

to this remark, by looking over some of the tables of Mr. Sufmilch, which Dr. Price has extracted in one of his notes to the postscript on the controversy respecting the population of England and Wales. They are considered as very correct; and if such tables were general, they would throw great light on the different ways by which population is repressed, and prevented from increasing beyond the means of subsistence in any country. I will extract a part of the tables, with Dr. Price's remarks.

In the Kingdom of Prussia, and Dukedom of Lithuania.

Annual Average.	Births.	Burials.	Marriage.	Proportion of Births to Marriages.	Proportion of Births to Burials.
10 Yrs. to 1702	21963	14718	5928	37 to 10	150 to 100
5 Yrs. to 1716	21602	11984	4968	37 to 10	180 to 100
5 Yrs. to 1756	28392	19154	5599	50 to 10	148 to 100

"N. B. In 1709 and 1710, a pestilence carried off 247,733 of the inhabitants

tants of this country, and in 1736 and 1737, epidemics prevailed, which again checked its increase."

It may be remarked, that the greatest proportion of births to burials, was in the five years after the great pestilence.

Dutchy of Pomerania.

Annual Average.	Births.	Burials.	Marriages.	Proportion of Births to Marriages.	Proportion of Births to Burials.
6 Yrs. to 1702	6540	4647	1810	36 to 10	140 to 100
6 Yrs. to 1708	7455	4208	1875	39 to 10	177 to 100
6 Yrs. to 1726	8432	5627	2131	39 to 10	150 to 100
4 Yrs. to 1756	12767	9281	2957	43 to 10	137 to 100

"In this instance the inhabitants appear to have been almost doubled in 56 years, no very bad epidemics having once interrupted the increase, but the three years immediately following the last period (to 1759,) were years so sickly that the births were sunk to 10,229, and the burials raised to 15,068."

Is it not probable, that in this case, the number of inhabitants had increased faster than the food and the accommodations necessary to preserve them in health. The mass of the people would, upon this supposition, be obliged to live harder, and a greater number would be crowded together in one house; and it is not surely improbable, that these were among the natural causes that produced the three sickly years. These causes may produce such an effect, though the country, absolutely considered, may not be extremely crowded and populous. In a country even thinly inhabited, if an increase of population take place, before more food is raised, and more houses are built, the inhabitants must be distressed in some degree for room and subsistence. Were the marriages in England, for the next eight or ten years, to be more prolific than usual, or even were a greater number of

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marriages than usual to take place, supposing the number of houses to remain the same; instead of five or six to a cottage, there must be seven or eight; and this, added to the necessity of harder living, would probably have a very unfavourable effect on the health of the common people.

Neumark of Brandenburg.

Annual Average.	Births.	Burials.	Marriages.	Proportion of Births to Marriages.	Proportion of Births to Burials.
5 Yrs. to 1701	5433	3483	1436	37 to 10	155 to 100
5 Yrs. to 1726	7012	4254	1713	40 to 10	164 to 100
5 Yrs. to 1756	7978	5567	1891	42 to 10	143 to 100

“ Epidemics prevailed for six years, from 1736, to 1741, which checked the increase.”

Dukedom of Magdeburgh.

Annual Average.	Births.	Burials.	Marriages.	Proportion of Births to Marriages.	Proportion of Births to Burials.
5 Yrs. to 1702	6431	4103	1681	38 to 10	156 to 100
5 Yrs. to 1717	7590	5335	2076	36 to 10	142 to 100
5 Yrs. to 1756	8850	8069	2193	40 to 10	109 to 100

“The years 1738, 1740, 1750, and 1751, were particularly sickly.”

For further information on this subject, I refer the reader to Mr. Sufmilch's tables. The extracts that I have made are sufficient to shew the periodical, though irregular returns of sickly seasons; and it seems highly probable, that a scantiness of room and food was one of the principal causes that occasioned them.

