

## CHAPTER VII.

## CONTINUATION OF THE SAME SUBJECT.

§ 1. BEFORE examining the influence of peasant properties on the ultimate economical interests of the labouring class, as determined by the increase of population; let us note the points respecting the moral and social influence of that territorial arrangement, which may be looked upon as established, either by the reason of the case, or by the facts and authorities cited in the preceding chapter.

The reader new to the subject must have been struck with the powerful impression made upon all the witnesses to whom I have referred, by what a Swiss statistical writer calls the "almost superhuman industry" of peasant proprietors\*. On this point, at least, authorities are unanimous. Those who have seen only one country of peasant properties, always think the inhabitants of that country the most industrious in the world. There is as little doubt among observers, with what feature in the condition of the peasantry this pre-eminent industry is connected. It is "the magic of property" which, in the words of Arthur Young, "turns sand into gold." The idea of property does not however necessarily imply that there should be no rent, any more than that there should be no taxes. It merely implies that the rent should be a fixed charge, not liable to be raised against the possessor by his own improvements, or by the will of a landlord. A tenant at a quit rent is to all intents and purposes a proprietor; a copyholder is not less so than a freeholder. What is wanted is perpetuity of possession on fixed

\* "*Fast übermenschliche Fleiss.*" Der Canton Schaffhausen (ut supra) p. 53.

terms. "Give a man the secure possession of a bleak rock, and he will turn it into a garden; give him a nine years' lease of a garden, and he will convert it into a desert."

The details which have been cited, and those, still more minute, to be found in the same authorities, concerning the habitually elaborate system of cultivation, and the thousand devices of the peasant proprietor for making every superfluous hour and odd moment instrumental to some increase in the future produce and value of the land, will explain what has been said in a previous chapter\* respecting the far larger gross produce which, with anything like parity of agricultural knowledge, is obtained, from the same quality of soil, on small farms, at least when they are the property of the cultivator. The treatise on "Flemish Husbandry" is especially instructive respecting the means by which untiring industry does more than outweigh inferiority of resources, imperfection of implements, and ignorance of scientific theories. The peasant cultivation of Flanders and Italy is affirmed to produce heavier crops, in equal circumstances of soil, than the best cultivated districts of Scotland and England. It produces them, no doubt, with an amount of labour which, if paid for by an employer, would make the cost to him more than equivalent to the benefit; but to the peasant it is not cost, it is the devotion of time which he can spare, to a favourite pursuit, if we should not rather say a ruling passion†.

\* Supra, Book I. ch. ix.

† Read the graphic description by the historian Michelet, of the feelings of a peasant proprietor towards his land.

"Si nous voulons connaître la pensée intime, la passion du paysan de France, cela est fort aisé. Promenons-nous le dimanche dans la campagne, suivons-le. Le voilà qui s'en va là-bas devant nous. Il est deux heures; sa femme est à vêpres; il est endimanché; je répons qu'il va voir sa maîtresse.

"Quelle maîtresse? sa terre.

"Je ne dis pas qu'il y aille tout droit. Non, il est libre ce jour-là, il est

§ 2. Another aspect of peasant properties, in which it is essential that they should be considered, is that of an instrument of popular education. It is difficult to imagine what theory of education that can be, which can attach no importance to such an instrument. Books and schooling are absolutely necessary to education; but not all-sufficient. The mental faculties will be most developed where they are most exercised; and what gives more exercise to them than the having a multitude of interests, none of which can be neglected, and which can be provided for only by varied efforts of will and intelligence? Some of the disparagers of small properties lay great stress on the cares and anxieties which beset the peasant proprietor of the Rhineland or Flanders. It is precisely those cares and anxieties which tend to make him a superior being to an English day labourer. It is, to be sure, rather abusing the privilege of fair argument to represent the condition of a day labourer as not an anxious one. I can conceive no circumstances in which he is free from anxiety where there is a possibility of being out of employment; unless he has access to a profuse dispensation of

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maître d'y aller ou de n'y pas aller. N'y va-t-il pas assez tous les jours de la semaine? Aussi, il se détourne, il va ailleurs, il a affaire ailleurs. Et pourtant, il y va.

"Il est vrai qu'il passait bien près; c'était une occasion. Il la regarde, mais apparemment il n'y entrera pas; qu'y ferait-il?—Et pourtant il y entre.

"Du moins, il est probable qu'il n'y travaillera pas; il est endimanché; il a la blouse et chemise blanches.—Rien n'empêche cependant d'ôter quelque mauvaise herbe, de rejeter cette pierre. Il y a bien encore cette souche qui gêne, mais il n'a pas sa pioche, se sera pour demain.

"Alors, il croise ses bras et s'arrête, regarde, sérieux, soucieux. Il regarde longtemps, très-longtemps, et semble s'oublier. A la fin, s'il se croit observé, s'il apperçoit un passant, il s'éloigne à pas lents. A trente pas encore, il s'arrête, se retourne, et jette sur sa terre un dernier regard, regard profond et sombre; mais pour qui sait bien voir, il est tout passionné, ce regard, tout de cœur, plein de dévotion."—*Le Peuple*, par J. Michelet, Ire partie, ch. 1.

parish pay, and no shame or reluctance in demanding it: then indeed he may feel with the old doggrel,

Hang sorrow, cast away care,  
The parish is bound to find us.

But unless so shielded, the day labourer has, in the existing state of society and population, many of the anxieties which have not an invigorating effect on the mind, and none of those which have. The position of the peasant proprietor of Flanders is the reverse. From the anxiety which chills and paralyses—the uncertainty of having food to eat—few persons are more exempt: it requires as rare a concurrence of circumstances as the potato failure combined with an universal bad harvest, to bring him within reach of that danger. His anxieties are the ordinary vicissitudes of *more* and *less*; his cares are that he takes his fair share of the business of life; that he is a free human being, and not perpetually a child, which seems to be the approved condition of the labouring classes according to the prevailing philanthropy. He is no longer a being of a different order from the middle classes; he has pursuits and objects like those which occupy them, and give to their intellects the greatest part of the cultivation which they receive. If there is a first principle in intellectual education, it is this—that the discipline which does good to the mind is that in which the mind is active, not that in which it is passive. The secret for developing the faculties is to give them much to do, and much inducement to do it. Few things surpass in this respect the occupations and interests created by the ownership and cultivation of land. This detracts nothing from the importance, and even necessity, of other kinds of mental cultivation. The possession of property will not prevent the peasant from being coarse, selfish, and narrow-minded. These things depend on other influences, and other kinds of instruction. But this great stimulus to one kind of mental activity, in no way impedes any other means of intellectual development.

On the contrary, by cultivating the habit of turning to practical use every fragment of knowledge acquired, it helps to render that schooling and reading fruitful, which without some such auxiliary influence are in too many cases like seed thrown on a rock.

§ 3. It is not to the intelligence alone, that the situation of a peasant proprietor is full of improving influences. It is no less propitious to the moral virtues of prudence, temperance, and self-control. The labourer who possesses property, "whether he can read and write, or not, has," as Mr. Laing remarks\*, "an educated mind: he has forethought, caution, and reflection guiding every action; he knows the value of restraint, and is in the constant habitual practice of it." It is remarkable how this general proposition is borne out by the character of the rural population in almost every civilized country where peasant properties are frequent. Day-labourers, where the labouring class mainly consists of them, are usually improvident: they spend carelessly to the full extent of their means, and let the future shift for itself. This is so notorious, that many persons otherwise well affected to the labouring classes, hold it as a fixed opinion, that an increase of wages would do them little good, unless accompanied by at least a corresponding improvement in their tastes and habits. The tendency of peasant proprietors, and of those who hope to become proprietors, is to the contrary extreme; to take even too much thought for the morrow. They are oftener accused of penuriousness than of prodigality. They deny themselves reasonable indulgences, and live wretchedly, in order to economize. In Switzerland, almost everybody saves, who has any means of saving; the case of the Flemish farmers I have already noticed: among the French, though a pleasure-loving, and reputed to be a self-indulgent people, the spirit of thrift is diffused through

\* *Residence in Norway*, p. 20.

the rural population in a manner most gratifying as a whole, and which in individual instances errs rather on the side of excess than defect. Among those who, from the hovels in which they live, and the herbs and roots which constitute their diet, are mistaken by travellers for proofs and specimens of general indigence, there are numbers who have hoards in leather bags, consisting of sums in five franc pieces, which they keep by them perhaps a whole generation, unless brought out to be expended in their most cherished gratification—the purchase of land. If there is a moral inconvenience attached to a state of society in which the peasantry have land, it is the danger of their being too careful of their pecuniary concerns; of its making them crafty, and "calculating" in the objectionable sense. The French peasant is no simple countryman, no downright "paysan du Danube;" both in fact and in fiction he is now "le rusé paysan." That is the stage which he has reached in the progressive developement which the constitution of things has imposed on human intelligence and human emancipation. But some excess in this direction is a small and a passing evil compared with recklessness and improvidence in the labouring classes, and a cheap price to pay for the inestimable worth of the virtue of self-dependence, as the general characteristic of a people: a virtue which is one of the first conditions of excellence in a human character—the stock on which if the other virtues are not grafted, they have seldom any firm root; a quality indispensable in the case of a labouring class, even to any tolerable degree of physical comfort; and by which the peasantry of France, and of most European countries of peasant proprietors, are distinguished beyond any other labouring population.

§ 4. Is it likely, that a state of economical relations so conducive to frugality and prudence in every other respect, should be prejudicial to it in the cardinal point of increase of population? That it is so, is the opinion expressed by most

of those English political economists who have written anything about the matter. Mr. Macculloch's opinion is well known. Mr. Jones affirms\*, that "a peasant population, raising their own wages from the soil, and consuming them in kind, are universally acted upon very feebly by internal checks, or by motives disposing them to restraint. The consequence is, that unless some external cause, quite independent of their will, forces such peasant cultivators to slacken their rate of increase, they will, in a limited territory, very rapidly approach a state of want and penury, and will be stopped at last only by the physical impossibility of procuring subsistence." He elsewhere† speaks of such a peasantry as "exactly in the condition in which the animal disposition to increase their numbers is checked by the fewest of those balancing motives and desires which regulate the increase of superior ranks or of more civilized people." The "causes of this peculiarity," Mr. Jones promises to point out in a subsequent work, which has never yet made its appearance: I am totally unable to conjecture from what theory of human nature, and of the motives which influence human conduct, he will derive them. Arthur Young assumes the same "peculiarity" as a fact; but, although not much in the habit of qualifying his opinions, he does not push his doctrine to so violent an extreme as Mr. Jones; having, as we have seen, himself testified to various instances in which peasant populations such as Mr. Jones speaks of, were not tending to "a state of want and penury," and were in no danger whatever of coming in contact with "physical impossibility of procuring subsistence."

That there should be discrepancy of experience on this matter, is easily to be accounted for. Whether the labouring people live by land or by wages, they have always hitherto multiplied up to the limit set by their habitual standard of

\* *Essay on the Distribution of Wealth*, p. 146.

† *Ibid.* p. 68.

comfort. When that standard was low, not exceeding a scanty subsistence, the size of properties, as well as the rate of wages, has been kept down to what would barely support life. Extremely low ideas of what is necessary for subsistence, are perfectly compatible with peasant properties; and if a people have always been used to poverty, and habit has reconciled them to it, there will be over-population, and excessive subdivision of land. But this is not to the purpose. The true question is, supposing a peasantry to possess land not insufficient but sufficient for their comfortable support, are they more, or less, likely to fall from this state of comfort through improvident multiplication, than if they were living in an equally comfortable manner as hired labourers? All *à priori* considerations are in favour of their being less likely. The dependance of wages on population is a matter of speculation and discussion. That wages would fall if population were much increased, is often a matter of real doubt, and always a thing which requires some exercise of the reflecting faculty for its intelligent recognition. But every peasant can satisfy himself, from evidence which he can fully appreciate, whether his piece of land can be made to support several families in the same comfort in which it supports one. Few people like to leave to their children a worse lot in life than their own. The parent who has land to leave, is perfectly able to judge whether the children can live upon it or not: but people who are supported by wages, see no reason why their sons should be unable to support themselves in the same way, and trust accordingly to chance. "In even the most useful and necessary arts and manufactures," says Mr. Laing\*, "the demand for labourers is not a seen, known, steady, and appreciable demand: but it so in husbandry" under small properties. "The labour to be done, the subsistence that labour will produce out of his portion of land, are seen and known elements in a man's calculation upon his

\* *Notes of a Traveller*, p. 46.

means of subsistence. Can his square of land, or can it not, subsist a family? Can he marry, or not? are questions which every man can answer without delay, doubt, or speculation. It is the depending on chance, where judgment has nothing clearly set before it, that causes reckless, improvident marriages in the lower, as in the higher classes, and produces among us the evils of over-population; and chance necessarily enters into every man's calculations, when certainty is removed altogether; as it is, where certain subsistence is, by our distribution of property, the lot of but a small portion instead of about two-thirds of the people."

There never has been a writer more keenly sensible of the evils brought upon the labouring classes by excess of population, than Sismondi, and this is one of the grounds of his earnest advocacy of peasant properties. He had ample opportunity, in more countries than one, for judging of their effect on population. Let us see his testimony. "In the countries in which cultivation by small proprietors still continues, population increases regularly and rapidly until it has attained its natural limits; that is to say, inheritances continue to be divided and subdivided among several sons, as long as, by an increase of labour, each family can extract an equal income from a smaller portion of land. A father who possessed a vast extent of natural pasture, divides it among his sons, and they turn it into fields and meadows; his sons divide it among their sons, who abolish fallows: each improvement in agricultural knowledge admits of another step in the subdivision of property. But there is no danger lest the proprietor should bring up his children to make beggars of them. He knows exactly what inheritance he has to leave them; he knows that the law will divide it equally among them; he sees the limit beyond which this division would make them descend from the rank which he has himself filled, and a just family pride, common to the peasant and to the nobleman, makes him abstain from summoning into life, children for whom he cannot properly provide. If

more are born, at least they do not marry, or they agree among themselves, which of several brothers shall perpetuate the family. It is not found that in the Swiss Cantons, the patrimonies of the peasants are ever so divided as to reduce them below an honourable competence, although the habit of foreign service, by opening to the children a career indefinite and uncalculable, sometimes calls forth a superabundant population\*."

There is similar testimony respecting Norway. Though there is no law or custom of primogeniture, and no manufactures to take off a surplus population, the subdivision of property is not carried to an injurious extent. "The division of the land among children," says Mr. Laing†, "appears not, during the thousand years it has been in operation, to have had the effect of reducing the landed properties to the minimum size that will barely support human existence. I have counted from five and twenty to forty cows upon farms, and that in a country in which the farmer must, for at least seven months in the year, have winter provender and houses provided for all the cattle. It is evident that some cause or other, operating on aggregation of landed property, counteracts the dividing effects of partition among children. That cause can be no other than what I have long conjectured would be effective in such a social arrangement; viz., that in a country where land is held, not in tenancy merely, as in Ireland, but in full ownership, its aggregation by the deaths of coheirs, and by the marriages of female heirs among the body of landholders, will balance its subdivision by the equal succession of children. The whole mass of property will, I conceive, be found in such a state of society to consist of as many estates of the class of 1000*l.*, as many of 100*l.*, as many of 10*l.* a year, at one period as at another." That this should happen, supposes diffused through society a very efficacious

\* *Nouveaux Principes*, Book III. ch. 3.

† *Residence in Norway*, p. 18.

prudential check to population; and it is reasonable to give part of the credit of this prudential restraint to the peculiar adaptation of the peasant-proprietary system for fostering it.

But the experience which most decidedly contradicts the asserted tendency of peasant proprietorship to produce excess of population, is the case of France. In that country the experiment is not tried in the most favourable circumstances, a large proportion of the properties being too small. The number of landed proprietors in France is not exactly ascertained, but on no estimate does it fall much short of five millions; which, on the lowest calculation of the number of persons to a family, (and for France it ought to be a low calculation,) shows much more than half the population as either possessing, or entitled to inherit, landed property. A majority of the properties are so small as not to afford a subsistence to the proprietors, of whom, according to some computations, as many as three millions are obliged to eke out their means of support either by working for hire, or by taking additional land, generally on metayer tenure. When the property possessed is not sufficient to relieve the possessor from dependance on wages, the condition of a proprietor loses much of its characteristic efficacy as a check to overpopulation: and if the prediction so often made in England had been realized, and France had become a "pauper warren," the experiment would have proved nothing against the tendencies of the same system of agricultural economy in other circumstances. But what is the fact? That the rate of increase of the French population is the slowest in Europe. During the generation which the Revolution raised from the extreme of hopeless wretchedness to sudden abundance, a great increase of population took place. But a generation has grown up, which, having been born in improved circumstances, has not learnt to be miserable; and upon them the spirit of thrift operates most conspicuously, in keeping the increase of population within the increase of national wealth. In a table, drawn up by

Professor Rau\*, of the rate of annual increase of the popu-

\* The following is the table (see p. 168 of the Belgian translation of M. Rau's large work) :

Per cent.		Per cent.	
United States .....	1820-30 .... 2.92	Scotland.....	1821-31 .... 1.30
Hungary (according to Rohrer)	2.40	Saxony .....	1815-30 .... 1.15
England .....	1811-21 .... 1.78	Baden ....	1820-30 (Heunisch) 1.13
" .....	1821-31 .... 1.60	Bavaria .....	1814-28 .... 1.08
Austria (Rohrer)....	.... 1.30	Naples .....	1814-24 .... 0.83
Prussia.....	1816-27 .... 1.54	France ...	1817-27 (Mathieu) 0.63
" .....	1820-30 .... 1.37	and more recently (Moreau de	
" .....	1821-31 .... 1.27	Jonnes) .....	0.55
Netherlands .....	1821-28 .... 1.28		

But the number given by Moreau de Jonnes, he adds, is not entitled to implicit confidence.

