

all modern countries which have a free intercourse with others; and, from this period, they must daily grow more and more dependent upon their less rich neighbours for their subsistence.

But if the reasons that have been adduced against this theory be judged valid, then it will appear, that though agriculture be not altogether so manageable as manufactures, yet that it is still capable of being encouraged and protected by human institutions. And that consequently a system of laws respecting bounties upon exportation, and duties upon importation, framed according to the circumstances of a particular country, with reference to the expence of bringing corn to market at home, and the average price of foreign corn, may make the production of this commodity answer to the farmers of such a country, however high may be, the taxes on consumption, the rent of land, and the price of labour.

And if it be admitted, that the cultivation of corn is susceptible of being encouraged by a bounty like other commodities, it will scarcely fail to follow, that the greater plenty, occasioned by this encouragement, will in the long run lower the price.

After all the circumstances which have been before mentioned as affecting price, have had their due weight, another cause must enter into our consideration capable of producing the greatest variations, and in its immediate effects more powerful than all the rest combined. This is, the proportion of the supply to the demand. A degree of plenty, indeed, which forces farmers to sell their corn below prime cost, evidently cannot last long; but the effects of scarcity are often permanent. The practical difficulty of lowering wages has before been noticed, but the same difficulty by no means exists with regard to raising them. Two or three years of high price from accidental causes are generally sufficient to do this; and when they are followed, as they generally are, by a rise in the rents of land, the extreme difficulty of a return to the former state of cheapness is obvious. Though it be allowed, therefore, that the growing of more corn, in average years, than is wanted for home consumption,

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in consequence of a bounty upon exportation, cannot permanently sink the price below what will fairly pay the British farmer; yet if it prevent that continual, and often permanent rise, occasioned by every slight deficiency of supply or increase of demand^a, its effect will clearly be, to keep the average price of corn lower than it otherwise would be. When a habit of considerable exportation prevails in consequence of a bounty, a slight increase of demand, or deficiency of supply, will produce scarcely any perceptible effect in the price of corn in the home market. This price can never exceed the average price in the ports of the commercial world, with the addition of the bounty, whatever that may be; and this addition will be absolutely nothing, compared with the increase of price which arises from the slightest deficiency of supply; a deficiency which the system of importation in a large, rich, and populous country, such as Great Britain, will always render probable, not only in the home market, but in all the ports of the commercial world, as we have lately experienced to our cost.

And if the ultimate tendency of the bounty be clearly to lower the average price of corn in the home market, all Dr. Smith's just reasonings respecting the disadvantage of the cheapness of silver in any particular country, or the dearness of all other commodities, return upon himself, and are applicable in favour of the corn laws, not against them.

We are now indeed feeling the disadvantage of the cheapness of silver in this country, and in a few years, when our commercial competitors have recovered from their late depression, shall probably feel it much more than we do at present; but it certainly is not owing to a system of exporting corn in consequence of the corn laws; but, apparently, to our having altered these corn laws in such a manner as to make them fail in producing the effect of exportation.

^a An occasional increase of demand for the supply of government stores, produces, in the present state of things, a great effect upon the price of corn, but under a system of exportation, it would not be felt.

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That we can readily, and with perfect facility, turn ourselves from an importing, to an exporting nation, in the article of corn, I would by no means pretend to say; but both theory, and the experience of the first half of the last century, warrant us in concluding it practicable; and we cannot but allow that it is worth the experiment, as the continuance of our national greatness, and commercial prosperity, seem absolutely to depend upon it. If we proceed in our present course, let us but for a moment reflect on the probable consequences. There cannot be a doubt, that, in the course of a few years, we shall draw from America, and the nations bordering on the Baltic, as much as two millions quarters of wheat, besides other corn, the support of above two millions of people. If, under these circumstances, any commercial discussion, or other dispute, were to arise with these nations, with what a weight of power they would negotiate! Not the whole British navy could offer a more convincing argument than the simple threat of shutting all their ports. I am not unaware, that, in general, you may securely depend upon people's not acting directly contrary to their interest. But this consideration, all powerful as it is, will sometimes yield voluntarily to national indignation, and is sometimes forced to yield to the resentment of a sovereign. It is of sufficient weight in practice, when applied to manufactures; because a delay in their sale is not of such immediate consequence, and from their smaller bulk, they are easily smuggled. But in the case of corn, a delay of three or four months may produce the most complicated misery; and from the great bulk of corn, it will generally be in the power of a sovereign to execute almost completely his resentful purpose. Small commercial states which depend nearly for the whole of their supplies on foreign powers, will always have many friends. They are not of sufficient consequence to excite any general indignation against them, and if they cannot be supplied from one quarter, they will from another. But this is by no means the case with such a country as Great Britain, whose commercial ambition is peculiarly calculated to excite a general jealousy, and in

fact has excited it, to a very great degree. If our commerce continue increasing for a few years, and our commercial population with it, we shall be laid so bare to the shafts of fortune, that nothing but a miracle can save us from being struck. The periodical return of such seasons of dearth, as those which we have of late experienced, I consider as absolutely certain, upon our present importing system: but, excluding from the question, at present, the dreadful distress that they occasion, which however no man of humanity can long banish from his mind, I would ask, is it politick, merely with a view to our national greatness, to render ourselves thus dependent upon others for our support, and put it in the power of a combination against us, to diminish our population two millions?

To restore our independence, and build our national greatness and commercial prosperity on the sure foundation of agriculture; it is evidently not sufficient, to propose premiums for tillage, to cultivate this or that waste, or even to pass a general inclosure bill, though these may be all good as far as they go. If the increase of the commercial population keep pace with these efforts, we shall only be where we were before, with regard to the necessity of importation. The object required, is to alter the relative proportion between the commercial and the agricultural population of the country, which can only be done by some system, which will permanently raise the profits of agriculture, encourage cultivators to employ more labour in the growing of corn, and completely secure them from all apprehensions of overstocking the market. I see no other way, at present, of effecting this object, but by a system of corn laws adapted to the peculiar circumstances of the country, and the state of foreign markets. All systems of peculiar restraints and encouragements are undoubtedly disagreeable, and the necessity of resorting to them may justly be lamented. But the objection which Dr. Smith brings against bounties in general, that, of forcing some part of the industry of the country into a channel less advantageous than that in which it would run of its own accord^a, does not apply in the present

^a Wealth of Nations, vol. ii. b. iv. c. v. p. 278.

instance, on account of the pre-eminent qualities of the products of agriculture, and the dreadful consequences that attend the slightest failure of them. The nature of things has, indeed, stamped upon corn a peculiar value^a; and this remark, made by Dr. Smith for another purpose, may fairly be applied to justify the exception of this commodity from the objections against bounties in general. If, throughout the commercial world, every kind of trade were perfectly free, one should undoubtedly feel the greatest reluctance in proposing any interruption to such a system of general liberty; and indeed, under such circumstances, agriculture would not need peculiar encouragements. But under the present universal prevalence of the commercial system, with all its different expedients of encouragement and restraint, it is folly to except from our attention the great manufacture of corn which supports all the rest. The high duties paid on the importation of foreign manufactures, are so direct an encouragement to the manufacturing part of the society, that nothing but some encouragement of the same kind, operating with the same force, can place the manufacturers and cultivators of this country on a fair footing. Any system of encouragement, therefore, which might be found necessary for the commerce of grain, would evidently be owing to the prior encouragements which had been given to manufactures. We consider the woollen manufacture of England as of the first importance, and protect and encourage it with peculiar care; but can any thinking man compare its influence on the strength and prosperity of the state, with the manufacture of corn, the scarcity or failure of which, will involve in it the failure of the favourite manufacture itself. If all be free, I have nothing to say; but if we protect and encourage, it seems to be folly not to encourage that production, which of all others is the most important and valuable^b.

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^a Wealth of Nations, vol. ii. b. iv. c. v. p. 278.

^b Though I have dwelt much on the importance of raising a quantity of corn in the country beyond the demands of the home consumption, yet I do not mean to recommend that

Let it not, however, be imagined, that the most enlightened system of agriculture, though it will undoubtedly be able to produce food beyond

that general system of ploughing, which takes place in most parts of France, and defeats its own purpose. A large stock of cattle is not only necessary as a very valuable part of the food of the country, and as contributing very greatly to the comforts of a considerable portion of its population; but it is also necessary in the production of corn itself. A large surplus produce, in proportion to the number of persons employed, can never be obtained without a great stock of cattle. At the same time, it does not follow, that we should throw all the land that is fit for it into pasture. It is an observation of Arthur Young, and I should think a just one, that the first and most obvious improvement in agriculture, is to make the fallows of a country support the additional cattle and sheep wanted in it. (Travels in France, vol. i. p. 361.) I am by no means sanguine, however, as to the practicability of converting England again into an exporting country, while the demands for the products of pasture are daily increasing, from the increasing riches of the commercial part of the nation. But should this be really considered as impracticable, it seems to point out to us, one of the great causes of the decay of nations. We have always heard, that states and empires have their periods of declension; and we learn from history, that the different nations of the earth have flourished in a kind of succession; and that poor countries have been continually rising on the ruins of their richer neighbours. Upon the commercial system, this kind of succession seems to be in the natural and necessary course of things, independently of the effects of war. If from the increasing riches of the commercial part of any nation and the consequently increasing demands for the products of pasture, more lands were daily laid down to grass, and more corn imported from other countries, the unavoidable consequence seems to be, that the increasing prosperity of these countries, which their exportations of corn would contribute to accelerate, must ultimately destroy the population and power of the countries which had fostered them. The ancients always attributed this natural weakness and old age of states to luxury. But the moderns, who have generally considered luxury as a principal encouragement to commerce and manufactures, and consequently a powerful instrument of prosperity, have, with great appearance of reason, been unwilling to consider it as a cause of decline. But allowing with the moderns, all the advantages of luxury, and when it falls short of actual vice, they are certainly great; there seems to be a point, beyond which it must necessarily become prejudicial to a state, and bring with it the seeds of weakness and decay. This point is, when it is pushed so far, as to trench on the funds necessary for its support, and to become an impediment instead of an encouragement to agriculture. I should be much misunderstood, if, from any thing that I have said in the four last chapters, I should be considered as not sufficiently aware of the advantages derived from commerce and manufactures. I look upon them as the most distinguishing characteristics of civili-

beyond the demands of the actual population, can ever be made to keep pace with an unchecked population. The errors that have arisen

zation, the most obvious and striking marks of the improvement of society, and calculated to enlarge our enjoyments, and add to the sum of human happiness. No great surplus produce of agriculture could exist without them, and if it did exist, it would be comparatively of very little value. But still they are rather the ornaments and embellishments of the political structure than its foundations. While these foundations are perfectly secure, we cannot be too solicitous to make all the apartments convenient and elegant; but if there be the slightest reason to fear that the foundations themselves may give way, it seems to be folly to continue directing our principal attention to the less essential parts. The most determined friend of commerce and manufactures must allow, that the persons employed in them cannot exist without the food to support them; and I cannot persuade myself to believe that they can be sufficiently secure of this food, if they depend for it principally on other countries. There has never yet been an instance in history, of a large nation continuing, with undiminished vigour, to support four or five millions of its people on imported corn; nor do I believe that there ever will be such an instance in future. England is, undoubtedly, from her insular situation, and commanding navy, the most likely to form an exception to this rule; but considering the subject as a general question in political economy, these advantages must evidently be looked upon as peculiar and incidental; and what might be applicable to England, would not be so to other countries. In spite, however, of the peculiar advantages of England, it appears to me clear that if she continue yearly to increase her importations of corn, she cannot ultimately escape that decline which seems to be the natural and necessary consequence of excessive commercial wealth; and the growing prosperity of those countries which supply her with corn, must, in the end, diminish her population, her riches, and her power. I am not now speaking of the next twenty or thirty years, but of the next two or three hundred. And though we are little in the habit of looking so far forwards, yet it may be questioned, whether we have a right knowingly to adopt a system which must necessarily terminate in the weakness and decline of our posterity. But whether we make any practical application of such a discussion or not, it is curious to contemplate the causes of those reverses in the fates of empires, which so frequently changed the face of the world in past times, and may be expected to produce similar, though perhaps not such violent, changes in future. War was, undoubtedly, in ancient times, the principal cause of these changes; but it frequently only finished a work which excess of luxury and the neglect of agriculture had begun. With regard to ourselves, we should recollect that it is only within the last twenty or thirty years, that we have become an importing nation. In so short a period, it could hardly be expected, that the evils of the system should be perceptible. We have, however, already felt some of its inconveniences; and if we persevere in it, its evil consequences may by no means be a matter

arisen from the constant appearance of a full supply, produced by the agricultural system, and the source of some other prejudices on the subject of population, will be noticed in the following chapter.

matter of remote speculation. It has been before observed, that, if from the beginning every kind of trade had been left to find its own level, agriculture would probably never have wanted any particular support; but when once this general and desirable liberty has been infringed, it seems to be clearly our interest to attend principally to those parts of the political structure, which in the actual circumstances of the country appear to be comparatively the weakest; and, upon this principle, we should be justified in giving particular encouragement to manufactures in such countries as Poland, and the southern parts of Siberia, and the same kind of encouragement to agriculture, in England.

C H A P. XI.

Of the principal Sources of the prevailing Errors on the Subject of Population.

It has been observed, that many countries at the period of their greatest degree of populousness, have lived in the greatest plenty, and have been able to export corn; but at other periods, when their population was very low, have lived in continual poverty and want, and have been obliged to import corn. Egypt, Palestine, Rome, Sicily, and Spain, are cited as particular exemplifications of this fact: and it has been inferred, that an increase of population in any state, not cultivated to the utmost, will tend rather to augment than diminish the relative plenty of the whole society; and that, as Lord Kaimes observes, a country cannot easily become too populous for agriculture; because agriculture has the signal property of producing food in proportion to the number of consumers^a.

The general facts from which these inferences are drawn, there is no reason to doubt; but the inferences by no means follow from the premises. It is the nature of agriculture, particularly when well conducted, to produce support for a considerable number above that which it employs; and consequently if these members of the society, or as Sir James Steuart calls them, the free hands, do not increase, so as to reach the limit of the number which can be supported by the surplus produce, the whole population of the country may continue for ages increasing with the improving state of agriculture, and yet

^a Sketches of the History of Man, b. i. sketch i. p. 106, 107. 8vo. 1788.

always be able to export corn. But this increase, after a certain period, will be very different from the natural, and unrestricted, increase of population; it will merely follow the slow augmentation of produce from the gradual improvement of agriculture; and population will still be checked by the difficulty of procuring subsistence. It is very justly observed by Sir James Steuart, that the population of England in the middle of the last century when the exports of corn were considerable, was still checked for want of food^a. The precise measure of the population in a country thus circumstanced, will not, indeed, be the quantity of food, because part of it is exported, but the quantity of employment. The state of this employment, however, will necessarily regulate the wages of labour, on which depends the power of the lower classes of people to procure food; and according as the employment in the country is increasing, whether slowly, or rapidly, these wages will be such, as either to check, or to encourage, early marriages, such, as to enable a labourer to support, only two or three, or as many as five or six, children.

The quantity of employment in any country will not of course vary from year to year, in the same manner as the quantity of produce must necessarily do, from the variation of the seasons; and consequently the check from want of employment will be much more steady in its operation, and be much more favourable to the lower classes of people, than the check from the immediate want of food. The first will be the preventive check; the second the positive check. When the demand for labour is either stationary, or increasing very slowly, people, not seeing any employment open by which they can support a family, or the wages of common labour being inadequate to this purpose, will of course be deterred from marrying. But if a demand for labour continue increasing with some rapidity, although the supply of food be uncertain, on account of variable seasons, and a dependence on other countries, the population will evidently go on,

Polit. Econ. vol. i. b. i. c. xv. p. 100.

till it is positively checked by famine, or the diseases arising from severe want.

Scarcity and extreme poverty, therefore, may, or may not, accompany an increasing population, according to circumstances. But they must necessarily accompany a permanently declining population; because there never has been, nor probably ever will be, any other cause than want of food, which makes the population of a country permanently decline. In the numerous instances of depopulation which occur in history, the causes of it may always be traced to the want of industry, or the ill direction of that industry, arising from violence, bad government, ignorance, &c. which first occasions a want of food, and of course depopulation follows. When Rome adopted the custom of importing all her corn, and laying all Italy into pasture, she soon declined in population. The causes of the depopulation of Egypt and Turkey have already been alluded to; and, in the case of Spain, it was certainly not the numerical loss of people, occasioned by the expulsion of the Moors; but the industry and capital thus expelled, which permanently injured her population. When a country has been depopulated by violent causes, if a bad government, with its usual concomitant, insecurity of property, ensue, which has generally been the case in all those countries which are now less peopled than formerly; neither the food nor the population can recover themselves, and the inhabitants will probably live in severe want. But when an accidental depopulation takes place, in a country which was before populous and industrious, and in the habit of exporting corn, if the remaining inhabitants be left at liberty to exert, and do exert, their industry in the same direction as before, it is a strange idea to entertain, that they would then be unable to supply themselves with corn in the same plenty; particularly, as the diminished numbers would, of course, cultivate principally the more fertile parts of their territory, and not be obliged, as in their more populous state, to apply to ungrateful soils. Countries in this situation would evidently have the same chance of recovering their former

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mer number, as they had originally of reaching this number; and indeed if absolute populousness were necessary to relative plenty, as some agriculturists have supposed^a, it would be impossible for new colonies to increase with the same rapidity as old states.

The prejudices on the subject of population, bear a very striking resemblance to the old prejudices about specie, and we know how slowly, and with what difficulty, these last have yielded to juster conceptions. Politicians observing, that states which were powerful and prosperous, were almost invariably populous, have mistaken an effect for a cause, and concluded that their population was the cause of their prosperity, instead of their prosperity being the cause of their population, as the old political economists concluded, that the abundance of specie was the cause of national wealth, instead of the effect of it. The annual produce of the land and labour, in

^a Among others, I allude more particularly to Mr. Anderson, who, in a *Calm Investigation of the Circumstances which have led to the present Scarcity of Grain in Britain*, (published in 1801,) has laboured, with extraordinary earnestness, and I believe with the best intentions possible, to impress this curious truth on the minds of his countrymen. The particular position which he attempts to prove is, *that an increase of population in any state whose fields have not been made to attain their highest possible degree of productiveness, (a thing that probably has never yet been seen on this globe,) will necessarily have its means of subsistence rather augmented, than diminished, by that augmentation of its population; and the reverse.* The proposition is, to be sure, expressed rather obscurely; but, from the context, his meaning evidently is, that every increase of population tends to increase relative plenty, and vice versa. He concludes his proofs by observing, that, if the facts which he has thus brought forward and connected, do not serve to remove the fears of those who doubt the possibility of this country producing abundance to sustain its increasing population, were it to augment in a ratio greatly more progressive than it has yet done, he should doubt, whether they could be convinced of it, were one even to rise from the dead to tell them so. Mr. A. is, perhaps, justified in this doubt, from the known incredulity of the age, which might cause people to remain unconvinced in both cases. I agree with Mr. A. however, entirely, respecting the importance of directing a greater part of the national industry to agriculture; but from the circumstance of its being possible for a country, with a certain direction of its industry, always to export corn, although it may be very populous, he has been led into the strange error of supposing, that an agricultural country could support an unchecked population.

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both these instances, became, in consequence, a secondary consideration, and its increase, it was conceived, would naturally follow the increase of specie in the one case, or of population in the other. The folly of endeavouring, by forcible means, to increase the quantity of specie in any country, and the absolute impossibility of accumulating it beyond a certain level by any human laws that can be devised, are now fully established, and have been completely exemplified in the instances of Spain and Portugal; but the illusion still remains respecting population; and under this impression, almost every political treatise has abounded in proposals to encourage population, with little or no comparative reference to the means of its support. Yet, surely, the folly of endeavouring to increase the quantity of specie in any country without an increase of the commodities which it is to circulate, is not greater, than that of endeavouring to increase the number of people, without an increase of the food which is to maintain them; and it will be found, that the level above which no human laws can raise the population of a country, is a limit more fixed and impassable, than the limit to the accumulation of specie. However improbable, in fact, it is possible to conceive, that means might be invented of retaining a quantity of specie in a state, greatly beyond what was demanded by the produce of its land and labour; but when, by great encouragements, population has been raised to such a height, that this produce is meted out to each individual in the smallest portions that can support life, no stretch of ingenuity can even conceive the possibility of going further.

It has appeared, I think, clearly, in the review of different societies given in the former part of this work, that those countries, the inhabitants of which were sunk in the most barbarous ignorance, or oppressed by the most cruel tyranny, however low they might be in actual population, were very populous in proportion to their means of subsistence; and upon the slightest failure of the seasons generally suffered the severities of want. Ignorance and despotism seem to have

have no tendency to destroy the passion which prompts to increase; but they effectually destroy the checks to it from reason and foresight. The improvident barbarian who thinks only of his present wants, or the miserable peasant, who, from his political situation, feels little security of reaping what he has sown, will seldom be deterred from gratifying his passions by the prospect of inconveniences which cannot be expected to press on him under three or four years. But though this want of foresight, which is fostered by ignorance and despotism, tend thus rather to encourage the procreation of children, it is absolutely fatal to the industry which is to support them. Industry cannot exist without foresight and security. The indolence of the savage is well known; and the poor Egyptian or Abyssinian farmer, without capital, who rents land, which is let out yearly to the highest bidder, and who is constantly subject to the demands of his tyrannical masters, to the casual plunder of an enemy, and, not unfrequently, to the violation of his miserable contract, can have no heart to be industrious, and if he had, could not exercise that industry with success. Even poverty itself, which appears to be the great spur to industry, when it has once passed certain limits, almost ceases to operate. The indigence which is hopeless, destroys all vigorous exertion, and confines the efforts to what is sufficient for bare existence. It is the hope of bettering our condition, and the fear of want, rather than want itself, that is the best stimulus to industry, and its most constant and best directed efforts will almost invariably be found among a class of people above the class of the wretchedly poor.

The effect of ignorance and oppression will therefore always be to destroy the springs of industry, and consequently to diminish the annual produce of the land and labour in any country; and this diminution will inevitably be followed by a decrease of the population, in spite of the birth of any number of children whatever, annually. The desire of immediate gratification, and the removal of the restraints to it from prudence, may perhaps, in such countries,

prompt universally to early marriages; but when these habits have once reduced the people to the lowest possible state of poverty, they can evidently have no further effect upon the population. Their only effect must be on the degree of mortality; and there is no doubt, that, if we could obtain accurate bills of mortality in those southern countries, where very few women remain unmarried, and all marry young, the proportion of the annual deaths would be 1 in 17, 18, or 20, instead of 1 in 34, 36, or 40, as in European states, where the preventive check operates.

That an increase of population, when it follows in its natural order, is both a positive good in itself, and absolutely necessary to a further increase in the annual produce of the land and labour of any country, I should be the last to deny. The only question is, what is the natural order of its progress? In this point, Sir James Steuart, who has in general explained this subject so well, appears to me to have fallen into an error. He determines that multiplication is the efficient cause of agriculture, and not agriculture of multiplication^a. But though it may be allowed that the increase of people beyond what could easily subsist on the natural fruits of the earth, first prompted man to till the ground; and that the view of maintaining a family, or of obtaining some valuable consideration in exchange for the products of agriculture, still operates as the principal stimulus to cultivation; yet it is clear, that these products in their actual state, must be beyond the lowest wants of the existing population, before any permanent increase can possibly be supported. And we know that multiplication has in numberless instances taken place, which has produced no effect upon agriculture, and has merely been followed by an increase of diseases; but perhaps there is no instance, where a permanent increase of agriculture, has not effected a permanent increase of population, somewhere or other. Consequently, agriculture may with more propriety be termed the efficient cause of population, than popu-

^a Polit. Econ. vol. i. b. i. c. xviii. p. 114.

tion of agriculture^a, though they certainly re-act upon each other, and are mutually necessary to each other's support. This indeed seems to be the hinge on which the subject turns, and all the prejudices respecting population have, perhaps, arisen from a mistake about the order of precedence.

The author of *L'Ami des Hommes*, in a chapter on the effects of a decay of agriculture upon population, acknowledges that he had fallen into a fundamental error in considering population as the source of revenue; and that he was afterwards fully convinced that revenue was the source of population^b. From a want of attention to this most important distinction, statesmen, in pursuit of the desirable object of population, have been led to encourage early marriages, to reward the fathers of families, and to disgrace celibacy; but this, as the same author justly observes, is to dress and water a piece of land without sowing it, and yet to expect a crop.

Among the other prejudices which have prevailed on the subject of population, it has been generally thought, that, while there is either waste among the rich, or land remaining uncultivated in any country, the complaints for want of food cannot be justly founded, or, at least, that the pressure of distress upon the poor is to be attributed to the ill-conduct of the higher classes of society, and the bad management of the land. The real effect, however, of these two circumstances, is merely to narrow the limit of the actual population; but they have little or no influence on what may be called the average pressure of distress on the poorer members of society. If our ancestors had been so frugal and industrious, and had transmitted such habits to their posterity, that nothing superfluous was now consumed by the higher classes, no horses were used for pleasure,

^a Sir James Steuart explains himself afterwards, by saying that he means principally the multiplication of those persons who have some valuable consideration to give for the products of agriculture; but this is evidently not mere increase of population, and such an explanation seems to admit the incorrectness of the general proposition.

^b Tom. viii. p. 84. 12mo. 9 vols. 1762.

and no land was left uncultivated, a striking difference would appear in the state of the actual population; but probably none whatever, in the state of the lower classes of people, with respect to the price of labour, and the facility of supporting a family. The waste among the rich, and the horses kept for pleasure, have indeed a little the effect of the consumption of grain in distilleries, noticed before with regard to China. On the supposition that the food consumed in this manner may be withdrawn on the occasion of a scarcity, and be applied to the relief of the poor, they operate, certainly, as far as they go, like granaries which are only opened at the time that they are most wanted, and must therefore tend rather to benefit than to injure the lower classes of society.