It appears from the tables, that these countries were increasing rather fast for old states, notwithstanding the occasional sickly seasons that prevailed. Cultivation must have been improving, and marriages, consequently, encouraged. For the checks to population appear to have been rather of the positive, than of the preventive kind. When from a prospect

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of increasing plenty in any country, the weight that represses population is in some degree removed; it is highly probable that the motion will be continued beyond the operation of the cause that first impelled it. Or, to be more particular, when the increasing produce of a country, and the increasing demand for labour, so far ameliorate the condition of the labourer, as greatly to encourage marriage, it is probable that the custom of early marriages will continue, till the population of the country has gone beyond the increased produce: and sickly seasons appear to be the natural and necessary consequence. I should expect, therefore, that those countries where subsistence was increasing sufficiently at times to encourage population, but not to answer all its demands, would be more subject to periodical epidemics than those where the

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population could more completely accommodate itself to the average produce.

An observation the converse of this will probably also be found true. In those countries that are subject to periodical sicknesses, the increase of population, or the excess of births above the burials, will be greater in the intervals of these periods, than is usual, *cæteris paribus*, in the countries not so much subject to such disorders. If Turkey and Egypt have been nearly stationary in their average population for the last century, in the intervals of their periodical plagues, the births must have exceeded the burials in a greater proportion than in such countries as France and England.

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The average proportion of births to burials in any country for a period of five or ten years, will hence appear to be a very inadequate criterion by which to judge of its real progress in population. This proportion certainly shews the rate of increase during those five or ten years; but we can by no means thence infer, what had been the increase for the twenty years before, or what would be the increase for the twenty years after. Dr. Price observes, that Sweden, Norway, Russia, and the kingdom of Naples, are increasing fast; but the extracts from registers that he has given, are not for periods of sufficient extent to establish the fact. It is highly probable, however, that Sweden, Norway, and Russia, are really increasing in their population, though not at the rate that the proportion of births to burials for the short periods that Dr. Price takes
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would seem to shew *. For five years, ending in 1777, the proportion of births to burials in the kingdom of Naples, was 144 to 100; but there is reason to suppose, that this proportion would indicate an increase much greater than would be really found to have taken place in that kingdom during a period of a hundred years.

Dr. Short compared the registers of many villages and market towns in England for two periods; the first, from Queen Elizabeth to the middle of the last century, and the second, from different years at the end of the last century, to the middle of the present. And from a comparison of these extracts, it appears, that in the former pe-

* See Dr. Price's Observations, 2 Vol. Postscript to the controversy on the population of England and Wales.

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riod the births exceeded the burials in the proportion of 124 to 100; but in the latter, only in the proportion of 111 to 100. Dr. Price thinks that the registers in the former period are not to be depended upon; but, probably, in this instance, they do not give incorrect proportions. At least, there are many reasons for expecting to find a greater excess of births above the burials in the former period than in the latter. In the natural progress of the population of any country, more good land will, *cæteris paribus**, be taken into cultivation in the earlier stages of it than

* I say *cæteris paribus*, because the increase of the produce of any country will always very greatly depend on the spirit of industry that prevails, and the way in which it is directed. The knowledge and habits of the people, and other temporary causes, particularly the degree of civil liberty and equality existing at the time, must always have great influence in exciting and directing this spirit.

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in the later. And a greater proportional yearly increase of produce, will almost invariably be followed by a greater proportional increase of population. But, besides this great cause, which would naturally give the excess of births above the burials greater at the end of Queen Elizabeth's reign, than in the middle of the present century, I cannot help thinking that the occasional ravages of the plague in the former period, must have had some tendency to increase this proportion. If an average of ten years had been taken in the intervals of the returns of this dreadful disorder; or if the years of plague had been rejected as accidental, the registers would certainly give the proportion of births to burials too high for the real average increase of the population. For some few years after the great plague in 1666, it is probable that there was a
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more than usual excess of births above burials, particularly if Dr. Price's opinion be founded, that England was more populous at the revolution (which happened only 22 years afterwards) than it is at present.