The following table given by M. Quetelet (*Sur l'Homme et le Developpement de ses Facultés*, vol. i., ch. 7) also on the authority of Rau, contains additional matter, and differs in some items from the preceding, probably from the author's having taken, in those cases, an average of different years :

Per cent.		Per cent.		Per cent.	
Ireland.....	2.45	Rhenish Prussia	1.33	Naples .....	0.83
Hungary .....	2.40	Austria.....	1.30	France .....	0.63
Spain .....	1.66	Bavaria .....	1.08	Sweden .....	0.58
England .....	1.65	Netherlands.....	0.94	Lombardy .....	0.45

A recent, and very carefully prepared statement, by M. Legoyt, in the *Journal des Economistes* for May, 1847, which brings up the results for France to the census of the preceding year 1846, is summed up in the following table :

	According to the census.	According to the excess of births over deaths.		According to the census.	According to the excess of births over *deaths.
	per cent.	per cent.		per cent.	per cent.
Sweden ....	0.83	1.14	Wurtemberg	0.01	1.00
Norway.....	1.36	1.30	Holland ....	0.90	1.03
Denmark ...	....	0.95	Belgium ....	..	0.76
Russia .....	....	0.61	Sardinia ....	1.08	....
Austria .....	0.85	0.90	Great Britain	} 1.95	1.00
Prussia .....	1.84	1.18	(exclusive of Ireland)		
Saxony .....	1.45	0.90	France .....	0.68	0.50
Hanover ....	....	0.85	United States	3.27	....
Bavaria .....	....	0.71			

lations of various countries, that of France, from 1817 to 1827, is stated at  $\frac{6.3}{100}$  per cent., that of England during a similar decennial period being  $1\frac{6}{10}$  annually, and that of the United States nearly 3. According to the official returns as analyzed by M. Legoyt\*, the increase of the population, which from 1801 to 1806 was at the rate of 1.28 per cent annually, averaged only 0.47 per cent from 1806 to 1831: from 1831 to 1836 it averaged 0.60 per cent, from 1836 to 1841, 0.41 per cent, and from 1841 to 1846, 0.68 per cent; but M. Legoyt is of opinion that the population was understated in 1841, and the increase between that time and 1846 consequently overstated, and that the real increase during the whole period was something intermediate between the last two averages, or not much more than one in two hundred. Even this slow increase is wholly the effect of a diminution of deaths; the number of births not increasing at all, while the proportion of the births to the population is constantly diminishing†. This slow growth of the numbers of the people, while capital increases much more rapidly, has caused a noticeable improvement in the condition of the

\* *Journal des Economistes* for March and May, 1847.

† The following are the numbers:

From 1824 to 1828,	{ annual number of births }	981,914,	being 1 in 32.30	{ of the po- pulation.
„ 1829 to 1833,	„	965,444,	„ 1 in 34.00	„
„ 1834 to 1838,	„	972,993,	„ 1 in 34.49	„
„ 1839 to 1843,	„	970,617,	„ 1 in 35.27	„
„ 1844 and 1845,	„	983,573,	„ 1 in 35.58	„

In the last two years the births, according to M. Legoyt, were swelled by the effects of a considerable immigration. "Cette diminution des naissances," he observes, "en présence d'un accroissement constant, quoique peu rapide, de la population générale et des mariages, ne peut être attribué qu'aux progrès de l'esprit d'ordre et de prévision dans les familles. C'est d'ailleurs la conséquence prévue de nos institutions civiles et sociales, qui, en amenant chaque jour une plus grande subdivision de la fortune territoriale et mobilière de la France, développent au sein des populations les instincts de conservation et de bien-être."

In four departments, among which are two of the most thriving in Normandy, the deaths actually exceed the births.

labouring class. The circumstances of that portion of the class who are landed proprietors are not easily ascertained with precision, being of course extremely variable; but the mere labourers, who derived no direct benefit from the changes in landed property which took place at the Revolution, have unquestionably much improved in condition since that period\*. M. Rau testifies to a similar fact in the case of another country in which the subdivision of land is really excessive; the Palatinat†.

\* "Les classes de notre population qui n'ont que leur salaire, celles qui, par cette raison, sont les plus exposées à l'indigence, sont aujourd'hui beaucoup mieux pourvues des objets nécessaires à la nourriture, au logement et au vêtement, qu'elles ne l'étaient au commencement du siècle. . . On peut appuyer [ce fait] du témoignage de toutes les personnes qui ont souvenir de la première des époques comparées. . . S'il restait des doutes à cet égard, on pourrait facilement les dissiper en consultant les anciens cultivateurs et les anciens ouvriers, ainsi que nous l'avons fait nous-mêmes dans diverses localités, sans rencontrer un seul témoignage contradictoire; on peut invoquer aussi les renseignements recueillis à ce sujet par un observateur exact, M. Villermé (*Tableau de l'Etat Physique et Moral des Ouvriers*, liv. ii., ch. 1.)" From an intelligent work published in 1846, *Récherches sur les Causes de l'Indigence*, par A. Clément, pp. 84-5. The same writer speaks (p. 118) of "la hausse considérable qui s'est manifestée depuis 1789 dans le taux du salaire de nos cultivateurs journaliers;" and adds the following evidence of a higher standard of habitual requirements, even in that portion of the town population, the state of which is usually represented as most deplorable. "Depuis quinze à vingt ans, un changement considérable s'est manifesté dans les habitudes des ouvriers de nos villes manufacturières: ils dépensent aujourd'hui beaucoup plus que par le passé pour le vêtement et la parure. . . . Les ouvriers de certaines classes, tels que les anciens *canuts* de Lyon," (according to all representations, like their counterpart, our handloom weavers, the very worst paid class of artisans,) "ne se montrent plus comme autrefois couverts de sales haillons." (Page 164.)

† In his little book on the Agriculture of the Palatinat, already cited. He says that the daily wages of labour, which during the last years of the war were unusually high, and so continued until 1817, afterwards sank to a lower money-rate, but that the prices of many commodities having fallen in a still greater proportion, the condition of the people was unequivocally improved. The food given to farm labourers by their employers has also greatly improved in quantity and quality. "Sie heutigen Tages bedeu-

I am not aware of a single authentic instance which supports the assertion that rapid multiplication is promoted by peasant properties. Instances may undoubtedly be cited of its not being prevented by them, and one of the principal of these is Belgium; the prospects of which, in respect to population, are at present a matter of considerable uncertainty. Belgium has the most rapidly increasing population on the Continent, and when the circumstances of the country require, as they must soon do, that this rapidity should be checked, there will be a considerable strength of existing habit to be broken through. One of the unfavourable circumstances is the great power possessed over the minds of the people by the Catholic priesthood, whose influence is everywhere strongly exerted against restraining population. As yet, however, it must be remembered that the indefatigable industry, and great agricultural skill of the people, have rendered the existing rapidity of increase practically innocuous; the great number of large estates still undivided, affording by their gradual dismemberment, a resource for the necessary augmentation of the gross produce; and there are, besides, many thriving manufacturing towns, and mining and coal districts, which attract and employ a large portion of the annual increase of population.

§ 5. But even where peasant properties are accompanied by an excess of numbers, this evil is not necessarily attended with the additional economical disadvantage of too great a

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tend besser ist, als vor ungefähr 40 Jahren, wo das Gesinde weniger Fleisch und Mehlspeisen, keinen Käse zum Brote u. dgl. erhielt." (p. 20.) "Such an increase of wages" (adds the Professor) "which must be estimated not in money, but in the quantity of necessaries and conveniences which the labourer is enabled to procure, is by universal admission a proof that the mass of capital must have increased." It proves not only this, but also that the labouring population has not increased in an equal degree; and that in this instance as well as in France, the *morcellement* of the land, even when excessive, has been compatible with a strengthening of the prudential checks to population.

subdivision of the land. It does not follow because landed *property* is minutely divided, that *farms* will be so. As large properties are perfectly compatible with small farms, so are small properties with farms of an adequate size; and a subdivision of occupancy is not an inevitable consequence of even undue multiplication among peasant proprietors. As might be expected from their admirable intelligence in things relating to their occupation, the Flemish peasantry have long learnt this lesson. "The habit of not dividing properties," says M. Rau\*, "and the opinion that this is advantageous, have been so completely preserved in Flanders, that even now, when a peasant dies leaving several children, they do not think of dividing his patrimony, though it be neither entailed nor settled in trust; they prefer selling it entire, and sharing the proceeds, considering it as a jewel which loses its value when it is divided." That the same feeling must prevail widely even in France, is shown by the great frequency of sales of land, amounting in ten years to a fourth part of the whole soil of the country: and M. Passy, in his tract "On the Changes in the Agricultural Condition of the Department of the Eure since the year 1800†," states other facts tending to the same conclusion. "The example," says he, "of this department attests that there does not exist, as some writers have imagined, between the distribution of property and that of cultivation, a connexion which tends invincibly to assimilate them. In no portion of it have changes of ownership had a perceptible influence on the size of holdings. While, in districts of small farming, lands belonging to the same owner are ordinarily distributed among many tenants, so neither is it uncommon, in places

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\* Page 334 of the Brussels translation. He cites as an authority, Scherz, *Landwirthschaftliche Mittheilungen*, i. 185.

† One of the important papers which have appeared in the *Journal des Economistes*, the monthly organ of most of the enlightened political economists of France, and doing great honour to their knowledge and abilities. M. Passy's essay has been reprinted separately as a pamphlet.



where the *grande culture* prevails, for the same farmer to rent the lands of several proprietors. In the plains of Vexin, in particular, many active and rich cultivators do not content themselves with a single farm; others add to the lands of their principal holding, all those in the neighbourhood which they are able to hire, and in this manner make up a total extent which in some cases reaches or exceeds two hundred hectares" (five hundred English acres). "The more the estates are dismembered, the more frequent do this sort of arrangements become; and as they conduce to the interest of all concerned, it is probable that time will confirm them."

Undue subdivision, and excessive smallness of holdings, are undoubtedly a prevalent evil in some countries of peasant proprietors, and particularly in parts of Germany and France. The governments of Bavaria and Nassau have thought it necessary to impose a legal limit to subdivision, and the Prussian Government unsuccessfully proposed the same, to the States of its Rhenish Provinces. But I do not think it will anywhere be found that the *petite culture* is the system of the peasants, and the *grande culture* that of the great landlords: on the contrary, wherever the small properties are divided among too many proprietors, I believe it to be true that the large properties also are parcelled out among too many farmers, and that the cause is the same in both cases, a backward state of capital, skill, and agricultural enterprise. There is reason to believe that the subdivision in France is not more excessive than is accounted for by this cause; that it is diminishing, not increasing; and that the terror expressed in some quarters, at the progress of the *morcellement*, is one of the most groundless of real or pretended panics\*.

If peasant properties have any effect in promoting subdivision beyond the degree which corresponds to the agricultural practices of the country, and which is customary on its large estates, the cause must lie in one of the salutary

\* See the Appendix to the present volume.

influences of the system; the eminent degree in which it promotes providence on the part of those who, not being yet peasant proprietors, hope to become so. In England, where the labourer has no investment for his savings but the savings' bank, and no position to which he can rise by any exercise of economy, except perhaps that of a petty shopkeeper, with its chances of bankruptcy, there is nothing at all resembling the intense spirit of thrift which takes possession of one who, from being a day labourer, can raise himself by saving to the condition of a landed proprietor. According to almost all authorities, the real cause of the *morcellement* is the higher price which can be obtained for land by selling it to the peasantry, as an investment for their small accumulations, than by disposing of it entire to some rich purchaser who has no object but to live on its income without improving it. The hope of obtaining such an investment is the most powerful of inducements, to those who are without land, to practise the industry, frugality, and self-restraint, on which their success in this object of rational ambition is dependent. In Flanders, according to Mr. Fauche, the British Consul at Ostend\*, "farmers' sons and those who have the means to become farmers will delay their marriage until they get possession of a farm." Once a farmer, the next object is to become a proprietor. "The first thing a Dane does with his savings," says Mr. Browne, the Consul at Copenhagen†, "is to purchase a clock, then a horse and cow, which he hires out, and which pays a good interest. Then his ambition is to become a petty proprietor; and this class of persons is better off than any in Denmark. Indeed I know of no people in any country who have more easily within their reach all that is really necessary for life than this class, which is very large in comparison with that of labourers."

As the result of this enquiry into the direct operation

\* In a communication to the Commissioners of Poor Law Enquiry, p. 640 of their Foreign Communications, Appendix F to their First Report.

† *Ib.* 268.

and indirect influences of peasant properties, I conceive it to be established, that there is no necessary connexion between this form of landed property and an imperfect state of the arts of production; that it is favourable in quite as many respects as it is unfavourable, to the most effective use of the powers of the soil; that no other existing state of agricultural economy has so beneficial an effect on the industry, the intelligence, the frugality and prudence of the population, nor tends on the whole so much to discourage an improvident increase of their numbers; and that no other, therefore, is on the whole so favourable, in the present state of their education, both to their moral and their physical welfare. Whether and in what these considerations admit of useful application to any of the social questions of our time, will be considered in a future chapter.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## OF METAYERS.

§ 1. FROM the case in which the produce of land and labour belongs undividedly to the labourer, we proceed to the cases in which it is divided, but between two classes only, the labourers and the landowners; the character of capitalist merging in the one or the other, as the case may be. It is possible indeed to conceive that there might be only two classes of persons to share the produce, and that a class of capitalists might be one of them; the character of labourer and that of landowner being united to form the other. This might occur in two ways. The labourers, though owning the land, might let it to a tenant, and work under him as hired servants. But this arrangement, even in the very rare cases which could give rise to it, would not require any particular discussion, since it would not differ, in any material respect, from the threefold system, of labourers, capitalists, and landlords. The other case is the not uncommon one, in which a peasant proprietor owns and cultivates the land, but raises the little capital required, by a mortgage upon it. Neither does this case present any important peculiarity. There is but one person, the peasant himself, who has any right or power of interference in the management. He pays a fixed annuity as interest to a capitalist, as he pays another fixed sum in taxes to the government. Without dwelling further on these cases, we pass to those which do present marked features of peculiarity.

When the two parties sharing in the produce are the labourer, or labourers, and the landowner, it is not a very material circumstance in the case, which of the two furnishes the stock, or whether, as sometimes happens, they furnish

it, in a determinate proportion, between them. The essential difference does not lie in this, but in another circumstance, namely, whether the division of the produce between the two, is regulated by custom, or by competition. We will begin with the former case; of which the metayer culture is the principal, and in Europe almost the sole, example.

The principle of the metayer system is that the labourer, or peasant, makes his engagement directly with the landowner, and pays, not a fixed rent, either in money or in kind, but a certain proportion of the produce, or rather of what remains of the produce after deducting what is considered necessary to keep up the stock. The proportion is usually, as the name imports, one-half; but in several districts in Italy it is two-thirds. Respecting the supply of stock, the custom varies from place to place: in some places the landlord furnishes the whole, in others half, in others some particular part, as for instance the cattle and seed, the labourer providing the implements\*. "This connexion," says Sismondi, speaking chiefly of Tuscany†, "is often the

\* In France, before the Revolution, according to Arthur Young (i. 403) there was great local diversity in this respect. In Champagne, "the landlord commonly finds half the cattle and half the seed, and the metayer labour, implements, and taxes; but in some districts the landlord bears a share of these. In Roussillon, the landlord pays half the taxes; and in Guienne, from Auch to Fleuran, many landlords pay all. Near Aguilon, on the Garonne, the metayers furnish half the cattle. At Nangis, in the Isle of France, I met with an agreement for the landlord to furnish live stock, implements, harness, and taxes; the metayer found labour and his own capitation tax: the landlord repaired the house and gates; the metayer the windows: the landlord provided seed the first year, the metayer the last; in the intervening years they supply half and half. In the Bourbonnois the landlord finds all sorts of live stock, yet the metayer sells, changes and buys at his will; the steward keeping an account of these mutations, for the landlord has half the product of sales, and pays half the purchases." In Piedmont, he says, "the landlord commonly pays the taxes and repairs the buildings, and the tenant provides cattle, implements, and seed." (ii. 151.)

† *Etudes sur l'Economie Politique*, 6me essai: De la condition des Cultivateurs en Toscane.

subject of a contract, to define certain services and certain occasional payments to which the metayer binds himself: nevertheless the differences in the obligations of one such contract and another are inconsiderable; usage governs alike all these engagements, and supplies the stipulations which have not been expressed: and the landlord who attempted to depart from usage, who exacted more than his neighbour, who took for the basis of the agreement anything but the equal division of the crops, would render himself so odious, he would be so sure of not obtaining a metayer who was an honest man, that the contract of all the metayers may be considered as identical, at least in each province, and never gives rise to any competition among peasants in search of employment, or any offer to cultivate the soil on cheaper terms than one another." To the same effect Chateauevieux\*, speaking of the metayers of Piedmont. "They consider it" (the farm) "as a patrimony, and never think of renewing the lease, but go on from generation to generation, on the same terms, without writings or registries†."

§ 2. When the partition of the produce is a matter of fixed usage, not of varying convention, political economy has no laws of distribution to investigate. It has only to consider, as in the case of peasant proprietors, the effects of the system, first, on the condition of the peasantry, morally and physically, and secondly, on the efficiency of the labour.

\* *Letters from Italy*. I quote from Dr. Rigby's translation (p. 22).

† This virtual fixity of tenure is not however universal even in Italy; and it is to its absence that Sismondi attributes the inferior condition of the metayers in some provinces of Naples, in Lucca, and in the Riviera of Genoa; where the landlords obtain a larger (though still a fixed) share of the produce. In those countries the cultivation is splendid, but the people wretchedly poor. "The same misfortune would probably have befallen the people of Tuscany, if public opinion did not protect the cultivator; but a proprietor would not dare to impose conditions unusual in the country, and even in changing one metayer for another, he alters nothing in the terms of the engagement." (*Nouveaux Principes*, liv. iii. ch. 5.)

In both these particulars the metayer system has the characteristic advantages of peasant properties, but has them in a less degree. The metayer has less motive to exertion than the peasant proprietor, since only half the fruits of his industry, instead of the whole, are his own. But he has a much stronger motive than a day labourer, who has no other interest in the result than not to be dismissed. If the metayer cannot be turned out except for some violation of his contract, he has a stronger motive to exertion than any tenant-farmer who has not a lease. The metayer is at least his landlord's partner, and a half-sharer in their joint gains. Where, too, the permanence of his tenure is guaranteed by custom, he acquires local attachments, and much of the feelings of a proprietor. I am supposing that his half produce is sufficient to yield him a comfortable support. Whether it is so, depends (in any given state of agriculture) on the degree of subdivision of the land; which depends on the operation of the population principle. A multiplication of people, beyond the number that can be properly supported on the land or taken off by manufactures, is incident even to a peasant proprietor, and of course not less but rather more incident to a metayer population. The tendency, however, which we noticed in the proprietary system, to promote prudence on this point, is in no small degree common to it with the metayer system. There, also, it is a matter of easy and exact calculation whether a family can be supported or not. If it is easy to see whether the owner of the whole produce can increase the production so as to maintain a greater number of persons equally well, it is a not less simple problem whether the owner of half the produce can do so\*.

\* A high authority among French political economists, M. Frédéric Bastiat, affirms that even in France, incontestably the least favourable example of the metayer system, its effect in repressing population is conspicuous.

"Un fait bien constaté, c'est que la tendance à une multiplication désordonnée se manifeste principalement au sein de cette classe d'hommes qui vit de salaires. Cette prévoyance qui retarde les mariages a sur elle

There is one check which this system seems to offer, over and above those held out even by the proprietary system; there is a landlord, who may exert a controlling power, by refusing his consent to a subdivision. I do not, however, attach great importance to this check, because the farm may be loaded with superfluous hands without being subdivided; and because, so long as the increase of hands increases the gross produce, which is almost always the case, the landlord, who receives half the produce, is an immediate gainer, the inconvenience falling only on the labourers. The landlord is no doubt liable in the end to suffer from their poverty, by being forced to make advances to them, especially in bad seasons; and a foresight of this ultimate inconvenience may operate beneficially on such landlords as prefer future security to present profit.