With regard to uncultivated land, it is evident, that its effect upon the poor is neither to injure, nor to benefit them. The sudden cultivation of it, will indeed tend to improve their condition for a time, and the neglect of lands before cultivated, will certainly make their situation worse for a certain period; but when no changes of this kind are going forward, the effect of uncultivated land on the lower classes, operates merely like the possession of a smaller territory. It is, indeed, a point of very great importance to the poor, whether a country be in the habit of exporting or importing corn; but this point is not necessarily connected with the complete or incomplete cultivation of the whole territory, but depends upon the proportion of the surplus produce, to those who are supported by it; and, in fact, this proportion is generally the greatest, in countries which have not yet completed the cultivation of all their territory. If every inch of land in this country were well cultivated, there would be no reason to expect, merely from this circumstance, that we should be able to export corn. Our power in this respect would depend entirely on the proportion of the surplus produce to the commercial population; and this, of course, would in its turn depend on the direction of capital to agriculture, or commerce.

It is not probable that any country with a large territory should
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ever be completely cultivated; and I am inclined to think, that we often draw very inconsiderate conclusions against the industry and government of states from the appearance of uncultivated lands in them. It seems to be the clear and express duty of every government, to remove all obstacles, and give every facility, to the inclosure and cultivation of land; but when this has been done, the rest must be left to the operation of individual interest; and, upon this principle, it cannot be expected that any new land should be brought into cultivation, the manure and the labour necessary for which, might be employed to greater advantage on the improvement of land already in cultivation; and this is a case which will very frequently occur. In countries possessed of a large territory, there will always be a great quantity of land of a middling quality, which requires constant dressing to prevent it from growing worse; but which would admit of very great improvement, if a greater quantity of manure and labour could be employed upon it. The great obstacle to the amelioration of land is the difficulty, the expence, and, sometimes, the impossibility, of procuring a sufficient quantity of dressing. As this instrument of improvement, therefore, is in practice limited, whatever it may be in theory, the question will always be, how it may be most profitably employed; and in any instance where a certain quantity of dressing and labour employed to bring new land into cultivation, would have yielded a permanently greater produce if employed upon old land, both the individual and the nation are losers. Upon this principle it is not uncommon for farmers in some situations, never to dress their poorest land, but to get from it merely a scanty crop every three or four years, and to employ the whole of their manure, which they practically feel is limited, on those parts of their farms, where it will produce a greater proportional effect.

The case will be different, of course, in a small territory with a great population, supported on funds not derived from their own soil. In this case there will be little or no choice of land, and a

comparative superabundance of manure; and under such circumstances the poorest soils may be brought under cultivation. But for this purpose, it is not mere population that is wanted, but a population which can obtain the produce of other countries, while it is gradually improving its own; otherwise, it would be immediately reduced in proportion to the limited produce of this small and barren territory; and the amelioration of the land might perhaps never take place; or if it did, it would take place very slowly indeed, and the population would always be exactly measured by this tardy rate, and could not possibly increase beyond it.

This subject is illustrated in the cultivation of the Campine in Brabant, which, according to the Abbé Mann^a, consisted originally of the most barren and arid sand. Many attempts were made by private individuals to bring it under cultivation, but without success; which prove that, as a farming project, and considered as a sole dependence, the cultivation of it would not answer. Some religious houses, however, at last settled there, and being supported by other funds, and improving the land merely as a secondary object, they, by degrees, in the course of some centuries, brought nearly the whole under cultivation, letting it out to farmers as soon as it was sufficiently improved.

There is no spot, however barren, which might not be made rich this way, or by the concentrated population of a manufacturing town; but this is no proof whatever that with respect to population and food, population has the precedence, because this concentrated population could not possibly exist, without the preceding existence of an adequate quantity of food in the surplus produce of some other district.

In a country like Brabant or Holland, where territory is the principal want, and not manure, such a district as the Campine is

^a Memoir on the Agriculture of the Netherlands, published in vol. i. of Communications to the Board of Agriculture, p. 225.

described

described to be, may perhaps be cultivated with advantage. But in countries, possessed of a large territory, and with a considerable quantity of land of a middling quality, the attempt to cultivate such a spot, would be a palpable misdirection and waste, both of individual and national resources.

The French have already found their error in bringing under cultivation too great a quantity of poor land. They are now sensible that they have employed in this way a portion of labour and dressing, which would have produced a permanently better effect, if it had been applied to the further improvement of better land. Even in China, which is so fully cultivated and so fully peopled; barren heaths have been noticed in some districts; which prove, that, distressed as the people appear to be for subsistence, it does not answer to them to employ any of their manure on such spots. These remarks will be still further confirmed, if we recollect, that in the cultivation of a large surface of bad land, there must necessarily be a very great waste of seed corn.

We should not, therefore, be too ready to make inferences against the internal economy of a country, from the appearance of uncultivated heaths, without other evidence. But the fact is, that as no country has ever reached, or probably ever will reach, its highest possible achme of produce, it appears always, as if the want of industry, or the ill-direction of that industry, was the actual limit to a further increase of produce and population, and not the absolute refusal of nature to yield any more; but a man who is locked up in a room, may be fairly said to be confined by the walls of it, though he may never touch them; and with regard to the principle of population, it is never the question, whether a country will produce *any more*, but whether it may be made to produce a sufficiency to keep pace with an unchecked increase of people. In China, the question is not, whether a certain additional quantity of rice might be raised by improved culture, but whether such an addition could be expected during the next twenty-five years, as would be sufficient

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to support an additional three hundred millions of people. And in this country, it is not the question, whether by cultivating all our commons, we could raise considerably more corn than at present; but whether we could raise sufficient for a population of twenty millions in the next twenty-five years, and forty millions, in the next fifty years.

The allowing of the produce of the earth to be absolutely unlimited, scarcely removes the weight of a hair from the argument, which depends entirely upon the differently increasing ratios of population and food: and all that the most enlightened governments, and the most persevering and best guided efforts of industry can do, is to make the necessary checks to population operate more equably, and in a direction to produce the least evil; but to remove them, is a task absolutely hopeless.

ESSAY, &c.

BOOK IV.

OF OUR FUTURE PROSPECTS RESPECTING THE REMOVAL OR
MITIGATION OF THE EVILS ARISING FROM THE PRINCIPLE
OF POPULATION.

CHAP. I.

*Of moral restraint, and the foundations of our obligation to practise
this virtue.*

As it appears, that in the actual state of every society which has come within our review, the natural progress of population has been constantly and powerfully checked; and as it seems evident, that no improved form of government, no plans of emigration, no benevolent institutions, and no degree or direction of national industry, can prevent the continued action of a great check to increase in some form or other; it follows, that we must submit to it as an inevitable law of nature; and the only inquiry that remains, is, how it may take place with the least possible prejudice to the virtue and happiness of human society. The various checks to population which have been observed to prevail in the same and different countries, seem all to be resolvable into moral restraint, vice, and misery; and if our choice be confined to these three, we cannot long hesitate in our decision respecting which it would be most eligible to encourage.

In the former edition of this essay, I observed, that, as from the laws of nature it appeared, that some check to population must exist, it was better that this check should arise from a foresight of the difficulties attending a family, and the fear of dependent poverty, than from the actual presence of want and sickness. This idea will admit of being pursued further, and I am inclined to think, that, from the prevailing opinions respecting population, which undoubtedly originated in barbarous ages, and have been continued and circulated by that part of every community, which may be supposed to be interested in their support, we have been prevented from attending to the clear dictates of reason and nature on this subject.

Natural and moral evil seem to be the instruments employed by the Deity in admonishing us to avoid any mode of conduct, which is not suited to our being, and will consequently injure our happiness. If we be intemperate in eating and drinking, we are disordered; if we indulge the transports of anger, we seldom fail to commit acts of which we afterwards repent; if we multiply too fast, we die miserably of poverty and contagious diseases. The laws of nature in all these cases are similar and uniform. They indicate to us, that we have followed these impulses too far, so as to trench upon some other law which equally demands attention. The uneasiness we feel from repletion, the injuries that we inflict on ourselves or others in anger, and the inconveniencies we suffer on the approach of poverty, are all admonitions to us to regulate these impulses better; and if we heed not this admonition, we justly incur the penalty of our disobedience, and our sufferings operate as a warning to others.

From the inattention of mankind hitherto, to the consequences of increasing too fast, it must be presumed, that these consequences are not so immediately and powerfully connected with the conduct which leads to them, as in the other instances; but the delayed knowledge of any particular effects does not alter their nature, nor our obligation to regulate our conduct accordingly, as soon as we
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are satisfied of what this conduct ought to be. In many other instances it has not been till after long and painful experience, that the conduct most favourable to the happiness of man has been forced upon his attention. The kind of food, and the mode of preparing it, best suited to the purposes of nutrition and the gratification of the palate; the treatment and remedies of different disorders; the bad effects on the human frame, of low and marshy situations; the invention of the most convenient and comfortable clothing; the construction of good houses; and all the advantages and extended enjoyments which distinguish civilized life; were not pointed out to the attention of man at once; but were the slow and late result of experience, and of the admonitions received by repeated failures.

Diseases have been generally considered as the inevitable inflictions of Providence; but, perhaps, a great part of them may more justly be considered as indications that we have offended against some of the laws of nature. The plague at Constantinople, and in other towns of the East, is a constant admonition of this kind to the inhabitants. The human constitution cannot support such a state of filth and torpor; and as dirt, squalid poverty, and indolence, are in the highest degree unfavourable to happiness and virtue, it seems a benevolent dispensation, that such a state should by the laws of nature produce disease and death, as a beacon to others to avoid splitting on the same rock.

The prevalence of the plague in London till the year 1666, operated in a proper manner on the conduct of our ancestors; and the removal of nuisances, the construction of drains, the widening of the streets, and the giving more room and air to their houses, had the effect of eradicating completely this dreadful disorder, and of adding greatly to the health and happiness of the inhabitants.

In the history of every epidemick it has almost invariably been observed, that the lower classes of people, whose food was poor and insufficient, and who lived crowded together, in small and dirty houses, were the principal victims. In what other manner can
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nature point out to us, that if we increase too fast for the means of subsistence, so as to render it necessary for a considerable part of the society to live in this miserable manner, we have offended against one of her laws. This law she has declared exactly in the same manner, as she declares that intemperance in eating and drinking will be followed by ill health; and that, however grateful it may be to us at the moment to indulge these passions to excess, this indulgence will ultimately produce unhappiness. It is as much a law of nature that repletion is bad for the human frame, as that eating and drinking, unattended with this consequence, is good for it.

An implicit obedience to the impulses of our natural passions would lead us into the wildest and most fatal extravagancies; and yet we have the strongest reasons for believing that all these passions are so necessary to our being, that they could not be generally weakened or diminished, without injuring our happiness. The most powerful and universal of all our desires is the desire of food, and of those things, such as clothing, houses, &c. which are immediately necessary to relieve us from the pains of hunger and cold. It is acknowledged by all, that these desires put in motion the greatest part of that activity from which spring the multiplied improvements and advantages of civilized life; and that the pursuit of these objects and the gratification of these desires form the principal happiness of the larger half of mankind, civilized or uncivilized, and are indispensably necessary to the more refined enjoyments of the other half. We are all conscious, of the inestimable benefits that we derive from these desires when directed in a certain manner; but we are equally conscious, of the evils resulting from them when not directed in this manner; so much so, that society has taken upon itself to punish most severely, what it considers as an irregular gratification of them. And yet the desires in both cases are equally natural, and, abstractedly considered, equally virtuous. The act of the hungry man who satisfies his appetite by taking a loaf from the shelf of another, is in no respect to be distinguished from

from the act of him who does the same thing with a loaf of his own, but by its consequences. From the consideration of these consequences, we feel the most perfect conviction, that if people were not prevented from gratifying their natural desires with the loaves in the possession of others, that the number of loaves would universally diminish. This experience is the foundation of the laws relating to property, and of the distinctions of virtue and vice, in the gratification of desires, otherwise perfectly the same.

If the pleasure arising from the gratification of these propensities were universally diminished in vividness, violations of property would become less frequent; but this advantage would be greatly overbalanced by the narrowing of the sources of enjoyment. The diminution in the quantity of all those productions, which contribute to human gratification, would be much greater, in proportion, than the diminution of thefts; and the loss of general happiness on the one side, would be beyond comparison greater, than the gain to happiness on the other. When we contemplate the constant and severe toils of the greatest part of mankind, it is impossible not to be forcibly impressed with the reflection, that the sources of human happiness would be most cruelly diminished, if the prospect of a good meal, a warm house, and a comfortable fireside in the evening, were not incitements sufficiently vivid, to give interest and cheerfulness to the labours and privations of the day.

After the desire of food, the most powerful and general of our desires, is, the passion between the sexes, taken in an enlarged sense. Of the happiness spread over human life by this passion, very few are unconscious. Virtuous love, exalted by friendship, seems to be that sort of mixture of sensual and intellectual enjoyment, particularly suited to the nature of man, and most powerfully calculated to awaken the sympathies of the soul, and produce the most exquisite gratifications. Perhaps there is scarcely a man who has once experienced the genuine delight of virtuous love, however great his intellectual pleasures may have been, that does not look back to the

the period, as the sunny spot, in his whole life, where his imagination loves most to bask, which he recollects, and contemplates with the fondest regret, and which he would most wish to live over again.

It has been said by Mr. Godwin, in order to shew the evident inferiority of the pleasures of sense, "Strip the commerce of the sexes of all its attendant circumstances, and it would be generally despised." He might as well say to a man who admired trees, strip them of their spreading branches, and lovely foliage, and what beauty can you see in a bare pole? But it was the tree with the branches and foliage, and not without them, that excited admiration. It is "the symmetry of person, the vivacity, the voluptuous softness of temper, the affectionate kindness of feeling, the imagination and the wit" of a woman, which excite the passion of love, and not the mere distinction of her being a female.

It is a very great mistake to suppose, that the passion between the sexes, only operates and influences human conduct, when the immediate gratification of it is in contemplation. The formation and steady pursuit of some particular plan of life, has been justly considered as one of the most permanent sources of happiness; but I am inclined to believe, that there are not many of these plans formed, that are not connected, in a considerable degree, with the prospect of the gratification of this passion, and with the support of children arising from it. The evening meal, the warm house, and the comfortable fireside, would lose half of their interest, if we were to exclude the idea of some object of affection with whom they were to be shared.

We have also great reason to believe, that the passion between the sexes has the most powerful tendency to soften and meliorate the human character, and keep it more alive to all the kindlier emotions of benevolence and pity. Observations on savage life have generally tended to prove, that nations in which this passion appeared to be less vivid, were distinguished by a ferocious and malignant spirit;

* Political Justice, vol. i. b. i. c. v. p. 72. 8vo.

and particularly by tyranny and cruelty to the sex. If, indeed, this bond of conjugal affection were considerably weakened, it seems probable, either that the man would make use of his superior physical strength, and turn his wife into a slave, as among the generality of savages; or at best, that every little inequality of temper which must necessarily occur between two persons, would produce a total alienation of affection; and this could hardly take place, without a diminution of parental fondness and care, which would have the most fatal effect on the happiness of society.

It may be further remarked, that observations on the human character in different countries, warrant us in the conclusion, that the passion is stronger, and its general effects in producing gentleness, kindness, and suavity of manners, much more powerful, where obstacles are thrown in the way of very early and universal gratification. In some of the southern countries where every impulse may be almost immediately indulged, the passion sinks into mere animal desire, is soon weakened and almost extinguished by excess; and its influence on the character is extremely confined. But in European countries, where, though the women are not secluded, yet manners have imposed considerable restraints on this gratification, the passion not only rises in force, but in the universality and beneficial tendency of its effects, and has often the most influence in the formation and improvement of the character, where it is the least gratified.

Considering then the passion between the sexes in all its bearings and relations, and including the endearing engagement of parent and child resulting from it, few will be disposed to deny that it is one of the principal ingredients of human happiness. Yet experience teaches us that much evil flows from the irregular gratification of it; and though the evil be of little weight in the scale, when compared with the good; yet its absolute quantity cannot be inconsiderable, on account of the strength and universality of the passion. It is evident, however, from the general conduct of all

governments in their distribution of punishments; that the evil resulting from this cause is not so great, and so immediately dangerous to society, as the irregular gratification of the desire of property; but placing this evil in the most formidable point of view, we should evidently purchase a diminution of it at a very dear price, by the extinction or diminution of the passion which causes it; a change, which would probably convert human life, either into a cold and cheerless blank, or a scene of savage and merciless ferocity.

A careful attention to the remote as well as immediate effects of all the human passions, and all the general laws of nature, leads us strongly to the conclusion, that, under the present constitution of things, few or none of them would admit of being greatly diminished, without narrowing the sources of good, more powerfully than the sources of evil. And the reason seems to be obvious. They are, in fact, the materials of all our pleasures, as well as of all our pains; of all our happiness, as well as of all our misery; of all our virtues, as well as of all our vices. It must therefore be regulation and direction that are wanted, not diminution or extinction.

It is justly observed by Dr. Paley, that, "Human passions are either necessary to human welfare, or capable of being made, and in a great majority of instances in fact made, conducive to its happiness. These passions are strong and general; and perhaps would not answer their purpose, unless they were so. But strength and generality, when it is expedient that particular circumstances should be respected, become, if left to themselves, excess and misdirection. From which excess and misdirection, the vices of mankind (the causes no doubt of much misery) appear to spring. This account, while it shews us the principle of vice, shews us at the same time, the province of reason and self-government."

Our virtue, therefore, as reasonable beings, evidently consists in educating, from the general materials which the Creator has placed

^a Natural Theology, c. xxvi. p. 547.

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under our guidance, the greatest sum of human happiness; and as all our natural impulses are abstractedly considered good, and only to be distinguished by their consequences, a strict attention to these consequences, and the regulation of our conduct conformably to them, must be considered as our principal duty.

The fecundity of the human species is, in some respects, a distinct consideration from the passion between the sexes, as it evidently depends more upon the power of women in bearing children, than upon the strength or weakness of this passion. It is, however, a law, exactly similar in its great features to all the other laws of nature. It is strong and general, and apparently would not admit of any very considerable diminution, without being inadequate to its object; the evils arising from it are incidental to these necessary qualities of strength and generality; and these evils are capable of being very greatly mitigated, and rendered comparatively light by human energy and virtue. We cannot but conceive, that it is an object of the Creator, that the earth should be replenished, at least to a considerable degree; and it appears to me clear, that this could not be effected, without a tendency in population to increase faster than food; and as with the present law of increase, the peopling of the earth does not proceed very rapidly, we have undoubtedly some reason to believe, that this law is not too powerful for its apparent object. The desire of the means of subsistence would be comparatively confined in its effects, and would fail of producing that general activity so necessary to the improvement of the human faculties, were it not for the strong and universal effort of population, to increase with greater rapidity than its supplies. If these two tendencies were exactly balanced, I do not see what motive there would be, sufficiently strong, to overcome the acknowledged indolence of man, and make him proceed in the cultivation of the soil. The population of any large territory, however fertile, would be as likely to stop at five hundred, or five thousand, as at five millions, or fifty millions. Such a balance therefore, would clearly defeat one great purpose of creation;

and if the question be merely a question of degree, a question of a little more, or a little less, strength, we may fairly distrust our competence to judge of the precise quantity necessary to answer the object, with the smallest sum of incidental evil. In the present state of things we appear to have under our guidance a great power, capable of peopling a desert region in a small number of years; and yet, under other circumstances, capable of being confined, by human energy and virtue, to any limits, however narrow, at the expence of a small comparative quantity of evil. The analogy of all the other laws of nature would be completely violated, if in this instance alone, there were no provision for accidental failures, no resources against the vices of mankind, or the partial mischiefs resulting from other general laws. To effect the apparent object without any attendant evil, it is evident, that a perpetual change in the law of increase would be necessary, varying with the varying circumstances of each country. But instead of this, it is not only more consonant to the analogy of the other parts of nature, but we have reason to think, that it is more conducive to the formation and improvement of the human mind, that the law should be uniform, and the evils, incidental to it under certain circumstances, be left to be mitigated or removed by man himself. His duties in this case vary with his situation; and he is thus kept more alive to the consequences of his actions, and his faculties have evidently greater play and opportunity of improvement, than if the evil were removed by a perpetual change of the law, according to circumstances.

Even if from passions too easily subdued, or the facility of illicit intercourse, a state of celibacy were a matter of indifference, and not a state of some privation, the end of nature in the peopling of the earth would be apparently liable to be defeated. It is of the very utmost importance to the happiness of mankind, that they should not increase too fast; but it does not appear that the object to be accomplished, would admit of any very considerable diminution in the desire of marriage. It is clearly the duty of each individual not to marry

marry till he has a prospect of supporting his children; but it is at the same time to be wished, that he should retain undiminished his desire of marriage, in order that he may exert himself to realize this prospect, and be stimulated to make provision for the support of greater numbers.

It is evidently therefore, regulation and direction that is required with regard to the principle of population, not diminution or alteration. And if moral restraint be the only virtuous mode of avoiding the incidental evils arising from this principle, our obligation to practise it will evidently rest exactly upon the same foundation, as our obligation to practise any of the other virtues, the foundation of utility.

Whatever indulgence we may be disposed to allow to occasional failures in the discharge of a duty, of acknowledged difficulty; yet, of the strict line of duty, during the period of celibacy, whatever that may be, we cannot doubt. And, with regard to the necessity of this celibacy in countries that have been long peopled, or our obligation not to marry till we have a fair prospect of being able to support our children, it will appear to deserve the attention of the moralist, if it can be proved, that an attention to this obligation is of more effect in the prevention of misery, than all the other virtues combined; and that if, in violation of this duty, it were the general custom to follow the first impulse of nature, and marry at the age of puberty, the universal prevalence of every known virtue in the greatest conceivable degree, would fail of rescuing society from the most wretched and desperate state of want, and all the diseases and famines which usually accompany it.

C H A P. II.

Of the Effects which would result to Society from the general practice of this virtue.

ONE of the principal reasons, which has prevented an assent to the doctrine of the constant tendency of population to increase beyond the means of subsistence, is, a great unwillingness to believe, that the Deity would, by the laws of nature, bring beings into existence, which, by the laws of nature, could not be supported in that existence. But if, in addition to that general activity and direction of our industry put in motion by these laws, we further consider, that the incidental evils arising from them, are constantly directing our attention to the proper check to population, moral restraint; and if it appear, that by a strict obedience to those duties which are pointed out to us by the light of nature and reason, and are confirmed and sanctioned by revelation, these evils may be avoided, the objection will, I trust, be removed, and all apparent imputation on the goodness of the Deity be done away.

The heathen moralists never represented happiness as attainable on earth, but through the medium of virtue; and among their virtues, prudence ranked in the first class, and by some was even considered as including every other. The christian religion places our present as well as future happiness in the exercise of those virtues which tend to fit us for a state of superior enjoyment; and the subjection of the passions to the guidance of reason, which, if not the whole, is a principal branch of prudence, is in consequence most particularly inculcated.

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If, for the sake of illustration, we might be permitted to draw a picture of society, in which, each individual endeavoured to attain happiness by the strict fulfilment of those duties which the most enlightened of the antient philosophers deduced from the laws of nature, and which have been directly taught, and received such powerful sanctions in the moral code of Christianity, it would present a very different scene from that which we now contemplate. Every act which was prompted by the desire of immediate gratification, but which threatened an ultimate overbalance of pain, would be considered as a breach of duty; and, consequently, no man whose earnings were only sufficient to maintain two children, would put himself in a situation in which he might have to maintain four or five, however he might be prompted to it by the passion of love. This prudential restraint, if it were generally adopted, by narrowing the supply of labour in the market, would, in the natural course of things, soon raise its price. The period of delayed gratification would be passed in saving the earnings which were above the wants of a single man, and in acquiring habits of sobriety, industry, and economy, which would enable him, in a few years, to enter into the matrimonial contract without fear of its consequences. The operation of the preventive check in this way, by constantly keeping the population within the limits of the food, though constantly following its increase, would give a real value to the rise of wages, and the sums saved by labourers before marriage, very different from those forced advances in the price of labour, or arbitrary parochial donations, which, in proportion to their magnitude and extensiveness, must of necessity be followed by a proportional advance in the price of provisions. As the wages of labour would thus be sufficient to maintain with decency a large family, and as every married couple would set out with a sum for contingencies, all squalid poverty would be removed from society, or, at least, be confined to a very few, who had fallen into misfortunes against which, no prudence or foresight could provide.

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The interval between the age of puberty, and the period at which each individual might venture on marriage, must, according to the supposition, be passed in strict chastity; because the law of chastity cannot be violated without producing evil. The effect of any thing like a promiscuous intercourse, which prevents the birth of children, is evidently to weaken the best affections of the heart, and, in a very marked manner, to degrade the female character. And any other intercourse, would, without improper arts, bring as many children into the society as marriage, with a much greater probability of their becoming a burden to it.

These considerations shew, that the virtue of chastity is not, as some have supposed, a forced produce of artificial society; but that it has the most real and solid foundation in nature and reason; being apparently the only virtuous mean of avoiding the vice and misery which result from the principle of population.

In such a society as we have been supposing, it might be necessary for both sexes to pass many of the early years of life in the single state; and if this were general, there would certainly be room for a much greater number to marry afterwards, so that fewer, upon the whole, would be condemned to pass their lives in celibacy. If the custom of not marrying early prevailed generally, and if violations of chastity were equally dishonourable in both sexes, a more familiar and friendly intercourse between them might take place without danger. Two young people might converse together intimately, without its being immediately supposed, that they either intended marriage or intrigue; and a much better opportunity would thus be given to both sexes of finding out kindred dispositions, and of forming those strong and lasting attachments, without which, the married state is generally more productive of misery than of happiness. The earlier years of life would not be spent without love, though without the full gratification of it. The passion, instead of being extinguished, as it now too frequently is by early sensuality, would only be repressed for a time, that it might afterwards burn with a brighter, purer, and steadier

steadier flame; and the happiness of the married state, instead of an opportunity of immediate indulgence, would be looked forward to, as the prize of industry and virtue, and the reward of a genuine and constant attachment^a.