Mr. King, in 1693, stated the proportion of the births to the burials throughout the Kingdom, exclusive of London, as 115 to 100. Dr. Short makes it, in the middle of the present century, 111 to 100, including London. The proportion in France for five years, ending in 1774, was 117 to 100. If these statements are near the truth; and if there are no very great variations at particular periods in the proportions, it would appear, that the population of France and England has accommodated itself very nearly to the average produce of each country. The
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discouragements to marriage, the consequent vicious habits, war, luxury, the silent though certain depopulation of large towns, and the close habitations, and insufficient food of many of the poor, prevent population from increasing beyond the means of subsistence; and, if I may use an expression which certainly at first appears strange, supercede the necessity of great and ravaging epidemics to repress what is redundant. Were a wasting plague to sweep off two millions in England, and six millions in France, there can be no doubt whatever, that after the inhabitants had recovered from the dreadful shock, the proportion of births to burials would be much above what it is in either country at present.

In New Jersey, the proportion of births to deaths on an average of seven years,

years, ending in 1743, was as 300 to 100. In France and England, taking the highest proportion, it is as 117 to 100. Great and astonishing as this difference is, we ought not to be so wonder-struck at it, as to attribute it to the miraculous interposition of heaven. The causes of it are not remote, latent and mysterious; but near us, round about us, and open to the investigation of every inquiring mind. It accords with the most liberal spirit of philosophy, to suppose that not a stone can fall, or a plant rise, without the immediate agency of divine power. But we know from experience, that these operations of what we call nature have been conducted almost invariably according to fixed laws. And since the world began, the causes of population and depopulation have probably been as constant as any of the laws.

laws of nature with which we are acquainted.

The passion between the sexes has appeared in every age to be so nearly the same, that it may always be considered, in algebraic language, as a given quantity. The great law of necessity which prevents population from increasing in any country beyond the food which it can either produce or acquire, is a law, so open to our view, so obvious and evident to our understandings, and so completely confirmed by the experience of every age, that we cannot for a moment doubt it. The different modes which nature takes to prevent, or repress a redundant population, do not appear, indeed, to us so certain and regular; but, though we cannot always predict the mode, we may with certainty predict the fact. If the proportion

tion of births to deaths for a few years, indicate an increase of numbers much beyond the proportional increased or acquired produce of the country, we may be perfectly certain, that unless an emigration takes place, the deaths will shortly exceed the births; and that the increase that had taken place for a few years cannot be the real average increase of the population of the country. Were there no other depopulating causes, every country would, without doubt, be subject to periodical pestilences or famines.

The only true criterion of a real and permanent increase in the population of any country, is the increase of the means of subsistence. But even this criterion is subject to some slight variations, which are, however, completely open to our view and observations.

tions. In some countries population appears to have been forced; that is, the people have been habituated by degrees to live almost upon the smallest possible quantity of food. There must have been periods in such countries when population increased permanently, without an increase in the means of subsistence. China seems to answer to this description. If the accounts we have of it are to be trusted, the lower classes of people are in the habit of living almost upon the smallest possible quantity of food, and are glad to get any putrid offals that European labourers would rather starve than eat. The law in China which permits parents to expose their children, has tended principally thus to force the population. A nation in this state must necessarily be subject to famines. Where a country is so populous in proportion to the

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means of subsistence, that the average produce of it is but barely sufficient to support the lives of the inhabitants, any deficiency from the badness of seasons must be fatal. It is probable that the very frugal manner in which the Gentoos are in the habit of living, contributes in some degree to the famines of Indostan.

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

proportional increase in the means of subsistence.

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

every friend to humanity will hope, an abortive attempt. Nothing is so common as to hear of encouragements that ought to be given to population. If the tendency of mankind to increase be so great as I have represented it to be, it may appear strange that this increase does not come when it is thus repeatedly called for. The true reason is, that the demand for a greater population is made without preparing the funds necessary to support it. Increase the demand for agricultural labour by promoting cultivation, and with it consequently increase the produce of the country, and ameliorate the condition of the labourer, and no apprehensions whatever need be entertained of the proportional increase of population. An attempt to effect this purpose in any other way is vicious, cruel, and tyrannical, and in any state of tolerable freedom cannot therefore suc-

ceed. It may appear to be the interest of the rulers, and the rich of a State, to force population, and thereby lower the price of labour, and consequently the expence of fleets and armies, and the cost of manufactures for foreign sale: but every attempt of the kind should be carefully watched and strenuously resisted by the friends of the poor, particularly when it comes under the deceitful garb of benevolence, and is likely, on that account, to be cheerfully, and cordially received by the common people.