The characteristic disadvantage of the metayer system is very fairly stated by Adam Smith. After pointing out that metayers "have a plain interest that the whole produce should be as great as possible, in order that their own proportion may be so," he continues\*, "it could never, however, be the interest of this species of cultivators to lay out, in the further improvement of the land, any part of the little stock which they might save from their own share of the

peu d'empire, parce que les maux qui résultent de l'excès de concurrence ne lui apparaissent que très-confusément, et dans un lointain en apparence peu redoutable. C'est donc la circonstance la plus favorable pour un pays d'être organisé de manière à exclure le salariat. Dans les pays de métairies, les mariages sont déterminés principalement par les besoins de la culture; ils se multiplient quand, par quelque circonstance, les métairies offrent des vides nuisibles aux travaux; ils se ralentissent quand les places sont remplies. Ici, un état de choses facile à constater, savoir, le rapport entre l'étendue du domaine et le nombre des bras, opère comme la prévoyance et plus sûrement qu'elle. Aussi voyons-nous que si aucune circonstance n'intervient pour ouvrir des débouchés à une population surnuméraire, elle demeure stationnaire. Nos départements méridionaux en sont la preuve."—*Considérations sur le Métayage, Journal des Economistes* for February, 1846.

\* *Wealth of Nations*, book iii. ch. 2.

produce, because the lord, who laid out nothing, was to get one-half of whatever it produced. The tithe, which is but a tenth of the produce, is found to be a very great hindrance to improvement. A tax, therefore, which amounted to one-half, must have been an effectual bar to it. It might be the interest of a metayer to make the land produce as much as could be brought out of it by means of the stock furnished by the proprietor; but it could never be his interest to mix any part of his own with it. In France, where five parts out of six of the whole kingdom are said to be still occupied by this species of cultivators, the proprietors complain that their metayers take every opportunity of employing the master's cattle rather in carriage than in cultivation; because in the one case they get the whole profits to themselves, in the other they share them with their landlord."

It is indeed implied in the very nature of the tenure, that all improvements which require expenditure of capital, must be made with the capital of the landlord. This however is essentially the case even in England, whenever the farmers are tenants-at-will; or (if Arthur Young is right) even on a "nine years' lease." If the landlord is willing to provide capital for improvements, the metayer has the strongest interest in promoting them, since half the benefit of them will accrue to himself. As, however, the perpetuity of tenure which, in the case which we are discussing, he enjoys by custom, renders his consent a necessary condition; the spirit of routine, and dislike of innovation, characteristic of an agricultural people when not corrected by education, are no doubt, as the advocates of the system seem to admit, a serious hindrance to improvement.

§ 3. The metayer system has met with no mercy from English authorities. "There is not one word to be said in favour of the practice," says Arthur Young\*, "and a thou-

\* *Travels*, vol. i. pp. 404—5.

sand arguments that might be used against it. The hard plea of necessity can alone be urged in its favour; the poverty of the farmers being so great, that the landlord must stock the farm, or it could not be stocked at all: this is a most cruel burthen to a proprietor, who is thus obliged to run much of the hazard of farming in the most dangerous of all methods, that of trusting his property absolutely in the hands of people who are generally ignorant, many careless, and some undoubtedly wicked. . . . In this most miserable of all the modes of letting land, the defrauded landlord receives a contemptible rent; the farmer is in the lowest state of poverty; the land is miserably cultivated; and the nation suffers as severely as the parties themselves. . . . Wherever\* this system prevails, it may be taken for granted that a useless and miserable population is found. . . . Wherever the country (that I saw) is poor and unwatered, in the Milanese, it is in the hands of metayers:" they are almost always in debt to their landlord for seed or food, and "their condition is more wretched than that of a day labourer. . . . There† are but few districts" (in Italy) "where lands are let to the occupying tenant at a money-rent; but wherever it is found, their crops are greater; a clear proof of the imbecility of the metaying system." "Wherever it," (the metayer system) "has been adopted," says Mr. Macculloch‡, "it has put a stop to all improvement, and has reduced the cultivators to the most abject poverty." Mr. Jones§ shares the common opinion, and quotes Turgot and Destutt-Tracy in support of it. The impression, however, of all these writers (notwithstanding Arthur Young's occasional references to Italy) seems to be chiefly derived from France, and France before the Revolu-

\* *Travels*, vol. ii. 151—3.

† *Ibid.*, ii. 217.

‡ *Principles of Political Economy*, 3rd ed., p. 471.

§ *Essay on the Distribution of Wealth*, pp. 102—4.

tion\*. Now the situation of French metayers under the old régime by no means represents the typical form of the contract. It is essential to that form, that the proprietor pays all the taxes. But in France the exemption of the noblesse from direct taxation had led the Government to throw the whole burthen of their ever increasing fiscal exactions upon the occupiers: and it is to these exactions that Turgot ascribed the extreme wretchedness of the metayers: a wretchedness in some cases so excessive, that in Limousin and Angoumois (the provinces which he administered) they had seldom more, according to him, after deducting all burthens, than from twenty-five to thirty livres (20 to 24 shillings) per head for their whole annual consumption: "je ne dis pas en argent, mais en comptant tout ce qu'ils consomment en nature sur ce qu'ils ont récolté‡." When we add that they had not the virtual fixity of tenure of the metayers of Italy, ("in Limousin," says Arthur Young‡, "the metayers are considered as little better than menial servants, removable

\* M. de Tracy is partially an exception, inasmuch as his experience reaches lower down than the revolutionary period: but he admits (as Mr. Jones has himself stated in another place) that he is acquainted only with a limited district, of great subdivision and unfertile soil.

M. Passy is of opinion, that a French peasantry must be in indigence and the country badly cultivated on a metayer system, because the proportion of the produce claimable by the landlord is too high, it being only in more favourable climates that any land, not of the most exuberant fertility, can pay half its gross produce in rent and leave enough to peasant farmers to enable them to grow successfully the more expensive and valuable products of agriculture. (*Systèmes de Culture*, p. 35.) This is an objection only to a particular numerical proportion, which is indeed the common one, but is not essential to the system.

† See the "Mémoire sur la Surcharge des Impositions qu'éprouvait la Généralité de Limoges, adressé au Conseil d'Etat en 1766," pp. 260-304 of the fourth volume of Turgot's Works. The occasional engagements of landlords (as mentioned by Arthur Young) to pay a part of the taxes, were, according to Turgot, of recent origin, under the compulsion of actual necessity. "Le propriétaire ne s'y prête qu'autant qu'il ne peut trouver de métayer autrement; ainsi, même dans ce cas-là, le métayer est toujours réduit à ce qu'il faut précisément pour ne pas mourir de faim." (P. 275.)

‡ Vol. i., p. 404.

at pleasure, and obliged to conform in all things to the will of the landlords") it is evident that their case affords no argument against the metayer system in its better form. A population who could call nothing their own, who, like the Irish cottiers, could not in any contingency be worse off, had nothing to restrain them from multiplying, and subdividing the land, until stopped by actual starvation.

We shall find a very different picture, by the most accurate authorities, of the metayer cultivation of Italy. In the first place, as to subdivision. In Lombardy, according to Châteauvieux\*, there are few farms which exceed sixty acres, and few which have less than ten. These farms are all occupied by metayers at half profit. They invariably display "an extent† and a richness in buildings rarely known in any other country in Europe." Their plan "affords the greatest room with the least extent of building; is best adapted to arrange and secure the crop, and is, at the same time, the most economical, and the least exposed to accidents by fire." The court-yard "exhibits a whole so regular and commodious, and a system of such care and good order, that our dirty and ill-arranged farms can convey no adequate idea of." The same description applies to Piedmont. The rotation of crops is excellent. "I should think‡ no country can bring so large a portion of its produce to market as Piedmont." Though the soil is not naturally very fertile, "the number of cities is prodigiously great." The agriculture must therefore be eminently favourable to the net as well as to the gross produce of the land. "Each plough works thirty-two acres in the season. . . . Nothing can be more perfect or neater than the hoeing and moulding up the maize, when in full growth, by a single plough, with a pair of oxen, without injury to a single plant, while all the weeds are effectually destroyed." So much for agricultural skill.

\* *Letters from Italy*, translated by Rigby, p. 16.

† *Ibid.*, pp. 19, 20.

‡ *Ibid.*, pp. 24-31.

"Nothing can be so excellent as the crop which precedes and that which follows it." The wheat "is threshed by a cylinder, drawn by a horse, and guided by a boy, while the labourers turn over the straw with forks. This process lasts nearly a fortnight; it is quick and economical, and completely gets out the grain. . . . In no part of the world are the economy and the management of the land better understood than in Piedmont, and this explains the phenomenon of its great population, and immense export of provisions." All this under metayer cultivation.

Of the valley of the Arno, in its whole extent, both above and below Florence, the same writer thus speaks\* :— "Forests of olive-trees covered the lower parts of the mountains, and by their foliage concealed an infinite number of small farms, which peopled these parts of the mountains; chestnut-trees raised their heads on the higher slopes, their healthy verdure contrasting with the pale tint of the olive-trees, and spreading a brightness over this amphitheatre. The road was bordered on each side with village-houses, not more than a hundred paces from each other. . . . They are placed at a little distance from the road, and separated from it by a wall, and a terrace of some feet in extent. On the wall are commonly placed many vases of antique forms, in which flowers, aloes, and young orange-trees are growing. The house itself is completely covered with vines. . . . Before these houses we saw groups of peasant females dressed in white linen, silk corsets, and straw-hats ornamented with flowers. . . . These houses being so near each other, it is evident that the land annexed to them must be small, and that property, in these valleys, must be very much divided; the extent of these domains being from three to ten acres. The land lies round the houses, and is divided into fields by small canals, or rows of trees, some of which are mulberry-trees, but the greatest number poplars, the

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\* Pp. 78—9.

leaves of which are eaten by the cattle. Each tree supports a vine. . . . These divisions, arrayed in oblong squares, are large enough to be cultivated by a plough without wheels, and a pair of oxen. There is a pair of them between ten or twelve of the farmers; they employ them successively in the cultivation of all the farms. . . . Almost every farm maintains a well-looking horse, which goes in a small two-wheeled cart, neatly made, and painted red; they serve for all the purposes of draught for the farm, and also to convey the farmer's daughters to mass and to balls. Thus, on holidays, hundreds of these little carts are seen flying in all directions, carrying the young women, decorated with flowers and ribbons."

This is not a picture of poverty; and so far as agriculture is concerned, it effectually redeems metayer cultivation, as existing in these countries, from the reproaches of English writers; but with respect to the condition of the cultivators, Châteauevieux's testimony is, in some points, not so favourable. "It is\* neither the natural fertility of the soil, nor the abundance that strikes the eye of the traveller, which constitute the well-being of its inhabitants. It is the number of individuals among whom the total produce is divided, which fixes the portion that each is enabled to enjoy. Here it is very small. I have thus far, indeed, exhibited a delightful country, well watered, fertile, and covered with a perpetual vegetation; I have shown it divided into countless inclosures, which, like so many beds in a garden, display a thousand varying productions; I have shown, that to all these inclosures are attached well-built houses, clothed with vines, and decorated with flowers; but, on entering them, we find a total want of all the conveniences of life, a table more than frugal, and a general appearance of privation." Is not Châteauevieux here unconsciously contrasting the condition of the metayers with that of the farmers of other countries,

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\* Pp. 73—6.

when the proper standard with which to compare it is that of the agricultural day-labourers?

Arthur Young says\*, "I was assured that these metayers are (especially near Florence), much at their ease; that on holidays they are dressed remarkably well, and not without objects of luxury, as silver, gold, and silk; and live well, on plenty of bread, wine, and legumes. In some instances this may possibly be the case, but the general fact is contrary. It is absurd to think that metayers, upon such a farm as is cultivated by a pair of oxen, can live at their ease; and a clear proof of their poverty is this, that the landlord, who provides half the live stock, is often obliged to lend the peasant money to procure his half. . . . The metayers, not in the vicinity of the city, are so poor, that landlords even lend them corn to eat: their food is black bread, made of a mixture with vetches; and their drink is very little wine, mixed with water, and called *aquarolle*; meat on Sundays only; their dress very ordinary." Mr. Jones admits the superior comfort of the metayers near Florence, and attributes it partly to straw-platting, by which the women of the peasantry can earn, according to Châteauevieux †, from fifteen to twenty pence a day. But even this fact tells in favour of the metayer system; for in those parts of England in which either straw-platting or lace-making is carried on by the women of the labouring class, as in Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire, the condition of the class is not better, but rather worse than elsewhere, the wages of agricultural labour being depressed by a full equivalent.

In spite of Châteauevieux's statement respecting the poverty of the metayers, his opinion, in respect to Italy at least, is given in favour of the system. "It occupies ‡ and constantly interests the proprietors, which is never the case with great proprietors who lease their estates at fixed rents.

\* *Travels*, vol. ii., p. 156.

† *Letters from Italy*, p. 75.

‡ *Ibid.*, pp. 295—6.

It establishes a community of interests, and relations of kindness between the proprietors and the metayers; a kindness which I have often witnessed, and from which result great advantages in the moral condition of society. The proprietor, under this system, always interested in the success of the crop, never refuses to make an advance upon it, which the land promises to repay with interest. It is by these advances, and by the hope thus inspired, that the rich proprietors of land have gradually perfected the whole rural economy of Italy. It is to them that it owes the numerous systems of irrigation which water its soil, as also the establishment of the terrace culture on the hills: gradual but permanent improvements, which common peasants, for want of means, could never have effected, and which could never have been accomplished by the farmers, nor by the great proprietors who let their estates at fixed rents, because they are not sufficiently interested. Thus the interested system forms of itself that alliance between the rich proprietor, whose means provide for the improvement of the culture, and the metayer, whose care and labours are directed, by a common interest, to make the most of these advances."

But the testimony most favourable to the system is that of Sismondi, which has the advantage of being specific, and from accurate knowledge; his information being not that of a traveller, but of a resident proprietor, intimately acquainted with rural life. His statements apply to Tuscany generally, and more particularly to the Val di Nievole, in which his own property lay, and which is not within the supposed privileged circle immediately round Florence. It is one of the districts in which the size of farms appears to be the smallest. The following is his description of the dwellings and mode of life of the metayers of that district\*.

"Cette maison, bâtie en bonnes murailles à chaux et à ciment, a toujours au moins un étage, quelquefois deux, au-

\* From his Sixth Essay, formerly referred to.



dessus du rez-de-chaussée. Le plus souvent on trouve à ce rez-de-chaussée la cuisine, une étable pour deux bêtes à corne, et le magasin, qui prend son nom, *tinaia*, des grandes cuves (*tini*) où l'on fait fermenter le vin, sans le soumettre au pressoir: c'est là encore que le métayer enferme sous clé ses tonneaux, son huile, et son blé. Presque toujours il possède encore un hangar appuyé contre la maison, pour qu'il puisse y travailler à couvert à raccommoier ses outils, ou à hacher le fourrage pour son bétail. Au premier et au second étage sont deux, trois, et souvent quatre chambres à lit. . . . La plus spacieuse et la mieux aérée de ces chambres est en général destinée par le métayer, pendant les mois de Mai et de Juin, à l'éducation des vers à soie: de grands coffres pour enfermer les habits et le linge, et quelques chaises de bois, sont les principaux meubles de ces chambres; mais une nouvelle épouse y apporte toujours sa commode de bois de noyer. Les lits sont sans rideaux, sans tour de lit; mais sur chacun, outre un bon garde-paille rempli de la paille élastique du blé de Turquie, on voit un ou deux matelas en laine, ou, chez les plus pauvres, en étoupe, une bonne couverture piquée, des draps de forte toile de chanvre, et sur le meilleur lit de la famille, un tapis de bourre de soie qu'on étale les jours de fête. Il n'y a de cheminée qu'à la cuisine; dans la même pièce on trouve toujours la grande table de bois où dîne la famille, avec ses bancs; le grand coffre, qui sert en même temps d'armoire pour conserver le pain et les provisions, et de pétrin; un assortiment assez complet et fort peu coûteux de pots, de plats et d'assiettes en terre cuite; une ou deux lampes de laiton, un poids à la romaine, et au moins deux cruches en cuivre rouge pour puiser et pour conserver l'eau. Tout le linge et tous les habits de travail de la famille ont été filés par les femmes de la maison. Ces habits, tant pour les hommes que pour les femmes, sont de l'étoffe qu'ils nomment *mezza lana* si elle est épaisse, *mola* si elle est légère. La trame est un gros fil ou de chanvre ou d'étoupe, le remplissage est de laine ou de coton; elle est

teinte par les mêmes paysannes qui l'ont filée. On se figurerait difficilement combien, par un travail assidu, les paysannes savent accumuler et de toile et de *mezza lana*; combien de draps se trouvent au dépôt commun: combien chaque membre de la famille a de chemises, de vestes, de pantalons, de jupons, et de robes. Pour le faire comprendre, nous joignons en note une partie de l'inventaire de la famille de paysans que nous connaissons le mieux; elle n'est ni parmi les plus pauvres ni parmi les plus riches, et elle vit heureuse par son travail sur la moitié des récoltes de moins de dix arpens de terre\*. Cette épouse avait eu 50 écus de dot, dont 20 payés comptant, et le reste à terme, à 2 écus par année. L'écu de Toscane vaut 6 francs. La dot la plus commune pour les paysannes, dans le reste de la Toscane où les métairies sont plus grandes, est de 100 écus, 600 francs."

Is this poverty, or consistent with poverty? When a common, M. de Sismondi even says *the* common, marriage portion of a metayer's daughter is 24*l.* English money, equivalent to at least 50*l.* in Italy and in that rank of life; when one whose dowry is only half that amount, has the trousseau

\* "Inventaire du trousseau de Jeanne, fille de Valente Papini, à son mariage avec Giovacchino Landi, le 29 Avril 1835, à Porta Vecchia, près Pescia :

"28 chemises, 3 robes de bourre de soie en couleur, 4 robes de fleur de soie en couleur, 7 robes d'Indienne ou toile de coton, 2 robes de travail d'hiver (*mezza lana*), 3 robes et jupons de travail d'été (*mola*), 3 jupes blanches, 5 tabliers de toile peinte, 1 tablier de soie noire, 1 tablier de mérinos noir, 9 tabliers de travail (*mola*) en couleur, 4 mouchoirs blancs, 8 mouchoirs en couleur, 3 mouchoirs de soie, 2 voiles brodés et 1 voile de tulle, 3 essuie-mains, 14 paires de bas, 2 chapeaux, l'un de feutre, l'autre de paille fine : 2 camées d'or, 2 boucles d'oreilles en or, 1 chapelet avec deux piastres romaines, 1 collier de corail avec sa croix d'or. . . . Toutes les épouses plus riches ont de plus *la veste di seta*, la grande robe de toilette, de soie, qu'elles ne portent que quatre ou cinq fois dans leur vie.