The passion of love is a powerful stimulus in the formation of character, and often prompts to the most noble and generous exertions; but this is only when the affections are centered in one object; and generally, when full gratification is delayed by difficulties^b. The heart is perhaps never so much disposed to virtuous conduct, and certainly at no time is the virtue of chastity so little difficult to men, as when under the influence of such a passion. Late marriages taking place in this way, would be very different from those of the same name at present, where the union is too frequently prompted solely by interested views, and the parties meet, not unfrequently, with exhausted constitutions, and generally with exhausted affections. The late marriages at present, are indeed principally confined to the men; and there are few, however advanced in life they may be, who,

^a Dr. Currie, in his interesting observations on the character and condition of the Scotch Peasantry, which he has prefixed to his life of Burns, remarks, with a just knowledge of human nature, that "in appreciating the happiness and virtue of a community, there is perhaps no single criterion on which so much dependence may be placed, as the state of the intercourse between the sexes. Where this displays ardour of attachment, accompanied by purity of conduct, the character and the influence of women rise, our imperfect nature mounts in the scale of moral excellence; and, from the source of this single affection, a stream of felicity descends, which branches into a thousand rivulets, that enrich and adorn the field of life. Where the attachment between the sexes sinks into an appetite, the heritage of our species is comparatively poor, and man approaches to the condition of the brutes that perish." Vol. i. p. 18.

^b Dr. Currie observes, that the Scottish peasant, in the course of his passion, often exerts a spirit of adventure, of which a Spanish cavalier need not be ashamed. Burns' Works, vol. i. p. 16. It is not to be doubted, that this kind of romantic passion, which, Dr. C. says, characterizes the attachments of the humblest of the people of Scotland, and which has been greatly fostered by the elevation of mind given to them by a superior education, has had a most powerful and most beneficial influence on the national character.

if they determine to marry, do not fix their choice on a very young wife. A young woman, without fortune, when she has passed her twenty-fifth year, begins to fear, and with reason, that she may lead a life of celibacy; and with a heart capable of forming a strong attachment, feels, as each year creeps on, her hopes of finding an object on which to rest her affections gradually diminishing, and the uneasiness of her situation aggravated by the silly and unjust prejudices of the world. If the general age of marriage among women were later, the period of youth and hope would be prolonged, and fewer would be ultimately disappointed.

That a change of this kind would be a most decided advantage to the more virtuous half of society, we cannot for a moment doubt. However impatiently the privation might be borne by the men, it would be supported by the women readily and cheerfully; and if they could look forwards with just confidence to marriage at twenty-eight or thirty, I fully believe, that if the matter were left to their free choice, they would clearly prefer waiting till this period, to the being involved in all the cares of a large family at twenty-five. The most eligible age of marriage, however, could not be fixed; but must depend on circumstances and situation, and must be determined entirely by experience. There is no period of human life at which nature more strongly prompts to an union of the sexes, than from seventeen or eighteen, to twenty. In every society above that state of depression which almost excludes reason and foresight, these early tendencies must necessarily be restrained; and if, in the actual state of things, such a restraint on the impulses of nature be found unavoidable, at what time can we be consistently released from it, but at that period, whatever it may be, when in the existing circumstances of the society a fair prospect presents itself of maintaining a family.

The difficulty of moral restraint, will perhaps be objected to this doctrine. To him who does not acknowledge the authority of the Christian religion, I have only to say, that, after the most careful investi-

investigation, this virtue appears to be absolutely necessary, in order to avoid certain evils which would otherwise result from the general laws of nature. According to his own principles, it is his duty to pursue the greatest good consistent with these laws; and not to fail in this important end, and produce an overbalance of misery, by a partial obedience to some of the dictates of nature while he neglects others. The path of virtue, though it be the only path which leads to permanent happiness, has always been represented by the heathen moralists, as of difficult ascent.

To the Christian I would say, that the scriptures most clearly and precisely point it out to us as our duty, to restrain our passions within the bounds of reason; and it is a palpable disobedience of this law, to indulge our desires in such a manner, as reason tells us, will unavoidably end in misery. The Christian cannot consider the difficulty of moral restraint as any argument against its being his duty; since in almost every page of the sacred writings, man is described as encompassed on all sides by temptations, which it is extremely difficult to resist; and though no duties are enjoined, which do not contribute to his happiness on earth as well as in a future state, yet an undeviating obedience is never represented as an easy task.

There is in general so strong a tendency to love in early youth, that it is extremely difficult, at this period, to distinguish a genuine, from a transient passion. If the earlier years of life were passed by both sexes in moral restraint, from the greater facility that this would give to the meeting of kindred dispositions, it might even admit of a doubt whether more happy marriages would not take place, and consequently more pleasure from the passion of love, than in a state such as that of America, the circumstances of which would allow of a very early union of the sexes. But if we compare the intercourse of the sexes in such a society as I have been supposing, with that which now exists in Europe, taken under all its circumstances, it may safely be asserted, that, independently of the load of misery which would be removed by the prevalence of moral restraint, the

sum of pleasurable sensations from the passion of love would be increased in a very great degree.

If we could suppose such a system general, the accession of happiness to society in its internal economy, would scarcely be greater than in its external relations. It might fairly be expected that war, that great pest of the human race, would, under such circumstances, soon cease to extend its ravages so widely, and so frequently, as it does at present, and might ultimately perhaps cease entirely.

One of its first causes, and most powerful impulses, was undoubtedly an insufficiency of room and food; and, greatly as the circumstances of mankind have changed since it first began, the same cause still continues to operate, and to produce, though in a smaller degree, the same effects. The ambition of princes would want instruments of destruction, if the distresses of the lower classes of people did not drive them under their standards. A recruiting serjeant always prays for a bad harvest, and a want of employment, or, in other words, a redundant population.

In the earlier ages of the world, when war was the great business of mankind, and the drains of population from this cause were, beyond comparison, greater than in modern times, the legislators and statesmen of each country, adverting principally to the means of offence and defence, encouraged an increase of people in every possible way, fixed a stigma on barrenness and celibacy, and honoured marriage. The popular religious followed these prevailing opinions. In many countries, the prolific power of nature was the object of solemn worship. In the religion of Mahomet, which was established by the sword, and the promulgation of which, in consequence, could not be unaccompanied by an extraordinary destruction of its followers, the procreation of children to glorify the Creator, was laid down as one of the principal duties of man; and he who had the most numerous offspring, was considered as having best answered the end of his creation. The prevalence of such moral sentiments had naturally a great effect in encouraging marriage; and the rapid procreation

tion which followed, was partly the effect and partly the cause of incessant war. The vacancies occasioned by former desolations made room for the rearing of fresh supplies; and the overflowing rapidity, with which these supplies followed, constantly furnished fresh incitements and fresh instruments for renewed hostilities. Under the influence of such moral sentiments, it is difficult to conceive how the fury of incessant war should ever abate.

It is a pleasing confirmation of the truth and divinity of the Christian religion, and of its being adapted to a more improved state of human society, that it places our duties respecting marriage, and the procreation of children, in a different light from that in which they were before beheld.

Without entering minutely into the subject, which would evidently lead too far, I think it will be admitted, that if we apply the spirit of St. Paul's declarations respecting marriage, to the present state of society, and the known constitution of our nature, the natural inference seems to be, that when marriage does not interfere with higher duties, it is right; when it does, it is wrong. According to the genuine principles of moral science, "The method of coming at the will of God from the light of nature is to inquire into the tendency of the action to promote or diminish the general happiness." There are perhaps few actions that tend so directly to diminish the general happiness, as to marry without the means of supporting children. He who commits this act, therefore, clearly offends against the will of God; and having become a burden on the society in which he lives, and plunged himself and family into a situation, in which virtuous habits are preserved with more difficulty than in any other, he appears to have violated his duty to his neighbours and to himself, and thus to have listened to the voice of passion in opposition to his higher obligations.

In a society, such as I have supposed, all the members of which

* Paley's Moral Philosophy, vol. i. b. ii. c. iv. p. 65.

endeavour

endeavour to attain happiness by obedience to the moral code, derived from the light of nature, and enforced by strong sanctions in revealed religion, it is evident that no such marriages could take place; and the prevention of a redundant population, in this way, would remove one of the principal causes, and certainly the principal means of offensive war; and at the same time tend powerfully to eradicate those two fatal political disorders, internal tyranny and internal tumult, which mutually produce each other.

Weak in offensive war, in a war of defence, such a society would be strong as a rock of adamant. Where every family possessed the necessaries of life in plenty, and a decent portion of its comforts and conveniences, there could not exist that hope of change, or at best that melancholy and disheartening indifference to it, which sometimes prompts the lower classes of people to say, "let what will come, we cannot be worse off than we are now." Every heart and hand would be united to repel an invader, when each individual felt the value of the solid advantages which he enjoyed, and a prospect of change presented only a prospect of being deprived of them.

As it appears, therefore, that it is in the power of each individual to avoid all the evil consequences to himself and society resulting from the principle of population, by the practice of a virtue clearly dictated to him by the light of nature, and expressly enjoined in revealed religion; and as we have reason to think that the exercise of this virtue to a certain degree, would rather tend to increase than diminish individual happiness; we can have no reason to impeach the justice of the Deity, because his general laws make this virtue necessary, and punish our offences against it by the evils attendant upon vice, and the pains that accompany the various forms of premature death. A really virtuous society, such as I have supposed, would avoid these evils. It is the apparent object of the Creator to deter us from vice by the pains which accompany it, and to lead us to

virtue by the happiness that it produces. This object appears to our conceptions to be worthy of a benevolent Creator. The laws of nature respecting population, tend to promote this object. No imputation, therefore, on the benevolence of the Deity, can be founded on these laws, which is not equally applicable to any of the evils necessarily incidental to an imperfect state of existence.

C H A P. III.

Of the only effectual mode of improving the condition of the Poor.

HE who publishes a moral code, or system of duties, however firmly he may be convinced of the strong obligation on each individual strictly to conform to it, has never the folly to imagine that it will be universally or even generally practised. But this is no valid objection against the publication of the code. If it were, the same objection would always have applied; we should be totally without general rules; and to the vices of mankind arising from temptation, would be added a much longer list, than we have at present, of vices from ignorance.

Judging merely from the light of nature, if we feel convinced of the misery arising from a redundant population, on the one hand, and of the evils and unhappiness, particularly to the female sex, arising from promiscuous intercourse, on the other, I do not see how it is possible for any person, who acknowledges the principle of utility as the great foundation of morals, to escape the conclusion that moral restraint, till we are in a condition to support a family, is the strict line of duty; and when revelation is taken into the question, this duty undoubtedly receives very powerful confirmation. At the same time, I believe that few of my readers can be less sanguine in their expectations of any great change in the general conduct of men on this subject than I am; and the chief reason, why, in the last chapter, I allowed myself to suppose the universal prevalence of this virtue, was, that I might endeavour to remove any imputation on the goodness of the Deity, by shewing that

that the evils arising from the principle of population were exactly of the same nature as the generality of other evils which excite fewer complaints, that they were increased by human ignorance and indolence, and diminished by human knowledge and virtue; and on the supposition, that each individual strictly fulfilled his duty, would be almost totally removed; and this, without any general diminution of those sources of pleasure, arising from the regulated indulgence of the passions, which have been justly considered as the principal ingredients of human happiness.

If it will answer any purpose of illustration, I see no harm in drawing the picture of a society in which each individual is supposed strictly to fulfil his duties; nor does a writer appear to be justly liable to the imputation of being visionary, unless he make such universal or general obedience necessary to the practical utility of his system, and to that degree of moderate and partial improvement, which is all that can rationally be expected from the most complete knowledge of our duties.

But in this respect, there is an essential difference between that improved state of society which I have supposed in the last chapter, and most of the other speculations on this subject. The improvement there supposed, if we ever should make approaches towards it, is to be effected in the way in which we have been in the habit of seeing all the greatest improvements effected, by a direct application to the interest and happiness of each individual. It is not required of us to act from motives, to which we are unaccustomed; to pursue a general good, which we may not distinctly comprehend, or the effect of which may be weakened by distance and diffusion. The happiness of the whole is to be the result of the happiness of individuals, and to begin first with them. No co-operation is required. Every step tells. He who performs his duty faithfully will reap the full fruits of it, whatever may be the number of others who fail. This duty is express, and intelligible to the humblest capacity. It is merely that he is not to bring beings into the world for whom he cannot find

find the means of support. When once this subject is cleared from the obscurity thrown over it by parochial laws and private benevolence, every man must feel the strongest conviction of such an obligation. If he cannot support his children, they must starve; and if he marry in the face of a fair probability that he shall not be able to support his children, he is guilty of all the evils which he thus brings upon himself, his wife, and his offspring. It is clearly his interest, and will tend greatly to promote his happiness, to defer marrying, till, by industry and economy, he is in a capacity to support the children that he may reasonably expect from his marriage; and as he cannot in the mean time gratify his passions, without violating an express command of God, and running a great risk of injuring himself, or some of his fellow creatures, considerations of his own interest and happiness will dictate to him the strong obligation to moral restraint.

However powerful may be the impulses of passion, they are generally in some degree modified by reason. And it does not seem entirely visionary to suppose, that if the true and permanent cause of poverty were clearly explained, and forcibly brought home to each man's bosom, it would have some, and perhaps not an inconsiderable, influence on his conduct; at least, the experiment has never yet been fairly tried. Almost every thing that has been hitherto done for the poor, has tended, as if with solicitous care, to throw a veil of obscurity over this subject, and to hide from them the true cause of their poverty. When the wages of labour are hardly sufficient to maintain two children, a man marries and has five or six. He of course finds himself miserably distressed. He accuses the insufficiency of the price of labour to maintain a family. He accuses his parish for their tardy and sparing fulfilment of their obligation to assist him. He accuses the avarice of the rich, who suffer him to want what they can so well spare. He accuses the partial and unjust institutions of society, which have awarded him an inadequate share of the produce of the earth. He accuses perhaps the dispensations of Providence, which

which have assigned to him a place in society so beset with unavoidable distress and dependance. In searching for objects of accusation, he never adverts to the quarter from which all his misfortunes originate. The last person that he would think of accusing is himself, on whom, in fact, the whole of the blame lies, except in as far as he has been deceived by the higher classes of society. He may perhaps wish that he had not married, because he now feels the inconveniences of it; but it never enters into his head that he can have done any thing wrong. He has always been told that to raise up subjects for his king and country is a very meritorious act. He has done this act, and yet is suffering for it. He naturally thinks that he is suffering for righteousness sake; and it cannot but strike him as most extremely unjust and cruel in his king and country, to allow him thus to suffer, in return, for giving them what they are continually declaring that they particularly want.

Till these erroneous ideas have been corrected, and the language of nature and reason has been generally heard on the subject of population, instead of the language of error and prejudice, it cannot be said that any fair experiment has been made with the understandings of the common people; and we cannot justly accuse them of improvidence and want of industry, till they act as they do now, after it has been brought home to their comprehensions, that they are themselves the cause of their own poverty; that the means of redress are in their own hands, and in the hands of no other persons whatever; that the society in which they live, and the government which presides over it, are totally without power in this respect; and however ardently they may desire to relieve them, and whatever attempts they may make to do so, they are really and truly unable to execute what they benevolently wish, but unjustly promise; that when the wages of labour will not maintain a family, it is an incontrovertible sign that their king and country do not want more subjects, or at least that they cannot support them; that if they marry in this case, so far from fulfilling a duty to society, they are throwing a useless burden

burden on it, at the same time that they are plunging themselves into distress; and that they are acting directly contrary to the will of God, and bringing down upon themselves various diseases, which might all, or in a great part, have been avoided, if they had attended to the repeated admonitions which he gives, by the general laws of nature, to every being capable of reason.

Dr. Paley, in his *Moral Philosophy*, observes, that "in countries in which subsistence is become scarce, it behoves the state to watch over the publick morals with increased solicitude; for nothing but the instinct of nature, under the restraint of chastity, will induce men to undertake the labour, or consent to the sacrifice of personal liberty and indulgence, which the support of a family in such circumstances requires." That it is always the duty of a state to use every exertion, likely to be effectual, in discouraging vice and promoting virtue, and that no temporary circumstances ought to cause any relaxation in these exertions, is certainly true. The means therefore proposed, are always good; but the particular end in view, in this case, appears to be absolutely criminal. We wish to force people into marriage, when, from the acknowledged scarcity of subsistence, they will have little chance of being able to support their children. We might as well force people into the water who are unable to swim. In both cases we rashly tempt Providence. Nor have we more reason to believe, that a miracle will be worked to save us from the misery and mortality resulting from our conduct, in the one case, than in the other.

The object of those who really wish to better the condition of the lower classes of society, must be, to raise the relative proportion between the price of labour and the price of provisions; so as to enable the labourer to command a larger share of the necessaries and comforts of life. We have hitherto principally attempted to attain this end, by encouraging the married poor, and consequently increas-

* Vol. ii. c. xi. p. 352.

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ing the number of labourers, and overstocking the market with a commodity, which we still say that we wish to be dear. It would seem to have required no great spirit of divination to foretell the certain failure of such a plan of proceeding. There is nothing however, like experience. It has been tried in many different countries, and for many hundred years, and the success has always been answerable to the nature of the scheme. It is really time now to try something else.

When it was found, that oxygene, or pure vital air, would not cure consumptions, as was expected, but rather aggravated their symptoms; a trial was made of an air of the most opposite kind. I wish we had acted with the same philosophical spirit in our attempts to cure the disease of poverty; and having found that the pouring in of fresh supplies of labour, only tended to aggravate the symptoms, had tried what would be the effect of withholding a little these supplies.

In all old and fully-peopled states, it is from this method, and this alone, that we can rationally expect any essential and permanent amelioration in the condition of the lower classes of people.

In an endeavour to raise the proportion of the quantity of provisions to the number of consumers, in any country, our attention would naturally be first directed to the increasing of the absolute quantity of provisions; but finding that as fast as we did this, the number of consumers more than kept pace with it, and that, with all our exertions, we were still as far as ever behind, we should be convinced that our efforts, directed only in this way, would never succeed. It would appear to be setting the tortoise to catch the hare. Finding, therefore, that, from the laws of nature, we could not proportion the food to the population, our next attempt should naturally be to proportion the population to the food. If we can persuade the hare to go to sleep, the tortoise may have some chance of overtaking her.

We are not, however, to relax our efforts in increasing the quantity

quantity of provisions; but to combine another effort with it, that of keeping the population, when once it has been overtaken, at such a distance behind, as to effect the relative proportion which we desire; and thus unite the two grand desiderata, a great actual population, and a state of society in which squalid poverty and dependence are comparatively but little known; two objects which are far from being incompatible.

If we be really serious in what appears to be the object of such general research, the mode of essentially and permanently bettering the condition of the poor, we must explain to them the true nature of their situation, and show them, that the withholding of the supplies of labour is the only possible way of really raising its price; and that they themselves being the possessors of this commodity have alone the power to do this.

I cannot but consider this mode of diminishing poverty, as so perfectly clear in theory, and so invariably confirmed by the analogy of every other commodity that is brought to market, that nothing but its being shewn to be calculated to produce greater evils than it proposes to remedy, can justify us in not making the attempt to put it into execution.

CHAP. IV.

Objections to this mode considered.

ONE objection, which perhaps will be made to this plan, is that, from which alone it derives its value—a market rather understocked with labour. This must undoubtedly take place in a certain degree; but by no means in such a degree as to affect the wealth and prosperity of the country. The way in which we are going on at present, and the enormous increase in the price of provisions, which seems to threaten us, will tend much more effectually to enable foreigners to undersell us in the markets of Europe, than the plan now proposed. If the population of this country were better proportioned to its food, the nominal price of labour might be lower than it is now, and yet be sufficient to maintain a wife and six children. But putting this subject of a market understocked with labour, in the most unfavourable point of view, if the rich will not submit to a slight inconvenience necessarily attendant on the attainment of what they profess to desire, they cannot really be in earnest in their professions. Their benevolence to the poor, must be either childish play, or hypocrisy; it must be either to amuse themselves, or to pacify the minds of the common people with a mere shew of attention to their wants. To wish to better the condition of the poor, by enabling them to command a greater quantity of the necessaries and comforts of life, and then to complain of high wages, is the act of a silly boy who gives away his cake and then cries for it. A market overstocked with labour, and an ample remuneration to each

each labourer, are objects perfectly incompatible with each other. In the annals of the world they never existed together; and to couple them, even in imagination, betrays a gross ignorance of the simplest principles of political economy.

A second objection that may be made to this plan is, the diminution of population that it would cause. It is to be considered, however, that this diminution is merely relative; and when once this relative diminution had been effected, by keeping the population stationary, while the supply of food had increased, it might then start afresh, and continue increasing for ages, with the increase of food, maintaining always the same relative proportion to it. I can easily conceive, that this country with a proper direction of the national industry, might, in the course of some centuries, contain two or three times its present population, and yet, every man in the kingdom be much better fed and clothed than he is at present. While the springs of industry continue in vigour, and a sufficient part of that industry is directed to agriculture, we need be under no apprehensions of a deficient population; and nothing perhaps would tend so strongly to excite a spirit of industry and economy among the poor, as a thorough knowledge that their happiness must always depend principally upon themselves; and that if they obey their passions in opposition to their reason, or be not industrious and frugal while they are single men, to save a sum for the common contingencies of the married state, they must expect to suffer the natural evils which Providence has prepared for those who disobey its repeated admonitions.

A third objection which may be started to this plan, and the only one which appears to me to have any kind of plausibility, is, that, by endeavouring to urge the duty of moral restraint on the poor, we may increase the quantity of vice relating to the sex.

I should be most extremely sorry to say any thing which could either directly or remotely be construed unfavourably to the cause of virtue: but I certainly cannot think that the vices which relate to

the sex, are the only vices which are to be considered in a moral question; or that they are even the greatest and most degrading to the human character. They can rarely or never be committed without producing unhappiness somewhere or other, and therefore ought always to be strongly reprobated; but there are other vices, the effects of which are still more pernicious; and there are other situations, which lead more certainly to moral offences than the refraining from marriage. Powerful as may be the temptations to a breach of chastity, I am inclined to think that they are impotent, in comparison of the temptations arising from continued distress. A large class of women, and many men, I have no doubt, pass a considerable part of their lives in moral restraint; but I believe there will be found very few, who pass through the ordeal of squalid and hopeless poverty, or even of long continued embarrassed circumstances, without a considerable moral degradation of character.

In the higher and middle classes of society, it is a melancholy and distressing sight to observe, not unfrequently, a man of a noble and ingenuous disposition, once feelingly alive to a sense of honour and integrity, gradually sinking under the pressure of circumstances, making his excuses at first, with a blush of conscious shame, afraid of seeing the faces of his friends from whom he may have borrowed money, reduced to the meanest tricks and subterfuges, to delay or avoid the payment of his just debts; till ultimately grown familiar with falsehood, and at enmity with the world, he loses all the grace and dignity of man.

To the general prevalence of indigence, and the extraordinary encouragements which we afford in this country to a total want of foresight and prudence among the common people, is to be attributed

^a Mr. Colquhoun, speaking of the poor laws, observes, that, "in spite of all the ingenious arguments which have been used in favour of a system, admitted to be wisely conceived in its origin, the effects it has produced incontestably prove, that, with respect to the mass of the poor, there is something radically wrong in the execution.

buted the principal part of those continual depredations on property, and other more atrocious crimes, which drive us to the painful resource of such a number of executions^a. According to Mr. Colquhoun, above twenty thousand miserable individuals of various classes, rise up every morning, without knowing how, or by what means, they are to be supported during the passing day; or where, in many instances, they are to lodge on the succeeding night^b. It is by these unhappy persons that the principal depredations on the public are committed; and, supposing but few of them to be married and driven to these acts, from the necessity of supporting their children; yet still it will not cease to be true, that the too great frequency of marriage among the poorest classes, is one of the principal causes of the temptations to these crimes. A considerable part of these unhappy wretches will probably be found to be the offspring of such marriages, educated in workhouses, where every vice is propagated, or bred up at home in filth and rags, and with an utter ignorance of every moral obligation^c. A still greater part, perhaps, consists of persons, who, being unable for some time to get employment, owing to the full supply of labour, have been urged to these extremities by their temporary wants, and having thus lost their characters, are rejected, even when their labour may be wanted, by the well-founded caution of civil society^d.

When

"If it were not so, it is impossible that there could exist in the metropolis such an inconceivable portion of human misery amidst examples of munificence and benevolence unparalleled in any age or country." *Police of Metropolis*, c. xiii. p. 359.

In the effects of the poor laws, I fully agree with Mr. Colquhoun; but I cannot agree with him in admitting that the system was well conceived in its origin. I attribute still more evil to the original ill conception, than to the subsequent ill execution.

^a Mr. Colquhoun observes, that, "Indigence, in the present state of society, may be considered as a principal cause of the increase of crimes." *Police of Metropolis*, c. xiii. p. 352.

^b *Id.* c. xi. p. 313.

^c *Ibid.* and c. xii. p. 355, 370.

^d *Police of the Metropolis*, c. xiii. p. 353. et seq. In so large a town as London, which must necessarily encourage a prodigious influx of strangers from the country, there

must

When indigence does not produce overt acts of vice, it pallies every virtue. Under the continued temptations to a breach of chastity, occasional failures may take place, and the moral sensibility, in other respects, not be very strikingly impaired; but the continued temptations which beset hopeless poverty, and the strong sense of injustice that generally accompanies it from an ignorance of its true cause, tend so powerfully to sour the disposition, to harden the heart, and deaden the moral sense, that, generally speaking, virtue takes her flight clear away from the tainted spot, and does not often return.