I entirely acquit Mr. Pitt of any sinister intention in that clause of his poor bill which allows a shilling a week to every labourer for each child he has above three. I confess, that before the bill was brought into Parliament, and for some time after, I thought that such a regulation would be highly beneficial; but

but further reflection on the subject has convinced me, that if its object be to better the condition of the poor, it is calculated to defeat the very purpose which it has in view. It has no tendency that I can discover to increase the produce of the country; and if it tend to increase population, without increasing the produce, the necessary and inevitable consequence appears to be, that the same produce must be divided among a greater number, and consequently that a day's labour will purchase a smaller quantity of provisions, and the poor therefore in general must be more distressed.

I have mentioned some cases, where population may permanently increase, without a proportional increase in the means of subsistence. But it is evident that the variation in different States, K 4 between

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

Other circumstances being the same, it may be affirmed, that countries are populous, according to the quantity of human food which they produce; and happy, according to the liberality with which that food is divided, or the quantity which a day's labour will purchase. Corn countries are more populous than pasture countries; and rice countries more populous than corn countries. The lands in England are not suited to rice, but they would all bear potatoes: and Dr. Adam Smith observes, that if potatoes were to become the favourite vegetable

ble food of the common people, and if the same quantity of land was employed in their culture, as is now employed in the culture of corn, the country would be able to support a much greater population; and would consequently in a very short time have it.

The happiness of a country does not depend, absolutely, upon its poverty, or its riches, upon its youth, or its age, upon its being thinly, or fully inhabited, but upon the rapidity with which it is increasing, upon the degree in which the yearly increase of food approaches to the yearly increase of an unrestricted population. This approximation is always the nearest in new colonies, where the knowledge and industry of an old State, operate on the fertile unappropriated land of a new one. In other cases, the youth or the age of a State is not in this

this respect of very great importance. It is probable, that the food of Great Britain is divided in as great plenty to the inhabitants, at the present period, as it was two thousand, three thousand, or four thousand years ago. And there is reason to believe that the poor and thinly inhabited tracts of the Scotch Highlands, are as much distressed by an overcharged population, as the rich and populous province of Flanders.

Were a country never to be over-run by a people more advanced in arts, but left to its own natural progress in civilization; from the time that its produce might be considered as an unit, to the time that it might be considered as a million, during the lapse of many hundred years, there would not be a single period, when the mass of the people could

could be said to be free from distress, either directly or indirectly, for want of food. In every State in Europe, since we have first had accounts of it, millions and millions of human existences have been repressed from this simple cause; though perhaps in some of these States, an absolute famine has never been known.

Famine seems to be the last, the most dreadful resource of nature. The power of population is so superior to the power in the earth to produce subsistence for man, that premature death must in some shape or other visit the human race. The vices of mankind are active and able ministers of depopulation. They are the precursors in the great army of destruction; and often finish the dreadful work themselves. But should they fail in this war of extermination, sickly seasons, epidemics,

demics, pestilence, and plague, advance in terrific array, and sweep off their thousands and ten thousands. Should success be still incomplete; gigantic inevitable famine stalks in the rear, and with one mighty blow, levels the population with the food of the world.

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

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

That population does invariably increase when the means of subsistence increase. And,

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That the superior power of population is repressed, and the actual population kept equal to the means of subsistence by misery and vice.

CHAP.

CHAP. VIII.

Mr. Wallace.—Error of supposing that the difficulty arising from population is at a great distance.—Mr. Condorcet's sketch of the progress of the human mind.—Period when the oscillation, mentioned by Mr. Condorcet, ought to be applied to the human race.