"Les hommes n'ont point de trousseau: l'époux en se mariant n'avait que 14 chemises, et le reste en proportion. Il n'a encore à présent que 13 paires de draps, tandis que dans la famille de sa femme il y en a 30 paires."

just described, which is represented by Sismondi as a fair average; must not the class be fully comparable, in general condition, to a large proportion even of capitalist farmers in other countries? and incomparably above the day labourers of any country, except a new colony, or the United States. Very little can be inferred, against such evidence, from a traveller's impression of the poor quality of their food. Its unexpensive character may be rather the effect of economy than of necessity. Costly feeding is not the favourite luxury of a southern people; their diet, in all classes, is principally vegetable, and no peasantry on the Continent has the superstition of the English labourer respecting white bread. But the nourishment of the Tuscan peasant, according to Sismondi, "is wholesome and various: its basis is an excellent wheaten bread, brown, but pure from bran and from all mixture." "Dans la mauvaise saison, il ne fait que deux repas par jour: à dix heures du matin il mange sa pollenta, à l'entrée de la nuit il mange la soupe, puis du pain avec quelque assaisonnement (*companatico*). En été il fait trois repas, à huit heures, à une heure, et au soir, mais il n'allume de feu qu'une seule fois par jour, pour son dîner, que se compose de soupe, puis d'un plat ou de viande salée, ou de poisson sec, ou de haricots, ou d'herbages, qu'il mange avec du pain. La viande salée n'entre que pour une quantité bien minime dans cet ordinaire, car il estime que quarante livres de porc salé par individu suffisent amplement à son provision de l'année: il en met deux fois par semaine un petit morceau dans son potage. Le dimanche il a toujours sur sa table un plat de viande fraîche, mais une morceau qui ne pèse qu'une livre ou une livre et demie suffit à toute la famille, quelque nombreuse qu'elle soit. Il ne faut point oublier que le paysan Toscan récolte en général de l'huile d'olive pour son usage: il s'en sert, non seulement pour s'éclairer, mais pour assaisonner tous les végétaux qu'il apprête pour sa table, et qui deviennent ainsi bien plus savoureux et plus nutritifs. A déjeuner il mange du pain, et

quelquefois du fromage et des fruits; à souper, du pain et de la salade. Sa boisson se compose du vin inférieur du pays, et de la vinelle ou piquette faite d'eau fermentée sur le marc du raisin. Il réserve cependant toujours quelque peu de son meilleur vin pour le jour où il battra son grain, et pour quelques fêtes qui se célèbrent en famille. Il estime à dix barils de vinelle par année (environ cinquante bouteilles) et à cinq sacs de froment (environ mille livrés de pain) la portion requise pour un homme fait."

The remarks of Sismondi on the moral influences of this state of society are not less worthy of attention. The rights and obligations of the metayer being fixed by usage, and all taxes and rates being paid by the proprietor, "le métayer a les avantages de la propriété sans l'inconvénient de la défendre. C'est au propriétaire qu'avec la terre appartient la guerre: pour lui il vit en paix avec tous ses voisins; il n'a à leur égard aucun motif de rivalité ou de défiance: il conserve la bonne harmonie avec eux, comme avec son maître, avec le fisc et avec l'église: il vend peu, il achète peu, il touche peu d'argent, mais personne ne lui en demande. On a souvent parlé du caractère doux et bienveillant des Toscans, mais on n'a point assez remarqué la cause qui a le plus contribué à préserver cette douceur: c'est celle qui a soustrait tous les agriculteurs, formant plus des trois quarts de la population, à presque toute occasion de querelle." The fixity of tenure which the metayer, so long as he fulfils his known obligations, possesses by usage although not by law, gives him the local attachments, and almost the strong sense of personal interest, characteristic of a proprietor. "Le métayer vit sur sa métairie comme sur son héritage, l'aimant d'affection, travaillant à la bonifier sans cesse, se confiant dans l'avenir, et comptant bien que ses champs seront travaillés après lui par ses enfans et les enfans de ses enfans. En effet, le plus grand nombre des métayers vivent de génération en génération sur la même terre; ils la connaissent en détail avec une précision que le sentiment seul de la propriété peut donner. . .

Les champs élevés en terrasses les uns au-dessus des autres n'ont souvent pas plus de quatre pieds de largeur, mais il n'y en a pas un dont le métayer n'ait étudié en quelque sorte le caractère. Celui-ci est sec, celui-là froid et humide; ici la terre est profonde, là ce n'est qu'une croûte qui couvre à peine le roc; le froment prospère mieux sur l'un, le seigle sur l'autre; ici ce serait peine perdue de semer du blé de Turquie, ailleurs la terre se refuse aux fèves et aux lupins, plus loin le lin viendra à merveille, et le bord de ce ruisseau sera propre au chanvre: ainsi l'on apprend du métayer, avec étonnement, que dans un espace de dix arpens, le sol, les aspects, et l'inclinaison du terrain, présentent plus de variété qu'un riche fermier n'en sait en général distinguer dans une ferme de cinq cents acres d'étendue. C'est que le dernier sent qu'il n'est là que de passage, que de plus il doit se conduire par des règles générales, et négliger les détails. Mais le métayer, avec l'expérience du passe, a senti son intelligence éveillée par l'intérêt et l'affection pour devenir le meilleur des observateurs, et avec tout l'avenir devant lui, il ne songe pas à lui seulement, mais à ses enfans et à ses petits enfans. Aussi lorsqu'il plante l'olivier, arbre séculaire, et qu'il ménage au fond du creux qu'il fait pour lui un écoulement aux eaux qui pourraient lui nuire, il étudie toutes les couches de terrain qu'il est appelé à défoncer\*."

\* Of the intelligence of this most interesting people, M. de Sismondi speaks in the most favourable terms. Few of them can read; but there is often one member of the family destined for the priesthood, who reads to them on winter evenings. Their language differs little from the purest Italian. The taste for improvisation in verse is general. "Les paysans du val de Nievole fréquentent le spectacle les jours de fête, en été, de neuf à onze heures du soir: leur admission ne leur coûte guère que cinq sols de France. Alfieri est leur auteur de prédilection; toute l'histoire des Atrides est familière à ces hommes qui ne savent pas lire, et qui vont demander à ce poète austère un délassement de leurs rudes travaux." Unlike most rustics, they find pleasure in the beauty of their country. "Dans les collines du val de Nievole on trouve devant chaque maison, l'aire pour battre le blé, qui a rarement plus de vingt-cinq à trente toises carrées, c'est le plus souvent le seul espace de niveau qu'on rencontre dans toute la métairie.

§ 4. I do not offer these quotations as evidence of the intrinsic excellence of the metayer system; but they surely suffice to prove that neither "land miserably cultivated" nor a people in "the most abject poverty," have any necessary connexion with it, and that the unmeasured vituperation lavished upon the system by English writers, is grounded on an extremely narrow view of the subject. I look upon the rural economy of Italy as simply so much additional evidence in favour of small occupations with perpetuity of tenure. It is an example of what can be accomplished by those two elements, even under the disadvantage of the peculiar nature of the metayer contract, in which the motives to exertion on the part of the tenant are only half as strong as if he farmed the land on the same footing of perpetuity at a money rent, either fixed, or varying according to some rule which would leave to the tenant the whole benefit of his own exertions. The metayer tenure is not one which we should be anxious to introduce where the exigencies of society had not naturally given birth to it; but neither ought we to be eager to abolish it, on a mere *à priori* view of its disadvantages. If the system, in Tuscany, works as well in practice as it is represented to do, with every appearance of minute knowledge, by so competent an authority as Sismondi; if the mode of living of the people, and the size of farms, have for ages maintained and still maintain themselves\* such as they

En même temps c'est une terrasse qui domine les plaines et la vallée, et d'où la vue s'étend sur un pays ravissant. Presque jamais je ne m'y suis arrêté pour l'admirer, sans que le métayer soit venu jouir de mon admiration, et m'indiquer du doigt les beautés qu'il croyait pouvoir m'avoir échappé."

\* "On ne voit jamais," says Sismondi, "une famille de métayers proposer à son maître de partager sa métairie, à moins que le travail ne soit réellement supérieur à ses forces, et qu'elle ne sente la certitude de conserver les mêmes jouissances sur un moindre espace de terrain. On ne voit jamais dans une famille plusieurs fils se marier en même temps, et former autant de ménages nouveaux; un seul prend une femme et se charge des soins du ménage; aucun de ses frères ne se marie, à moins que lui-même

are said to be by him, it were to be regretted that a state of rural well being so much beyond what is realized in most European countries, should be put to hazard by an attempt to introduce, under the guise of agricultural improvement, a system of money rents and capitalist farmers. Even where the metayers are poor, and the subdivision great, it is not to be assumed as of course, that the change would be for the better. The enlargement of farms, and the introduction of what are called agricultural improvements, usually diminish the number of labourers employed on the land; and unless the growth of capital in trade and manufactures affords an opening for the displaced population, or unless there are reclaimable wastes on which they can be located, competition will so reduce wages, that they will probably be worse off as day-labourers than they were as metayers.

Mr. Jones very properly objects against the French Economists of the last century, that in pursuing their favourite object of introducing money rents, they turned their minds solely to putting farmers in the place of metayers, instead of transforming the existing metayers into farmers; which, as he justly remarks, can scarcely be effected, unless, to enable the metayers to save and become owners of stock, the proprietors submit for a considerable time to a diminution of income, instead of expecting an increase of it, which has generally been their immediate motive for making the attempt. If this transformation were effected, and no other change made in the metayer's condition; if, preserving all the other rights which usage ensures to him, he merely got rid of the landlord's claim to half the produce, paying in lieu of it a moderate fixed rent; he would be so far in a better position than at present, as the whole, instead of only half the fruits of any improvement he made, would now belong to himself; but even so, the benefit would not be without alloy; for

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n'ait pas d'enfans, ou que l'on n'offre à cet autre frère une nouvelle métairie."—*Nouveaux Principes*, liv. iii., ch. 5.

a metayer, though not himself a capitalist, has a capitalist for his partner, and has the use, in Italy at least, of a considerable capital, as is proved by the excellence of the farm buildings: and it is not probable that the landowners would any longer consent to peril their moveable property on the hazards of agricultural enterprise, when assured of a fixed money income without it. Thus would the question stand even if the change left undisturbed the metayer's virtual fixity of tenure, and converted him, in fact, into a peasant proprietor at a quit rent. But if we suppose him converted into a mere tenant, displaceable at the landlord's will, and liable to have his rent raised by competition to any amount which any unfortunate being in search of subsistence can be found to offer or promise for it; he would lose all the features in his condition which preserve it from being deteriorated: he would be cast down from his present position of a kind of half-proprietor of the land, and would sink into a cottier tenant.

## CHAPTER IX.

### OF COTTIERS.

§ 1. By the general appellation of cottier tenure I shall designate all cases without exception in which the labourer makes his contract for land without the intervention of a capitalist farmer, and in which the conditions of the contract, especially the amount of rent, are determined not by custom but by competition. The principal European example of this tenure is Ireland, and it is from that country that the term cottier is derived\*. Nearly the whole agricultural population of Ireland may be said to be cottier-tenants; except so far as the Ulster tenant-right constitutes an exception. There is, indeed, a numerous class of labourers who (we may presume through the refusal either of proprietors or of tenants in possession to permit any further sub-division,) have been unable to obtain even the smallest patch of land as permanent tenants. But, from the deficiency of capital, the custom of paying wages in land is so universal, that even those who work as casual labourers for the cottiers or for such larger farmers as are found in the country, are usually paid not in money, but by permission to cultivate for the season a piece of ground, which is generally delivered to them by the farmer ready manured, and is known by the name of conacre. For this they agree to pay a money rent, often of several pounds an acre, but no money actually passes, the debt being worked out in labour, at a money valuation.

\* In its original acceptation the word "cottier" designates a class of sub-tenants, who rent a cottage and an acre or two of land from the small farmers. But the usage of writers has long since stretched the term to include those small farmers themselves, and generally all peasant farmers whose rents are determined by competition.

The produce, on the cottier system, being divided into two portions, rent, and the remuneration of the labourer; the one is evidently determined by the other. The labourer has whatever the landlord does not take: the condition of the labourer depends on the amount of rent. But rent, being regulated by competition, depends upon the relation between the demand for land, and the supply of it. The demand for land depends on the number of competitors, and the competitors are the whole rural population. The effect, therefore, of this tenure, is to bring the principle of population to act directly on the land, and not as in England, on capital. Rent, in this state of things, depends on the proportion between population and land. As the land is a fixed quantity, while population has an unlimited power of increase; unless something checks that increase, the competition for land soon forces up rent to the highest point, consistent with keeping the population alive. The effects, therefore, of cottier tenure depend on the extent to which the capacity of population to increase is controlled, either by custom, by individual prudence, or by starvation and disease.

It would be an exaggeration to affirm, that cottier tenancy is absolutely incompatible with a prosperous condition of the labouring class. If we could suppose it to exist among a people to whom a high standard of comfort was habitual; whose requirements were such, that they would not offer a higher rent for land than would leave them an ample subsistence, and whose moderate increase of numbers left no unemployed population to force up rents by competition, save when the increasing produce of the land from increase of skill would enable a higher rent to be paid without inconvenience; the cultivating class might be as well remunerated, might have as large a share of the necessaries and comforts of life, on this system of tenure as on any other. They would not, however, while their rents were arbitrary, enjoy any of the peculiar advantages which metayers on the Tuscan system derive from their connexion with the land. They

would neither have the use of a capital belonging to their landlords, nor would the want of this be made up by the intense motives to bodily and mental exertion which act upon the peasant who has assurance of a perpetuity. On the contrary, any increased value given to the land by the exertions of the tenant, would have no effect but to raise the rent against himself, either the next year, or at farthest when his lease expired. The landlords might have justice or good sense enough not to avail themselves of the advantage which competition would give them; and different landlords would do so in different degrees. But it is never safe to expect that a class or body of men will act contrary to their immediate pecuniary interest; and even a doubt on the subject would be almost as fatal as a certainty, for when a person is considering whether he shall undergo a present exertion or sacrifice for a comparatively remote future, the scale is turned by a very small probability that the fruits of the exertion or of the sacrifice will be taken away from him. The only safeguard against these uncertainties would be the growth of a custom, insuring a permanence of tenure in the same occupant, without liability to any other increase of rent, than might happen to be sanctioned by the general sentiments of the community. The Ulster tenant-right is such a custom. The very considerable sums which outgoing tenants obtain from their successors, for the goodwill of their farms\*, in the first place actually limit the competition for land to persons who have such sums to offer: while the same fact also proves that full advantage is not taken by the landlord of even that more limited competition, since the landlord's rent

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\* "It is not uncommon for a tenant without a lease to sell the bare privilege of occupancy or possession of his farm, without any visible sign of improvement having been made by him, at from ten to sixteen, up to twenty and even forty years' purchase of the rent."—(*Digest of Evidence taken by Lord Devon's Commission*. Introductory Chapter.) The compiler adds, "the comparative tranquillity of that district" (Ulster) "may perhaps be mainly attributable to this fact."

does not amount to the whole of what the incoming tenant not only offers but actually pays. He does so in the full confidence that the rent will not be raised; and for this he has the guarantee of a custom, not recognized by law, but deriving its binding force from another sanction, perfectly well understood in Ireland\*. Without one or other of these supports, a custom limiting the rent of land is not likely to grow up in any progressive community. If wealth and population were stationary, rent also would generally be stationary, and after remaining a long time unaltered, would probably come to be considered unalterable. But all progress in wealth and population tends to a rise of rents. Under a metayer system there is an established mode in which the owner of land is sure of participating in the increased produce drawn from it. But on the cottier system he can only do so by a readjustment of the contract, while that readjustment, in a progressive community, would almost always be to his advantage. His interest, therefore, would be decidedly opposed to the growth of any custom commuting rent into a fixed demand.

§ 2. Where the amount of rent is not limited, either by law or custom, a cottier system has the disadvantages of the worst metayer system, with scarcely any of the advantages by which, in the best forms of that tenure, they are compensated. It is scarcely possible that cottier agriculture should be other than miserable. There is not the same necessity that the condition of the cultivators should be so.

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\* "It is in the great majority of cases not a reimbursement for outlay incurred, or improvements effected on the land, but a mere life insurance or purchase of immunity from outrage."—(*Digest, ut supra*.) "The present tenant-right of Ulster," (the writer judiciously remarks,) "is an embryo copyhold." "Even there, if the tenant-right be disregarded, and a tenant be ejected without having received the price of his good-will, outrages are generally the consequence."—(Ch. viii.) "The disorganized state of Tipperary, and the agrarian combination throughout Ireland, are but a methodized war to obtain the Ulster tenant-right."

Since by a sufficient restraint on population competition for land could be kept down, and extreme poverty prevented; habits of prudence and a high standard of comfort, once established, would have a fair chance of maintaining themselves: although even in these favourable circumstances the motives to prudence would be considerably weaker than in the case of metayers, protected by custom (like those of Tuscany) from being deprived of their lands: since a metayer family, thus protected, could not be impoverished by any other improvident multiplication than their own, but a cottier family, however prudent and self-restraining, may have the rent raised against it by the consequences of the multiplication of other families. Any protection to the cottier against this evil could only be derived from a salutary sentiment of duty or dignity, pervading the class. From this source, however, he might derive considerable protection. If the habitual standard of requirement among the class were high, a young man might not choose to offer a rent which would leave him in a worse situation than the preceding tenant; or it might be the general custom, as it actually is in some countries, not to marry until a farm was vacant.

But it is not where a high standard of comfort has rooted itself in the habits of the labouring class, that we are ever called upon to consider the effects of a cottier system. That system is found only where the habitual requirements of the rural labourers are the lowest possible; where, as long as they are not actually starving they will multiply; and population is only checked by the diseases, and the shortness of life, consequent on insufficiency of mere physical necessities. This is unhappily the state of the largest portion of the Irish peasantry. When a people have sunk into this state, and still more when they have been in it from time immemorial, the cottier system is an almost insuperable obstacle to their emerging from it. When the habits of the people are such that their increase is never checked but by the impossibility

of obtaining a bare support, and when this support can only be obtained from land, all stipulations and agreements respecting amount of rent are merely nominal; the competition for land makes the tenants undertake to pay more than it is possible they should pay, and when they have paid all they can, more almost always remains due.