Even with respect to the vices which relate to the sex, marriage has been found to be by no means a complete remedy. Among the

must be always a great many persons out of work; and it is possible that some public institution for the relief of the casual poor, upon a plan similar to that proposed by Mr. Colquhoun, (c. xiii. p. 371.) might, under very judicious management, produce more good than evil. But, for this purpose, it would be absolutely necessary, that if work were provided by the institution, the sum that a man could earn by it, should be less than the worst paid common labour; otherwise the claimants would rapidly increase, and the funds would soon be inadequate to their object. In the institution at Hamburgh, which appears to have been the most successful of any yet established, the nature of the work was such, that, though paid above the usual price, a person could not easily earn by it, more than eighteen pence a week. It was the determined principle of the managers of the institution to reduce the support which they gave, lower than what any industrious man or woman in such circumstances could earn. (*Account of the management of the poor in Hamburgh*, by C. Voght, p. 18.) And it is to this principle that they attribute their success. It should be observed, however, that neither the institution at Hamburgh, nor that planned by Count Rumford in Bavaria, has subsisted long enough for us to be able to pronounce on their permanent good effects. It will not admit of a doubt that institutions for the relief of the poor, on their first establishment, remove a great quantity of distress. The only question is, whether, as succeeding generations arise, the increasing funds necessary for their support, and the increasing numbers that become dependent, are not greater evils, than that, which was to be remedied; and whether the country will not ultimately be left with as much mendicity as before, besides all the poverty and dependence accumulated in the public institutions. This seems to be nearly the case in England at present. I do not believe that we should have more beggars, if we had no poor laws.

higher classes, our Doctors Commons, and the lives that many married men are known to lead, sufficiently prove this; and the same kind of vice, though not so much heard of among the lower classes of people, owing to their indifference and want of delicacy on these subjects, is probably not very much less frequent.

Add to this, that squalid poverty, particularly when joined with idleness, is a state the most unfavourable to chastity that can well be conceived. The passion is as strong, or nearly so, as in other situations, and every restraint on it, from personal respect, or a sense of morality, is generally removed. There is a degree of squalid poverty, in which, if a girl was brought up, I should say that her being really modest at twenty was an absolute miracle. Those persons must have extraordinary minds indeed, and such as are not usually formed under similar circumstances, who can continue to respect themselves, when no other person whatever respects them. If the children thus brought up were even to marry at twenty, it is probable that they would have passed some years in vicious habits, before that period.

If after all, however, these arguments should appear insufficient; if we reprobate the idea of endeavouring to encourage the virtues of moral restraint and prudence among the poor, from a fear of producing vice; and if we think that to facilitate marriage by all possible means is a point of the first consequence to the morality and happiness of the people; let us act consistently, and, before we proceed, endeavour to make ourselves acquainted with the mode by which alone we can effect our object.

CHAP. V.

Of the consequences of pursuing the opposite mode.

It is an evident truth, that whatever is the rate of increase in the means of subsistence, the increase of population must be limited by it, at least after the food has once been divided into the smallest shares that will support life. All the children born, beyond what would be required to keep up the population to this level, must necessarily perish, unless room be made for them by the deaths of grown persons. It has appeared, indeed, clearly in the course of this work, that in all old states, the marriages and births depend principally upon the deaths, and that there is no encouragement to early unions so powerful as a great mortality. To act consistently, therefore, we should facilitate, instead of foolishly and vainly endeavouring to impede, the operations of nature, in producing this mortality; and if we dread the too frequent visitation of the horrid form of famine, we should sedulously encourage the other forms of destruction which we compel nature to use. Instead of recommending cleanliness to the poor, we should encourage contrary habits. In our towns, we should make the streets narrower, crowd more people into the houses, and court the return of the plague. In the country, we should build our villages near stagnant pools, and particularly encourage settlements in all marshy and unwholesome situations^a. But above all, we should reprobate specific remedies.

^a Necker, speaking of the proportion of the births in France, makes use of a new and instructive expression on this subject, though he hardly seems to be sufficiently aware of it

remedies for ravaging diseases, and those benevolent, but much mistaken men, who have thought they were doing a service to mankind by projecting schemes for the total extirpation of particular disorders. If by these, and similar means, the annual mortality were increased from 1 in 36 or 40, to 1 in 18 or 20, we might, probably, every one of us marry at the age of puberty, and yet few be absolutely starved.

If however, we all marry at this age, and yet still continue our exertions to impede the operations of nature, we may rest assured that all our efforts will be vain. Nature will not, nor cannot be defeated in her purposes. The necessary mortality must come, in some form or other; and the extirpation of one disease will only be the signal for the birth of another, perhaps more fatal. We cannot lower the waters of misery by pressing them down in different places which must necessarily make them rise somewhere else: the only way in which we can hope to effect our purpose is by drawing them off. To this course nature is constantly directing our attention by the chastisements which await a contrary conduct. These chastisements are more or less severe, in proportion to the degree in which her admonitions produce their intended effect. In this country, at present, these admonitions are by no means entirely neglected. The preventive check to population prevails to a considerable degree, and her chastisements are, in consequence, moderate: but if we were all to marry at the age of puberty, they would be severe indeed. Political evils would probably be added to physical. A people goaded by constant distress, and visited by frequent returns of famine, could

it himself. He says "Le nombre des naissances est celui des habitans de un a vingt-trois et vingt-quatre dans les lieux *contrariés par la nature, ou par des circonstances morales*: " ce meme rapport dans la plus grande partie de la France, est de un a 25, 25 $\frac{1}{2}$, & 26." *Administ. des Finances*, tom. i. c. ix. p. 254. 12mo. It would appear, therefore, that we had nothing more to do, than to settle people in marshy situations, and oppress them by a bad government, in order to attain what politicians have hitherto considered as so desirable—a great proportion of marriages, and a great proportion of births.

not be kept down but by a cruel despotism. We should approach to the state of the people in Egypt or Abyssinia; and I would ask, whether, in that case, it is probable that we should be more virtuous?

Physicians have long remarked the great changes which take place in diseases; and that, while some appear to yield to the efforts of human care and skill, others seem to become, in proportion, more malignant and fatal. Dr. William Heberden published not long since, some valuable observations on this subject deduced from the London bills of mortality. In his preface, speaking of these bills, he says, "the gradual changes they exhibit in particular diseases correspond to the alterations which in time are known to take place, " in the channels through which the great stream of mortality is " constantly flowing^a." In the body of his work afterwards, speaking of some particular diseases, he observes with that candour which always distinguishes true science: "It is not easy to give a " satisfactory reason for all the changes which may be observed to " take place in the history of diseases. Nor is it any disgrace to " physicians, if their causes are often so gradual in their operation, " or so subtle, as to elude investigation^b."

I hope I shall not be accused of presumption, in venturing to suggest, that, under certain circumstances, such changes must take place; and perhaps without any alteration in those proximate causes which are usually looked to on these occasions. If this should appear to be true, it will not seem extraordinary that the most skilful and scientific physicians, whose business it is principally to investigate proximate causes, should sometimes search for these causes in vain.

In a country which keeps its population at a certain standard, if the average number of marriages and births be given, it is evident, that the average number of deaths will also be given; and, to use Dr. Heberden's metaphor, the channels through which the great

^a Observations on the Increase and Decrease of different Diseases. Preface, p. v. 4to. 1801.

^b Id. p. 43.

stream of mortality is constantly flowing, will always convey off a given quantity. Now if we stop up any of these channels, it is most perfectly clear, that the stream of mortality must run with greater force through some of the other channels; that is, if we eradicate some diseases, others will become proportionally more fatal. In this case the only distinguishable cause is the damming up a necessary outlet of mortality^a. Nature, in the attainment of her great purposes, seems always to seize upon the weakest part. If this part be made strong by human skill, she seizes upon the next weakest part, and so on in succession; not like a capricious deity, with an intention to sport with our sufferings, and constantly to defeat our labours; but like a kind though sometimes severe instructor, with the intention of teaching us to make all parts strong, and to chase vice and misery from the earth. In avoiding one fault we are too apt to run into some other; but we always find nature faithful to her great object, at every false step we commit, ready to admonish us of our errors, by the infliction of some physical or moral evil. If the prevalence of the preventive check to population, in a sufficient degree, were to remove many of those diseases which now afflict us, yet be accompanied by a considerable increase of the vice of promiscuous intercourse; it is probable that the disorders and unhappiness, the physical and moral evils arising from this vice, would increase in strength and degree, and, admonishing us severely of our error, would point to the only line of conduct approved by nature, reason, and religion, abstinence from marriage till we can support our children, and chastity till that period arrives.

In the case just stated, in which the population and the number of marriages are supposed to be fixed, the necessity of a change in the mortality of some diseases, from the diminution or extinction of others, is capable of mathematical demonstration. The only obscurity which can possibly involve this subject, arises

^a The way in which it operates is probably by increasing poverty, in consequence of a supply of labour too rapid for the demand.

from taking into consideration the effect that might be produced by a diminution of mortality, in increasing the population, or in decreasing the number of marriages. That the removal of any of the particular causes of mortality can have no further effect upon population, than the means of subsistence will allow; and that it has little or no influence on these means of subsistence, is a fact, of which, I hope, the reader is already convinced. Of its operation in tending to prevent marriage, by diminishing the demand for fresh supplies of children, I have no doubt; and there is reason to think that it had this effect, in no inconsiderable degree, on the extinction of the plague, which had so long and so dreadfully ravaged this country. Dr. Heberden draws a striking picture of the favourable change observed in the health of the people of England since this period; and justly attributes it to the improvements which have gradually taken place, not only in London, but in all great towns; and in the manner of living throughout the kingdom, particularly with respect to cleanliness and ventilation^a. But these causes would not have been adequate to the effect observed, if they had not been accompanied by an increase of the preventive check; and, probably, the spirit of cleanliness, and better mode of living, which then began to prevail, by spreading more generally a decent and useful pride, principally contributed to this increase. The diminution in the number of marriages, however, was not sufficient to make up for the great decrease of mortality, from the extinction of the plague, and the striking reduction of the deaths in the dysentery^b. While these, and some other disorders, became almost evanescent, consumption, palsy, apoplexy, gout, lunacy, and the small-pox, became more mortal^c. The widening of these drains was necessary to carry off the population which still remained redundant, notwithstanding the increased operation of the preventive check, and the part which was annually disposed of, and enabled to exist, by the increase of agriculture.

^a Observ. on Inc. and Dec. of Diseases, p. 35.

^b Id. p. 34.

^c Id. p. 36. et seq.

Dr. Haygarth, in the sketch of his benevolent plan for the extermination of the casual small-pox, draws a frightful picture of the mortality which has been occasioned by this distemper; attributes to it the slow progress of population; and makes some curious calculations on the favourable effects which would be produced, in this respect, by its extermination^a. His conclusions, however, I fear, would not follow from his premises. I am far from doubting that millions and millions of human beings have been destroyed by the small-pox. But were its devastations, as Dr. Haygarth supposes, many thousand degrees greater than the plague^b, I should still doubt, whether the average population of the earth had been diminished by them a single unit. The small-pox is certainly one of the channels, and a very broad one, which nature has opened for the last thousand years, to keep down the population to the level of the means of subsistence; but had this been closed, others would have become wider, or new ones would have been formed. In ancient times the mortality from war and the plague, was incomparably greater than in modern. On the gradual diminution of this stream of mortality, the generation, and almost universal prevalence, of the small-pox is a great and striking instance, of one of those changes in the channels of mortality, which ought to awaken our attention, and animate us to patient and persevering investigation. For my own part, I feel not the slightest doubt, that, if the introduction of the cow-pox should extirpate the small-pox, and yet the number of marriages continue the same, we shall find a very perceptible difference in the increased mortality of some other diseases. Nothing could prevent this effect, but a sudden start in our agriculture; and should this take place, which I fear we have not much reason to expect, it will not be owing to the number of children saved from death by the cow-pox inoculation, but to the alarms occasioned among the people of property by the late scarcities, and to the increased gains of

^a Vol. i. part ii. sect. v. and vi.^b Id. f. viii. p. 164.

farmers,

farmers, which have been so absurdly reprobated. I am strongly, however, inclined to believe, that the number of marriages will not, in this case, remain the same; but that the gradual light which may be expected to be thrown, on this interesting topic of human inquiry, will teach us how to make the extinction of a mortal disorder, a real blessing to us, a real improvement in the general health and happiness of the society.

If, on contemplating the increase of vice which might contingently follow an attempt to inculcate the duty of moral restraint, and the increase of misery that must necessarily follow the attempts to encourage marriage and population, we come to the conclusion, not to interfere in any respect, but to leave every man to his own free choice, and responsible only to God for the evil which he does, in either way; this is all I contend for; I would on no account do more; but I contend that at present we are very far from doing this.

Among the lower classes, where the point is of the greatest importance, the poor laws afford a direct, constant, and systematical encouragement to marriage, by removing from each individual that heavy responsibility, which he would incur by the laws of nature, for bringing beings into the world which he could not support. Our private benevolence has the same direction as the poor laws, and almost invariably tends to facilitate the rearing of families, and to equalize, as much possible, the circumstances of married and single men.

Among the higher classes of people, the superior distinctions which married women receive, and the marked inattentions to which single women of advanced age are exposed, enable many men, who are neither agreeable in mind or person, and are besides in the wane of life, to choose a partner among the young and fair instead of being confined, as nature seems to dictate, to persons of nearly their own age and accomplishments. It is scarcely to be doubted, that the fear of being an old maid, and of that silly and unjust

unjust ridicule, which folly sometimes attaches to this name, drives many women into the marriage union, with men whom they dislike, or, at best, to whom they are perfectly indifferent. Such marriages must to every delicate mind appear little better than legal prostitutions; and they often burden the earth with unnecessary children, without compensating for it by any accession of happiness and virtue to the parties themselves.

Throughout all the ranks of society, the prevailing opinions respecting the duty and obligation of marriage, cannot but have a very powerful influence. The man who thinks that in going out of the world without leaving representatives behind him, he shall have failed in an important duty to society, will be disposed to force, rather than to repress, his inclinations on this subject; and when his reason represents to him the difficulties attending a family, he will endeavour not to attend to these suggestions, will still determine to venture, and will hope that, in the discharge of what he conceives to be his duty, he shall not be deserted by Providence.

In a civilized country, such as England, where a taste for the decencies and comforts of life prevail among a very large class of people, it is not possible that the encouragements to marriage from positive institutions and prevailing opinions, should entirely obscure the light of nature and reason on this subject; but still they contribute to make it comparatively weak and indistinct. And till this obscurity is entirely removed, and the poor are undeceived with respect to the principal cause of their past poverty, and taught to know that their future happiness or misery must depend chiefly upon themselves, it cannot be said, that, with regard to the great question of marriage, or celibacy, we leave every man to his own free and fair choice.

C H A P. VI.

Effect of the knowledge of the principal cause of poverty on Civil Liberty.

It may appear, perhaps, that a doctrine, which attributes the greatest part of the sufferings of the lower classes of society exclusively to themselves, is unfavourable to the cause of liberty; as affording a tempting opportunity to governments of oppressing their subjects at pleasure, and laying the whole blame on the laws of nature and the imprudence of the poor. We are not, however, to trust to first appearances; and I am strongly disposed to believe, that those who will be at the pains to consider this subject deeply, will be convinced, that nothing would so powerfully contribute to the advancement of rational freedom, as a thorough knowledge generally circulated, of the principal cause of poverty; and that the ignorance of this cause, and the natural consequences of this ignorance, form, at present, one of the chief obstacles to its progress.

The pressure of distress on the lower classes of people, with the habit of attributing this distress to their rulers, appears to me to be the rock of defence, the castle, the guardian spirit, of despotism. It affords to the tyrant the fatal and unanswerable plea of necessity. It is the reason that every free government tends constantly to its destruction; and that its appointed guardians become daily less jealous of the encroachments of power. It is the reason that so many noble efforts in the cause of freedom have failed, and that almost every revolution, after long and painful sacrifices, has terminated in a military despotism. While any dissatisfied man of talents

has power to persuade the lower classes of people, that all their poverty and distress arise solely from the iniquity of the government, though perhaps the greatest part of what they suffer is totally unconnected with this cause, it is evident that the seeds of fresh discontents, and fresh revolutions, are continually sowing. When an established government has been destroyed, finding that their poverty is not removed, their resentment naturally falls upon the successors to power; and when these have been immolated without producing the desired effect, other sacrifices are called for, and so on without end. Are we to be surpris'd, that, under such circumstances, the majority of well-dispos'd people, finding that a government, with proper restrictions, was unable to support itself against the revolutionary spirit, and weary and exhausted with perpetual change, to which they could see no end, should give up the struggle in despair, and throw themselves into the arms of the first power which could afford them protection against the horrors of anarchy.

A mob, which is generally the growth of a redundant population, goaded by resentment for real sufferings, but totally ignorant of the quarter from which they originate, is, of all monsters, the most fatal to freedom. It fosters a prevailing tyranny, and engenders one where it was not; and though, in its dreadful fits of resentment, it appears occasionally to devour its unfighly offspring; yet no sooner is the horrid deed committed, than, however unwilling it may be to propagate such a breed, it immediately groans with the pangs of a new birth.

Of the tendency of mobs to produce tyranny, we may not be long without an example in this country. As a friend to freedom, and an enemy to large standing armies, it is with extreme reluctance that I am compelled to acknowledge, that, had it not been for the organized force in the country, the distresses of the people during the late scarcities, encouraged by the extreme ignorance and folly of many among the higher classes, might have driven them to commit the most dreadful outrages, and ultimately to involve the country in all
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the horrors of famine. Should such periods often recur, a recurrence which we have too much reason to apprehend from the present state of the country, the prospect which opens to our view is melancholy in the extreme. The English constitution will be seen hastening with rapid strides to the *Euthanasia* foretold by Hume; unless its progress be interrupted by some popular commotion; and this alternative presents a picture still more appalling to the imagination. If political discontents were blended with the cries of hunger, and a revolution were to take place by the instrumentality of a mob, clamouring for want of food, the consequences would be unceasing change, and unceasing carnage, the bloody career of which, nothing but the establishment of some complete despotism could arrest.

We can scarcely believe that the appointed guardians of British liberty should quietly have acquiesced in those gradual encroachments of power, which have taken place of late years, but from the apprehension of these still more dreadful evils. Great as has been the influence of corruption, I cannot yet think so meanly of the country gentlemen of England, as to believe that they would thus have given up a part of their birthright of liberty, if they had not been actuated by a real and genuine fear, that it was then in greater danger from the people, than from the crown. They appeared to surrender themselves to government on condition of being protected from the mob; but they never would have made this melancholy and disheartening surrender, if such a mob had not existed either in reality or in imagination. That the fears on this subject were artfully exaggerated, and increased beyond the limits of just apprehension, is undeniable; but I think it is also undeniable, that the frequent declamation which was heard against the unjust institutions of society, and the delusive arguments on equality which were circulated among the lower classes, gave us just reason to suppose, that if the *vox populi* had been allowed to speak, it would have appeared to be the voice of error and absurdity, instead of the *vox Dei*.

To say that our conduct is not to be regulated by circumstances,

is to betray an ignorance of the most solid and incontrovertible principles of morality. Though the admission of this principle may sometimes afford a cloke to changes of opinion that do not result from the purest motives; yet the admission of a contrary principle would be productive of infinitely worse consequences. The phrase of existing circumstances has, I believe, not unfrequently created a smile in the English House of Commons; but the smile should have been reserved for the application of the phrase, and not have been excited by the phrase itself. A very frequent repetition of it, has indeed, of itself, rather a suspicious air; and its application should always be watched with the most jealous and anxious attention; but no man ought to be judged *in limine* for saying, that existing circumstances had obliged him to alter his opinions and conduct. The country gentlemen were perhaps too easily convinced that existing circumstances called upon them to give up some of the most valuable privileges of Englishmen; but, as far as they were really convinced of this obligation, they acted consistently with the clearest rule of morality.

The degree of power to be given to the civil government, and the measure of our submission to it, must be determined by general expediency; and in judging of this expediency, every circumstance is to be taken into consideration; particularly, the state of publick opinion, and the degree of ignorance and delusion prevailing among the common people. The patriot, who might be called upon by the love of his country, to join with heart and hand in a rising of the people for some specifick attainable object or reform, if he knew that they were enlightened respecting their own situation, and would stop short when they had attained their demand; would be called upon by the same motive, to submit to very great oppression, rather than give the slightest countenance to a popular tumult, the members of which, at least the greater number of them, were persuaded, that the destruction of the Parliament, the Lord Mayor, and the monopolizers, would make bread cheap, and that a revolution would enable them all to

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support their families. In this case, it is more the ignorance and delusion of the lower classes of people that occasions the oppression, than the actual disposition of the government to tyranny.

That there is, however, in all power a constant tendency to encroach is an incontrovertible truth, and cannot be too strongly inculcated. The checks which are necessary to secure the liberty of the subject, will always, in some degree, embarrass and delay the operations of the executive government. The members of this government feeling these inconveniences, while they are exerting themselves, as they conceive, in the service of their country, and conscious, perhaps, of no ill intention towards the people, will naturally be disposed, on every occasion, to demand the suspension or abolition of these checks; but if once the convenience of ministers be put into competition with the liberties of the people, and we get into a habit of relying on fair assurances, and personal character, instead of examining, with the most scrupulous and jealous care, the merits of each particular case, there is an end of British freedom. If we once admit the principle that the government must know better with regard to the quantity of power which it wants, than we can possibly do with our limited means of information, and that therefore it is our duty to surrender up our private judgments, we may just as well, at the same time, surrender up the whole of our constitution. Government is a quarter in which liberty is not, nor cannot be, very faithfully preserved. If we are wanting to ourselves, and inattentive to our great interests in this respect, it is the height of folly and unreasonableness, to expect that government will attend to them for us. Should the British constitution ultimately lapse into a despotism, as has been prophesied, I shall think that the country gentlemen of England will have really much more to answer for than the ministers.

To do the country gentlemen justice, however, I should readily acknowledge, that, in the partial desertion of their posts as guardians of British freedom, which has already taken place, they have been actuated more by fear than treachery. And the principal

reason of this fear was, I conceive, the ignorance and delusions of the common people, and the prospective horrors which were contemplated, if, in such a state of mind, they should, by any revolutionary movement, obtain an ascendant.

The circulation of Paine's Rights of Man, it is supposed, has done great mischief among the lower and middling classes of people in this country. This is probably true; but not because man is without rights, or that these rights ought not to be known; but because Mr. Paine has fallen into some fundamental errors respecting the principles of government, and in many important points has shewn himself totally unacquainted with the structure of society, and the different moral effects to be expected from the physical difference between this country and America. Mobs, of the same description as those collections of people known by this name in Europe, could not exist in America. The number of people without property, is, there, from the physical state of the country, comparatively small; and therefore the civil power which is to protect property, cannot require the same degree of strength. Mr. Paine very justly observes, that whatever the apparent cause of any riots may be, the real one is always want of happiness; but when he goes on to say, it shews that something is wrong in the system of government, that injures the felicity by which society is to be preserved, he falls into the common error of attributing all want of happiness to government. It is evident, that this want of happiness might have existed, and from ignorance might have been the principal cause of the riots, and yet be almost wholly unconnected with any of the proceedings of government. The redundant population of an old state furnishes materials of unhappiness, unknown to such a state as that of America; and if an attempt were to be made to remedy this unhappiness, by distributing the produce of the taxes to the poorer classes of society, according to the plan proposed by Mr. Paine, the evil would be aggravated a hundred fold, and, in a very short time, no sum that

the society could possibly raise, would be adequate to the proposed object.

Nothing would so effectually counteract the mischiefs occasioned by Mr. Paine's Rights of Man, as a general knowledge of the real rights of man. What these rights are, it is not my business at present to explain; but there is one right, which man has generally been thought to possess, which I am confident he neither does, nor can, possess, a right to subsistence when his labour will not fairly purchase it. Our laws indeed say, that he has this right, and bind the society to furnish employment and food to those who cannot get them in the regular market; but in so doing, they attempt to reverse the laws of nature; and it is, in consequence, to be expected, not only that they should fail in their object, but that the poor who were intended to be benefited, should suffer most cruelly from this inhuman deceit which is practised upon them.

A man who is born into a world already possessed, if he cannot get subsistence from his parents on whom he has a just demand, and if the society do not want his labour, has no claim of *right* to the smallest portion of food, and, in fact, has no business to be where he is. At nature's mighty feast there is no vacant cover for him. She tells him to be gone, and will quickly execute her own orders, if he do not work upon the compassion of some of her guests. If these guests get up and make room for him, other intruders immediately appear demanding the same favour. The report of a provision for all that come, fills the hall with numerous claimants. The order and harmony of the feast is disturbed, the plenty that before reigned is changed into scarcity; and the happiness of the guests is destroyed by the spectacle of misery and dependence in every part of the hall, and by the clamorous importunity of those, who are justly enraged at not finding the provision which they had been taught to expect. The guests learn too late their error, in counteracting those strict orders to all intruders, issued by the great mistress of the feast, who, wishing that all her guests should have plenty, and knowing that she could

not provide for unlimited numbers, humanely refused to admit fresh comers when her table was already full.

The Abbé Raynal has said, that "Avant toutes les loix sociales l'homme avoit le droit de subsister^a." He might with just as much propriety have said, that, before the institution of social laws, every man had a right to live a hundred years. Undoubtedly he had then, and has still, a good right to live a hundred years, nay, a thousand, *if he can*, without interfering with the right of others to live; but the affair, in both cases, is principally an affair of power, not of right. Social laws very greatly increase this power, by enabling a much greater number to subsist, than could subsist without them, and so far very greatly enlarge *le droit de subsister*; but neither before nor after the institution of social laws, could an unlimited number subsist; and before, as well as since, he who ceased to have the power, ceased to have the right.

If the great truths on these subjects were more generally circulated, and the lower classes of people could be convinced, that, by the laws of nature, independently of any particular institutions, except the great one of property which is absolutely necessary in order to attain any considerable produce, no person has any claim of right on society for subsistence, if his labour will not purchase it, the greatest part of the mischievous declamation on the unjust institutions of society would fall powerless to the ground. The poor are by no means inclined to be visionary. Their distresses are always real, though they are not attributed to the real causes. If these real causes were properly explained to them, and they were taught to know how small a part of their present distress was attributable to government, and how great a part to causes totally unconnected with it, discontent and irritation among the lower classes of people would shew themselves much less frequently than at present; and when they did shew themselves, would be much less to be dreaded. The efforts

^a Raynal, Hist. des Indes, vol. x. f. x. p. 322. 8vo.