TO a person who draws the preceding obvious inferences, from a view of the past and present state of mankind, it cannot but be a matter of astonishment, that all the writers on the perfectibility of man and of society, who have noticed the argument of an overcharged population, treat it always very slightly, and invariably represent the difficulties arising from it, as at a great and almost immeasurable distance. Even Mr. Wallace, who thought the argument itself of so much weight, as to destroy his whole system of equality, did not seem to be aware that any
difficulty

difficulty would occur from this cause, till the whole earth had been cultivated like a garden, and was incapable of any further increase of produce. Were this really the case, and were a beautiful system of equality in other respects practicable, I cannot think that our ardour in the pursuit of such a scheme ought to be damped by the contemplation of so remote a difficulty. An event at such a distance might fairly be left to providence: but the truth is, that if the view of the argument given in this essay be just, the difficulty so far from being remote, would be imminent, and immediate. At every period during the progress of cultivation, from the present moment, to the time when the whole earth was become like a garden, the distress for want of food would be constantly pressing on all mankind, if they were equal. Though the produce of the
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earth might be increasing every year, population would be increasing much faster; and the redundancy must necessarily be repressed by the periodical or constant action of misery or vice.

Mr. Condorcet's *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain*, was written, it is said, under the pressure of that cruel proscription which terminated in his death. If he had no hopes of its being seen during his life, and of its interesting France in his favour, it is a singular instance of the attachment of a man to principles, which every days experience was so fatally for himself contradicting. To see the human mind in one of the most enlightened nations of the world; and after a lapse of some thousand years, debased by such a fermentation of disgusting passions, of fear, cruelty, malice, revenge, ambition, madness,

ness, and folly, as would have disgraced the most savage nation in the most barbarous age, must have been such a tremendous shock to his ideas, of the necessary and inevitable progress of the human mind, that nothing but the firmest conviction of the truth of his principles, in spite of all appearances, could have withstood.

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

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In the last division of the work, which treats of the future progress of man towards perfection, he says, that comparing, in the different civilized nations of Europe, the actual population with the extent of territory; and observing their cultivation, their industry, their divisions of labour, and their means of subsistence, we shall see that it would be impossible to preserve the same means of subsistence, and, consequently, the same population, without a number of individuals, who have no other means of supplying their wants, than their industry. Having allowed the necessity of such a class of men, and adverting afterwards to the precarious revenue of those families that would depend so entirely on the life and health of their chief*, he says, very justly,

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“To save time and long quotations, I shall here give the substance of some of Mr. Condorcet's sentiments,

“There exists then, a necessary cause of inequality, of dependence, and even of misery, which menaces, without ceasing, the most numerous and active class of our societies.” The difficulty is just, and well stated, and I am afraid that the mode by which he proposes it should be removed, will be found inefficacious. By the application of calculations to the probabilities of life, and the interest of money, he proposes that a fund should be established, which should assure to the old an assistance, produced, in part, by their own former savings, and, in part, by the savings of individuals, who in making the same sacrifice, die before they reap the benefit of it. The same, or a similar fund, should give assistance to

ments, and hope I shall not misrepresent them, but I refer the reader to the work itself, which will amuse, if it does not convince him.

women and children, who lose their husbands, or fathers; and afford a capital to those who were of an age to found a new family, sufficient for the proper development of their industry. These establishments he observes, might be made, in the name, and under the protection, of the society. Going still further, he says, that by the just application of calculations, means might be found of more completely preserving a state of equality, by preventing credit from being the exclusive privilege of great fortunes, and yet giving it a basis equally solid, and by rendering the progress of industry, and the activity of commerce, less dependent on great capitalists.

Such establishments and calculations, may appear very promising upon paper, but when applied to real life, they will be found to be absolutely nugatory. Mr.