“As it may fairly be said of the Irish peasantry,” says Mr. Revans, the Secretary to the Irish Poor Law Enquiry Commission\*, “that every family which has not sufficient land to yield its food has one or more of its members supported by begging, it will easily be conceived that every endeavour is made by the peasantry to obtain small holdings, and that they are not influenced in their biddings by the fertility of the land, or by their ability to pay the rent, but solely by the offer which is most likely to gain them possession. The rents which they promise, they are almost invariably incapable of paying; and consequently they become indebted to those under whom they hold, almost as soon as they take possession. They give up, in the shape of rent, the whole produce of the land with the exception of a sufficiency of potatoes for a subsistence; but as this is rarely equal to the promised rent, they constantly have against them an increasing balance. In some cases, the largest quantity of produce which their holdings ever yielded, or which, under their system of tillage, they could in the most favourable seasons be made to yield, would not be equal to the rent bid; consequently, if the peasant fulfilled his engagement with his landlord, which he is rarely able to accomplish, he would till the ground for nothing, and give his landlord a premium for being allowed to till it. On the sea-coast, fishermen, and in the northern counties those who have looms, frequently pay more in rent than the market

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\* *Evils of the State of Ireland, their Causes and their Remedy.* Page 10. A pamphlet, containing, among other things, an excellent digest and selection of evidence from the mass collected by the Commission presided over by Archbishop Whately.

value of the whole produce of the land they hold. It might be supposed that they would be better without land under such circumstances. But fishing might fail during a week or two, and so might the demand for the produce of the loom, when, did they not possess the land upon which their food is grown, they might starve. The full amount of the rent bid, however, is rarely paid. The peasant remains constantly in debt to his landlord; his miserable possessions—the wretched clothing of himself and of his family, the two or three stools, and the few pieces of crockery, which his wretched hovel contains, would not, if sold, liquidate the standing and generally accumulating debt. The peasantry are mostly a year in arrear, and their excuse for not paying more is destitution. Should the produce of the holding, in any year, be more than usually abundant, or should the peasant by any accident become possessed of any property, his comforts cannot be increased; he cannot indulge in better food, nor in a greater quantity of it. His furniture cannot be increased, neither can his wife or children be better clothed. The acquisition must go to the person under whom he holds. The accidental addition will enable him to reduce his arrear of rent, and thus to defer ejection. But this must be the bound of his expectation.”

As an extreme instance of the intensity of competition for land, and of the monstrous height to which it occasionally forces up the nominal rent, we may cite from the evidence taken by Lord Devon's Commission\*, a fact attested by Mr. Hurly, Clerk of the Crown for Kerry: “I have known a tenant bid for a farm that I was perfectly well acquainted with, worth 50%. a-year: I saw the competition get up to such an extent, that he was declared the tenant at 450%.”

§ 3. In such a condition, what can a tenant gain by any

\* Evidence, p. 351.

amount of industry or prudence, and what lose by any recklessness? If the landlord at any time exerted his full legal rights, the cottier would not be able even to live. If by extra exertion he doubled the produce of his bit of land, or if he prudently abstained from producing mouths to eat it up, his only gain would be to have more left to pay to his landlord; while, if he had twenty children, they would still be fed first, and the landlord could only take what was left. Almost alone among mankind the Irish cottier is in this condition, that he can scarcely be either better or worse off by any act of his own. If he was industrious or prudent, nobody but his landlord would gain; if he is lazy or intemperate it is at his landlord's expense. A situation more devoid of motives to either labour or self-command, imagination itself cannot conceive. The inducements of free human beings are taken away, and those of a slave not substituted. He has nothing to hope, and nothing to fear, except being dispossessed of his holding, and against this he protects himself by the *ultima ratio* of a defensive civil war. Rockism and Whiteboyism are the determination of a people, who have nothing that can be called theirs but a daily meal of the lowest description of food, not to submit to being deprived of that for other people's convenience.

Is it not, then, a bitter satire on the mode in which opinions are formed on the most important problems of human nature and life, to find grave public instructors imputing the backwardness of Irish industry, and the want of energy of the Irish people in improving their condition, to a peculiar indolence and *insouciance* in the Celtic race? Of all vulgar modes of escaping from the consideration of the effect of social and moral influences on the human mind, the most vulgar is that of attributing the diversities of conduct and character to inherent natural differences. What race would not be indolent and insouciant when things are so arranged, that they derive no advantage from forethought or exertion? If such are the arrangements in the midst of which they live



and work, what wonder if the listlessness and indifference so engendered are not shaken off the first moment an opportunity offers when exertion would really be of use? It is very natural that a pleasure-loving and sensitively organised people like the Irish, should be less addicted to steady routine labour than the English, because life has more excitements for them independent of it; but they are not less fitted for it than their Celtic brethren the French, not less so than the Tuscans, or the ancient Greeks. An excitable organization is precisely that in which by adequate inducements it is easiest to kindle a spirit of animated exertion. It speaks nothing against the capacities of industry in human beings, that they will not exert themselves when they have no motive. No labourers work harder, in England or America, than the Irish; but not under a cottier system.

§ 4. The multitudes who till the soil of India, are in a condition sufficiently analogous to the cottier system, and at the same time sufficiently different from it, to render the comparison of the two a source of some instruction. In most parts of India there are, and have always been, only two contracting parties, the landlord, and the peasant: the landlord being generally the sovereign, except where he has, by a special instrument, conceded his rights to an individual, who becomes his representative. The payments, however, of the peasants, or ryots as they are termed, have seldom if ever been regulated, as in Ireland, by competition. Though the customs locally obtaining were infinitely various, and though practically no custom existed against the sovereign's will, there was always a rule of some sort, common to a neighbourhood: the collector did not make his separate bargain with every peasant, but assessed each according to the rule adopted for the rest. The idea was thus kept up of a right of property in the tenant, or at all events, of a right to permanent possession; and the anomaly arose of a fixity of

tenure in the peasant-farmer, co-existing with an arbitrary power of increasing the rent.

When the Mogul Government substituted itself throughout the greater part of India for the Hindoo rulers, it proceeded on a different principle. A minute survey was made of the land, and upon that survey an assessment was founded, fixing the specific payment due to the government from each field. If this assessment had never been exceeded, the ryots would have been in the comparatively advantageous position of peasant proprietors, subject to a heavy but a fixed quit-rent. The absence however of any real protection against illegal extortions, rendered this improvement in their condition rather nominal than real; and, except during the occasional accident of a humane and vigorous local administrator, the exactions had no practical limit but the inability of the ryot to pay more.

It was to this state of things that the English rulers of India succeeded; and they were, at an early period, struck with the importance of putting an end to this arbitrary character of the land-revenue, and imposing a fixed limit to the government demand. They did not attempt to go back to the Mogul valuation. It has been in general the very rational practice of the English Government in India, to pay little regard to what was laid down as the theory of the native institutions, but to inquire into the rights which existed and were respected in practice, and to protect and enlarge those. For a long time, however, it blundered grievously about matters of fact, and grossly misunderstood the usages and rights which it found existing. Its mistakes arose from the inability of ordinary minds to imagine a state of social relations fundamentally different from those with which they are practically familiar. England being accustomed to great estates and great landlords, the English rulers took it for granted that India must possess the like; and looking round for some set of people who might be mistaken for the objects of their search, they pitched upon a sort of tax-

gatherers called Zemindars. "The zemindar," says the philosophical historian of India\*, "had some of the attributes which belong to a landowner; he collected the rents of a particular district, he governed the cultivators of that district, lived in comparative splendour, and his son succeeded him when he died. The zemindars, therefore, it was inferred without delay, were the proprietors of the soil, the landed nobility and gentry of India. It was not considered that the zemindars, though they collected the rents, did not keep them; but paid them all away, with a small deduction, to the government. It was not considered that if they governed the ryots, and in many respects exercised over them despotic power, they did not govern them as tenants of theirs, holding their lands either at will or by contract under them. The possession of the ryot was an hereditary possession; from which it was unlawful for the zemindar to displace him: for every farthing which the zemindar drew from the ryot, he was bound to account: and it was only by fraud, if out of all that he collected, he retained an *ana* more than the small proportion which, as pay for collection, he was permitted to receive."

"There was an opportunity in India," continues the historian, "to which the history of the world presents not a parallel. Next after the sovereign, the immediate cultivators had, by far, the greatest portion of interest in the soil. For the rights (such as they were) of the zemindars, a complete compensation might have easily been made. The generous resolution was adopted, of sacrificing to the improvement of the country, the proprietary rights of the sovereign. The motives to improvement which property gives, and of which the power was so justly appreciated, might have been bestowed upon those upon whom they would have operated with a force incomparably greater than that with which they could operate upon any other class of men: they might have

\* Mill's *History of British India*, book vi. ch. 5.

been bestowed upon those from whom alone, in every country, the principal improvements in agriculture must be derived, the immediate cultivators of the soil. And a measure worthy to be ranked among the noblest that ever were taken for the improvement of any country, might have helped to compensate the people of India, for the miseries of that misgovernment which they had so long endured. But the legislators were English aristocrats; and aristocratical prejudices prevailed."

The measure proved a total failure, as to the main effects which its well-meaning promoters expected from it. Unaccustomed to estimate the mode in which the operation of any given institutions is modified even by such variety of circumstances as exists within a single kingdom, they flattered themselves that they had created, throughout the Bengal provinces, English landlords, and it proved that they had only created Irish ones. The new landed aristocracy disappointed every expectation built upon them. They did nothing for the improvement of their estates, but everything for their own ruin. The same pains not being taken, as has been taken in Ireland, to enable landlords to defy the consequences of their improvidence, the whole land of Bengal had to be sequestrated and sold, for debt or arrears of revenue, and in one generation the ancient zemindars had ceased to exist. Other families, mostly the descendants of Calcutta money dealers, now occupy their place; and live as useless drones upon the soil which has been given up to them. Whatever the government has sacrificed of its pecuniary claims, for the creation of such a class, has at the best been wasted.

But in this ill judged measure there was one redeeming point, to which may probably be ascribed all the progress which the Bengal provinces have since made in production and in amount of revenue. The ryots were reduced, indeed, to the rank of tenants of the zemindar; but tenants with fixity of tenure. The rents were left to the zemindars to

fix at their discretion; but once fixed, were never more to be altered. This is now the law and practice of landed tenure, in the most flourishing part of the British Indian dominions.

In the parts of India into which the British rule has been more recently introduced, the blunder has been avoided of endowing a useless body of great landlords with gifts from the public revenue; but along with the evil, the good also has been left undone. The government has done less for the ryots than it has required to be done for them by the landlords of its creation. In the greater part of India, the immediate cultivators have never yet obtained a perpetuity of tenure at a fixed rent. The government manages the land on the principle on which a good Irish landlord manages his estate; not putting it up to competition, not asking the cultivators what they will promise to pay, but determining for itself what they can afford to pay, and defining its demand accordingly. In some places it makes its arrangements with the ryots individually, in others with the village communities, leaving them to apportion the demand according to usage or agreement. Sometimes the rent is fixed only for one year, sometimes for three, or five; but the tendency of recent policy is towards long leases, extending, in the northern provinces of India, to a term of thirty years, with conditional renewal for twenty more. This arrangement has not existed for a sufficient time to have shewn by experience, how far the motives which the long lease creates in the minds of the cultivators, fall short of the beneficial influence of a perpetual settlement. But the two plans, of annual settlements and of short leases, are irrevocably condemned. They can only be said to have succeeded, in comparison with the unlimited oppression which existed before. They are approved by nobody, and were never looked upon in any other light than as temporary arrangements, to be abandoned when a more complete knowledge of the capabilities of the country should afford data for something more permanent.

## CHAPTER X.

### MEANS OF ABOLISHING COTTIER TENANCY.

§ 1. THE question, what is to be done with a cottier population? which in any case would have been a fit subject for consideration in a work like the present, is to the English Government at this time the most urgent of practical questions. The majority of a population of eight millions, having long grovelled in helpless inertness and abject poverty under the cottier system; reduced by its operation to mere food, of the cheapest description, and to an incapacity of either doing or willing anything for the improvement of their lot; have at last, by the failure of that lowest quality of food, been plunged into a state in which the alternative is death, or to be permanently supported by other people, or a radical change in the economical arrangements under which it has hitherto been their misfortune to live. Such an emergency has compelled attention to the subject from the legislature and from the nation, but it can hardly as yet be said, with much result; for, the evil having originated in a system of land tenancy which withdrew from the people every motive to industry or thrift except the fear of starvation, the remedy provided by Parliament was to take away even that, by conferring on them a legal claim to eleemosynary support: while, towards correcting the cause of the mischief, nothing was done, beyond vain complaints, though at the price to the national treasury of ten millions sterling for one year's delay.

I presume it is needless to expend any argument in proving that the very foundation of the economical evils of Ireland is the cottier system: that while peasant rents fixed by competition are the practice of the country, to expect

industry, useful activity, any restraint on population but death, or any the smallest diminution of poverty, is to look for figs on thistles and grapes on thorns. If our practical statesmen are not ripe for the recognition of this fact; or if while they acknowledge it in theory, they have not a sufficient feeling of its reality, to be capable of founding upon it any course of conduct; there is still another, and a purely physical consideration, from which they will find it impossible to escape. If the one crop on which the people have hitherto supported themselves continues to be precarious, either some new and great impulse must be given to agricultural skill and industry, or the soil of Ireland can no longer feed any thing like its present population. The whole produce of the western half of the island, leaving nothing for rent, will not now keep permanently in existence the whole of its people: and they will necessarily remain an annual charge on the taxation of the empire, until they are reduced either by emigration or by starvation to a number corresponding with the low state of their industry, or unless the means are found of making that industry much more productive.

Cottiers, therefore, must cease to be. Nothing can be done for Ireland without transforming her rural population from cottier tenants into something else. But into what? Those who, knowing neither Ireland nor any foreign country, take as their sole standard of social and economical excellence English practice, propose as the single remedy for Irish wretchedness, the transformation of the cottiers into hired labourers. I contend that the object should be their transformation, as far as circumstances admit, into landed proprietors. Either, indeed, would be a most desirable exchange from the present nuisance; but as a practical object the latter of the two seems to me preferable in an almost incalculable degree to the former, both as the most desirable in itself, and very much the easiest to effect.

§ 2. To convert the cottiers into hired labourers is

rather a scheme for the improvement of Irish agriculture, than of the condition of the Irish people. The status of a day labourer has no charm for infusing forethought, frugality or self-restraint into a people devoid of them. It is not necessarily injurious to those qualities where they exist, but it seldom engenders them where they are absent. If the Irish peasantry could be instantaneously changed into receivers of wages, the wages being no higher than they now are, or than there is any reason to hope that they would be, and the present habits and mental characteristics of the people remaining, we should merely see five or six millions of people living as day labourers in the same wretched manner in which as cottiers they lived before; equally passive in the absence of every comfort, equally reckless in multiplication, and even, perhaps, equally listless at their work; since they could not be dismissed *en masse*, and if they could, dismissal would now be simply remanding them to the poor-rate. Far other would be the effect of making them peasant proprietors. A people who in industry and providence have everything to learn—who are confessedly among the most backward of European populations in the industrial virtues—require for their regeneration the most powerful incitements by which those virtues can be stimulated: and there is no stimulus comparable to property in land. A permanent interest in the soil to those who till it, is almost a guarantee for the most unwearied laboriousness; against over-population, though not infallible, it is the best preservative yet known; and where it failed, any other plan would probably fail much more egregiously; the evil would be beyond the reach of merely economical remedies. Having already insisted so strongly on these topics, I feel it needless to argue any further, that the conversion of the Irish peasantry, or of some considerable portion of them, into small landed proprietors, is a more beneficial object than the transformation of all of them indiscriminately into labourers for hire.

But besides being more desirable, it is, above all, more attainable. The other plan, as a measure standing by itself, is wholly impracticable. It involves contradictory conditions. The conversion of the cottiers into hired labourers implies the introduction, all over Ireland, of capitalist farmers, in lieu of the present small tenants. These farmers, or their capital at least, must come from England. But to induce capital to come in, the cottier population must first be peaceably got rid of: in other words, that must be already accomplished, which English capital is proposed as the means of accomplishing. Why is Ireland the only country in the world to which English capital does *not* go? Because it cannot go to any purpose without turning out the people, and the people refuse to be turned out. I presume it is not seriously proposed that they should be turned out *en masse*, without being otherwise provided for. With their own consent they never will be dislodged from their holdings until something better is given to them. They will not be got rid of by merely telling them that something better will follow.

It is necessary however in the next place to consider, what is the condition of things which would follow. The ineffective Irish agriculture is to be converted into an effective English agriculture, by throwing together the small holdings into large farms, cultivated by combined labour, with the best modern improvements. On the supposition of success, Ireland would be assimilated, in her agriculture, to the most improved parts of England. But what are the most improved parts of England? Those in which fewest labourers are employed, in proportion to the extent of the soil. Taking the number of Irish peasants to the square mile, and the number of hired labourers on an equal space in the model counties of Scotland or England, the former number is commonly computed to be about three times the latter. Two-thirds, therefore, of the Irish peasantry, would be absolutely dispensed with. What is to be done with them? Is it supposed that they would find employment in

manufacturing labour? They are at present unfit for it; and even if fit, capital would require to be imported for that purpose too; and is it likely that manufacturing capital will resort to Ireland, abandoning Leeds and Manchester? Under a more efficient cultivation of her soil, Ireland would require a greatly increased amount of manufactured goods, but these would still be most advantageously manufactured in Lancashire or Yorkshire; and even if Ireland became, as to agricultural improvement, an English county, she would be but a larger Devonshire, drawing everything which she consumed, except the products of agriculture, from elsewhere. All the excess of Irish population above the Devonshire standard would be a local surplus, which must migrate to England, or to America, or subsist on taxation or on charity, or must be enabled to raise its own food from its own soil. The plan therefore of turning the cottiers into labourers for wages, even if it fulfilled its utmost promise, only disposes of a third of the population; with respect to the remaining two-thirds, the original difficulty recurs in its full force.

The question, what system of agriculture is best in itself, is, for Ireland, of purely theoretical interest: the people are there, and the problem is not how to improve the country, but how it can be improved by and for its present inhabitants. It is not probable that England will undertake a simultaneous removal of two millions—the smallest number which in the opinion of any person acquainted with the subject, would make a clear field for the introduction of English agriculture. But unless she does, the soil of Ireland must continue to employ and feed the people of Ireland: and since it cannot do this on the English system, or on any system whatever of large farming, all idea of that species of agricultural improvement as an exclusive thing must be abandoned: the *petite culture* in some one of its shapes will continue, and a large proportion of the peasants, if they do not become small proprietors, will remain small farmers. In the few cases in which comprehensive measures of agricultural

improvement have been undertaken by large capitals, the capitalists have not, as some perhaps might suppose, employed themselves in creating large farms, and cultivating them by hired labour; their farms are of a size only sufficient for a single family: it was by other expedients that the improvement, which was to render the enterprize profitable, was brought about: these were, advances of capital, and a temporary security of tenure. There is a Company called the Irish Waste Land Improvement Society, of whose operations, in 1845, the following report was made, by their intelligent manager, Colonel Robinson\*.

“Two hundred and forty-five tenants, many of whom were a few years since in a state bordering on pauperism, the occupiers of small holdings of from ten to twenty plantation acres each, have, by their own free labour, with the Society’s aid, improved their farms to the value of 4,396*l.*; 605*l.* having been added during the last year, being at the rate of 17*l.* 18*s.*, per tenant for the whole term, and 2*l.* 9*s.*, for the past year; the benefit of which improvements each tenant will enjoy during the unexpired term of a *thirty-one years’ lease*.