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of turbulent and discontented men in the middle classes of society, might safely be disregarded, if the poor were so far enlightened respecting the real nature of their situation, as to be aware, that by aiding them in their schemes of renovation, they would probably be promoting the ambitious views of others, without, in any respect, benefiting themselves. And the country gentlemen, and men of property in England, might securely return to a wholesome jealousy of the encroachments of power; and, instead of daily sacrificing the liberties of the subject, on the altar of publick safety, might, without any just apprehension from the people, not only tread back all their late steps, but firmly insist upon those gradual reforms, which the lapse of time, and the storms of circumstances, have rendered necessary, to prevent the gradual destruction of the British constitution.

All improvements in government must necessarily originate with persons of some education, and these will of course be found among the people of property. Whatever may be said of a few, it is impossible to suppose that the great mass of the people of property should be really interested in the abuses of government. They merely submit to them, from the fear, that an endeavour to remove them, might be productive of greater evils. Could we but take away this fear, reform and improvement would proceed with as much facility, as the removal of nuisances, or the paving and lighting the streets. In human life we are continually called upon, to submit to a lesser evil, in order to avoid a greater; and it is the part of a wise man to do this readily and cheerfully; but no wise man will submit to any evil, if he can get rid of it, without danger. Remove all apprehension from the tyranny or folly of the people, and the tyranny of government could not stand a moment. It would then appear in its proper deformity, without palliation, without pretext, without protector. Naturally feeble in itself, when it was once stripped naked, and deprived of the support of publick opinion, and of the great plea of necessity, it would fall without a struggle. Its few interested defenders would hide their heads abashed; and would be ashamed
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any longer to advocate a cause for which no human ingenuity could invent a plausible argument.

The most successful supporters of tyranny are without doubt those general declaimers, who attribute the distresses of the poor, and almost all the evils to which society is subject, to human institutions and the iniquity of governments. The falsity of these accusations, and the dreadful consequences that would result from their being generally admitted and acted upon, make it absolutely necessary that they should at all events be resisted; not only on account of the immediate revolutionary horrors to be expected from a movement of the people acting under such impressions, a consideration which must at all times have very great weight; but on account of the extreme probability that such a revolution would terminate in a much worse despotism, than that which it had destroyed. On these grounds, a genuine friend of freedom, a zealous advocate for the real rights of man, might be found among the defenders of a considerable degree of tyranny. A cause bad in itself, might be supported by the good and the virtuous, merely because that which was opposed to it was much worse; and at the moment it was absolutely necessary to make a choice between the two. Whatever therefore may be the intention of those indiscriminate and wholesale accusations against governments, their real effect undoubtedly is, to add a weight of talents and principles to the prevailing power which it never would have received otherwise.

It is a truth, which I trust has been sufficiently proved in the course of this work, that, under a government constructed upon the best and purest principles, and executed by men of the highest talents and integrity, the most squalid poverty and wretchedness might universally prevail from the principle of population alone. And as this cause of unhappiness has hitherto been so little understood, that the efforts of society have always tended rather to aggravate than to lessen it, we have the strongest reasons for supposing, that, in all the governments with which we are acquainted, a very
great

great part of the misery to be observed among the lower classes of the people, arises from this cause.

The inference, therefore, which Mr. Paine and others have drawn against governments from the unhappiness of the people, is palpably unfair; and before we give a sanction to such accusations, it is a debt we owe to truth and justice, to ascertain how much of this unhappiness arises from the principle of population, and how much is fairly to be attributed to government. When this distinction has been properly made, and all the vague, indefinite, and false accusations removed, government would remain, as it ought to be, clearly responsible for the rest. A tenfold weight would be immediately given to the cause of the people, and every man of principle would join in asserting and enforcing, if necessary, their rights.

I may be deceived; but I confess that if I were called to name the cause, which, in my conception, had more than any other contributed to the very slow progress of freedom, so disheartening to every liberal mind, I should say that it was the confusion that had existed, respecting the causes of the unhappiness and discontents which prevail in society; and the advantage which governments had been able to take, and indeed had been compelled to take, of this confusion, to confirm and strengthen their power. I cannot help thinking, therefore, that a knowledge generally circulated, that the principal cause of want and unhappiness is unconnected with government, and totally beyond its power to remove; and that it depends upon the conduct of the poor themselves; would, instead of giving any advantage to governments, give a great additional weight to the popular side of the question, by removing the dangers with which, from ignorance, it is at present accompanied; and thus tend, in a very powerful manner, to promote the cause of rational freedom.

C H A P. VII.

Plan of the gradual abolition of the Poor Laws proposed.

IF the principles in the preceding chapters should stand the test of examination, and we should ever feel the obligation of endeavouring to act upon them, the next inquiry would be, in what way we ought practically to proceed. The first grand obstacle which presents itself in this country, is the system of the poor laws, which has been justly stated to be an evil, in comparison of which, the national debt, with all its magnitude of terror, is of little moment^a. The extraordinary rapidity with which the poor rates have increased of late years, presents us, indeed, with the prospect of a monstrous deformity in society, which, if it did not really exist to a great degree at present, and were not daily advancing in growth, would be considered as perfectly incredible. It presents us with the prospect of a great nation, flourishing in arts, and arms, and commerce, and with a government, which has generally been allowed to be the best, which has hitherto stood the test of experience, in any country, and yet the larger half of the people reduced to the condition of paupers^b.

Greatly as we may be shocked at such a prospect, and ardently as we may wish to remove it, the evil is now so deeply seated, and the

^a Reports of the Society for bettering the condition of the poor, vol. iii. p. 21.

^b It has been said, that, during the late scarcities, half of the population of the country received relief. If the poor rates continue increasing as rapidly as they have done on the average of the last ten years, how melancholy are our future prospects? The system of the poor laws has been justly stated by the French to be *la plaie politique de l'Angleterre la plus dévorante.* (Comité de Mendicité.)

relief

relief given by the poor laws so widely extended, that no man of humanity could venture to propose their immediate abolition. To mitigate their effects, however, and stop their future increase, to which, if left to continue upon their present plan, we can see no probable termination, it has been proposed to fix the whole sum to be raised, at its present rate, or any other that might be determined upon; and to make a law that on no account this sum should be exceeded. The objection to this plan is, that a very large sum would be still to be raised, and a great number of people to be supported; the consequence of which would be, that the poor would not be easily able to distinguish the alteration that had been made. Each individual would think that he had as good a right to be supported when he was in want, as any other person; and those who unfortunately chanced to be in distress when the fixed sum had been collected, would think themselves particularly ill used on being excluded from all assistance, while so many others were enjoying this advantage. If the sum collected, were divided among all that were in want, however their numbers might increase; though such a plan would be perfectly fair, with regard to those who became dependent, after the sum had been fixed, it would undoubtedly be rather hard upon those, who had been in the habit of receiving a more liberal supply, and had done nothing to justify its being taken from them.

I have reflected much on the subject of the poor laws, and hope, therefore, that I shall be excused, in venturing to suggest a mode of their gradual abolition, to which, I confess, that at present I can see no material objection. Of this, indeed, I feel nearly convinced, that, should we ever become sufficiently sensible of the wide-spreading tyranny, dependence, indolence, and unhappiness, which they create, as seriously to make an effort to abolish them, we shall be compelled to adopt the principle, if not the plan, which I shall mention. It seems impossible to get rid of so extensive a system of support, consistently with humanity, without applying ourselves directly to its

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vital principle, and endeavouring to counteract that deeply-seated cause, which occasions the rapid growth of all such establishments, and invariably renders them inadequate to their object.

To this end, I should propose a regulation to be made, declaring, that no child born from any marriage, taking place after the expiration of a year from the date of the law; and no illegitimate child born two years from the same date, should ever be entitled to parish assistance. And to give a more general knowledge of this law, and to enforce it more strongly on the minds of the lower classes of people, the clergyman of each parish should, previously to the solemnization of a marriage, read a short address to the parties, stating the strong obligation on every man to support his own children; the impropriety, and even immorality, of marrying without a fair prospect of being able to do this; the evils which had resulted to the poor themselves, from the attempt which had been made to assist, by publick institutions, in a duty which ought to be exclusively appropriated to parents; and the absolute necessity which had at length appeared, of abandoning all such institutions, on account of their producing effects totally opposite to those which were intended.

This would operate as a fair, distinct, and precise notice, which no man could well mistake; and, without pressing hard on any particular individuals, would at once throw off the rising generation from that miserable and helpless dependence upon the government and the rich, the moral as well as physical consequences of which are almost incalculable. When the poor are in the habit of constantly looking to these sources, for all the good or evil they enjoy or suffer, their minds must almost necessarily be under a continual state of irritation against the higher classes of society, whenever they feel distressed from the pressure of circumstances.

I have often heard great surprise expressed that the poor in this country should be with such difficulty persuaded to take to any substitutes during a period of scarcity; but I confess, that this fact never surprised me in the least. The poor are told that the parish

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is obliged to provide for them. This, they naturally conceive, is a rich source of supply; and when they are offered any kind of food to which they are not accustomed, they consider it as a breach of obligation in the parish, and as proceeding, not from the hard law of necessity from which there is no appeal; but from the injustice and hardheartedness of the higher classes of society, against which they would wish to appeal to the right of the strongest. The language which they generally make use of upon these occasions, is, "See what stuff *they* want to make us eat, I wonder how *they* would like it *themselves*. I should like to see some of *them* do a day's work upon it." The words *they* and *them* generally refer to the Parliament, the Lord Mayor, the Justices, the Parish, and in general to all the higher classes of society. Both the irritation of mind and the helplessness in expedients, during the pressure of want, arise in this instance from the wretched system of governing too much. When the poor were once taught, by the abolition of the poor laws, and a proper knowledge of their real situation, to depend more upon themselves, we might rest secure, that they would be fruitful enough in resources, and that the evils which were absolutely irremediable, they would bear with the fortitude of men, and the resignation of Christians.

After the publick notice which I have proposed had been given, and the system of poor laws had ceased with regard to the rising generation, if any man chose to marry, without a prospect of being able to support a family, he should have the most perfect liberty so to do. Though to marry, in this case, is in my opinion clearly an immoral act, yet it is not one, which society can justly take upon itself to prevent or punish; because the punishment provided for it by the laws of nature, falls directly and most severely upon the individual who commits the act, and, through him, only more remotely and feebly on the society. When nature will govern and punish for us, it is a very miserable ambition, to wish to snatch the rod from her hands, and draw upon ourselves the odium of executioner.

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executioner. To the punishment, therefore, of nature he should be left, the punishment of severe want. He has erred in the face of a most clear and precise warning, and can have no just reason to complain of any person but himself, when he feels the consequences of his error. All parish assistance should be most rigidly denied him: and if the hand of private charity be stretched forth in his relief, the interests of humanity imperiously require that it should be administered very sparingly. He should be taught to know that the laws of nature, which are the laws of God, had doomed him and his family to starve for disobeying their repeated admonitions; that he had no claim of right on society for the smallest portion of food, beyond that which his labour would fairly purchase; and that, if he and his family were saved from suffering the utmost extremities of hunger, he would owe it to the pity of some kind benefactor, to whom, therefore, he ought to be bound by the strongest ties of gratitude.

If this system were pursued, we need be under no apprehensions whatever, that the number of persons in extreme want would be beyond the power and the will of the benevolent to supply. The sphere for the exercise of private charity would, I am confident, be less than it is present; and the only difficulty would be, to restrain the hand of benevolence from assisting those in distress in so liberal a manner as to encourage indolence and want of foresight in others.

With regard to illegitimate children, after the proper notice had been given, they should on no account whatever be allowed to have any claim to parish assistance. If the parents desert their child, they ought to be made answerable for the crime. The infant is, comparatively speaking, of no value to the society, as others will immediately supply its place. Its principal value is on account of its being the object of one of the most delightful passions in human nature—parental affection. But if this value be disregarded, by those who are alone in a capacity to feel it, the society cannot be called upon to put itself in their place; and has no further business

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in its protection, than in the case of its murder or intentional ill-treatment to follow the general rules in punishing such crimes; which rules, for the interests of morality, it is bound to pursue, whether the object, in the particular instance, be of value to the state or not.

At present the child is taken under the protection of the parish^a, and generally dies, at least in London, within the first year. The loss to the society, if it be one, is the same; but the crime is diluted by the number of people concerned, and the death passes as a visitation of Providence, instead of being considered as the necessary consequence of the conduct of its parents, for which they ought to be held responsible to God and to society.

The desertion of both parents, however, is not so common as the desertion of one. When a servant or labouring man has an illegitimate child, his running away is perfectly a matter of course; and it is by no means uncommon for a man with a wife and large family to withdraw into a distant county, and leave them to the parish; indeed, I once heard a hard-working good sort of man propose to do this, as the best mode of providing for a wife and six children^b. If the simple fact of these frequent desertions were related in some countries, a strange inference would be drawn against the English character; but the wonder would cease when our publick institutions were explained.

By the laws of nature, a child is confided directly and exclusively to the protection of its parents. By the laws of nature, the mother of a child is confided almost as strongly and exclusively to the man who is the father of it. If these ties were suffered to remain in the

^a I fully agree with Sir F. M. Eden, in thinking that the constant publick support which deserted children receive, is the cause of their very great numbers in the two most opulent countries of Europe, France and England. *State of the Poor*, vol. i. p. 339.

^b “That many of the poorer classes of the community avail themselves of the liberality of the law, and leave their wives and children on the parish, the reader will find abundant proof in the subsequent part of this work.” Sir F. M. Eden on the *State of the Poor*, vol. i. p. 339.

state

state in which nature has left them, and the man were convinced, that the woman and the child depended solely upon him for support, I scarcely believe that there are ten men breathing so atrocious as to desert them. But our laws, in opposition to the laws of nature, say, that if the parents forsake their child, other persons will undertake to support it; or, if the man forsake the woman, she shall still meet with protection elsewhere; that is, we take all possible pains to weaken and render null the ties of nature, and then say, that men are unnatural. But the fact is, that the society itself, in its body politick, is the unnatural character, for framing laws that thus counteract the laws of nature, and give premiums to the violation of the best and most honourable feelings of the human heart.

It is a common thing, in most parishes, when the father of an illegitimate child can be seized, to endeavour to frighten him into marriage by the terrors of a jail; but such a proceeding cannot surely be too strongly reprobated. In the first place, it is a most shallow policy in the parish officers; for, if they succeed, the effect, upon the present system, will generally be, the having three or four children to provide for, instead of one. And, in the next place, it is difficult to conceive a more gross and scandalous profanation of a religious ceremony. Those who believe that the character of the woman is saved by such a forced engagement, or that the moral worth of the man is enhanced by affirming a lie before God, have, I confess, very different ideas of delicacy and morality, from those which I have been taught to consider as just. If a man deceive a woman into a connexion with him under a promise of marriage, he has undoubtedly been guilty of a most atrocious act; and there are few crimes which merit a more severe punishment: but the last that I should choose is that which will oblige him to affirm another falsehood, which will probably render the woman that he is to be joined to miserable, and will burden the society with a family of paupers.

The obligation on every man to support his children, whether
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legitimate or illegitimate, is so clear and strong, that it would be just to arm society with any power to enforce it, which would be likely to answer the purpose. But I am inclined to believe, that no exercise of the civil power, however rigorous, would be half so effectual, as a knowledge generally circulated, that children were in future to depend solely for support upon their parents, and would perhaps starve if they were deserted.

It may appear to be hard, that a mother and her children, who had been guilty of no particular crime themselves, should suffer for the ill-conduct of the father; but this is one of the invariable laws of nature; and knowing this, we should think twice upon the subject, and be very sure of the ground on which we go, before we presume *systematically* to counteract it.

I have often heard the goodness of the Deity impeached on account of that part of the decalogue, in which he declares, that he will visit the sins of the father upon the children; but the objection has not perhaps been sufficiently considered. Without a most complete and fundamental change in the whole constitution of human nature; without making man an angel, or at least something totally different from what he is at present; it seems absolutely necessary that such a law should prevail. Would it not require a perpetual miracle, which is, perhaps, a contradiction in terms, to prevent children from being affected in their moral and civil condition by the conduct of their parents? What man is there that has been brought up by his parents, who is not, at the present moment, enjoying something from their virtues, or suffering something from their vices; who, in his moral character, has not been elevated, in some degree, by their prudence, their justice, their benevolence, their temperance, or depressed by the contraries; who, in his civil condition, has not been raised by their reputation, their foresight, their industry, their good fortune; or lowered by their want of character, their imprudence, their indolence, and their adversity? And how much does a knowledge of this transmission of blessings contribute

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to excite and invigorate virtuous exertion? Proceeding upon this certainty, how ardent and incessant are the efforts of parents to give their children a good education, and to provide for their future situation in the world. If a man could neglect or desert his wife and children, without their suffering any injury, how many individuals there are, who, not being very fond of their wives, or being tired of the shackles of matrimony, would withdraw from household cares and difficulties, and resume their liberty and independence as single men. But the consideration that children may suffer for the faults of their parents has a strong hold even upon vice, and many who are in such a state of mind, as to disregard the consequences of their habitual course of life, as far as relates to themselves, are yet greatly anxious that their children should not suffer from their vices and follies. In the moral government of the world, it seems evidently necessary, that the sins of the fathers should be visited upon the children; and if in our overweening vanity we imagine that we can govern a private society better by endeavouring *systematically* to counteract this law, I am inclined to believe that we shall find ourselves very greatly mistaken.

If the plan, which I have proposed, were adopted, the poor's rates in a few years would begin very rapidly to decrease, and in no great length of time would be completely extinguished; and yet, as far as it appears to me at present, no individual would be either deceived or injured, and consequently no person could have a just right to complain.

The abolition of the poor laws, however, is not of itself sufficient; and the obvious answer to those who lay too much stress upon this system, is, to desire them to look at the state of the poor in some other countries, where such laws do not prevail, and to compare it with their condition in England. But this comparison, it must be acknowledged, is in many respects unfair; and would by no means decide the question of the utility, or inutility, of such a system. England possesses very great natural and political advantages, in
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which, perhaps, the countries that we should, in this case, compare with her, would be found to be palpably deficient. The nature of her soil and climate is such, that those almost universal failures in the crops of grain, which are known in some countries, never occur in England. Her insular situation and extended commerce are peculiarly favourable for importation. Her numerous manufactures employ all the hands that are not engaged in agriculture, and afford the means of a regular distribution of the annual produce of the land and labour to the whole of her inhabitants. But above all, throughout a very large class of the people, a decided taste for the conveniences and comforts of life, a strong desire of bettering their condition, that master-spring of publick prosperity, and, in consequence, a most laudable spirit of industry and foresight, are observed to prevail. These dispositions, so contrary to the hopeless indolence remarked in despotick countries, are probably generated, in great measure, by the constitution of the English government, and the excellence of its laws, which secure to every individual the produce of his industry. When, therefore, on a comparison with other countries, England appears to have the advantage in the state of her poor, the superiority is entirely to be attributed to these favourable circumstances, and not to the poor laws. A woman with one bad feature may greatly excel in beauty some other who may have this individual feature tolerably good; but it would be rather strange, to assert, in consequence, that the superior beauty of the former was occasioned by this particular deformity. The poor laws have constantly tended, in the most powerful manner, to counteract the natural and acquired advantages of this country. Fortunately, these advantages have been so considerable, that, though greatly weakened, they could not be entirely overcome; and to these advantages, and these alone, it is owing, that England has been able to bear up so long against this pernicious system. I am so strongly of this opinion, that I do not think that any other country in the world, except
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perhaps Holland before the revolution, could have acted upon it so completely, for the same period of time, without utter ruin.

It has been proposed by some, to establish poor laws in Ireland; but, from the wretched and degraded state of the common people, and the total want of that decent pride, which in England prevents so many from having recourse to parish assistance, there is little reason to doubt, that, on the establishment of such laws, the whole of the landed property would very soon be absorbed, or the system be given up in despair.

In Sweden, from the dearths which are not unfrequent, owing to the general failure of crops in an unpropitious climate, and the impossibility of great importations in a poor country, an attempt to establish a system of parochial relief such as that in England, if it were not speedily abandoned from the physical impossibility of executing it, would level the property of the kingdom from one end to the other, and convulse the social system in such a manner, as absolutely to prevent it from recovering its former state on the return of plenty.

Even in France, with all her advantages of situation and climate, the tendency to population is so great, and the want of foresight among the lower classes of the people so conspicuous, that if poor laws were established, the landed property would soon sink under the burden, and the wretchedness of the people at the same time be increased. On these considerations the committee *de Mendicité*, at the beginning of the revolution, very properly and judiciously rejected the establishment of such a system which had been proposed.

The exception of Holland, if it were an exception, would arise from very particular circumstances—her extensive foreign trade, and her numerous colonial emigrations, compared with the smallness of her territory; and the extreme unhealthiness of a great part of the country, which occasions a much greater average mortality than is common in other states. These, I conceive, were the unobserved

causes which principally contributed to render Holland so famous for the management of her poor, and able to employ and support all who applied for relief.

No part of Germany is sufficiently rich to support an extensive system of parochial relief; but I am inclined to think, that, from the absence of it, the lower classes of the people in some parts of Germany, are in a better situation than those of the same class in England. In Switzerland, for the same reason, their condition, before the late troubles, was perhaps universally superior. And in a journey through the duchies of Holstein and Sleswick belonging to Denmark, the houses of the lower classes of people appeared to me to be neater and better, and, in general, there were fewer indications of poverty and wretchedness among them, than among the same ranks in this country.

Even in Norway, notwithstanding the disadvantage of a severe and uncertain climate, from the little that I saw in a few weeks residence in the country, and the information that I could collect from others, I am inclined to think, that the poor were, on the average, better off than in England. Their houses and clothing were superior, and, though they had no white bread, they had much more meat, fish, and milk, than our labourers; and I particularly remarked, that the farmers' boys were much stouter and healthier looking lads than those of the same description in England. This degree of happiness, superior to what could be expected from the soil and climate, arises almost exclusively from the degree in which the preventive check to population operates; and the establishment of a system of poor laws which would destroy this check, would at once sink the lower classes of the people into a state of the most miserable poverty and wretchedness; would diminish their industry, and consequently the produce of the land and labour of the country; would weaken the resources of ingenuity in times of scarcity; and ultimately involve the country in all the horrors of continual famines.

If, as in Ireland, and in Spain, and many of the southern countries, the people be in so degraded a state, as to propagate their species like brutes, totally regardless of consequences, it matters little, whether they have poor laws or not. Misery in all its various forms must be the predominant check to their increase. Poor laws, indeed, will always tend to aggravate the evil, by diminishing the general resources of the country, and, in such a state of things, could exist only for a very short time; but with, or without them, no stretch of human ingenuity and exertion could rescue the people from the most extreme poverty and wretchedness.

CHAP.

C H A P. VIII.

Of the modes of correcting the prevailing opinions on the subject of Population.

IT is not enough to abolish all the positive institutions which encourage population; but we must endeavour, at the same time, to correct the prevailing opinions, which have the same, or perhaps even a more powerful, effect. This must necessarily be a work of time; and can only be done, by circulating juster notions on these subjects, in writings and conversation; and by endeavouring to impress as strongly as possible on the publick mind, that it is not the duty of man simply to propagate his species, but to propagate virtue and happiness; and that, if he has not a tolerably fair prospect of doing this, he is by no means called upon to leave descendants.

The merits of the childless, and of those who have brought up large families, should be compared without prejudice, and their different influence on the general happiness of society justly appreciated.

The matron who has reared a family of ten or twelve children, and whose sons, perhaps, may be fighting the battles of their country, is apt to think that society owes her much; and this imaginary debt, society is, in general, fully inclined to acknowledge. But if the subject be fairly considered, and the respected matron weighed in the scales of justice against the neglected old maid, it is possible that the matron might kick the beam. She will appear rather in the character of a monopolist, than of a great benefactor to the state. If she had not married and had

had so many children, other members of the society might have enjoyed this satisfaction; and there is no particular reason for supposing that her sons would fight better for their country than the sons of other women. She has therefore rather subtracted from, than added to, the happiness of the other parts of society. The old maid, on the contrary, has exalted others by depressing herself. Her self-denial has made room for another marriage, without any additional distress; and she has not, like the generality of men, in avoiding one error, fallen into its opposite. She has really and truly contributed more to the happiness of the rest of the society arising from the pleasures of marriage, than if she had entered in this union herself, and had besides portioned twenty maidens with a hundred pounds each; whose particular happiness would have been balanced, either by an increase in the general difficulties of rearing children and getting employment, or by the necessity of celibacy in twenty other maidens somewhere else. Like the truly benevolent man in an irremediable scarcity, she has diminished her own consumption, instead of raising up a few particular people, by pressing down the rest. On a fair comparison, therefore, she seems to have a better founded claim to the gratitude of society than the matron. Whether we could always completely sympathize with the motives of her conduct, has not much to do with the question. The particular motive which influenced the matron to marry, was certainly not the good of her country. To refuse a proper tribute of respect to the old maid, because she was not directly influenced in her conduct by the desire of conferring on society a certain benefit, which, though it must undoubtedly exist, must necessarily be so diffused as to be invisible to her, is in the highest degree impolitic and unjust. It is expecting a strain of virtue beyond humanity. If we never reward any persons with our approbation, but those who are exclusively influenced by motives of general benevolence, this powerful encouragement to good actions will not be very often called into exercise.

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There are very few women who might not have married in some way or other. The old maid, who has either never formed an attachment, or has been disappointed in the object of it, has, under the circumstances in which she has been placed, conducted herself with the most perfect propriety; and has acted a much more virtuous and honourable part in society, than those women who marry without a proper degree of love, or at least of esteem, for their husbands; a species of immorality which is not reprobated as it deserves.

If, in comparisons of this kind, we should be compelled to acknowledge that, in considering the general tendency of population to increase beyond the means of subsistence, the conduct of the old maid had contributed more to the happiness of the society than that of the matron; it will surely appear, not only unjust, but strikingly impolitic, not to proportion our tribute of honour and estimation more fairly according to their respective merits. Though we should not go so far as to reward single women with particular distinctions; yet the plainest principles of equity and policy require, that the respect which they might claim from their personal character, should, in no way whatever, be impeded by their particular situation; and that, with regard to rank, precedence, and the ceremonial attentions of society, they should be completely on a level with married women.