Condorcet

Condorcet allows, that a class of people, which maintains itself entirely by industry, is necessary to every state. Why does he allow this? No other reason can well be assigned, than that he conceives that the labour necessary to procure subsistence for an extended population, will not be performed without the goad of necessity. If by establishments of this kind, this spur to industry be removed, if the idle and the negligent are placed upon the same footing with regard to their credit, and the future support of their wives and families, as the active and industrious; can we expect to see men exert that animated activity in bettering their condition, which now forms the master spring of public prosperity. If an inquisition were to be established, to examine the claims of each individual, and to determine whether he had, or had not, exerted himself to the

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utmost, and to grant or refuse assistance accordingly, this would be little else than a repetition upon a larger scale of the English poor laws, and would be completely destructive of the true principles of liberty and equality.

But independent of this great objection to these establishments, and supposing for a moment, that they would give no check to productive industry, by far the greatest difficulty remains yet behind.

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

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"But in this progress of industry and happiness, each generation will be called to more extended enjoyments, and in consequence, by the physical constitution of the human frame, to an increase in the number of individuals. Must not there arrive a period then, when these laws, equally necessary, shall counteract each other? When the increase of the number of men surpassing their means of subsistence, the necessary result must be, either a continual diminution of happiness and population, a movement truly retrograde, or at least, a kind of oscillation between good and evil? In societies arrived at this term, will not this oscillation be a constantly subsisting cause of periodical misery? Will it not mark the limit when all further amelioration will become impossible, and point out that term to the perfectibility of the human race, which it may reach

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in the course of ages, but can never pass?

He then adds,

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

Mr. Condorcet's picture of what may be expected to happen when the number of men shall surpass the means of their subsistence, is justly drawn. The oscillation which he describes, will certainly take place, and will, without doubt, be a constantly subsisting cause of periodical misery. The only point in which I differ from Mr. Condorcet with regard
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to this picture, is, the period, when it may be applied to the human race. Mr. Condorcet thinks, that it cannot possibly be applicable, but at an æra extremely distant. If the proportion between the natural increase of population and food, which I have given, be in any degree near the truth, it will appear, on the contrary, that the period when the number of men surpasses their means of subsistence, has long since arrived; and that this necessary oscillation, this constantly subsisting cause of periodical misery, has existed ever since we have had any histories of mankind, does exist at present, and will for ever continue to exist, unless some decided change take place, in the physical constitution of our nature.

Mr. Condorcet, however, goes on to say, that should the period, which he
conceives

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

CHAP.

CHAP. IX.

Mr. Condorcet's conjecture concerning the organic perfectibility of man, and the indefinite prolongation of human life.—Fallacy of the argument, which infers an unlimited progress from a partial improvement, the limit of which cannot be ascertained, illustrated in the breeding of animals, and the cultivation of plants.

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

themselves, are susceptible of amelioration?

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

this word to mean, either a constant approach to an unlimited extent, without ever reaching it; or, an increase in the immensity of ages to an extent greater than any assignable quantity.

But surely the application of this term in either of these senses, to the duration of human life, is in the highest degree unphilosophical, and totally unwarranted by any appearances in the laws of nature. Variations from different causes are essentially distinct from a regular and unretrograde increase. The average duration of human life will, to a certain degree, vary, from healthy or unhealthy climates, from wholesome or unwholesome food, from virtuous or vicious manners, and other causes; but it may be fairly doubted, whether there is really the smallest perceptible advance in the natural duration of human life, since first we have had

any authentic history of man. The prejudices of all ages have indeed been directly contrary to this supposition, and though I would not lay much stress upon these prejudices, they will in some measure tend to prove, that there has been no marked advance in an opposite direction.

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

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

The constancy of the laws of nature, and of effects and causes, is the foundation of all human knowledge; though
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far be it from me to say, that the same power which framed and executes the laws of nature, may not change them all "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye." Such a change may undoubtedly happen. All that I mean to say is, that it is impossible to infer it from reasoning. If without any previous observable symptoms or indications of a change, we can infer that a change will take place, we may as well make any assertion whatever, and think it as unreasonable to be contradicted, in affirming that the moon will come in contact with the earth to-morrow, as in saying, that the sun will rise at its usual time.