“These 245 tenants and their families have, by spade husbandry, reclaimed and brought into cultivation 1,032 plantation acres of land, previously unproductive mountain waste, upon which they grew, last year, crops valued by competent practical persons at 3,896*l.*, being in the proportion of 15*l.* 18*s.* each tenant; and their live stock, consisting of cattle, horses, sheep, and pigs, now actually upon the estates, is valued, according to the present prices of the neighbouring markets, at 4,162*l.*, of which 1,304*l.* has been added since February 1844, being at the rate of 16*l.* 19*s.*, for the whole period, and 5*l.* 6*s.*, for the last year; during which time their stock has thus increased in value a sum equal to their present annual rent; and by the statistical table and returns referred to in previous reports, it is proved that the tenants, in general,

\* In the *Appendix to the Report of Lord Devon’s Commission*, p. 84.

improve their little farms, and increase their cultivation and crops, in nearly direct proportion to the number of available working persons of both sexes of which their families consist.”

There cannot be a stronger testimony to the superior amount of *gross* produce raised by small farming, under any tolerable system of landed tenure: and it is worthy of attention, that the industry and zeal are greatest among the smaller holders: Colonel Robinson noticing as exceptions to the remarkable and rapid progress of improvement, some tenants “who are occupants of larger farms than twenty acres, a class too often deficient in the enduring industry indispensable for the successful prosecution of mountain improvements.”

§ 3. The case of Ireland is similar in its requirements to that of India. In India though great errors have from time to time been committed, no one ever proposed, under the name of agricultural improvement, to eject the ryots or peasant farmers from their possessions; all the improvement that has been looked for, has been through making their tenure more secure to them, and the sole difference of opinion is between those who contend for a perpetuity, and those who think that long leases will suffice. The same question may exist as to Ireland; and with the case of the Waste Lands Improvement Society before us, as well as many other instances of reclamation of land, recorded by Lord Devon’s Commission, it would be idle to deny that long leases, under such landlords as are sometimes to be found, do effect wonders, even in Ireland. But then, they must be leases at a low rent. Long leases are in no way to be relied on for getting rid of cottierism. During the existence of cottier tenancy, leases have always been long; twenty-one years and three lives concurrent, was a usual term. But the rent being fixed by competition, at a higher amount than could be paid, so that the tenant neither had, nor could by any exertion acquire, a beneficial interest in the land, the advantage

of a lease was merely nominal. In India, the government is able to prevent this evil, because, being itself the landlord, it can fix the rent according to its own judgment; but under individual landlords, while rents are fixed by competition, and the competitors are a peasantry struggling for subsistence, nominal rents are inevitable, unless the population is so thin that the competition itself is only nominal. The majority of landlords will grasp at immediate money and immediate power; and so long as they find cottiers eager to offer them every thing, it is useless to rely on them for tempering the vicious practice by a considerate self-denial.

A perpetuity is a preferable tenure to a long lease; it is a far stronger stimulus to improvement: not only because the longest lease, before coming to an end, passes through all the varieties of short leases down to no lease at all; but for more fundamental reasons. It is very shallow, even in pure economics, to take no account of the influence of imagination: there is a virtue in "for ever" beyond the longest term of years; even if the term is long enough to include children, and all whom a person individually cares for, he will not exert himself with the same ardour to increase the value of an estate, his interest in which diminishes in value every year. A lease, therefore, is never a complete substitute for a perpetuity. But where a country is under cottier tenure, the question of perpetuity is quite secondary to the more important point, a limitation of the rent. Rent paid by a capitalist, who farms for profit and not for bread, may safely be abandoned to competition; rent paid by labourers cannot, unless the labourers were in a state of civilization and improvement which labourers have nowhere yet reached, and cannot easily reach under such a tenure. Peasant rents ought never to be arbitrary, never at the discretion of the landlord: either by custom or law it is imperatively necessary that they should be fixed; and where no mutually advantageous custom, such as the metayer system of Tuscany, has established itself, reason and experience recommend that they should be

fixed in perpetuity; thus changing the rent into a quit-rent, and the farmer into a peasant proprietor.

§ 4. Let us then examine what means are afforded by the economical circumstances of Ireland, for carrying this change into effect on a sufficiently large scale to accomplish the complete abolition of cottier tenancy. The mode which first suggests itself is the obvious and direct one, of doing the thing outright by Act of Parliament; making the whole land of Ireland the property of the tenants, subject to the rents now really paid (not the nominal rents), as a fixed rent charge. This, under the name of "fixity of tenure," was one of the demands of the Repeal Association during the most successful period of their agitation: and was better expressed by Mr. Conner, its earliest, most enthusiastic, and most indefatigable apostle\*, by the words, "a valuation and a perpetuity." In this measure there would not, strictly speaking, be any injustice, provided the landlords were compensated for the present value of the chances of increase which they would be prospectively required to forego. The rupture of existing social relations would hardly be more violent than that effected by the ministers Stein and Hardenberg, when by a series of edicts, in the early part of the present century, they revolutionized the state of landed property in the Prussian monarchy, and left their names to posterity among the greatest benefactors of their country. To enlightened foreigners writing on Ireland, Von Raumer and Gustave de Beaumont, a remedy of this sort seems so exactly and obviously what the disease requires, that they have some difficulty in comprehending how it is that the thing is not yet done.

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\* Author of numerous pamphlets, entitled "True Political Economy of Ireland," "Letter to the Earl of Devon," "Two Letters on the Rackrent Oppression of Ireland," and others. Mr. Conner has been an agitator on the subject since 1832.

But though this measure is not beyond the competence of a just legislature, and would be no infringement of property if the landlords had the option allowed them of giving up their lands at the full value, reckoned at the ordinary number of years' purchase; it is only fit to be adopted if the nature of the case admitted of no milder remedy. In the first place, it is a complete expropriation of the higher classes of Ireland: which, if there is any truth in the principles we have laid down, would be perfectly warrantable, but only if it were the sole means of effecting a great public good. In the second place, that there should be none but peasant proprietors, is in itself far from desirable. Large farms, cultivated by large capitals, and owned by persons of the best education which the country can give, persons qualified by instruction to appreciate scientific discoveries, and able to bear the delay and risk of costly experiments, are an important part of a good agricultural system. Many such landlords there are even in Ireland; and it would be a public misfortune to drive them from their post. Other objections might be added: a large proportion of the present holdings are too small, to try the proprietary system under the greatest advantages: nor are the tenants always the persons one would desire to select, as the first occupants of peasant properties. There are numbers of them on whom it would have a more beneficial effect to give them the hope of acquiring a landed property by industry and frugality, than the property itself in immediate possession.

§ 5. Some persons who desire to avoid the term fixity of tenure, but who cannot be satisfied without some measure co-extensive with the whole country, have proposed the universal adoption of "tenant right." Under this equivocal phrase, two things are confounded. What it commonly stands for in Irish discussion, is the Ulster practice, which is in fact, fixity of tenure. It supposes a customary, though not a legal, limitation of the rent: without which the tenant

evidently could not acquire a beneficial and saleable interest. Its existence is highly salutary, and is one principal cause of the superiority of Ulster in efficiency of cultivation and in the comfort of the people, notwithstanding a minuter subdivision of holdings than in the other provinces. But to convert this customary limitation of rent into a legal one, and to make it universal, would be to establish a fixity of tenure by law, the objections to which have already been stated.

The same appellation (tenant right) has of late years been applied, more particularly in England, to something altogether different, and falling as much short of the exigency, as the enforcement of the Ulster custom would exceed it. This English tenant right, with which a high agricultural authority has connected his name by endeavouring to obtain for it legislative sanction, amounts to no more than this, that on the expiration of a lease, the landlord should make compensation to the tenant for "unexhausted improvements." This is certainly very desirable, but provides only for the case of capitalist farmers, and of improvements made by outlay of money; of the worth and cost of which, an experienced land agent or a jury of farmers could accurately judge. The improvements to be looked for from peasant cultivators are the result not of money but of their labour, applied at such various times and in such minute portions as to be incapable of judicial appreciation. For such labour, compensation could not be given on any principle but that of paying to the tenant the whole difference between the value of the property when he received it, and when he gave it up: which would as effectually annihilate the right of property of the landlord, as if the rent had been fixed in perpetuity, while it would not offer the same inducements to the cultivator who improves from affection and passion as much as from calculation, and to whom his own land is a widely different thing from the most liberal possible pecuniary compensation for it.

§ 6. There are then strong objections, as well as great



difficulties, opposed to the attempt to make peasant properties universal. But, fortunately, that they should be universal is not necessary to their usefulness. There is no need to extend them to all the population, or all the land. It is enough if there be land available, on which to locate so great a portion of the population, that the remaining area of the country shall not be required to maintain greater numbers than are compatible with large farming and hired labour. For this purpose there is an obvious resource in the waste lands; which are happily so extensive, and a large proportion of them so improveable, as to afford a means by which, without making the present tenants proprietors, nearly the whole surplus population might be converted into peasant proprietors elsewhere. This plan has been strongly pressed upon the public by several writers: but the first to bring it prominently forward in England was Mr. William Thornton, in a work\* honourably distinguished from most others which have been recently published, by its rational treatment of the great questions affecting the economical condition of the labouring classes.

The detailed estimate of an irrefragable authority, Mr. Griffith, annexed to the Report of Lord Devon's Commission, shows nearly a million and a half of acres reclaimable for the spade or plough, some of them with the promise of great fertility, and about two millions and a half more reclaimable for pasture†: the greater part being in most convenient proximity to the principal masses of destitute population. Besides these four millions of acres, there are above two millions and a half‡, pronounced by Mr. Griffith to be unimprovable; but he is only speaking of reclamation for profit: it is doubtful if there be any land, in a temperate

\* *Over Population and its Remedy.* By William Thomas Thornton, pp. 429—34.

† Mr. Griffith's numbers are 1,425,000 and 2,330,000. See p. 53 of the Report.

‡ 2,535,000.

climate, which cannot be reclaimed and rendered productive by labourers themselves, under the inducement of a permanent property. Confining ourselves to the one and a half million of arable first mentioned, it would furnish properties averaging five acres each to three hundred thousand persons, which at the rate of five persons to a family, a rather low rate for Ireland, answers to a population of fifteen hundred thousand. Suppose such a number drafted off to a state of independence and comfort, together with a very moderate additional relief by emigration; and the introduction of English capital and farming, over the remaining surface of Ireland, would at once cease to be chimerical\*.

"The improvement of wastes," Mr. Thornton observes, "may perhaps be thought to require a good deal of capital; but capital is principally useful for its command of labour, and the Irish peasantry have quite labour enough at their own disposal. Their misfortune is, that they have so much. Their labour would not be the worse applied because they worked for themselves, instead of for a paymaster. So far is

\* If instead of throwing small farms into large, and exchanging peasant for capitalist farmers, the "clearing" were limited to such a consolidation of small holdings as would make them correspond in size to the admirable small farms of Belgium, the adequacy of the resource is still more clear and unquestionable. "There are at present," says the Digest of Evidence to Lord Devon's Report, (p. 399,) "326,084 occupiers of land (more than one-third of the total number returned in Ireland) whose holdings vary from seven acres to less than one acre, and are therefore inadequate to support the families residing upon them." It is shewn by calculation, "that the consolidation of these small holdings, up to eight acres, would require the removal of about 192,368 families, and that the first class of improvable waste land in Ireland would furnish to those removed families locations of about eight acres each; or the first and second qualities of improvable waste land, taken together, would furnish them with locations of about twenty acres each." It is computed (p. 565) that by these arrangements 500,000 labourers, equivalent to at least two millions and a half of population, would be abstracted from competition in the labour market, while, on the waste land alone, an addition of nearly twenty-two millions sterling would be made to the gross produce of the country; "and that the first three or four years' crops would return the cost requisite to bring about this change."

[large] capital from being indispensable for the cultivation of barren tracts, that schemes of this kind, which could only bring loss to a rich speculator, are successfully achieved by his penniless rival. A capitalist must have a certain return for the money he lays out, but the poor man expends nothing but his own superabundant labour, which would be valueless if not so employed, so that his returns, however small, are all clear profit. No man in his senses would ever have thought of wasting money upon the original sand of the Pays de Waes; but the hard-working boors who settled there two hundred years ago, without any other stock than their industry, contrived to enrich both themselves and the land, and indeed to make the latter the richest in Europe. There is no soil so worthless that an English labourer will not eagerly accept an allotment of it; and while the green valley, from which some Highland community has been driven, is fast relapsing under the superintendence of a wealthy sheep-farmer into its primitive wildness, its former tenants are forming new patches of arable land on the rock-strewn moors along the sea-coast."

"The profit of reclaiming waste land," says the Digest of Evidence to Lord Devon's Commission\*, "will be best understood from a practice not uncommon in Ireland, to which farmers sometimes resort. This consists in giving the use of a small portion of it to a poor cottier or herdsman for the first three crops, after which this improved portion is given up to the farmer, and a fresh piece of the waste land is taken on the same terms by the cottier." Well may the compiler say, "Here we have the example of the very poorest class in Ireland obtaining a livelihood by the cultivation of waste land under the most discouraging and the least remunerative circumstances that can well be imagined."

It is quite worthy of the spirit which pervades the wretched attempts as yet made to do good to Ireland, that this spectacle of the poorest of mankind making the land

\* P. 570.

valuable by their labour for the profit of other people, who have done nothing to assist them, does not once strike Lord Devon and his Commission as a thing which ought not to be. Mr. Thornton strongly urges the claims of common justice and common sense.

"The colonists ought to be allowed to retain permanent possession of the spots reclaimed by them. To employ them as labourers, in bringing the land into a remunerative condition, (see Report of Land Occupation Commissioners), in order that it may then be let to some one else, while they are sent to shift for themselves where they can, may be an excellent mode of enriching the landlord, but must eventually aggravate the sufferings of the poor. It is probably because this plan has been generally practised, that the reclamation of waste land has hitherto done nothing for the benefit of the Irish peasantry. If the latter are to derive any advantage from it, such of them as may be located on the waste, should receive perpetual leases of their respective allotments—should be made freeholders, in fact, or at least perpetual tenants at a quit-rent. Such an appropriation of waste land would of course require that compensation should be made to all who previously possessed any interest in it. But the value of a legal interest in land which cannot be enclosed or cultivated without permission of the legislature, can only be proportionate to the actual yearly produce; and as land in a natural state yields little or nothing, all legal claims upon it might be bought up at a trifling expense, or might be commuted for a very small annual payment to be made by the settlers. Of the perfect competence of Parliament to direct some arrangement of this kind, there can be no question. An authority which compels individuals to part with their most valued property on the slightest pretext of public convenience, and permits railway projectors to throw down family mansions and cut up favourite pleasure grounds, need not be very scrupulous about forcing the sale of boggy meadows or mountain pastures, in order to obtain

the means of curing the destitution and misery of an entire people.”

It would be desirable, and in most cases necessary, that the tracts of land should be prepared for the labours of the peasant, by being drained and intersected with roads at the expense of Government; the interest of the sums so expended, and of the compensation paid for existing rights to the waste land, being charged on it when reclaimed as a perpetual quit-rent, redeemable at a moderate number of years' purchase. The state would thus incur no loss, while the advances made would give that immediate employment to the surplus labour of Ireland, which if not given in this manner, will assuredly have to be given in some other, not only less useful, but far less likely to repay its cost. The millions lavished during the famine in the almost nominal execution of useless works, without any result but that of keeping the people alive, would, if employed in a great operation on the waste lands, have been quite as effectual for relieving immediate distress, and would have laid the foundation broad and deep for something really deserving the name of social improvement. But, as usual, it was thought better to throw away money and exertion in a beaten track, than to take the responsibility of the most advantageous investment of them in an untrodden one.

§ 7. If after the superabundant evidence elicited in the Irish inquiries, of the extent and capability of improvement of the waste lands, the reader can doubt their sufficiency for home colonization on such a scale as to effect with benefit to everybody the “clearing” of all Ireland; there are yet other means, by which not a little could be done in the dissemination of peasant proprietors over even the existing area of cultivation. There is at the present time an experiment in progress, in more than one part of England, for the creation of peasant proprietors. The project is of Chartist origin, and its first colony is now in full operation near Rickmans-

worth, in Hertfordshire. The plan is as follows:—Funds were raised, in shares, by a joint stock company. With part of these funds an estate of several hundred acres was bought. This estate was divided into portions of two, three, and four acres, on each of which a house was erected by the Association. These holdings were let to select labourers, to whom also such sums were advanced as were thought to amount to a sufficient capital for cultivation by spade labour. An annual payment, affording to the Company an interest of five per cent on their outlay, was laid on the several holdings as a fixed quitrent, never in any circumstances to be raised. The tenants were thus proprietors from the first, and their redemption of the quitrent, by saving from the produce of their labour, is desired and calculated upon.

Should the issue of this experiment be unfavourable, which at present there seems no reason to believe, the cause of failure will be in the details of management, not in the principle. These well-conceived arrangements afford a mode in which private capital may co-operate in renovating the social and agricultural economy of Ireland, not only without sacrifice but with considerable profit to its owners. The remarkable success of the Waste Land Improvement Society, which proceeded on a plan far less advantageous to the tenant, is an instance of what an Irish peasantry can be stimulated to do, by a sufficient assurance that what they do will be for their own advantage. It is not indispensable to begin at once with a perpetuity; long leases at moderate rents, like those of the Waste Land Society, would suffice, if a prospect were held out to the farmers of being allowed to purchase their farms with the capital which they might acquire, as the Society's tenants were so rapidly acquiring under the influence of its beneficent system. It would be a boon to allow them to become purchasers of the land even at the value given to it by their own labour: and though, on the part of government, to take such an advantage of their exertions would be most ungenerous and illiberal, it would

be allowable in private capitalists undertaking a work of national benefit as an advantageous investment of capital. When the lands were sold, the funds of the association would be liberated, and it might recommence operations in some other quarter.

Nor is it only by joint-stock associations, and the introduction of English capital, that this system might be acted upon: it would be most advantageous to every individual landowner in the distressed counties, who has any funds which he can freely dispose of. Under the new Irish poor law, there are no means for the landlords of escaping ruin, unless, by some potent stimulant to the industrial energies of the people, they can largely increase the produce of agriculture: and since there is no stimulant available, so potent as a permanent interest in the soil, either the present landlords, or those English mortgagees to whom the estates of the more impoverished landowners must inevitably pass, would find it to their advantage, if not to grant at once this permanent interest to their tenants, at least to hold out to them the prospect of acquiring it. The government, too, into whose hands no small portion of the land of Ireland may be expected to fall, in consequence of unrepaid advances, either past or yet to come, will have a noble opportunity of rendering the acquisition instrumental to the formation of a peasant proprietary: but, to the state, it would be most discreditable to seek for profit at the expense of the peasantry; and whether the ownerships were granted immediately or only held out in prospect, the rent or price should be no more than sufficient to repay the state for its advances.