It is still however true, that the life of a married person with a family, is of more consequence to society than that of a single person; because, when there is a family of children already born, it is of the utmost importance, that they should be well taken care of, and well educated; and of this there is very seldom so fair a probability when they have lost their parents. Our object should be merely to correct the prevailing opinions with regard to the duty of marriage; and, without positively discouraging it, to prevent any persons from being attracted, or driven into this state by the respect and honour which await the married dame, and the neglect and inconveniences attendant on the single woman.

It is perfectly absurd as well as unjust, that a giddy girl of sixteen should,

should, because she is married, be considered by the forms of society as the protector of women of thirty, should come first into the room, should be assigned the highest place at table, and be the prominent figure to whom the attentions of the company are more particularly addressed. Those who believe that these distinctions, added to the very long confinement of single women to the parental roof, and their being compelled, on all occasions, to occupy the back ground of the picture, have not an influence in impelling many young women into the married state against their natural inclinations, and without a proper degree of regard for their intended husbands, do not, as I conceive, reason with much knowledge of human nature. And till these customs are changed, as far as circumstances will admit, and the respect and liberty which women enjoy, are made to depend more upon personal character and propriety of conduct, than upon their situation as married or single; it must be acknowledged, that among the higher ranks of life we encourage marriage by considerable premiums.

It is not, however, among the higher ranks of society, that we have most reason to apprehend the too great frequency of marriage. Though the circulation of juster notions on this subject might, even in this part of the community, do much good, and prevent many unhappy marriages; yet, whether we make particular exertions for this purpose, or not, we may rest assured, that the degree of proper pride, and spirit of independence, almost invariably connected with education and a certain rank in life, will secure the operation of the preventive check to a considerable extent. All that the society can reasonably require of its members is, that they should not have families without being able to support them. This may be fairly enjoined as a solemn duty. Every restraint beyond this, though in many points of view highly desirable, must be considered as a matter of choice and taste; but, from what we already know of the habits which prevail among the higher ranks of life, we have
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reason to think, that little more is wanted to attain the object required than to award a greater degree of respect and of personal liberty to single women, and to remove the distinctions in favour of married women, so as to place them exactly upon a level; a change which, independently of any particular purpose in view, the plainest principles of equity seem to demand.

If, among the higher classes of society, the object of securing the operation of the preventive check to population to a sufficient degree, appear to be attainable without much difficulty; the obvious mode of proceeding with the lower classes of society, where the point is of the principal importance, is, to endeavour to infuse into them a portion of that knowledge and foresight, which so much facilitates the attainment of this object in the educated part of the community.

The fairest chance of accomplishing this end, would probably be by the establishment of a system of parochial education upon a plan similar to that proposed by Dr. Smith^a. In addition to the usual subjects of instruction, and those which he has mentioned, I should be disposed to lay considerable stress on the frequent explanation of the real state of the lower classes of society, as affected by the principle of population, and their consequent dependence on themselves, for the chief part of their happiness, or misery. If, in the course of time, a few of the simplest principles of political economy could be added to these instructions, the benefit to society would be almost incalculable^b. In some conversations with labouring men, during
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^a Wealth of Nations, vol. iii. b. v. c. i. p. 187.

^b Dr. Smith proposes that the elementary parts of geometry and mechanics should be taught in these parish schools; and I cannot help thinking that the common principles by which markets are regulated might be made sufficiently clear, to be of considerable use. It is certainly a subject, that, as it interests the lower classes of people nearly, would be likely to attract their attention. At the same time, it must be confessed, that it is impossible to be in any degree sanguine on this point, recollecting how very ignorant in general the educated part of the community is of these principles. If, however, political economy cannot be taught to the common people, I really think that it ought to form a branch of a university education. Scotland has set us an example in
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the late scarcities, I confess that I was to the last degree disheartened, at observing their inveterate prejudices on the subject of grain; and I felt very strongly the almost absolute incompatibility of a government really free, with such a degree of ignorance. The delusions are of such a nature, that, if acted upon, they must, at all events, be repressed by force; and it is extremely difficult to give such a power to the government as will be sufficient at all times for this purpose, without the risk of its being employed improperly, and endangering the liberty of the subject. And this reflection cannot but be disheartening to every friend to freedom.

We have lavished immense sums on the poor, which we have every reason to think have constantly tended to aggravate their misery. But in their education, and in the circulation of those important political truths that most nearly concern them, which are perhaps the only means in our power of really raising their condition, and of making them happier men and more peaceable subjects, we have been miserably deficient. It is surely a great national disgrace, that the education of the lower classes of people in England should be left merely to a few Sunday schools, supported by a subscription from individuals, who of course can give to the course of instruction in them, any kind of bias which they please. And even the improve-

this respect, which we ought not to be so slow to imitate. It is of the very utmost importance, that the gentlemen of the country, and particularly the clergy, should not, from ignorance, aggravate the evils of scarcity every time that it unfortunately occurs. During the late dearths, half of the gentlemen and clergymen in the kingdom richly deserved to have been prosecuted for sedition. After inflaming the minds of the common people against the farmers and corn-dealers, by the manner in which they talked of them, or preached about them, it was but a feeble antidote to the poison which they had infused, coldly to observe, that however the poor might be oppressed or cheated, it was their duty to keep the peace. It was little better than Anthony's repeated declaration, that the conspirators were all honourable men; which did not save either their houses or their persons from the attacks of the mob. Political economy is perhaps the only science of which it may be said, that the ignorance of it is not merely a deprivation of good, but produces great positive evil.

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ment of Sunday schools, for objectionable as they are in some points of view, and imperfect in all, I cannot but consider them as an improvement, is of very late date.

The arguments which have been urged against instructing the people, appear to me to be not only illiberal, but to the last degree feeble; and they ought, on the contrary, to be extremely forcible, and to be supported by the most obvious and striking necessity, to warrant us in withholding the means of raising the condition of the lower classes of people, when they are in our power. Those who will not listen to any answer to these arguments drawn from theory, cannot, I think, refuse the testimony of experience; and I would ask, whether the advantage of superior instruction which the lower classes of people in Scotland are known to possess, has appeared to have any tendency towards creating a spirit of tumult and discontent amongst them. And yet from the natural inferiority of its soil and climate, the pressure of want is more constant, and the dearths are not only more frequent, but more dreadful than in England. In the case of Scotland, the knowledge circulated among the common people, though not sufficient essentially to better their condition by increasing, in an adequate degree, their habits of prudence and foresight; has yet the effect of making them bear with patience the evils which they suffer, from being aware of the folly and inefficacy of turbulence. The quiet and peaceable habits of the instructed Scotch peasant, compared with the turbulent disposition of the ignorant Irishman, ought not to be without effect upon every impartial reasoner.

The principal argument that I have heard advanced against a system of national education in England, is, that the common people would be put in a capacity to read such works as those of Paine, and that the consequences would probably be fatal to government. But, on this subject, I agree most cordially with Dr. Smith^a in thinking,

^a Wealth of Nations, vol. iii. b. v. c. i. p. 192.

that an instructed and well-informed people, would be much less likely to be led away by inflammatory writings; and would be much better able to detect the false declamation of interested and ambitious demagogues, than an ignorant people. One or two readers in a parish are sufficient to circulate any quantity of sedition; and if these be gained to the democratic side, they will probably have the power of doing much more mischief, by selecting the passages best suited to their hearers, and choosing the moments when their oratory is likely to have the most effect; than if each individual in the parish had been in a capacity to read and judge of the whole work himself; and, at the same time, to read and judge of the opposing arguments, which we may suppose would also reach him.

But in addition to this, a double weight would undoubtedly be added to the observation of Dr. Smith, if these schools were made the means of instructing the people in the real nature of their situation; if they were taught, what is really true, that, without an increase of their own industry and prudence, no change of government could essentially better their condition; that though they might get rid of some particular grievance, yet that, in the great point of supporting their families, they would be but little, or perhaps not at all benefited; that a revolution would not alter in their favour the proportion of the supply of labour to the demand, or the quantity of food to the number of the consumers; and that, if the supply of labour were greater than the demand, and the demand for food greater than the supply, they might suffer the utmost severity of want, under the freest, the most perfect, and best executed government that the human imagination could conceive.

A knowledge of these truths, so obviously tends to promote peace and quietness, to weaken the effect of inflammatory writings, and to prevent all unreasonable and ill-directed opposition to the constituted authorities, that those, who would still object to the instruction of the people, may fairly be suspected of a wish to encourage their

ignorance,

ignorance, as a pretext for tyranny, and an opportunity of increasing the power and the influence of the executive government.

Besides correcting the prevailing opinions respecting marriage, and explaining the real situation of the lower classes of society, as depending almost entirely upon themselves for their happiness or misery; the parochial schools would, by early instruction and the judicious distribution of rewards, have the fairest chance of training up the rising generation in habits of sobriety, industry, independence, and prudence, and in a proper discharge of their religious duties; which would raise them from their present degraded state, and approximate them, in some degree, to the middle classes of society, whose habits, generally speaking, are certainly superior.

In most countries, among the lower classes of people, there appears to be something like a standard of wretchedness, a point below which, they will not continue to marry and propagate their species. This standard is different in different countries, and is formed by various concurring circumstances of soil, climate, government, degree of knowledge, and civilization, &c. The principal circumstances which contribute to raise it, are, liberty, security of property, the spread of knowledge, and a taste for the conveniences and the comforts of life. Those which contribute principally to lower it are despotism and ignorance.

In an attempt to better the condition of the lower classes of society, our object should be to raise this standard as high as possible, by cultivating a spirit of independence, a decent pride, and a taste for cleanliness and comfort among the poor. These habits would be best inculcated by a system of general education and, when strongly fixed, would be the most powerful means of preventing their marrying with the prospect of being obliged to forfeit such advantages; and would consequently raise them nearer to the middle classes of society.

C H A P. IX.

Of the direction of our charity.

AN important and interesting inquiry yet remains, relating to the mode, by which we could direct our private charity, so as not to interfere with the great object in view, of ameliorating the condition of the lower classes of people, by preventing the population from pressing too hard against the limits of the means of subsistence.

The emotion which prompts us to relieve our fellow-creatures in distress, is like all our other natural passions, general, and in some degree indiscriminate and blind. Our feelings of compassion may be worked up to a higher pitch by a well-wrought scene in a play, or a fictitious tale in a novel, than by almost any events in real life; and if, among ten petitioners, we were to listen only to the first impulses of our feelings, without making further inquiries, we should undoubtedly give our assistance to the best actor of the party. It is evident, therefore, that the impulse of benevolence, like the impulses of love, of anger, of ambition, of eating and drinking, or any other of our natural propensities, must be regulated by experience, and frequently brought to the test of utility, or it will defeat its intended purpose.

The apparent object of the passion between the sexes is, the continuation of the species, and the formation of such an intimate union of views and interests between two persons, as will best promote their happiness, and at the same time secure the proper degree of attention to the helplessness of infancy and the education of the rising generation; but if every man were to obey at all times the impulses

impulses of nature in the gratification of this passion, without regard to consequences, the principal part of the important objects would not be attained, and even the continuation of the species might be defeated by a promiscuous intercourse.

The apparent end of the impulse of benevolence, is to draw the whole human race together, but more particularly that part of it which is of our own nation and kindred, in the bonds of brotherly love; and by giving men an interest in the happiness and misery of their fellow-creatures, to prompt them, as they have power, to mitigate some of the partial evils arising from general laws, and thus to increase the sum of human happiness; but if our benevolence be indiscriminate, and the degree of apparent distress be made the sole measure of our liberality, it is evident, that it will be exercised almost exclusively upon common beggars, while modest unobtrusive merit, struggling with unavoidable difficulties, yet still maintaining some slight appearances of decency and cleanliness, will be totally neglected. We shall raise the worthless above the worthy; we shall encourage indolence and check industry; and, in the most marked manner, subtract from the sum of human happiness.

Our experience has, indeed, informed us, that the impulse of benevolence is not so strong as the passion between the sexes, and that, generally speaking, there is much less danger to be apprehended from the indulgence of the former than of the latter; but, independently of this experience, and of the moral codes founded upon it, a youth of eighteen would be as completely justified in indulging the sexual passion with every object capable of exciting it, as in following indiscriminately every impulse of his benevolence. They are both natural passions which are excited by their appropriate objects, and to the gratification of which, we are prompted by the pleasurable sensations which accompany them. As animals, or till we know their consequences, our only business is to follow these dictates of nature; but, as reasonable beings, we are under the strongest obligations to attend to their consequences; and if they be evil to our-

elves or others, we may justly consider it as an indication that such a mode of indulging these passions is not suited to our state, or conformable to the will of God. As moral agents, therefore, it is clearly our duty to restrain their indulgence in these particular directions; and by thus carefully examining the consequences of our natural passions, and frequently bringing them to the test of utility, gradually to acquire a habit of gratifying them, only in that way, which, being unattended with evil, will clearly add to the sum of human happiness, and fulfil the apparent purpose of the Creator.

Though utility, therefore, can never be the immediate excitement to the gratification of any passion, it is the test by which alone we can know, whether it ought, or ought not, to be indulged; and is, therefore, the surest foundation of all morality which can be collected from the light of nature. All the moral codes which have inculcated the subjection of the passions to reason, have been, as I conceive, really built upon this foundation, whether the promulgators of them were aware of it or not.

I remind the reader of these truths, in order to apply them to the habitual direction of our charity; and, if we keep the criterion of utility constantly in view, we may find ample room for the exercise of our benevolence, without interfering with the great purpose which we have to accomplish.

One of the most valuable parts of charity, is its effect upon the giver. It is more blessed to give than to receive. Supposing it to be allowed, that the exercise of our benevolence in acts of charity is not, upon the whole, really beneficial to the poor, yet we could never sanction any endeavour to extinguish an impulse, the proper gratification of which has so evident a tendency to purify and exalt the human mind. But it is particularly satisfactory and pleasing to find, that the mode of exercising our charity, which, when brought to the test of utility, will appear to be most beneficial to the poor, is precisely that, which will have the best and most improving effect on the mind of the donor.

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The quality of charity like that of mercy,

“ is not strained;

“ It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven

“ Upon the earth beneath.”

The immense sums distributed to the poor, in this country, by the parochial laws, are improperly called charity. They want its most distinguishing attribute; and, as it might be expected, from an attempt to force that which loses its essence the moment that it ceases to be voluntary, their effect upon those from whom they are collected are as prejudicial, as on those to whom they are distributed. On the side of the receivers of this mis-called charity, instead of real relief, we find accumulated distress and more extended poverty; on the side of the givers, instead of pleasurable sensations, unceasing discontent and irritation.

In the great charitable institutions supported by voluntary contributions, many of which are certainly of a prejudicial tendency, the subscriptions, I am inclined to fear, are sometimes given grudgingly, and rather because they are expected by the world from certain stations, and certain fortunes, than because they are prompted by motives of genuine benevolence; and as the greater part of the subscribers do not interest themselves in the management of the funds, or in the fate of the particular objects relieved, it is not to be expected that this kind of charity should have any strikingly beneficial influence on the minds of the majority who exercise it.

Even in the relief of common beggars, we shall find that we are more frequently influenced by the desire of getting rid of the importunities of a disgusting object, than by the pleasure of relieving it. We wish that it had not fallen in our way, rather than rejoice in the opportunity given us of assisting a fellow-creature. We feel a painful emotion at the sight of so much apparent misery; but the pittance we give does not relieve it. We know that it is totally inadequate to produce any essential effect. We know, besides, that we shall be

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addressed in the same manner at the corner of the next street; and we know that we are liable to the grossest impostures. We hurry, therefore, sometimes by them, and shut our ears to their importunate demands. We give no more than we can help giving without doing actual violence to our feelings. Our charity is in some degree forced; and, like forced charity, it leaves no satisfactory impression on the mind, and cannot, therefore, have any very beneficial and improving effect on the heart and affections.

But it is far otherwise with that voluntary and active charity, which makes itself acquainted with the objects which it relieves; which seems to feel, and to be proud of, the bond which unites the rich with the poor; which enters into their houses; informs itself not only of their wants, but of their habits and dispositions; checks the hopes of clamorous and obtrusive poverty, with no other recommendation but rags; and encourages with adequate relief the silent and retiring sufferer, labouring under unmerited difficulties. This mode of exercising our charity presents a very different picture from that of any other; and its contrast with the common mode of parish relief, cannot be better described than in the words of Mr. Townsend, in the conclusion of his admirable dissertation on the Poor Laws: "Nothing in nature can be more disgusting than a parish pay-table, attendant upon which, in the same objects of misery, are too often found combined, snuff, gin, rags, vermin, insolence, and abusive language; nor in nature, can any thing be more beautiful than the mild complacency of benevolence hastening to the humble cottage to relieve the wants of industry and virtue, to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, and to soothe the sorrows of the widow with her tender orphans; nothing can be more pleasing, unless it be their sparkling eyes, their bursting tears, and their uplifted hands, the artless expressions of unfeigned gratitude for unexpected favours. Such scenes will frequently occur whenever men shall have power to dispose of their own property."

I conceive it to be almost impossible, that any person could be
much

much engaged in such scenes without daily making advances in virtue. No exercise of our affections can have a more evident tendency to purify and exalt the human mind. It is almost exclusively this species of charity that blesteth him that gives; and, in a general view, it is almost exclusively this species of charity which blesteth him that takes; at least it may be asserted, that there is no other mode of exercising our charity, in which large sums can be distributed without a greater chance of producing evil than good.

The discretionary power of giving or withholding relief, which is, to a certain extent, vested in parish officers and justices, is of a very different nature, and will have a very different effect, from the discrimination which may be exercised by voluntary charity. Every man in this country, under certain circumstances, is entitled by law to parish assistance; and unless his disqualification be clearly proved, has a right to complain if it be withheld. The inquiries necessary to settle this point, and also the extent of the relief to be granted, too often produce evasion and lying on the part of the petitioner, and afford an opening to partiality and oppression in the overseer. If the proposed relief be given, it is of course received with unthankfulness; and if it be denied, the party generally thinks himself severely aggrieved, and feels resentment and indignation at his treatment.

In the distribution of voluntary charity, nothing of this kind can take place. The person who receives it, is made the proper subject of the pleasurable sensation of gratitude; and those who do not receive it, cannot possibly conceive themselves, in the slightest degree, injured. Every man has a right to do what he will with his own; and cannot, in justice, be called upon to render a reason why he gives in the one case, and abstains from it in the other. This kind of despotic power, essential to voluntary charity, gives the greatest facility to the selection of worthy objects of relief, without being accompanied by any ill consequences; and has further a most
beneficial

beneficial effect from the degree of uncertainty which must necessarily be attached to it. It is, in the highest degree, important to the general happiness of the poor, that no man should look to charity, as a fund on which he may confidently depend. He should be taught that his own exertions, his own industry and foresight, were his only just ground of dependence; that if these failed, assistance in his distresses could only be the subject of rational hope; and that even the foundation of this hope must be in his own good conduct, and the consciousness that he had not involved himself in these difficulties by his indolence or imprudence.

That, in the distribution of our charity, we are under a strong moral obligation to inculcate this lesson on the poor, by a proper discrimination, is a truth, of which I cannot feel a doubt. If all could be completely relieved, and poverty banished from the country, even at the expence of three-fourths of the fortunes of the rich, I would be the last to say a single syllable against relieving all, and making the degree of distress alone the measure of our bounty. But as experience has proved, I believe without a single exception, that poverty and misery have always increased in proportion to the quantity of indiscriminate charity; are we not bound to infer, reasoning as we usually do from the laws of nature, that it is an intimation, that such a mode of distribution is not the proper office of benevolence.

The laws of nature say, with St. Paul, "If a man will not work, neither shall he eat." They also say, that he is not rashly to trust to Providence. They appear indeed to be constant and uniform for the express purpose of telling him what he is to trust to, and that if he marry, without being able to support a family, he must expect severe want. These intimations appear from the constitution of human nature to be absolutely necessary, and to have a strikingly beneficial tendency. If in the direction either of our publick or our private charity, we say, that though a man will not work, yet he shall eat; and though he marry, without being able to support a family,
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yet his family shall be supported; it is evident that we do not merely endeavour to mitigate some of the partial evils arising from general laws, but regularly and systematically to counteract the obviously beneficial effects of these general laws themselves. And we cannot easily conceive, that the Deity should implant any passion in the human breast for such a purpose.

In the great course of human events, the best-founded expectations will sometimes be disappointed; and industry, prudence, and virtue, not only fail of their just reward, but be involved in unmerited calamities. Those who are thus suffering in spite of the best-directed endeavours to avoid it, and from causes which they could not be expected to foresee, are the genuine objects of charity. In relieving these, we exercise the appropriate office of benevolence, that of mitigating some of the partial evils arising from general laws; and in this direction of our charity, therefore, we need not apprehend any ill consequences. Such objects ought to be relieved according to our means liberally and adequately, even though the worthless were starving.

When indeed, this first claim on our benevolence was satisfied, we might then turn our attention to the idle and improvident: but the interests of human happiness most clearly require, that the relief which we afford them should be very scanty. We may perhaps take upon ourselves, with great caution, to mitigate, in some degree, the punishments which they are suffering from the laws of nature; but on no account to remove them entirely. They are deservedly at the bottom, in the scale of society; and, if we raise them from this situation, we not only palpably defeat the end of benevolence, but commit a most glaring injustice to those who are above them. They should on no account be enabled to command so much of the necessaries of life, as can be obtained by the worst-paid common labour. The brownest bread, with the coarsest and scantiest apparel, is the utmost which they should have the means of purchasing.

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It is evident that these reasonings do not apply to those cases of urgent distress arising from disastrous accidents, unconnected with habits of indolence and improvidence. If a man break a leg or an arm, we are not to stop to inquire into his moral character before we lend him our assistance; but in this case we are perfectly consistent, and the touchstone of utility completely justifies our conduct. By affording the most indiscriminate assistance in this way, we are in little danger of encouraging people to break their arms and legs. According to the touchstone of utility, the high approbation which Christ gave to the conduct of the good Samaritan, who followed the immediate impulse of his benevolence in relieving a stranger, in the urgent distress of an accident, does not, in the smallest degree, contradict the expressions of St. Paul, "If a man will not work, neither shall he eat."

We are not, however, in any case, to lose a present opportunity of doing good, from the mere supposition that we may possibly meet with a worthier object. In all doubtful cases, it may safely be laid down as our duty, to follow the natural impulse of our benevolence; but when, in fulfilling our obligation as reasonable beings, to attend to the consequences of our actions, we have, from our own experience and that of others, drawn the conclusion, that the exercise of our benevolence in one mode is prejudicial, and in another is beneficial, in its effects, we are certainly bound, as moral agents, to check our natural propensities in the one direction, and to encourage them, and acquire the habits of exercising them, in the other.

C H A P. X.

Of the errors in different plans which have been proposed, to improve the condition of the Poor.

IN the distribution of our charity, or in any efforts which we may make to better the condition of the lower classes of society, there is another point relating to the main argument of this work, to which we must be particularly attentive. We must on no account do any thing, which tends directly to encourage marriage; or to remove, in any regular and systematic manner, that inequality of circumstances, which ought always to exist between the single man and the man with a family. The writers who have best understood the principle of population, appear to me all to have fallen into very important errors on this point.

Sir James Steuart, who is fully aware of what he calls vicious procreation, and of the misery that attends a redundant population, recommends, notwithstanding, the general establishment of foundling hospitals; the taking of children, under certain circumstances, from their parents, and supporting them at the expence of the state; and particularly laments the inequality of condition between the married and single man, so ill-proportioned to their respective wants^a. He forgets, in these instances, that if, without the encouragement to multiplication, of foundling hospitals, or of publick support for the children of some married persons; and under the discouragement

^a Political Economy, vol. i. b. i. c. xiii.

of great pecuniary disadvantages on the side of the married man, population be still redundant; which is evinced by the inability of the poor to maintain all their children; it is a clear proof, that the funds destined for the maintenance of labour cannot properly support a greater population; and that, if further encouragements to multiplication be given, and discouragements removed, the result must be, an increase, somewhere or other, of that vicious procreation which he so justly reprobates.

Mr. Townsend, who, in his dissertation on the Poor Laws, has treated this subject with great skill and perspicuity, appears to me to conclude with a proposal, which violates the principles on which he had reasoned so well. He wishes to make the benefit clubs, or friendly societies, which are now voluntarily established in many parishes, compulsory and universal; and proposes, as a regulation, that an unmarried man should pay a fourth part of his wages, and a married man with four children, not more than a thirtieth part^a.

I must first remark, that the moment these subscriptions are made compulsory, they will necessarily operate exactly like a direct tax upon labour, which, as Dr. Smith justly states, will always be paid, and in a more expensive manner, by the consumer. The landed interest, therefore, would receive no relief from this plan, but would pay the same sum as at present, only in the advanced price of labour and of commodities, instead of in the parish rates. A compulsory subscription of this kind, would have almost all the ill effects of the present system of relief, and, though altered in name, would still possess the essential spirit of the poor laws.

Dean Tucker, in some remarks on a plan of the same kind, proposed by Mr. Pew, observed, that, after much talk and reflection on the subject, he had come to the conclusion, that they must be voluntary associations, and not compulsory assemblies. A voluntary subscription is like a tax upon a luxury, and does not necessarily raise the price of labour.

^a Dissertation on the Poor Laws, p. 89. 2d edit. 1787.

It should be recollected also, that in a voluntary association of a small extent, over which each individual member can exercise a superintendence, it is highly probable, that the original agreements will all be strictly fulfilled, or if they be not, every man may, at least, have the redress of withdrawing himself from the club. But in an universal compulsory subscription, which must necessarily become a national concern, there would be no security whatever for the fulfilment of the original agreements; and when the funds failed, which they certainly would do, when all the idle and dissolute were included, instead of some of the most industrious and provident, as at present, a larger subscription would probably be demanded, and no man would have the right to refuse it. The evil would thus go on increasing as the poor rates do now. If, indeed, the assistance given were always specific, and on no account to be increased, as in the present voluntary associations, this would certainly be a striking advantage; but the same advantage might be completely attained by a similar distribution of the sums collected by the parish rates. On the whole, therefore, it appears to me, that, if the friendly societies were made universal and compulsory, it would be merely a different mode of collecting parish rates; and any particular mode of distribution, might be as well adopted upon one system as upon the other.