With regard to the duration of human life, there does not appear to have existed, from the earliest ages of the world, to the present moment, the smallest permanent symptom, or indication, of increasing

creasing prolongation.* The observable effects of climate, habit, diet, and other causes,

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

On the contrary, a candid investigation of these subjects, accompanied with a perfect readiness to adopt any theory, warranted by sound philosophy, may have a tendency to convince them, that in forming improbable and unfounded hypotheses, so far from

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causes, on length of life, have furnished the pretext for asserting its indefinite extension; and the sandy foundation on enlarging the bounds of human science, they are contracting it; so far from promoting the improvement of the human mind, they are obstructing it: they are throwing us back again almost into the infancy of knowledge; and weakening the foundations of that mode of philosophizing, under the auspices of which, science has of late made such rapid advances. The present rage for wide and unrestrained speculation, seems to be a kind of mental intoxication, arising, perhaps, from the great and unexpected discoveries which have been made of late years, in various branches of science. To men elate, and giddy with such successes, every thing appeared to be within the grasp of human powers; and, under this illusion, they confounded subjects where no real progress could be proved, with those, where the progress had been marked, certain, and acknowledged. Could they be persuaded to sober themselves with a little severe and chastized thinking, they would see, that the cause of truth, and of sound philosophy, cannot but suffer by substituting wild flights and unsupported assertions, for patient investigation, and well authenticated proofs.

which the argument rests, is, that because the limit of human life is undefined; because you cannot mark its precise term, and say so far exactly shall it go and no further; that therefore its extent may increase for ever, and be properly termed, indefinite or unlimited. But the fallacy and absurdity of this argument will sufficiently appear from a slight examination of what Mr. Condorcet calls the organic perfectibility, or degeneration, of the race of plants and animals, which he says may be regarded as one of the general laws of nature.

I am told that it is a maxim among the improvers of cattle, that you may breed to any degree of nicety you please, and they found this maxim upon another, which is, that some of the offspring will possess the desirable qualities of the parents in a greater degree. In the

famous Leicestershire breed of sheep, the object is to procure them with small heads and small legs. Proceeding upon these breeding maxims, it is evident, that we might go on till the heads and legs were evanescent quantities; but this is so palpable an absurdity, that we may be quite sure that the premises are not just, and that there really is a limit, though we cannot see it, or say exactly where it is. In this case, the point of the greatest degree of improvement, or the smallest size of the head and legs, may be said to be undefined, but this is very different from unlimited, or from indefinite, in Mr. Condorcet's acceptance of the term. Though I may not be able, in the present instance, to mark the limit, at which further improvement will stop, I can very easily mention a point at which it will not arrive. I should not scruple to assert, that were the breeding

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to continue for ever, the head and legs of these sheep would never be so small as the head and legs of a rat.

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

The progress of a wild plant, to a beautiful garden flower, is perhaps more marked and striking, than any thing that takes place among animals, yet even here, it would be the height of absurdity to assert, that the progress was unlimited or indefinite. One of the most obvious features of the improvement is the increase of size. The flower has grown gradually larger by cultivation. If the progress were really unlimited, it might be increased ad infinitum; but

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this is so gross an absurdity, that we may be quite sure, that among plants, as well as among animals, there is a limit to improvement, though we do not exactly know where it is. It is probable that the gardeners who contend for flower prizes have often applied stronger dressing without success. At the same time, it would be highly presumptuous in any man to say, that he had seen the finest carnation or anemone that could ever be made to grow. He might however assert without the smallest chance of being contradicted by a future fact, that no carnation or anemone could ever by cultivation be increased to the size of a large cabbage; and yet there are assignable quantities much greater than a cabbage. No man can say that he has seen the largest ear of wheat, or the largest oak that could ever grow; but he might easily, and with perfect certainty, name a

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point of magnitude, at which they would not arrive. In all these cases therefore, a careful distinction should be made, between an unlimited progress, and a progress where the limit is merely undefined.

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

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ture of the same size that would support as large a head as a cabbage.