§ 8. When the formidable difficulties in which the government of this country is becoming more and more deeply involved by the condition of Ireland, shall be met instead of evaded, by men capable of rising superior both to their own indolence and prejudices and to those of others; we may hope to see, from the present lazy, apathetic,

reckless, improvident, and lawless Ireland, a new Ireland arise, consisting of peasant proprietors with something to lose, and of hired labourers with something to gain; the former attached to peace and law through the possession of property, the latter through the hope of it; while the agriculture of one-half of Ireland would be conducted on the best system of small cultivation, and that on the other half on the best principles of large farming and combination of labour. Would it be too much to hope, that when the number of hired labourers was duly proportioned to the soil on which they were employed, and a peaceful "clearing" had made the country safe for English capital to dwell in, the rate of wages would be sufficient to establish a tolerably high standard of living—and the spirit of saving, fostered by the desire of acquiring land, would prevent that standard from being again depressed through an imprudent increase of population?

In the complication of human affairs, the actual effects of causes, whether salutary or injurious, remain always far short of their tendencies. But history is not without examples of changes, similar in kind to that which I have been sketching, and the results of them are not uninteresting. Three times during the course of French history, the peasantry have been purchasers of land; and these times immediately preceded the three principal eras of French agricultural prosperity.

"Aux temps les plus mauvais," says the historian Michelet\*, "aux moments de pauvreté universelle, où le riche même est pauvre et vend par force, alors le pauvre se trouve en état d'acheter; nul acquéreur ne se présentant, le paysan en guenilles arrive avec sa pièce d'or, et il acquiert un bout de terre. Ces moments de désastre où le paysan a pu acquérir la terre à bon marché, ont toujours été suivis d'un élan subit de fécondité qu'on ne s'expliquait pas. Vers 1500, par exemple, quand la France épuisée par Louis XI. semble achever sa ruine en Italie, la noblesse qui part est

\* *Le Peuple*, 1re partie, ch. 1.

obligée de vendre; la terre, passant à de nouvelles mains, refleurit tout-à-coup; on travaille, on bâtit. Ce beau moment (dans le style de l'histoire monarchique) s'est appelé *le bon Louis XII.*

“Il dure peu, malheureusement. La terre est à peine remise en bon état, le fisc fond dessus; les guerres de religion arrivent, qui semblent raser tout jusqu'au sol, misères horribles, famines atroces où les mères mangeaient leurs enfants. Qui croirait que le pays se relève de là? Eh bien, la guerre finit à peine, de ce champ ravagé, de cette chaumière encore noire et brûlée, sort l'épargne du paysan. Il achète; en dix ans, la France a changé de face; en vingt ou trente, tous les biens ont doublé, triplé de valeur. Ce moment encore baptisé d'un nom royal, s'appelle *le bon Henri IV* et le grand Richelieu.”

Of the third era it is needless to speak: it was that of the Revolution.

Whoever would study the reverse of the picture, may compare these historic periods, characterized by the dismemberment of large and the construction of small properties, with the wide-spread national suffering which accompanied, and the permanent deterioration of the condition of the labouring classes which followed, the “clearing” away of small yeomen to make room for large grazing farms, which was the grand economical event of English history during the sixteenth century.

I have concluded a discussion, which has already occupied a space almost disproportioned to the dimensions of this work; and I here close the examination of those simpler forms of social economy in which the produce of the land either belongs undividedly to one class, or is shared only between two classes. We now proceed to the hypothesis of a threefold division of the produce, among labourers, landlords, and capitalists: and in order to connect the coming discussions as closely as possible with those which have now for some time occupied us, I shall commence with the subject of Wages.

## CHAPTER XI.

### OF WAGES.

§ 1. UNDER the head of Wages are to be considered, first, the causes which determine or influence the wages of labour generally, and secondly, the differences that exist between the wages of different employments. It is convenient to keep these two classes of considerations separate; and in discussing the law of wages, to proceed in the first instance as if there were no other kind of labour than common unskilled labour, of the average degree of hardness and disagreeableness.

Wages, like other things, may be regulated either by competition or by custom: but the last is not a common case. A custom on the subject, even if established, could not easily maintain itself unaltered in any other than a stationary state of society. An increase or a falling off in the demand for labour, an increase or diminution of the labouring population, could hardly fail to engender a competition which would break down any custom respecting wages, by giving either to one side or the other a strong direct interest in infringing it. We may at all events speak of the wages of labour as determined, in ordinary circumstances, by competition.

Wages, then, depend upon the demand and supply of labour; or, as it is often expressed, on the proportion between population and capital. By population is here meant the number only of the labouring class, or rather of those who work for hire; and by capital, only circulating capital, and not even the whole of that, but the part which is expended in the direct purchase of labour. To this, however, must be added all funds which, without forming a part

of capital, are paid in exchange for labour, such as the wages of soldiers, domestic servants, and all other unproductive labourers. There is unfortunately no mode of expressing by one familiar term, the aggregate of what may be called the wages-fund of a country; and as the wages of productive labour form nearly the whole of that fund, it is usual to overlook the smaller and less important part, and to say that wages depend on population and capital. It will be convenient to employ this expression, remembering, however, to consider it as elliptical, and not as a literal statement of the entire truth.

With these limitations of the terms, wages not only depend upon the relative amount of capital and population, but cannot be affected by anything else. Wages (meaning, of course, the general rate) cannot rise, but by an increase of the aggregate funds employed in hiring labourers, or a diminution in the number of the competitors for hire; nor fall, except either by a diminution of the funds devoted to paying labour, or by an increase in the number of labourers to be paid.

§ 2. There are, however, some facts in apparent contradiction to this doctrine, which it is incumbent on us to consider and explain.

For instance, it is a common saying that wages are high when trade is good. The demand for labour in any particular employment is more pressing, and higher wages are paid, when there is a brisk demand for the commodity produced; and the contrary when there is what is called a stagnation: then workpeople are dismissed, and those who are retained must submit to a reduction of wages: although in these cases there is neither more nor less capital than before. This is true; and is one of those complications in the concrete phenomena, which obscure and disguise the operation of general causes; but it is not really inconsistent with the principles laid down. Capital which the owner

does not employ in purchasing labour, but keeps idle in his hands, is the same thing to the labourers, for the time being, as if it did not exist. All capital is, from the variations of trade, occasionally in this state. A manufacturer, finding a slack demand for his commodity, forbears to employ labourers in increasing a stock which he finds it difficult to dispose of; or if he goes on until all his capital is locked up in unsold goods, then at least he must of necessity pause until he can get paid for some of them. But no one expects either of these states to be permanent; if he did, he would at the first opportunity remove his capital to some other occupation, in which it would still continue to employ labour. The capital remains unemployed for a time, during which the labour market is overstocked, and wages fall. Afterwards the demand revives, and perhaps becomes unusually brisk, enabling the manufacturer to sell his commodity even faster than he can produce it: his whole capital is then brought into complete efficiency, and if he is able, he borrows capital in addition, which would otherwise have gone into some other employment. At such times wages, in his particular occupation, rise. If we suppose, what in strictness is not absolutely impossible, that one of these fits of briskness or of stagnation should affect all occupations at the same time, wages altogether might undergo a rise or a fall. These, however, are but temporary fluctuations: the capital now lying idle will next year be in active employment, that which is this year unable to keep up with the demand will in its turn be locked up in crowded warehouses; and wages in these several departments will ebb and flow accordingly: but nothing can permanently alter general wages, except either an increase or a diminution of capital itself (always meaning by the term, the funds of all sorts, destined for the payment of labour) compared with the quantity of labour offering itself to be hired.

Again, it is another common notion, that high prices make high wages; because the producers and dealers, being better

off, can afford to pay more to their labourers. I have already said that a brisk demand, which causes temporary high prices, causes also temporary high wages. But high prices, in themselves, can only raise wages if the dealers, receiving more, are induced to save more, and make an addition to their capital, or at least to their purchases of labour. This is indeed likely enough to be the case; and if the high prices came direct from heaven, or even from abroad, the labouring class might be benefited, not by the high prices themselves, but by the increase of capital occasioned by them. The same effect however is often attributed to a high price which is the result of restrictive laws, or which is in some way or other to be paid by the remaining members of the community; they having no greater means than before to pay it with. High prices of this sort, if they benefit one class of labourers, can only do so at the expense of others; since if the dealers by receiving high prices are enabled to make greater savings, or otherwise increase their purchases of labour, all other people by paying those high prices have their means of saving, or of purchasing labour, reduced in an equal degree; and it is a matter of accident whether the one alteration or the other will have the greatest effect on the labour market. Wages will probably be temporarily higher in the employment in which prices have risen, and somewhat lower in other employments: in which case, while the first half of the phenomenon excites notice, the other is generally overlooked, or if observed, is not ascribed to the cause which really produced it. Nor will the partial rise of wages last long: for though the dealers in that one employment gain more, it does not follow that there is room to employ a greater amount of savings in their own business: their increasing capital will probably flow over into other employments, and there counterbalance the diminution previously made in the demand for labour by the diminished savings of other classes.

Another opinion often maintained is, that wages vary with the price of food; rising when it rises, and falling when

it falls. This opinion is, I conceive, only partially true; and in so far as true, in no way affects the dependence of wages on the proportion between capital and labour; since the price of food, when it affects wages at all, affects them through that law. Dear or cheap food caused by variety of seasons does not affect wages (unless they are artificially adjusted to it by law or charity): or rather, it has some tendency to affect them in the contrary way to that supposed; since in times of scarcity people generally work harder, and lower the labour market against themselves. But dearness or cheapness of food, when of a permanent character, and capable of being calculated on beforehand, may affect wages. In the first place, if the labourers have, as is often the case, no more than enough to keep them in working condition and enable them barely to support the ordinary number of children, it follows that if food grows permanently dearer without a rise of wages, a greater number of the children will prematurely die; and thus wages will ultimately be higher, but only because the number of people will be smaller, than if food had remained cheap. But, secondly, even though wages were high enough to admit of food's becoming more costly without depriving the labourers and their families of necessaries; though they could bear, physically speaking, to be worse off, perhaps they would not consent to be so. They may have habits of comfort which are to them as necessaries, and sooner than forego which, they would put an additional restraint on their power of multiplication; so that wages would rise, not by increase of deaths but by diminution of births. In these cases, therefore, wages do adapt themselves to the price of food, though after an interval of almost a generation. Mr. Ricardo considers these two cases to comprehend all cases. He assumes, that there is everywhere a minimum rate of wages: either the lowest with which it is physically possible to keep up the population, or the lowest with which the people will choose to do so. To this minimum, he assumes that the general rate of wages always tends;

that they can never be lower, beyond the length of time required for a diminished rate of increase to make itself felt, and can never long continue higher. This assumption contains sufficient truth to render it admissible for the purposes of abstract science; and the conclusion which Mr. Ricardo draws from it, namely that wages in the long run rise and fall with the permanent price of food, is, like almost all his conclusions, true hypothetically, that is, granting the suppositions from which he sets out. But in the application to practice, it is necessary to consider that the minimum of which he speaks, especially when it is not a physical, but what may be termed a moral minimum, is itself liable to vary. If wages were previously so high that they could bear reduction, to which the obstacle was a high standard of comfort habitual among the labourers, a rise of the price of food, or any other disadvantageous change in their circumstances, may operate in two ways: it may correct itself by a rise of wages, brought about through a gradual effect on the prudential check to population; or it may permanently lower the standard of living of the class, in case their previous habits in respect of population prove stronger than their previous habits in respect of comfort. In that case the injury done to them will be permanent, and their deteriorated condition will become a new minimum, tending to perpetuate itself as the more ample minimum did before. It is to be feared that of the two modes in which the cause may operate, the last is the most frequent, or at all events sufficiently so, to render all propositions ascribing a self-repairing quality to the calamities which befall the labouring classes, practically of no validity. There is considerable evidence that the circumstances of the agricultural labourers in England have more than once in our history sustained great permanent deterioration, from causes which operated by diminishing the demand for labour, and which, if population had exercised its power of self-adjustment in obedience to the previous standard of comfort, could only have had a temporary effect: but unhappily the poverty

in which the class was plunged during a long series of years brought that previous standard into disuse; and the next generation, growing up without having possessed those pristine comforts, multiplied in turn without any attempt to retrieve them\*.

The converse case occurs when, by improvements in agriculture, the repeal of corn laws, or other such causes, the necessaries of the labourer are cheapened, and he is enabled, with the same wages, to command greater comforts than before. Wages will not fall immediately; it is even possible that they may rise; but they will fall at last, so as to leave the labourers no better off than before, unless during this interval of prosperity the standard of comfort regarded as indispensable by the class, is permanently raised. Unfortunately this salutary effect is by no means to be counted upon: it is a much more difficult thing to raise, than to lower, the scale of living which the labourers will consider as more indispensable than marrying and having a family. If they content themselves with enjoying the greater comfort while it lasts, but do not learn to require it, they will people down to their old scale of living. If from poverty their children had previously been insufficiently fed or improperly nursed, a greater number will now be reared, and the competition of these, when they grow up, will depress wages, probably in full proportion to the greater cheapness of food. If the effect is not produced in this mode, it will be produced by earlier and more numerous marriages, or by an increased number of births to a marriage. According to all experience, a great increase invariably takes place in the number of marriages, in seasons of cheap food and full employment. I cannot, therefore, agree in the importance so often attached to the repeal of the corn laws, considered merely as a labourers' question, or to any of the schemes, of which some one or

\* See the historical sketch of the condition of the English peasantry, prepared from the best authorities by Mr. Thornton, in his work on *Over-Population*.



other is at all times in vogue, for making the labourers a very little better off. Things which only affect them a very little, make no permanent impression upon their habits and requirements, and they soon slide back into their former state. To produce permanent advantage, the temporary cause operating upon them must be sufficient to make a great change in their condition—a change such as will be felt for many years, notwithstanding any stimulus which it may give during one generation to the increase of people. When, indeed, the improvement is of this signal character, and a generation grows up which has always been used to an improved scale of comfort, the habits of this new generation in respect to population become formed upon a higher minimum, and the improvement in their condition becomes permanent. Of cases in point, the most remarkable is France after the Revolution. The majority of the population being suddenly raised from misery, to independence and comparative comfort; the immediate effect was that population, notwithstanding the destructive wars of the period, started forward with unexampled rapidity, partly because improved circumstances enabled many children to be reared who would otherwise have died, and partly from increase of births. The succeeding generation however grew up with habits entirely altered; and though the country was never before in so prosperous a state, the annual number of births is now nearly stationary\*, and the increase of population extremely slow†.

\* Supra, pp. 338 to 340.

† A similar, though not an equal improvement in the standard of living took place among the labourers of England during the remarkable fifty years from 1715 to 1765, which were distinguished by such an extraordinary succession of fine harvests (the years of decided deficiency not exceeding five in all that period) that the average price of wheat during those years was much lower than during the previous half century. Mr. Malthus computes that on the average of sixty years preceding 1720, the labourer could purchase with a day's earnings only two-thirds of a peck of wheat, while from 1720 to 1750 he could purchase a whole peck. The

§ 3. Wages depend, then, on the proportion between the number of the labouring population, and the capital or other funds devoted to the purchase of labour; we will say, for shortness, the capital. If wages are higher at one time or place than at another, if the subsistence and comfort of the class of hired labourers are more ample, it is, and can be, for no other reason, than because capital bears a greater proportion to population. It is not the absolute amount of accumulation or of production, that is of importance to the labouring class; it is not the amount even of the funds destined for distribution among the labourers: it is the proportion between those funds and the numbers among whom they are shared. The condition of the class can be bettered in no other way than by altering that proportion to their advantage: and every scheme for their benefit, which does not proceed on this as its foundation, is, for all permanent purposes, a delusion.

In countries like North America and the Australian colonies, where the knowledge and arts of civilized life, and a high effective desire of accumulation, co-exist with a boundless extent of unoccupied land, the growth of capital easily keeps pace with the utmost possible increase of population, and is chiefly retarded by the impracticability of obtaining labourers enough. All, therefore, who can possibly be born, can find employment without overstocking the market:

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average price of wheat, according to the Eton tables, for fifty years ending with 1715, was 41s. 7<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>d. the quarter, and for the last twenty-three of these, 45s. 8d., while for the fifty years following it was no more than 34s. 11d. So considerable an improvement in the condition of the labouring class, though arising from the accidents of seasons, yet continuing for more than a generation, had time to work a change in the habitual requirements of the labouring class; and this period is always noted as the date of "a marked improvement of the quality of the food consumed, and a decided elevation in the standard of their comforts and conveniences."—(Malthus, *Principles of Political Economy*, p. 255.) For the character of the period, see Mr. Tooke's excellent *History of Prices*, vol. i. pp. 38 to 61, and for the prices of corn, the Appendix to that work.

every labouring family enjoys in abundance the necessaries, many of the comforts, and some of the luxuries of life; and, unless in case of individual misconduct, or actual inability to work, poverty does not, and dependence needs not, exist. A similar advantage, though in a less degree, is occasionally enjoyed by some special class of labourers in old countries, from an extraordinarily rapid growth, not of capital generally, but of the capital employed in a particular occupation. So gigantic has been the progress of the cotton manufacture since the inventions of Watt and Arkwright, that the capital engaged in it has probably quadrupled in the time which population requires for doubling. While, therefore, it has attracted from other employments nearly all the hands which geographical circumstances and the habits or inclinations of the people rendered available; and while the demand it created for infant labour has enlisted the immediate pecuniary interest of the operatives in favor of promoting, instead of restraining, the increase of population; nevertheless wages in the great seats of the manufacture are still so high, that the collective earnings of a family amount to a very satisfactory sum; and there is, as yet, no sign of decrease, while the effect has also been felt in raising the general standard of agricultural wages in the surrounding country.

But those circumstances of a country, or of an occupation, in which population can with impunity increase at its utmost rate, are rare, and transitory. Very few are the countries presenting the needful union of conditions. Either the industrial arts are backward and stationary, and capital therefore increases slowly; or the effective desire of accumulation being low, the increase soon reaches its limit; or, even though both these elements are at their highest known degree, the increase of capital is checked, because there is not fresh land to be resorted to, of as good a quality as that already occupied. Though capital should for a time double itself simultaneously with population, if all this capital and population are to find employment on the same land,

they cannot without an unexampled succession of agricultural inventions continue doubling the produce; therefore, if wages did not fall, profits must; and when profits fall, increase of capital is slackened. Besides, even if wages did not fall, the price of food (as will be shown more fully hereafter) would in these circumstances necessarily rise; which is equivalent to a fall of wages.

Except, therefore, in the very peculiar cases which I have just noticed, of which the only one of any practical importance is that of a new colony, or a country in circumstances equivalent to it; it is impossible that population should increase at its utmost rate, without lowering wages. Nor will the fall be stopped at any point, short of that which either by its physical or its moral operation, checks the increase of population. In no old country, therefore, does population increase at anything like its utmost rate; in most, at a very moderate rate; in some countries, not at all. These facts are only to be accounted for in two ways. Either the whole number of births which nature admits of, and which happen in some circumstances, do not take place; or, if they do, a large proportion of those who are born, die. The retardation of increase results either from mortality or prudence; from Mr. Malthus's positive, or from his preventive check: and one or the other of these must and does exist, and very powerfully too, in all old societies. Wherever population is not kept down by the prudence either of individuals or of the state, it is kept down by starvation or disease.

