plenty, which must necessarily be repressed on the first return of scarcity, or even of average crops. With the present high price of labour, and the existing habits of the poor, in this country, I should consider it as a great misfortune, if from the late alarms respecting scarcity, and the unusual quantity of corn sown in consequence of them, the price of wheat, for the next two years, were to fall to ten or twelve pounds the load. It is not to be doubted, that in this case a more than usual number of marriages would take place among the common people. The mouths would be rapidly increasing; but as this price of corn, with the present advanced rents of land, accumulated taxes on consumption, and high price of labour, would certainly not repay the farmer, the supplies would be rapidly decreasing, and the consequences are but too obvious.

The most plausible argument that Dr. Smith adduces against the corn laws, is, that, as the money price of corn regulates that of all other home-made commodities, the advantage to the proprietor from the increased money price is merely apparent, and not real; since what he gains in his sales, he must lose in his purchases<sup>a</sup>.

This position, however, is not true, without many limitations<sup>b</sup>. The money price of corn, in a particular country, is undoubtedly by far the most powerful ingredient in regulating the price of labour, and of all other commodities; but it is not the sole ingredient. Many parts of the raw produce of land, though affected by the price of corn, do not, by any means, rise and fall exactly in pro-

<sup>a</sup> Wealth of Nations, vol. ii. b. iv. c. v. p. 269.

<sup>b</sup> In the Physiocratic, by Dupont de Nemours, it is proposed as a problem in political economy, to determine, whether an advance in the money price of corn is a real or only nominal advantage: and the question is resolved, I think justly, on the side of the reality of the advantage. Tom. ii.

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portion to this price. When great improvements in manufacturing machinery have taken place in any country, the part of the expence arising from the wages of labour will bear a comparatively small proportion to the whole value of the wrought commodity, and consequently, the price of it, though affected by the price of corn, will not be affected proportionally. When great and numerous taxes on consumption exist in any country, those who live by the wages of labour must always receive wherewithal to pay them, at least all those upon necessaries, such as soap, candles, leather, salt, &c. A fall in the price of corn, therefore, though it would decrease that part of the wages of labour which resolves itself into food, evidently, would not decrease the whole in the same proportion. And besides these, and other limitations that might be named, the experienced difficulty of lowering wages when once they have been raised, should be taken into consideration before the position can be practically applied.

During the first half of the eighteenth century, the price of corn gradually fell, and that, in a very considerable degree; but it does not appear that the price of labour fell in consequence of it. If this effect therefore did not take place in the course of fifty years, we could hardly expect that it would in seven or eight. And if with the view of lowering the price of labour, the farmers were to push their superfluity on the home market, the disappointment of this view would clearly disable them from growing the same quantity of corn in future: and under such circumstances, it is obvious, that a bounty alone could encourage them to continue the same growth of corn, and that this bounty is a great positive advantage to them, and far from being merely apparent, as Dr. Smith endeavours to prove.

Even supposing, that either by glutting the home market with British corn, or by the importation of foreign corn, duty free, we could succeed in lowering the wages of labour, the expences of the British farmer in raising corn and bringing it to market, would not

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be lowered in proportion. One of the principal ingredients in the price of British corn, is the high rent of land; another, the numerous taxes on consumption which the farmer pays in his instruments of agriculture, his horses, his windows, and the necessary expences of his establishment. While these ingredients of price remained the same, a fall in the wages of labour could not proportionally affect the price at which British corn could be brought to market<sup>a</sup>: and the British farmer would labour under a very considerable disadvantage in a competition with the farmers of America and the shores of the Baltic, where these two ingredients of price are comparatively trifling.

When Dr. Smith says, that the nature of things has stamped upon corn a real value, which cannot be altered by merely altering the money price; and that no bounty upon exportation, no monopoly of the home market, can raise that value; nor the freest competition lower it<sup>b</sup>; it is evident, that he changes the question from the profits of the growers of corn in any particular country, to the physical and absolute value of corn in itself. Nothing can be more obvious than that the competition of farmers who pay few or no taxes, and little comparative rent for their land, must lower the profits of those who labour under these disadvantages, and other things being equal, must ultimately juggle them out of the market. And it is also obvious, that the bounty to those who labour under these disadvantages, must tend to raise their profits and give them a fairer chance of standing the competition with the others. But all this while, undoubtedly, the physical value of corn remains just the same, untouched either by competition, or bounty. I certainly do not mean to say, that the bounty alters the physical value of corn,

<sup>a</sup> The immense tax paid in this country for the support of the poor, forms undoubtedly, another powerful ingredient in the price of British corn; but I have not mentioned it in the text, because it would always diminish immediately with the price of corn, which the other two ingredients would not.

<sup>b</sup> *Wealth of Nations*, vol. ii. b. iv. c. v. p. 278.

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and makes a bushel of it support a greater number of labourers for a day, than it did before: but I certainly do mean to say, that the bounty to the British cultivator does, in the actual state of things, really increase his profits on this commodity; and by thus making the growth of corn answer to him, encourages him to sow more than he otherwise would do, and enables him in consequence to employ more bushels of corn in the maintenance of a greater number of labourers. For, even supposing that the part of the price of labour which depends directly upon corn, were to rise and fall exactly with the variations in the price of this commodity, it is demonstrably evident, that the other two principal ingredients in the price remaining the same, every rise in the money price of corn would be a positive gain to the grower or proprietor, and every fall a positive loss. And were we to go still further, and suppose that the rent of land would vary in the same way, which might be the case in the long run; yet still the money taxes on consumption remaining unaltered, the effect of a rise or fall in the money price of corn, would be to benefit or injure the grower or proprietor though in a less degree than before. But in applying a theory to practice, all circumstances should certainly be taken into consideration; and in judging of the practical effects of the corn laws, or the opposite system, of importation duty free, not only, as was before observed, the difficulty of lowering the price of labour should be attended to, but also the length of time which it would require to lower the rents of land, and the probable ruin of agriculture before these two objects could be effected.

If Dr. Smith's theory be just, and if it be impossible in the nature of things to encourage the growth of corn by bounties, or any other human institutions, then it follows clearly, that every rich country must cease to grow corn, as soon as the price of labour, the rents of land, and the taxes on consumption, rise so high as to exceed the advantages of superior skill and a home market. As we cannot force people to raise a commodity which will not pay them, this point evidently forms an impassable limit to the agriculture of

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