With regard to the proposal of making single men pay a fourth part of their earnings weekly, and married men with families only a thirtieth part, it would evidently operate as a heavy fine upon bachelors, and a high bounty upon children; and is therefore directly adverse to the general spirit in which Mr. Townsend's excellent dissertation is written. Before he introduces this proposal, he lays it down as a general principle, that no system for the relief of the poor can be good, which does not regulate population by the demand for labour^a; but this proposal clearly tends to encourage population without any reference to the demand for labour, and

^a P. 84.

punishes a young man for his prudence in refraining from marriage at a time, perhaps, when this demand is so small, that the wages of labour are totally inadequate to the support of a family. I should be averse to any compulsory system whatever for the poor; but, certainly, if single men were compelled to pay a contribution for the future contingencies of the married state, they ought, in justice, to receive a benefit, proportioned to the period of their privation; and the man who had contributed a fourth of his earnings for merely one year, ought not to be put upon a level with him who has contributed this proportion for ten years.

Arthur Young, in most of his works, appears clearly to understand the principle of population, and is fully aware of the evils which must necessarily result from an increase of people beyond the demand of labour, and the means of comfortable subsistence. In his tour through France, he has particularly laboured this point, and shewn most forcibly the misery, which results, in that country, from the excess of population occasioned by the too great division of property. Such an increase, he justly calls, merely a multiplication of wretchedness.

“ Couples marry and procreate on the idea, not the reality, of a maintenance; they increase beyond the demand of towns and manufactures; and the consequence is, distress, and numbers dying of diseases arising from insufficient nourishment.”

In another place he quotes a very sensible passage from the report of the committee of mendicity, which, alluding to the evils of overpopulation, concludes thus, “ Il faudroit enfin necessairement que le prix de travail baissat par la plus grand concurrence de travailleurs, d’ou resulteroit un indigence complete pour ceux qui ne trouveroient pas de travail, et une subsistence incomplete pour ceux memes aux quels il ne seroit pas refuse.” And in remarking upon this passage, he observes, “ France itself affords an irrefragable proof of the truth of these sentiments; for, I am clearly of opinion,

^a Travels in France, vol. i. c. xii. p. 488.

“ from

“ from the observations I made in every province of the kingdom, that her population is so much beyond the proportion of her industry and labour, that she would be much more powerful and infinitely more flourishing, if she had five or six millions less of inhabitants. From her too great population, she presents, in every quarter, such spectacles of wretchedness, as are absolutely inconsistent with that degree of national felicity, which she was capable of attaining, even under the old government. A traveller, much less attentive than I was to objects of this kind, must see at every turn most unequivocal signs of distress. That these should exist, no one can wonder, who considers the price of labour and of provisions, and the misery into which a small rise in the price of wheat throws the lower classes.”

“ If you would see,” he says, “ a district with as little distress in it as is consistent with the political system of the old government of France, you must assuredly go where there are no little properties at all. You must visit the great farms in Beauce, Picardy, part of Normandy, and Artois, and there you will find no more population than what is regularly employed and regularly paid; and if in such districts, you should, contrary to this rule, meet with much distress, it is twenty to one, but that it is in a parish which has some commons, which tempt the poor to have cattle—to have property—and in consequence misery. When you are engaged in this political tour, finish it by seeing England, and I will shew you a set of peasants well clothed, well nourished, tolerably drunken from superfluity, well lodged, and at their ease; and yet, amongst them, not one in a thousand has either land or cattle.” A little further on, alluding to encouragements to marriage, he says of France; “ the predominant evil of the kingdom is the having so great a population, that she can neither employ nor feed it; why then encourage marriage?”

^a Travels in France, vol. i. c. xvii. p. 469.

^b Id. p. 471.

“ would

“ would you breed more people, because you have more already
 “ than you know what to do with? you have so great a competition
 “ for food, that your people are starving or in misery; and you
 “ would encourage the production of more to encrease that com-
 “ petition. It may almost be questioned whether the contrary
 “ policy ought not to be embraced? whether difficulties should not
 “ be laid on the marriage of those who cannot make it appear that
 “ they have the prospect of maintaining the children that shall be
 “ the fruit of it? But why encourage marriages which are sure to
 “ take place in all situations in which they ought to take place?
 “ There is no instance to be found of plenty of regular employment
 “ being first established where marriages have not followed in a
 “ proportionate degree. The policy therefore, at best, is useless,
 “ and may be pernicious.”

After having once so clearly understood the principle of population
 as to express these and many other sentiments on the subject, equally
 just and important; it is not a little surprising to find Mr. Young in
 a pamphlet, intitled, *The Question of Scarcity plainly stated, and
 Remedies considered, (published in 1800)*, observing, that “ the means
 “ which would of all others perhaps tend most surely to prevent
 “ future scarcities so oppressive to the poor as the present, would be
 “ to secure to every country labourer in the kingdom, that has three
 “ children and upwards, half an acre of land for potatoes, and
 “ grafs enough to feed one or two cows”. * * * * If each had
 “ his ample potatoe ground and a cow, the price of wheat would be
 “ of little more consequence to them, than it is to their brethren in
 “ Ireland.”

“ Every one admits the system to be good, but the question is,
 “ how to enforce it.”

I was by no means aware, that the excellence of the system had
 been so generally admitted. For myself I strongly protest against
 being included in the general term of *every one*, as I should consider

^a P. 77.

the

the adoption of this system, as the most cruel and fatal blow to the
 happiness of the lower classes of people in this country, that they
 had ever received.

Mr. Young, however, goes on to say, that, “ The magnitude of
 “ the object should make us disregard any difficulties, but such as
 “ are insuperable: none such would probably occur if something
 “ like the following means were resorted to:

“ I. Where there are common pastures, to give to a labouring
 “ man having children, a right to demand an allotment pro-
 “ portioned to the family, to be set out by the parish officers, &c.
 “ * * * and a cow bought. Such labourer to have both for life,
 “ paying 40s. a year till the price of the cow, &c. was reimbursed:
 “ at his death to go to the labourer having the most numerous
 “ family, for life, paying shillings a week to the widow of his
 “ predecessor.

“ II. Labourers thus demanding allotments by reason of their
 “ families to have land assigned, and cows bought, till the proportion
 “ so allotted amounts to one of the extent of the common.

“ III. In parishes where there are no commons, and the quality
 “ of the land adequate, every cottager having children, to
 “ whose cottage there is not within a given time land sufficient for
 “ a cow, and half an acre of potatoes, assigned at a fair average
 “ rent, subject to appeal to the sessions, to have a right to demand
 “ shillings per week of the parish for every child, till such
 “ land be assigned; leaving to landlords and tenants the means of
 “ doing it. Cows to be found by the parish, under an annual
 “ reimbursement.”

“ The great object is, by means of milk and potatoes, to take the
 “ mass of the country poor from the consumption of wheat, and to
 “ give them substitutes equally wholesome and nourishing, and as
 “ independent of scarcities, natural and artificial, as the providence
 “ of the Almighty will admit.”

^a P. 78.

^b P. 79.

Would

Would not this plan operate, in the most direct manner, as an encouragement to marriage and bounty on children, which Mr. Young has with so much justice reprobated in his travels in France? and does he seriously think that it would be an eligible thing, to feed the mass of the people in this country on milk and potatoes, and make them as independent of the price of corn, and of the demand for labour, as their brethren in Ireland?

The specifick cause of the poverty and misery of the lower classes of people in France and Ireland, is, that, from the extreme subdivision of property in the one country, and the facility of obtaining a potatoe ground in the other, a population is brought into existence, which is not demanded by the quantity of capital and employment in the country; and the consequence of which must, therefore, necessarily be, as is very justly expressed in the report of the committee of mendicity before mentioned, to lower in general the price of labour by too great competition; from which must result complete indigence to those who cannot find employment, and an incomplete subsistence even to those who can.

The obvious tendency of Mr. Young's plan, is, by encouraging marriage and furnishing a cheap food, independent of the price of corn, and, of course, of the demand for labour, to place the lower classes of people exactly in this situation.

It may perhaps be said, that our poor laws, at present, regularly encourage marriage and children, by distributing relief in proportion to the size of families; and that this plan, which is proposed as a substitute, would merely do the same thing in a less objectionable manner. But surely, in endeavouring to get rid of the evil of the poor laws, we ought not to retain their most pernicious quality: and Mr. Young must know, as well as I do, that the principal reason why poor laws have invariably been found ineffectual in the relief of the poor, is, that they tend to encourage a population which is not regulated by the demand for labour. Mr. Young himself, indeed, expressly takes notice of this effect in England, and observes, that

that notwithstanding the unrivalled prosperity of her manufactures, "population is sometimes too active, as we see clearly by the "dangerous increase of poor's rates in country villages".

But the fact is, that Mr. Young's plan would be incomparably more powerful in encouraging a population beyond the demand for labour, than our present poor laws. A laudable repugnance to the receiving of parish relief, arising partly from a spirit of independence not yet extinct, and partly, from the disagreeable mode in which the relief is given, undoubtedly deters many from marrying with a certainty of falling on the parish; and the proportion of marriages to the whole population, which has before been noticed, clearly proves that the poor laws, though they have undoubtedly a considerable influence in this respect, do not encourage marriage so much as might be expected from theory. But the case would be very different, if, when a labourer had an early marriage in contemplation, the terrific forms of workhouses and parish officers, which might disturb his resolution, were to be exchanged for the fascinating visions of land and cows. If the love of property, as Mr. Young has repeatedly said, will make a man do much, it would be rather strange if it would not make him marry; an action to which, it appears from experience, that he is by no means disinclined.

The population which would be thus called into being, would be supported by the extended cultivation of potatoes, and would of course go on without any reference to the demand for labour. In the present state of things, notwithstanding the flourishing condition of our manufactures, and the numerous checks to our population, there is no practical problem so difficult as to find employment for the poor; but this difficulty would evidently be aggravated a hundred fold, under the circumstances here supposed.

In Ireland, or in any other country, where the common food is

² Travels in France, vol. i. c. xvii. p. 470.

potatoes, and every man who wishes to marry may obtain a piece of ground, sufficient, when planted with this root, to support a family, prizes may be given till the treasury is exhausted, for essays on the best means of employing the poor; but till some stop to the progress of population, naturally arising from this state of things, take place, the object in view is really a physical impossibility^a.

Mr. Young has intimated, that if the people were fed upon milk and potatoes, they would be more independent of scarcities than at present; but why this should be the case I really cannot comprehend. Undoubtedly, people who live upon potatoes will not be much affected by a scarcity of wheat; but is there any contradiction in the supposition of a failure in the crops of potatoes? I believe it is generally understood, that they are more liable to suffer damage during the winter than grain. From the much greater quantity of food, yielded by a given piece of land, when planted with potatoes, than under any other kind of cultivation, it would naturally happen, that, for some time after the introduction of this root, as the general food of the lower classes of people, a greater quantity would be grown than was demanded, and they would live in plenty. Mr. Young, in his travels through France, observes, that, "In districts which contain immense quantities of waste land of a certain degree of fertility, as in the roots of the Pyrenees, belonging to communities ready to sell them, economy and industry, animated with the views of settling and marrying, flourish greatly; in such neighbourhoods something like an American increase takes place, and, if the land be cheap, little distress is found. But as procreation goes on rapidly under such circumstances, the least check to subsistence is attended with

^a Dr. Crumpe's prize essay on the best means of finding employment for the people, is an excellent treatise, and contains much valuable information; but, till the capital of the country is better proportioned to its population, it is perfectly chimerical to expect success in any project of the kind. I am also strongly disposed to believe that the indolent and turbulent habits of the lower Irish can never be corrected, while the potatoe system enables them to increase so much beyond the regular demand for labour.

" great

" great misery; as wastes becoming dearer, or the best portions being sold, or difficulties arising in the acquisition; all which circumstances I met with in those mountains. The moment that any impediment happens the distress of such people will be proportioned to the activity and vigour which had animated population^b." This description will apply exactly to what would take place in this country, on the distribution of small portions of land to the common people, and the introduction of potatoes as their general food. For a time, the change might appear beneficial, and, of course, the idea of property would make it, at first, highly acceptable to the poor; but as Mr. Young, in another place, says, "You presently arrive at the limit, beyond which, the earth, cultivate it as you please, will feed no more mouths; yet those simple manners which instigate to marriage still continue; what then is the consequence but the most dreadful misery imaginable^b?"

When the commons were all divided and difficulties began to occur in procuring potatoe grounds, the habit of early marriages which had been introduced, would occasion the most complicated distress; and when, from the increasing population, and diminishing sources of subsistence, the average growth of potatoes was not more than the average consumption, a scarcity of potatoes would be, in every respect, as probable, as a scarcity of wheat at present, and when it did arrive, it would be, beyond all comparison, more dreadful.

When the common people of a country live principally upon the dearest grain, as they do in England on wheat, they have great resources in a scarcity; and barley, oats, rice, cheap soups, and potatoes, all present themselves as less expensive, yet, at the same time, wholesome means of nourishment; but when their habitual food is the lowest in this scale, they appear to be absolutely without resource, except in the bark of trees, like the poor Swedes; and a

^b Travels in France, vol. i. c. xvii. p. 409. ^b Ibid.

great portion of them must necessarily be starved. Wheaten bread, roast beef, and turbot, which might not fail at the same time, are indeed, in themselves, unexceptionable substitutes for potatoes, and would probably be accepted as such, without murmuring by the common people; but the misfortune is, that a large population which had been habitually supported by milk and potatoes, would find it difficult to obtain these substitutes in sufficient quantities, even if the whole benevolence of the kingdom were called into action for the purpose.

The wages of labour will always be regulated by the proportion of the supply to the demand. And as, upon the potatoe system, a supply more than adequate to the demand would very soon take place, and this supply might be continued at a very cheap rate, on account of the cheapness of the food which would furnish it, the common price of labour would soon be regulated principally by the price of potatoes, instead of the price of wheat, as at present; and the rags and wretched cabins of Ireland would follow of course.

When the demand for labour occasionally exceeds the supply, and wages are regulated by the price of the dearest grain, they will generally be such as to yield something besides mere food, and the common people may be able to obtain decent houses and decent clothing. If the contrast between the state of the French and English labourers which Mr. Young has drawn, be in any degree near the truth, the advantage on the side of England has been occasioned, precisely and exclusively, by these two circumstances; and if, by the adoption of milk and potatoes as the general food of the common people, these circumstances were totally altered, so as to make the supply of labour constantly in a great excess above the demand for it, and regulate wages by the price of the cheapest food, the advantage would be immediately lost, and no efforts of benevolence could prevent the most general and abject poverty.

Upon the same principle, it would by no means be eligible that the cheap soups of Count Rumford should be adopted as the
general

general food of the common people. They are excellent inventions for publick institutions, and as occasional resources; but if they were once universally adopted by the poor, it would be impossible to prevent the price of labour from being regulated by them; and the labourer, though at first he might have more to spare for other expences, besides food, would ultimately have much less to spare than before.

The desirable thing, with a view to the happiness of the common people, seems to be, that their habitual food should be dear, and their wages regulated by it; but that, in a scarcity, or other occasional distress, the cheaper food should be readily and cheerfully adopted^a. With a view of rendering this transition easier, and at the same time of making a useful distinction between these who are dependent on parish relief, and those who are not, I should think that one plan which Mr. Young proposes, would be extremely eligible. This is "to pass an act prohibiting relief, so far as subsistence is concerned, in any other manner than by potatoes, rice, and soup, not merely as a measure of the moment, but permanently^b." I do not think that this plan would necessarily introduce these articles as the common food of the lower classes; and if it merely made the transition to them in periods of distress easier, and, at the same time, drew a more marked line than at present, between dependence and independence, it would have a very beneficial effect.

As it is acknowledged that the introduction of milk and potatoes, or of cheap soups, as the general food of the lower classes of people,

^a It is certainly to be wished, that every cottage in England should have a garden to it, well stocked with vegetables. A little variety of food is in every point of view highly useful. Potatoes are undoubtedly a most valuable subsidiary, though I should be very sorry ever to see them the principal dependence of our labourers.

^b Question of Scarcity, &c. p. 80. This might be done, at least, with regard to workhouses. In assisting the poor at their own homes, it might be subject to some practical difficulties.

would lower the price of labour, perhaps some cold politician might propose to adopt the system, with a view of underselling foreigners in the markets of Europe. I should not envy the feelings which could suggest such a proposal. I really cannot conceive any thing much more detestable than the idea of knowingly condemning the labourers of this country to the rags and wretched cabins of Ireland, for the purpose of selling a few more broadcloths and calicoes^a. The wealth and power of nations are, after all, only desirable as they contribute to happiness. In this point of view, I should be very far from undervaluing them, considering them, in general, as absolutely necessary means to attain the end; but if any

^a In this observation I have not the least idea of alluding to Mr. Young, who, I firmly believe, ardently wishes to ameliorate the condition of the lower classes of people, though I do not think that his plan would effect the object in view. He either did not see those consequences which I apprehend from it; or he has a better opinion of the happiness of the common people in Ireland, than I have. In his Irish tour he seemed much struck with the plenty of potatoes which they possessed, and the absence of all apprehension of want. Had he travelled in 1800 and 1801, his impressions would by all accounts have been very different. From the facility which has hitherto prevailed in Ireland of procuring potatoe grounds, scarcities have certainly been rare, and all the effects of the system have not yet been felt, though certainly enough to make it appear very far from desirable.

Mr. Young has since pursued his idea more in detail, in a pamphlet, entitled, *An Inquiry into the Propriety of applying Wastes to the better Maintenance and Support of the Poor*. But the impression on my mind is still the same; and it appears to me calculated to assimilate the condition of the labourers of this country to that of the lower classes of the Irish. Mr. Young seems, in a most unaccountable manner, to have forgotten all his general principles on this subject. He has treated the question of a provision for the poor, as if it was merely, How to provide in the cheapest and best manner for a given number of people? If this had been the sole question, it would never have taken so many hundred years to resolve. But the real question is, How to provide for those who are in want, in such a manner, as to prevent a continual accumulation of their numbers? and it will readily occur to the reader, that a plan of giving them land and cows cannot promise much success in this respect. If, after all the commons had been divided, the poor laws were still to continue in force, no good reason can be assigned, why the rates should not in a few years be as high as they are at present, independently of all that had been expended in the purchase of land and stock.

particular

particular case should occur, in which they appeared to be in direct opposition to each other, we cannot rationally doubt which ought to be postponed.

Fortunately, however, even on the narrowest political principles, the adoption of such a system would not answer. It has always been observed, that those who work chiefly on their own property, work very indolently and unwillingly when employed for others; and it must necessarily happen, when, from the general adoption of a very cheap food, the population of a country increases considerably beyond the demand for labour, that habits of idleness and turbulence will be generated, most peculiarly unfavourable to a flourishing state of manufactures. In spite of the cheapness of labour in Ireland, there are few manufactures which can be prepared in that country for foreign sale so cheap as in England: and this is evidently owing to the want of those industrious habits which can only be produced by regular employment.

C H A P. XI.

Of the necessity of general principles on this subject.

IT has been observed by Hume, that of all sciences, there is none, where first appearances are more deceitful than in politicks^a. The remark is undoubtedly very just, and is most peculiarly applicable to that department of the science, which relates to the modes of improving the condition of the lower classes of society.

We are continually hearing declamations against theory and theorists, by men who pride themselves upon the distinction of being practical. It must be acknowledged that bad theories are very bad things, and the authors of them useless, and sometimes pernicious members of society. But these advocates of practice do not seem to be aware, that they themselves very often come under this description, and that a great part of them may be classed among the most mischievous theorists of their time. When a man faithfully relates any facts which have come within the scope of his own observation, however confined it may have been, he undoubtedly adds to the sum of general knowledge, and confers a benefit on society. But when, from this confined experience, from the management of his own little farm, or the details of the workhouse in his neighbourhood, he draws a general inference, as is very frequently the case, he then at once erects himself into a theorist; and is the more dangerous; because experience being the only just

^a Essay xi. vol. i. p. 431. 8vo.

foundation

foundation for theory, people are often caught merely by the sound of the word; and do not stop to make the distinction between that partial experience which, on such subjects, is no foundation whatever for a just theory, and that general experience, on which alone a just theory can be founded.

There are, perhaps, few subjects, on which human ingenuity has been more exerted, than in the endeavour to ameliorate the condition of the poor; and there is certainly no subject in which it has so completely failed. The question between the theorist who calls himself practical, and the genuine theorist, is, whether this should prompt us to look into all the holes and corners of workhouses, and content ourselves with mulcting the parish officers for their waste of cheese parings and candle ends, and with distributing more soups and potatoes; or to recur to general principles, which shew us at once the cause of the failure, and prove that the system has been from the beginning radically erroneous. There is no subject to which general principles have been so seldom applied; and yet, in the whole compass of human knowledge, I doubt if there be one, in which it is so dangerous to lose sight of them; because the partial and immediate effects of a particular mode of giving assistance are so often directly opposite to the general and permanent effects.

It has been observed in particular districts, where cottagers are possessed of small pieces of land, and are in the habit of keeping cows; that, during the late scarcities, some of them were able to support themselves without parish assistance, and others with comparatively little^a.

According to the partial view in which this subject has been always contemplated, a general inference has been drawn from such instances; that, if we could place all our labourers in a similar situation, they would all be equally comfortable, and equally inde-

^a See an Inquiry into the State of Cottagers in the Counties of Lincoln and Rutland by Robert Gourlay. Annals of Agriculture, vol. xxxvii. p. 514.

pendent

pendent of the parish. This is an inference, however, that by no means follows. The advantage which cottagers, who at present keep cows, enjoy, arises in a great measure from its being peculiar; and would be destroyed if it were made general.

A farmer or gentleman living in a grazing country has, we will suppose, a certain number of cottages on his farm. Being a liberal man, and liking to see all the people about him comfortable, he may join a piece of land to his cottages sufficient to keep one or two cows, and give, besides, high wages. His labourers will of course live in plenty, and be able to rear up large families; but a grazing farm requires few hands; and though the master may choose to pay those that he employs well, he will not probably wish to have more labourers on his farm than his work requires. He does not therefore build more houses; and the children of the labourers whom he employs must evidently emigrate and settle in other countries. While such a system continues peculiar to certain families, or certain districts, no great inconveniences arise from it to the community in general; and it cannot be doubted, that the individual labourers employed on these farms are in an enviable situation, and such as we might naturally wish was the lot of all our labourers. But it is perfectly clear, that such a system could not, in the nature of things, possess the same advantages, if it were made general; because there would then be no countries, to which the children could emigrate with any prospect of finding work. Population would evidently increase beyond the demand of towns and manufactories, and universal poverty must necessarily ensue.

It should be observed also, that one of the reasons, why the labourers who at present keep cows, are so comfortable, is, that they are able to make a considerable profit of the milk which they do not use themselves; an advantage which would evidently be very much diminished if the system were universal. And though they were certainly able to struggle through the late scarcities with less assistance than their neighbours,

neighbours, as might naturally be expected, from their having other resources besides the article which in those individual years was scarce; yet if the system were universal, there can be no reason assigned, why they would not be subject to suffer as much from a scarcity of grass and a mortality among cows, as our common labourers do now from a scarcity of wheat. We should be extremely cautious therefore of trusting to such appearances, and of drawing a general inference from this kind of partial experience.

The main principle on which the society for increasing the comforts, and bettering the condition of the poor, professes to proceed, is excellent. To give effect to that master-spring of industry, the desire of bettering our condition^a, is the true mode of improving the state of the lower classes; and we may safely agree with Mr. Bernard, in one of his able prefaces, that whatever encourages and promotes habits of industry, prudence, foresight, virtue, and cleanliness, among the poor, is beneficial to them and to the country; and whatever removes or diminishes the incitements to any of these qualities, is detrimental to the state, and pernicious to the individual^b.

Mr. Bernard, indeed, himself, seems in general to be fully aware of the difficulties which the society has to contend with in the accomplishment of its object. But still it appears to be in some danger of falling into the error before alluded to, of drawing general inferences from insufficient experience. Without adverting to the plans, respecting cheaper foods and parish shops, recommended by individuals, the beneficial effects of which depend entirely upon their being peculiar to certain families or certain parishes, and would be lost if they were general, by lowering the wages of labour; I shall only notice one observation of a more comprehensive nature, which occurs in the preface to the second volume of the Reports. It is there remarked, that the experience of the society seemed to

^a Preface to vol. ii. of the Reports.

^b Preface to vol. iii. of the Reports.

warrant the conclusion, that the best mode of relieving the poor, was, by assisting them at their own homes, and placing out their children as soon as possible in different employments, apprenticeships, &c. I really believe that this is the best, and it is certainly the most agreeable mode, in which occasional and discriminate assistance can be given. But it is evident, that it must be done with caution, and cannot be adopted as a general principle, and made the foundation of universal practice. It is open exactly to the same objection as the cow system in pasture countries which has just been noticed, and that part of the act of the 43d of Elizabeth which directs the overseers to employ and provide for the children of the poor. A particular parish, where all the children, as soon as they were of a proper age, were taken from their parents, and placed out in proper situations, might be very comfortable; but if the system were general, and the poor saw that all their children would be thus provided for, every employment would presently be overstocked with hands, and the consequence need not be again repeated.

Nothing can be more clear, than that it is within the power of money, and of the exertions of the rich, adequately to relieve a particular family, a particular parish, and even a particular district. But it will be equally clear, if we reflect a moment on the subject, that it is totally out of their power to relieve the whole country in the same way; at least, without providing a regular vent for the overflowing numbers in emigration, or without the prevalence of a particular virtue among the poor, which the distribution of this assistance tends obviously to discourage.

Even industry itself, is, in this respect, not very different from money. A man who possesses a certain portion of it, above what is usually possessed by his neighbours, will, in the actual state of things, be almost sure of a competent livelihood; but if all his neighbours were to become at once as industrious as himself, the absolute portion of industry which he before possessed would no longer be a security

security against want. Hume fell into a very great error, when he asserted that "almost all the moral, as well as natural evils of human life, arise from idleness;" and for the cure of these ills, required only that the whole species should possess naturally an equal diligence, with that which many individuals are able to attain by habit and reflection^a. It is evident that this given degree of industry possessed by the whole species, if not combined with another virtue of which he takes no notice, would totally fail of rescuing society from want and misery, and would scarcely remove a single moral or physical evil, of all those to which he alludes.