Mr. Malthus has taken great pains to ascertain, for almost every country in the world, which of these checks it is that operates; and the evidence which he collected on the subject, in his Essay on Population, may even now be read with advantage. Throughout Asia, and formerly in most European countries, in which the labouring classes were not in personal bondage, there is, or was, no restrainer of population but

death. The mortality was not always the result of poverty; much of it proceeded from unskilful and careless management of children, from uncleanly and otherwise unhealthy habits of life among the adult population, and from the almost periodical occurrence of destructive pestilences. Throughout Europe these causes of shortened life have much diminished, but they have nowhere ceased to exist. Until a period not very remote, hardly any of our large towns kept up their population, independently of the stream always flowing into them from the rural districts: this was still true of Liverpool until very recently, and even in London, the mortality is larger, and the average duration of life shorter, than in rural districts where there is much greater poverty. In Ireland, epidemic fevers, and deaths from the exhaustion of the constitution by insufficient nutriment, accompany even the most moderate deficiency of the potato crop. Nevertheless, it cannot now be said that in any part of Europe, population is principally kept down by disease, still less by starvation, either in a direct or an indirect form. The agency by which it is limited is preventive, not (in the language of Mr. Malthus) positive. But the preventive remedy seldom, I believe, consists in the unaided operation of prudential motives on a class wholly or mainly composed of labourers for hire, and looking forward to no other lot. In England, for example, I much doubt if the generality of agricultural labourers practise any prudential restraint whatever. They generally marry as early, and have as many children to a marriage, as they would or could do if they were settlers in the United States. During the generation which preceded the enactment of the present Poor Law, they received the most direct encouragement to this sort of improvidence; being not only assured of support, on easy terms, whenever out of employment, but even when in employment, very commonly receiving from the parish a

weekly allowance proportioned to their number of children; and the married with large families being always, from a shortsighted economy, employed in preference to the unmarried; which last premium on population still exists. Under such prompting, the rural labourers acquired habits of recklessness, which are so congenial to the uncultivated mind that in whatever manner produced, they in general long survive their immediate causes. There are so many new elements at work in society, even in those deeper strata which are inaccessible to the mere movements on the surface, that it is hazardous to affirm anything positive on the mental state or practical impulses of classes and bodies of men, when the same assertion may be true to day, and may require great modification in five years' time. It does however seem, that if the rate of increase of population depended solely on the agricultural labourers, it would, as far as dependent on births, and unless repressed by deaths, be as rapid in the southern counties of England as in America. The restraining principle lies in the very great proportion of the population composed of the middle classes and the skilled artisans, who in this country almost equal in number the common labourers, and on whom prudential motives do, in a considerable degree, operate.

§ 4. Where a labouring class who have no property but their daily wages, and no hope of acquiring it, refrain from over-rapid multiplication, the cause, I believe, has always hitherto been, either actual legal restraint, or a custom of some sort which, without intention on their part, insensibly moulds their conduct, or affords immediate inducements not to marry. It is not generally known in how many countries of Europe direct legal obstacles are opposed to improvident marriages. The communications made to the original Poor Law Commission by our foreign ministers and consuls in different parts of Europe, contain a considerable amount of

information on this subject. Mr. Senior, in his preface to those communications\*, says that in the countries which recognize a legal right to relief, "marriage on the part of persons in the actual receipt of relief appears to be everywhere prohibited, and the marriage of those who are not likely to possess the means of independent support is allowed by very few. Thus we are told that in Norway no one can marry without 'showing, to the satisfaction of the clergyman, that he is permanently settled in such a manner as to offer a fair prospect that he can maintain a family.'

"In Mecklenburg, that 'marriages are delayed by conscription in the twenty-second year, and military service for six years; besides, the parties must have a dwelling, without which a clergyman is not permitted to marry them. The men marry at from twenty-five to thirty, the women not much earlier, as both must first gain by service enough to establish themselves.'

"In Saxony, that 'a man may not marry before he is twenty-one years old, if liable to serve in the army. In Dresden, professionists (by which word artisans are probably meant) may not marry until they become masters in their trade.'

"In Wurtemberg, that 'no man is allowed to marry till his twenty-fifth year, on account of his military duties, unless permission be especially obtained or purchased: at that age he must also obtain permission, which is granted on proving that he and his wife would have together sufficient to maintain a family or to establish themselves; in large towns, say from 800 to 1000 florins (from 6*l.* 13*s.* 4*d.* to 84*l.* 3*s.* 4*d.*); in smaller, from 400 to 500 florins; in villages, 200 florins (16*l.* 13*s.* 4*d.*)'

The minister at Munich says, "The great cause why the

\* Forming an Appendix (F) to the General Report of the Commissioners, and also published by authority as a separate volume.

† Preface, p. xxxix.

number of the poor is kept so low in this country arises from the prevention by law of marriages in cases in which it cannot be proved that the parties have reasonable means of subsistence; and this regulation is in all places and at all times strictly adhered to. The effect of a constant and firm observance of this rule has, it is true, a considerable influence in keeping down the population of Bavaria, which is at present low for the extent of country, but it has a most salutary effect in averting extreme poverty and consequent misery\*."

At Lubeck, "marriages among the poor are delayed by the necessity a man is under, first, of previously proving that he is in a regular employ, work, or profession, that will enable him to maintain a wife: and secondly, of becoming a burgher, and equipping himself in the uniform of the burgher guard, which together may cost him nearly 4*l.*†" At Frankfurt, "the government prescribes no age for marrying, but the permission to marry is only granted on proving a livelihood‡."

The allusion, in some of these statements, to military duties, points out an indirect obstacle to marriage, interposed by the laws of some countries in which there is no direct legal restraint. In Prussia, for instance, the institutions which compel every able-bodied man to serve for several years in the army, at the time of life at which imprudent marriages are most likely to take place, are probably a full equivalent, in effect on population, for the legal restrictions of the smaller German states.

§ 5. Where there is no general law restrictive of marriage, there are often customs equivalent to it. When the guilds, or trade corporations of the middle ages were in vigour, their bye-laws or regulations were conceived with a very vigilant eye to the advantage which the trade derived from

\* Preface, p. xxxiii., or p. 554 of the Appendix itself.

† Appendix, p. 419.

‡ Ibid. p. 567.

limiting competition: and they made it very effectually the interest of artisans not to marry until after passing through the two stages of apprentice and journeyman, and attaining the rank of master\*. In Norway, where the labour is chiefly

\* "En général," says Sismondi, "le nombre des maîtres était fixé dans chaque communauté, et le maître pouvait seul tenir boutique, acheter et vendre pour son compte. Chaque maître ne pouvait former qu'un certain nombre d'apprentis, auxquels il enseignait son métier; et dans plusieurs communautés, il n'en pouvait tenir qu'un seul. Chaque maître pouvait de même tenir un nombre limité d'ouvriers, qui portaient le nom de compagnons; et, dans les métiers où l'on ne pouvait avoir qu'un seul apprenti, on ne pouvait avoir non plus qu'un seul, ou que deux compagnons. Aucun homme ne pouvait acheter, vendre, ou travailler dans un métier, s'il n'était apprenti, compagnon, ou maître; aucun homme ne pouvait devenir compagnon s'il n'avait servi un nombre d'années déterminé comme apprenti, ou devenir maître s'il n'avait servi un nombre égal d'années comme compagnon; et s'il n'avait de plus fait son chef-d'œuvre, ou exécuté un travail désigné dans son métier, qui devait être jugé par sa jurande. On voit que cette organisation mettait entièrement dans la main des maîtres le renouvellement des corps de métier. Eux seuls pouvaient recevoir des apprentis; mais ils n'étaient point obligés à en prendre; aussi se faisaient-ils payer cette faveur, et souvent à un prix très-élevé; en sorte qu'un jeune homme ne pouvait entrer dans un métier s'il n'avait, au préalable, la somme qu'il fallait payer pour son apprentissage, et celle qui lui était nécessaire pour se sustenter pendant la durée de cet apprentissage; car, pendant quatre, cinq, ou sept ans, tout son travail appartenait à son maître. Sa dépendance de ce maître était tout aussi longtemps absolue; car un seul acte de la volonté, ou même du caprice de celui-ci, pouvait lui fermer l'entrée des professions lucratives. L'apprenti, devenu compagnon, acquérait un peu plus de liberté; il pouvait s'engager avec quel maître il voulait, passer de l'un à l'autre; et comme l'entrée au compagnonage n'était ouverte que par l'apprentissage, il commençait à profiter du monopole dont il avait souffert, et il était à peu près sûr de se faire bien payer un travail que personne ne pouvait faire, si ce n'est lui. Cependant il dépendait de la jurande pour obtenir la maîtrise; aussi ne se regardait-il point encore comme assuré de son sort, comme ayant un état. En général, il ne se mariait point qu'il ne fût *passé maître*."

"Il est bien certain, et comme fait et comme théorie, que l'établissement des corps de métier empêchait et devait empêcher la naissance d'une population surabondante. D'après les statuts de presque tous les corps de métier, un homme ne pouvait être passé maître qu'après vingt-cinq ans; mais s'il n'avait pas un capital à lui, s'il n'avait pas fait des économies suffisantes, il continuait bien plus longtemps à travailler comme compagnon;

agricultural, it is forbidden by law to engage a farm-servant for less than a year; which was the general English practice until the poor laws destroyed it, by enabling the farmer to cast his labourers on parish pay whenever he did not immediately require their labour. In consequence of this custom, and of its enforcement by law, the whole of the rather limited class of agricultural labourers in Norway have an engagement for a year at least, which if the parties are content with one another, naturally becomes a permanent engagement: hence it is known in every neighbourhood whether there is, or is likely to be, a vacancy, and unless there is, a young man does not marry, knowing that he could not obtain employment. The custom still exists in Cumberland and Westmoreland, except that the term is half a year instead of a year; and seems to be still attended with the same consequences. The farm servants "are lodged and boarded in their master's houses, which they seldom leave until, through the death of some relation or neighbour, they succeed to the ownership or lease of a cottage farm. What is called surplus labour does not here exist\*." I have mentioned in another chapter the check to population in England during the last century, from the difficulty of obtaining a separate dwelling place†. Other customs restrictive of population might be specified: in some parts of Italy, it is the practice according to Sismondi among the poor, as it is well known to be in the higher ranks, that all but one of the sons remain unmarried. But such family arrangements are not likely to exist among day labourers. They are the resource

plusieurs, et peut-être le plus grand nombre des artisans, demeuraient compagnons toute leur vie. Il était presque sans exemple, cependant, qu'ils se mariassent avant d'être reçus maîtres; quand ils auraient été assez imprudens pour le désirer, aucun père n'aurait voulu donner sa fille à un homme qui n'avait point d'état."—*Nouveaux Principes*, book iv. ch. 10. See also Adam Smith, book i. ch. 10. part 2.

\* See Thornton on *Over-Population*, p. 18, and the authorities there cited.

† *Supra*, p. 191.

of small proprietors and metayers, for preventing too minute a subdivision of the land.

In England generally there is now scarcely a relic of these indirect checks to population; except that in parishes owned by one or a very small number of landowners, the increase of resident labourers is still occasionally obstructed, by preventing cottages from being built, or by pulling down those which exist; thus restraining the population liable to become locally chargeable, without any material effect on population generally, the work required in those parishes being performed by labourers settled elsewhere. The surrounding districts always feel themselves much aggrieved by this practice, against which they cannot defend themselves by similar means, since a single acre of land owned by any one who does not enter into the combination, enables him to defeat the attempt, very profitably to himself, by covering that acre with cottages. To meet these complaints it has already been under the consideration of Parliament to abolish parochial settlements, and make the poor rate a charge not on the parish but on the whole union. If this proposition be adopted, which for other reasons is very desirable, it will remove the small remnant of what was once a check to population: the value of which, however, from the narrow limits of its operation, must now be considered very trifling.

§ 6. In the case, therefore, of the common agricultural labourer, the checks to population may almost be considered as non-existent. If the growth of the towns, and of the capital there employed, by which the factory operatives are maintained at their present average rate of wages notwithstanding their rapid increase, did not also absorb a great part of the annual addition to the rural population, there seems no reason in the present habits of the people why they should not fall into as miserable a condition as the Irish; and if the market for our manufactures should, I do not say fall off, but even cease to expand at the rapid rate

of the last fifty years, there is no certainty that this fate may not be in reserve for us; especially considering how much the Irish themselves contribute to it, by migrating to this country and underbidding its native inhabitants. Without carrying our anticipations forward to such a calamity, which the great and growing intelligence of the factory population would, it may be hoped, avert, by an adaptation of their habits to their circumstances; the existing condition of the labourers of some of the most exclusively agricultural counties, Wiltshire, Somersetshire, Dorsetshire, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, is sufficiently painful to contemplate. The labourers of these counties, with large families, and seven or perhaps eight shillings for their weekly wages when in full employment, have lately become one of the stock objects of popular compassion: it is time that they had the benefit also of some application of common sense.

Unhappily, sentimentality rather than common sense is the genius that usually presides over the discussion of these subjects; and while there is a growing sensitiveness to the hardships of the poor, and a ready disposition to admit claims in them upon the good offices of other people, there is an all but universal unwillingness to face the real difficulty of their position, or advert at all to the conditions which nature has made indispensable to the improvement of their physical lot. Discussions on the condition of the labourers, lamentations over its wretchedness, denunciations of all who are supposed to be indifferent to it, projects of one kind or another for improving it, were in no country and in no time of the world, so rife as at present: but there is a tacit agreement to ignore totally the law of wages, or to dismiss it in a parenthesis, with such terms as "hard-hearted Malthusianism;" as if it were not a thousand times more hard-hearted to tell human beings that they may, than that they may not, call into existence swarms of creatures who are sure to be miserable, and most likely to be depraved; and forgetting that the conduct, which it is reckoned so cruel to

disapprove, is a degrading slavery to a brute instinct in one of the persons concerned, and most commonly, in the other, helpless submission to a revolting abuse of power.

It is not wonderful that the working classes themselves should cherish error on this subject. They obey a common propensity, in laying the blame of their misfortunes, and the responsibility of providing remedies, on any shoulders but their own. They must be above the average level of humanity if they chose the more disagreeable opinion, when nearly all their professed teachers, both in their own and in every other class, either silently reject or noisily declaim against it. The true theory of the causes of poverty seems to answer nobody's peculiar purpose. Those who share the growing and certainly well-grounded discontent with the place filled and the part performed in society by what are called the higher classes, seem to think that acknowledging the necessary dependence of wages on population is removing some blame from those classes, and acquitting them at the bar of public opinion for doing so little for the people; as if anything they could do, either in their present relation to them or in any other, could be of permanent use to the people in their material interests, unless grounded on a recognition of all the facts on which their condition depends. To this class of opponents, the accidents of personal politics have latterly added nearly the whole effective literary strength of the party who proclaim themselves Conservative of existing social arrangements. Any one with whom the cause of the poor is a principle, and not a pretence, or a mere freak of sensibility, must contemplate with unfeigned bitterness the conduct, during ten important years, of a large portion of the Tory party, including nearly all its popular organs; who have studiously fostered the prejudices and inflamed the passions of the democracy, on the points on which democratic opinion is most liable to be dangerously wrong, for the paltry advantage of turning into a handle of popular declamation against their Whig rivals, an enactment most salutary

in principle, in which their own party had concurred, but of which those rivals were almost accidentally the nominal authors.

So long as mankind remained in a semi-barbarous state, with the indolence and the few wants of the savage, it probably was not desirable that population should be restrained; the pressure of physical want may have been a necessary stimulus, in that stage of the human mind, to the exertion of labour and ingenuity required for accomplishing that greatest of all past changes in human modes of existence, by which industrial life attained predominance over the hunting, the pastoral, and the military or predatory state. Want, in that age of the world, had its uses, as even slavery had; and there may be corners of the earth where those uses are not yet superseded, though they might easily be so were a helping hand held out by more civilized communities. But in Europe the time, if it ever existed, is long past, when a life of privation had the smallest tendency to make men either better workmen or more civilized beings. It is, on the contrary, evident, that if the agricultural labourers were better off, they would both work more efficiently, and be better citizens. I ask, then, is it true or not, that if their numbers were fewer they would obtain higher wages? This is the question, and no other: and it is idle to divert attention from it, by attacking any incidental position of Malthus or some other writer, and pretending that to refute that, is to disprove the principle of population. Some, for instance, have achieved an easy victory over a passing remark of Mr. Malthus, hazarded chiefly by way of illustration, that the increase of food may perhaps be assumed to take place in an arithmetical ratio, while population increases in a geometrical: when every candid reader knows that Mr. Malthus laid no stress on this unlucky attempt to give numerical precision to things which do not admit of it, and every person capable of reasoning must see that it is wholly superfluous to his argument. Others have laid immense stress upon a

correction which more recent political economists have made in the mere language of the earlier followers of Mr. Malthus. Several writers had said that it is the tendency of population to *increase faster* than the means of subsistence. The assertion was true in the sense in which they meant it, namely that population would in most circumstances increase faster than the means of subsistence, if it were not checked either by mortality or by prudence. But inasmuch as these checks act with unequal force at different times and places, it was possible to interpret the language of these writers as if they had meant that population is usually gaining ground upon subsistence, and the poverty of the people becoming greater. Under this interpretation of their meaning, it was urged that the reverse is the truth: that as civilization advances, the prudential check tends to become stronger, and population to slacken its rate of increase, relatively to subsistence; and that it is an error to maintain that population, in any improving community, tends to increase faster than, or even so fast as, subsistence. The word tendency is here used in a totally different sense from that of the writers who affirmed the proposition: but waving the verbal question, is it not allowed on both sides, that in old countries, population presses too closely upon the means of subsistence? And although its pressure diminishes, the more the ideas and habits of the poorest class of labourers can be improved, to which it is to be hoped that there is always some tendency in a progressive country, yet since that tendency has hitherto been, and still is, extremely faint, and (to descend to particulars) has not yet extended to giving to the Wiltshire labourers higher wages than eight shillings a week, the only thing which it is necessary to consider is, whether that is a sufficient and suitable provision for a labourer? for if not, population does, as an existing fact, bear too great a proportion to the means of subsistence; and whether it pressed still harder or not quite so hard at some former period, is practically of no moment, except that, if the ratio is an improving one, there

is the better hope that by proper aids and encouragements it may be made to improve more and faster.

It is not, however, against reason, that the argument on this subject has to struggle; but against a feeling of dislike, which will only reconcile itself to the unwelcome truth, when every device is exhausted by which the recognition of that truth can be evaded. It is necessary, therefore, to enter into a detailed examination of these devices, and to force every position which is taken up by the enemies of the population principle, in their determination to find some refuge for the labourer, some plausible means of improving his condition, without requiring the exercise, either enforced or voluntary, of any self-restraint, or any greater control than at present over the animal power of multiplication. This will be the object of the next chapter.