I am aware of an objection, which will, with great appearance of justice, be urged against the general tenour of these reasonings. It will be said, that to argue thus, is at once to object to every mode of assisting the poor, as it is impossible, in the nature of things, to assist people individually, without altering their relative situation in society, and proportionally depressing others; and that as those who have families, are the persons naturally most subject to distress, and as we are certainly not called upon to assist those who do not want our aid, we must necessarily, if we act at all, relieve those who have children, and thus encourage marriage and population.

I have already observed, however, and I here repeat it again, that the general principles on these subjects ought not to be pushed too far, though they should always be kept in view; and that many cases may occur, in which the good resulting from the relief of the present distress, may more than overbalance the evil to be apprehended from the remote consequence.

All relief in instances of distress, not arising from idle and improvident habits, clearly comes under this description; and in general it may be observed, that it is only that kind of systematic and certain relief, on which the poor can confidently depend, whatever may be their conduct, that violates general principles, in such

^a Dialogues on Natural Religion, Part xi. p. 212.

a manner, as to make it clear that the general consequence is worse than the particular evil.

Independently of this discriminate and occasional assistance, the beneficial effects of which I have fully allowed in a preceding chapter, I have before endeavoured to shew, that much might be expected from a better and more general system of education. Every thing that can be done in this way, has indeed a very peculiar value; because education is one of those advantages, which not only all may share without interfering with each other, but the raising of one person may actually contribute to the raising of others. If, for instance, a man by education acquires that decent kind of pride, and those juster habits of thinking, which will prevent him from burdening society with a family of children, which he cannot support, his conduct, as far as an individual instance can go, tends evidently to improve the condition of his fellow labourers; and a contrary conduct from ignorance, would tend as evidently to depress it.

I cannot help thinking also, that something might be done towards bettering the situation of the poor, by a general improvement of their cottages; if care were taken, at the same time, not to make them so large, as to allow of two families settling in them; and not to increase their number faster than the demand for labour required. Perhaps one of the most salutary, and least pernicious checks, to the frequency of early marriages in this country, is the difficulty of procuring a cottage, and the laudable habits which prompt a labourer rather to defer his marriage some years, in the expectation of a vacancy, than to content himself with a wretched mud cabin, like those in Ireland ^a.

Even

^a Perhaps, however, this is not often left to his choice, on account of the fear which every parish has of increasing its poor. There are many ways by which our poor laws operate in counteracting their first obvious tendency to increase population, and this is

Even the cow system, upon a more confined plan, might not be open to objection. With any view of making it a substitute for the Poor Laws, and of giving labourers a right to demand land and cows in proportion to their families; or of taking the common people from the consumption of wheat, and feeding them on milk and potatoes; it appears to me, I confess, truly preposterous: but if it were so ordered as merely to provide a comfortable situation for the better and more industrious class of labourers, and to supply, at the same time, a very important want among the poor in general, that of milk for their children, I think that it would be extremely beneficial, and might be made a very powerful incitement to habits of industry, economy, and prudence. With this view, however, it is evident, that only a certain portion of the labourers in each parish could be embraced in the plan; that good conduct, and not mere distress, should have the most valid claim to preference; that too much attention should not be paid to the number of children; and that, universally, those who had saved money enough for the purchase of a cow, should be preferred, to those who required to be furnished with one by the parish ^a.

To facilitate the saving of small sums of money for this purpose, and encourage young labourers to economize their earnings with a view to a provision for marriage; it might be extremely useful to have country banks, where the smallest sums would be received, and a fair interest paid for them. At present, the few labourers who save a little money, are often greatly at a loss to know what to do

one of them. I have little doubt that it is almost exclusively owing to these counteracting causes, that we have been able to persevere in this system so long, and that the condition of the poor has not been so much injured by it as might have been expected.

^a The act of Elizabeth which prohibited the building of cottages, unless four acres of land were annexed to them, is probably impracticable in a manufacturing country like England; but upon this principle, certainly the greatest part of the poor might possess land; because the difficulty of procuring such cottages would always operate as a powerful check to their increase. The effect of such a plan would be very different from that of Mr. Young's.

with

with it; and under such circumstances we cannot be much surpris'd that it should sometimes be ill employed, and last but a short time. It would probably be essential to the success of any plan of this kind, that the labourer should be able to draw out his money whenever he wanted it, and have the most perfect liberty of disposing of it in every respect as he pleas'd. Though we may regret, that money so hardly earned should sometimes be spent to little purpose; yet it seems to be a case in which we have no right to interfere; nor if we had, would it, in a general view, be advantageous; because the knowledge of possessing this liberty would be of more use in encouraging the practice of saving, than any restriction of it, in preventing the misuse of money so saved.

One should undoubtedly be extremely unwilling, not to make as much use as possible of that known stimulus to industry and economy, the desire of, and the attachment to, property: but it should be recollected, that the good effects of this stimulus, show themselves principally, when this property is to be procured, or preserved, by personal exertions; and that they are by no means so general, under other circumstances. If any idle man with a family could demand, and obtain, a cow and some land, I should expect to see both very often neglected.

It has been observed, that those cottagers who keep cows, are more industrious and more regular in their conduct than those who do not. This is probably true, and what might naturally be expected; but the inference that the way to make all people industrious, is to give them cows, may by no means be quite so certain. Most of those who keep cows at present have purchased them with the fruits of their own industry. It is therefore more just to say, that their industry has given them a cow, than that a cow has given them their industry; though I would by no means be understood to imply, that the sudden possession of property never generates industrious habits.

The practical good effects which have been already experienced,
from

from cottagers keeping cows^a, arise in fact from the system being nearly such as the confined plan which I have mentioned. In the districts where cottagers of this description most abound, they do not bear a very large proportion to the population of the whole parish: they consist in general of the better sort of labourers, who have been able to purchase their own cows; and the peculiar comforts of their situation arise, more from the relative, than the positive advantages which they possess.

From observing, therefore, their industry and comforts, we should be very cautious of inferring that we could give the same industry and comforts to all the lower classes of people, by giving them the same possessions. There is nothing that has given rise to such a cloud of errors, as a confusion between relative and positive, and between cause and effect.

It may be said, however, that any plan of generally improving the cottages of the poor, or of enabling more of them to keep cows, would evidently give them the power of rearing a greater number of children, and, by thus encouraging population, violate the principles which I have endeavoured to establish. But if I have been successful in making the reader comprehend the principal bent of this work, he will be aware, that the precise reason why I think that more children ought not to be born than the country can support, is, that the greatest possible number of those that are born may be supported. We cannot, in the nature of things, assist the poor, in any way, without enabling them to rear up to manhood a greater number of their children. But this is, of all other things, the most desirable, both with regard to individuals and the publick. Every loss of a child from the consequences of poverty, must evidently be preceded and accompanied by great misery to individuals; and, in a publick view, every child that dies under ten years of age, is a loss to the nation of all that had been expended in its subsist-

^a Inquiry into the State of Cottagers in the Counties of Lincoln and Rutland, by Robert Gourlay. *Annals of Agriculture*, vol. xxxvii. p. 514.

ence till that period. Consequently, in every point of view, a decrease of mortality, at all ages, is what we ought to aim at. We cannot, however, effect this object, without first crowding the population in some degree by making more children grow up to manhood; but we shall do no harm in this respect, if, at the same time, we can impress these children with the idea that to possess the same advantages as their parents, they must defer marriage till they have a fair prospect of being able to maintain a family. And it must be candidly confessed that, if we cannot do this, all our former efforts will have been thrown away. It is not in the nature of things that any permanent and general improvement in the condition of the poor can be effected, without an increase in the preventive check: and unless this take place, either with, or without our efforts, every thing that is done for the poor must be temporary and partial: a diminution of mortality at present, will be balanced by an increased mortality in future; and the improvement of their condition in one place, will proportionally depress it in another. This is a truth so important, and so little understood, that it can scarcely be too often insisted on. The generality of charitable people and of the encouragers of marriage, are not in the smallest degree aware of the real effects of what they do.

Dr. Paley, in a chapter on population, provision, &c. in his *Moral Philosophy*, observes, that the condition most favourable to the population of a country, and, at the same time, to its general happiness, is, "that of a laborious frugal people ministering to the demands of an opulent, luxurious nation^a." Such a form of

^a Vol. ii. c. xi. p. 359. From a passage in Dr. Paley's late work on *Natural Theology*, I am inclined to think, that subsequent reflection has induced him to modify some of his former ideas on the subject of population. He has stated most justly, (chap. xxv. p. 539.) that mankind will in every country breed up to a certain point of distress. If this be allowed, that country will evidently be the happiest, where the degree of distress at this point is the least, and consequently, if the spread of luxury, by producing the check sooner, tend to diminish this degree of distress, it is certainly desirable.

society

society has not; it must be confessed, an inviting aspect. Nothing but the conviction of its being absolutely necessary, could reconcile us to the idea of ten millions of people condemned to incessant toil, and to the privation of every thing but absolute necessaries, in order to minister to the excessive luxuries of the other million. But the fact is, that such a form of society is by no means necessary. It is by no means necessary, that the rich should be excessively luxurious, in order to support the manufactures of a country, or that the poor should be deprived of all luxuries, in order to make them sufficiently numerous. The best, and in every point of view the most advantageous, manufactures in this country, are those which are consumed by the great body of the people. The manufactures which are confined exclusively to the rich, are not only trivial on account of the comparative smallness of their quantity; but are further liable to the great disadvantage of producing much occasional misery among those employed in them, from changes of fashion. It is the spread of luxury, therefore, among the mass of the people, and not an excess of it in a few, that seems to be most advantageous, both with regard to national wealth and national happiness; and what Dr. Paley considers as the true evil and proper danger of luxury, I should be disposed to consider as its true good, and peculiar advantage. If, indeed, it be allowed that in every society, not in the state of a new colony, some powerful check to population must prevail; and if it be observed, that a taste for the comforts and conveniences of life will prevent people from marrying under the certainty of being deprived of these advantages; it must be allowed that we can hardly expect to find any check to marriage so little prejudicial to the happiness and virtue of society as the general prevalence of such a taste; and consequently that the spread of luxury^a in this sense of the

^a In a note to the tenth chapter of the last book, I have mentioned the point at which, alone, it is probable that luxury becomes really prejudicial to a country. But this point

the term, is particularly desirable; and one of the best means of raising that standard of wretchedness, alluded to in the eighth chapter of this book.

It has been generally found that the middle parts of society are most favourable to virtuous and industrious habits, and to the growth of all kinds of talents. But it is evident, that all cannot be in the middle. Superior and inferior parts are, in the nature of things, absolutely necessary; and not only necessary, but strikingly beneficial. If no man could hope to rise, or fear to fall in society; if industry did not bring with it its reward, and indolence its punishment; we could not expect to see that animated activity in bettering our condition, which now forms the master-spring of publick prosperity. But in contemplating the different states of Europe, we observe a very considerable difference in the relative proportions of the superior, the middle, and the inferior parts; and from the effect of these differences, it seems probable, that our best grounded expectations of an increase in the happiness of the mass of human society, are founded in the prospect of an increase in the relative proportions of the middle parts. And if the lower classes of people had acquired the habit of proportioning the supplies of labour to a stationary, or even decreasing demand, without an increase of misery and mortality, as at present; we might even venture to indulge a hope, that at some future period, the processes for abridging human labour, the progress of which has of late years been so rapid, might ultimately supply all the wants of the most wealthy society with less personal labour than at present; and if they did not diminish the severity of individual exertion, might, at least, diminish the number of those employed in severe toil. If the lowest classes of society were thus diminished, and the middle classes increased, each labourer might indulge a more rational hope of rising by diligence and exertion into

does not depend upon the spread of luxury, as diminishing the frequency of marriage among the poor, but upon the proportion which those employed in preparing or procuring luxuries, bears to the funds which are to support them.

a better

a better station; the rewards of industry and virtue would be increased in number; human society would appear to consist of fewer blanks and more prizes; and the sum of social happiness would be evidently augmented.

To indulge, however, in any distant views of this kind, unaccompanied by the evils usually attendant on a stationary, or decreasing demand for labour, we must suppose the general prevalence of such prudential habits among the poor, as would prevent them from marrying, when the actual price of labour, joined to what they might have saved in their single state, would not give them the prospect of being able to support a wife and six children without assistance. And, in every point of view, such a degree of prudential restraint would be extremely beneficial; and would produce a very striking amelioration in the condition of the lower classes of people.

It may be said, perhaps, that even this degree of prudence might not always avail, as when a man marries he cannot tell what number of children he shall have, and many have more than six. This is certainly true; and in this case I do not think that any evil would result from making a certain allowance to every child above this number; not with a view of rewarding a man for his large family, but merely, of relieving him from a species of distress, which it would be unreasonable in us to expect that he should calculate upon. And with this view, the relief should be merely such, as to place him exactly in the same situation as if he had had six children. Montesquieu disapproves of an edict of Lewis the fourteenth, which gave certain pensions to those who had ten and twelve children, as being of no use in encouraging population^a. For the very reason that he disapproves of it, I should think that some law of the kind might be adopted without danger, and might relieve particular individuals from a very pressing and unlooked-for distress, without operating in any respect as an encouragement to marriage.

^a *Esprit des Loix*, liv. xxiii. c. xxvii.

If at some future period, any approach should be made towards the more general prevalence of prudential habits with respect to marriage among the poor, from which alone any permanent and general improvement of their condition can arise; I do not think that the narrowest politician need be alarmed at it, from the fear of its occasioning such an advance in the price of labour as will enable our commercial competitors to undersell us in foreign markets. There are four circumstances that might be expected to accompany it, which would probably either prevent, or fully counterbalance, any effect of this kind. These are, 1st, The more equable and lower price of provisions, from the demand being less frequently above the supply. 2dly, The removal of that heavy burden on agriculture, and that great addition to the present wages of labour, the poor's rates. 3dly, The national saving of a great part of that sum, which is expended without return, in the support of those children who die prematurely, from the consequences of poverty. And, lastly, The more general prevalence of economical and industrious habits, particularly among unmarried men, which would prevent that indolence, drunkenness, and waste of labour, which at present are too frequently a consequence of high wages.

CHAP.

C H A P. XII.

Of our rational expectations respecting the future improvement of Society.

IN taking a general and concluding view of our rational expectations respecting the mitigation of the evils arising from the principle of population, it may be observed, that though the increase of population in a geometrical ratio be incontrovertible, and the period of doubling, when unchecked, has been uniformly stated in this work, rather below than above the truth; yet there are some natural consequences of the progress of society and civilization, which necessarily repress its full effects. There are, more particularly, great towns and manufactures, in which we can scarcely hope, and certainly not expect, to see any very material change. It is undoubtedly our duty, and in every point of view highly desirable, to make towns and manufacturing employments as little injurious as possible to the duration of human life; but, after all our efforts, it is probable that they will always remain less healthy than country situations and country employments; and consequently, operating as positive checks, will diminish in some degree the necessity of the preventive check.

In every old state it is observed, that a considerable number of grown-up people, remain for a time unmarried. The duty of practising the common and acknowledged rules of morality during this period, has never been controverted in theory, however it may have been opposed in practice. This branch of the duty of moral restraint has scarcely been touched by the reasonings of this work.

It

It rests on the same foundation as before, neither stronger nor weaker. And knowing how incompletely this duty has hitherto been fulfilled, it would certainly be visionary to expect any very material change for the better, in future.

The part which has been affected by the reasonings of this work is not, therefore, that which relates to our conduct during the period of celibacy, but to the duty of extending this period till we have a prospect of being able to maintain our children. And it is by no means visionary to indulge a hope of some favourable change in this respect; because it is found by experience, that the prevalence of this kind of prudential restraint is extremely different in different countries, and in the same countries at different periods.

It cannot be doubted, that throughout Europe in general, and most particularly in the northern states, a decided change has taken place in the operation of this prudential restraint, since the prevalence of those warlike and enterprising habits which destroyed so many people. In later times, the gradual diminution, and almost total extinction, of the plagues which so frequently visited Europe in the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries, produced a change of the same kind. And in this country it is not to be doubted that the proportion of marriages has become smaller, since the improvement of our towns, the less frequent returns of epidemics, and the adoption of habits of greater cleanliness. During the late scarcities, it appears that the number of marriages diminished; and the same motives which prevented many people from marrying during such a period, would operate precisely in the same way, if, in future, the additional number of children reared to manhood from the introduction of the cow-pox, were to be such, as to crowd all employments, lower the price of labour, and make it more difficult to support a family.

Universally, the practice of mankind on the subject of marriage has been much superior to their theories; and however frequent may have been the declamations on the duty of entering into this

state, and the advantage of early unions to prevent vice, each individual has practically found it necessary to consider of the means of supporting a family, before he ventured to take so important a step. That great *vis medicatrix reipublicæ*, the desire of bettering our condition, and the fear of making it worse, has been constantly in action, and has been constantly directing people into the right road in spite of all the declamations which tended to lead them aside. Owing to this powerful spring of health in every state, which is nothing more than an inference from the general course of the laws of nature, irresistibly forced on each man's attention, the prudential check to marriage has increased in Europe; and it cannot be unreasonable to conclude, that it will still make further advances. If this take place, without any marked and decided increase of a vicious intercourse with the sex, the happiness of society will evidently be promoted by it; and with regard to the danger of such increase, it is consolatory to remark, that those countries in Europe where marriages are the least frequent, are by no means particularly distinguished by vices of this kind. It has appeared that Norway, Switzerland, England, and Scotland, are above all the rest in the prevalence of the preventive check; and though I do not mean to insist particularly on the virtuous habits of these countries, yet I think that no person would select them as the countries most marked for profligacy of manners. Indeed, from the little that I know of the continent, I should have been inclined to select them as most distinguished for contrary habits, and as rather above than below their neighbours in the chastity of their women, and consequently in the virtuous habits of their men. Experience therefore seems to teach us, that it is possible for moral and physical causes to counteract the effects that might at first be expected from an increase of the preventive check; but allowing all the weight to these effects which is in any degree probable, it may be safely asserted, that the diminution of the vices arising from indigence, would fully counterbalance them; and that all the advantages of diminished mortality, and superior comforts, which would certainly

certainly result from an increase of the preventive check, may be placed entirely on the side of the gains to the cause of happiness and virtue.

It is less the object of the present work to propose new plans of improving society, than to inculcate the necessity of resting contented with that mode of improvement, which is dictated by the course of nature, and of not obstructing the advances which would otherwise be made in this way.

It would be undoubtedly highly advantageous, that all our positive institutions, and the whole tenour of our conduct to the poor, should be such as actively to co-operate with that lesson of prudence inculcated by the common course of human events; and if we take upon ourselves, sometimes, to mitigate the natural punishments of imprudence, that we should balance it by increasing the rewards of an opposite conduct. But much would be done, if merely the institutions which directly tend to encourage marriage were gradually changed, and we ceased to circulate opinions, and inculcate doctrines, which positively counteract the lessons of nature.

The limited good which it is sometimes in our power to effect, is often lost by attempting too much, and by making the adoption of some particular plan essentially necessary even to a partial degree of success. In the practical application of the reasonings of this work, I hope that I have avoided this error. I wish to press on the recollection of the reader, that, though I may have given some new views of old facts, and may have indulged in the contemplation of a considerable degree of *possible* improvement, that I might not absolutely shut out that prime cheerer hope; yet in my expectations of probable improvement, and in suggesting the means of accomplishing it, I have been very cautious. The gradual abolition of the poor laws has already often been proposed, in consequence of the practical evils which have been found to flow from them, and the danger of their becoming a weight absolutely intolerable on the landed property of the kingdom. The establishment of a more extensive system of
national

national education, has neither the advantage of novelty with some, nor its disadvantage with others, to recommend it. The practical good effects of education have long been experienced in Scotland; and almost every person who has been placed in a situation to judge, has given his testimony, that education appears to have a considerable effect in the prevention of crimes^a, and the promotion of industry, morality, and regular conduct. Yet these are the only plans which have been offered; and though the adoption of them in the modes suggested, would very powerfully contribute to forward the object of this work, and better the condition of the poor; yet if nothing be done in this way, I shall not absolutely despair of some partial good effects from the general tenour of the reasoning.

If the principles which I have endeavoured to establish be false, I most sincerely hope to see them completely refuted; but if they be true, the subject is so important, and interests the question of human happiness so nearly, that it is impossible that they should not in time be more fully known, and more generally circulated, whether any particular efforts be made for the purpose or not.

Among the higher and middle classes of society, the effect of this knowledge would, I hope, be to direct without relaxing their efforts in bettering the condition of the poor; to shew them what they can, and what they cannot do; and that, although much may be done by advice and instruction, by encouraging habits of prudence and cleanliness, by occasional and discriminate charity, and by any mode of bettering the present condition of the poor, which is followed by an increase of the preventive check; yet that, without this last effect, all the former efforts would be futile; and that, in any old and well-peopled state, to assist the poor in such a manner as to enable

^a Mr. Howard found fewer prisoners in Switzerland and Scotland, than in other countries, which he attributed to a more regular education among the lower classes of the Swiss and the Scotch. During the number of years which the late Mr. Fielding presided at Bow-street, only six Scotchmen were brought before him. He used to say that of the persons committed the greater part were Irish. Preface to vol. iii. of the Reports of the Society for bettering the condition of the poor, p. 32.

them to marry as early as they please, and rear up large families, is a physical impossibility. This knowledge, by tending to prevent the rich from destroying the good effects of their own exertions, and wasting their efforts in a direction where success is unattainable, would confine their attention to the proper objects, and thus enable them to do more good.

Among the poor themselves, its effects would be still more important. That the principal and most permanent cause of poverty, has little or no relation to forms of government, or the unequal division of property; and that, as the rich do not in reality possess the power of finding employment and maintenance for the poor, the poor cannot, in the nature of things, possess the right to demand them, are important truths flowing from the principle of population, which, when properly explained, would by no means be above the most ordinary comprehensions. And it is evident, that every man in the lower classes of society, who became acquainted with these truths, would be disposed to bear the distresses in which he might be involved with more patience; would feel less discontent and irritation at the government and the higher classes of society on account of his poverty; would be on all occasions less disposed to insubordination and turbulence; and if he received assistance, either from any public institution, or from the hand of private charity, he would receive it with more thankfulness, and more justly appreciate its value.

If these truths were by degrees more generally known, which in the course of time does not seem to be improbable, from the natural effects of the mutual interchange of opinions, the lower classes of people, as a body, would become more peaceable and orderly; would be less inclined to tumultuous proceedings in seasons of scarcity, and would at all times be less influenced by inflammatory and seditious publications, from knowing how little the price of labour, and the means of supporting a family, depend upon a revolution. The mere knowledge of these truths, even if they did not operate sufficiently to produce any marked change in the prudential habits of the poor,

with

with regard to marriage, would still have a most beneficial effect on their conduct in a political light; and undoubtedly one of the most valuable of these effects would be, the power that would result to the higher and middle classes of society of gradually improving governments^a, without the apprehension of those revolutionary excesses, the fear of which, at present, threatens to deprive Europe even of that degree of liberty, which she had before experienced to be practicable, and the salutary effects of which she had long enjoyed.

From a review of the state of society in former periods, compared with the present, I should certainly say, that the evils resulting from the principle of population have rather diminished, than increased, even under the disadvantage of an almost total ignorance of their real cause. And if we can indulge the hope that this ignorance will be gradually dissipated, it does not seem unreasonable to expect, that they will be still further diminished. The increase of absolute population which will of course take place, will evidently tend but little to weaken this expectation, as every thing depends upon the relative proportions between population and food, and not on the absolute number of people. In the former part of this work, it appeared, that the countries which possessed the fewest people, often suffered the most from the effects of the principle of population; and it can scarcely be doubted, that taking Europe throughout, fewer famines, and fewer diseases arising from want, have prevailed in the last century, than in those which preceded it.

On the whole, therefore, though our future prospects respecting the mitigation of the evils arising from the principle of population, may not be so bright as we could wish, yet they are far from being

^a I cannot believe that the removal of all unjust grounds of discontent against constituted authorities would render the people torpid and indifferent to advantages which are really attainable. The blessings of civil liberty are so great, that they surely cannot need the aid of false colouring to make them desirable. I should be sorry to think that the lower classes of people could never be animated to assert their rights but by means of such illusory promises, as will generally make the remedy of resistance much worse than the disease that it was intended to cure.

entirely disheartening, and by no means preclude that gradual and progressive improvement in human society, which, before the late wild speculations on the subject, was the object of rational expectation. To the laws of property and marriage, and to the apparently narrow principle of self-love, which prompts each individual to exert himself in bettering his condition, we are indebted for all the noblest exertions of human genius, for every thing that distinguishes the civilized from the savage state. A strict inquiry into the principle of population leads us strongly to the conclusion, that we shall never be able to throw down the ladder by which we have risen to this eminence; but it by no means proves that we may not rise higher by the same means. The structure of society, in its great features, will probably always remain unchanged. We have every reason to believe, that it will always consist of a class of proprietors, and a class of labourers; but the condition of each, and the proportion which they bear to each other, may be so altered as greatly to improve the harmony and beauty of the whole. It would, indeed, be a melancholy reflection, that, while the views of physical science are daily enlarging, so as scarcely to be bounded by the most distant horizon, the science of moral and political philosophy should be confined within such narrow limits, or at best be so feeble in its influence, as to be unable to counteract the increasing obstacles to human happiness arising from the progress of population. But however formidable these obstacles may have appeared in some parts of this work, it is hoped that the general result of the inquiry is such, as not to make us give up the cause of the improvement of human society in despair. The partial good which seems to be attainable, is worthy of all our exertions; is sufficient to direct our efforts and animate our prospects. And although we cannot expect that the virtue and happiness of mankind will keep pace with the brilliant career of physical discovery, yet if we are not wanting to ourselves, we may confidently indulge the hope, that, to no unimportant extent, they will be influenced by its progress, and will partake in its success.

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