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

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

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

The capacity of improvement in plants and animals, to a certain degree, no person can possibly doubt. A clear and decided progress has already been made; and yet, I think it appears, that it would be highly absurd to say, that this progress has no limits. In human life, though there are great variations from different causes, it may be doubted, whether, since the world began, any
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organic improvement whatever in the human frame can be clearly ascertained. The foundations therefore, on which the arguments for the organic perfectibility of man rest, are unusually weak, and can only be considered as mere conjectures. It does not, however, by any means, seem impossible, that by an attention to breed, a certain degree of improvement, similar to that among animals, might take place among men. Whether intellect could be communicated may be a matter of doubt: but size, strength, beauty, complexion, and perhaps even longevity are in a degree transmissible. The error does not seem to lie, in supposing a small degree of improvement possible, but in not discriminating between a small improvement, the limit of which is undefined, and an improvement really unlimited. As the human race however could not be improved in

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this way, without condemning all the bad specimens to celibacy, it is not probable, that an attention to breed should ever become general; indeed, I know of no well-directed attempts of the kind, except in the ancient family of the Bickerstaffs, who are said to have been very successful in whitening the skins, and increasing the height of their race by prudent marriages, particularly by that very judicious cross with Maud, the milk-maid, by which some capital defects in the constitutions of the family were corrected.

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

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

CHAP.

CHAP. X.

Mr. Godwin's system of equality.—Error of attributing all the vices of mankind to human institutions.—Mr. Godwin's first answer to the difficulty arising from population totally insufficient.—Mr. Godwin's beautiful system of equality supposed to be realized.—Its utter destruction simply from the principle of population in so short a time as thirty years.

IN reading Mr. Godwin's ingenious and able work on political justice, it is impossible not to be struck with the spirit and energy of his style, the force and precision of some of his reasonings, the ardent tone of his thoughts, and particularly with that impressive earnestness of manner which gives an air of truth to the whole. At the same time, it must be confessed, that he has not proceeded in his enquiries with the caution that sound philosophy seems to require. His conclusions are often un-

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warranted by his premises. He fails sometimes in removing the objections which he himself brings forward. He relies too much on general and abstract propositions which will not admit of application. And his conjectures certainly far outstrip the modesty of nature.

The system of equality which Mr. Godwin proposes, is, without doubt, by far the most beautiful and engaging of any that has yet appeared. An amelioration of society to be produced merely by reason and conviction, wears much more the promise of permanence, than any change effected and maintained by force. The unlimited exercise of private judgment, is a doctrine inexpressibly grand and captivating, and has a vast superiority over those systems where every individual is in a manner the slave of the public. The substitution of benevolence

volence as the master-spring, and moving principle of society, instead of self-love, is a consummation devoutly to be wished. In short, it is impossible to contemplate the whole of this fair structure, without emotions of delight and admiration, accompanied with ardent longing for the period of its accomplishment. But, alas! that moment can never arrive. The whole is little better than a dream, a beautiful phantom of the imagination. These "gorgeous palaces" of happiness and immortality, these "solemn temples" of truth and virtue will dissolve, "like the baseless fabric of a vision," when we awaken to real life, and contemplate the true and genuine situation of man on earth.

Mr. Godwin, at the conclusion of the third chapter of his eighth book, speaking of population, says, "There is a prin-

principle in human society, by which population is perpetually kept down to the level of the means of subsistence. Thus among the wandering tribes of America and Asia, we never find through the lapse of ages that population has so increased as to render necessary the cultivation of the earth." This principle, which Mr. Godwin thus mentions as some mysterious and occult cause, and which he does not attempt to investigate, will be found to be the grinding law of necessity; misery, and the fear of misery.

The great error under which Mr. Godwin labours throughout his whole work, is, the attributing almost all the vices and misery that are seen in civil society to human institutions. Political regulations, and the established administration of property, are with him the

the fruitful sources of all evil, the hotbeds of all the crimes that degrade mankind. Were this really a true state of the case, it would not seem a hopeless task to remove evil completely from the world; and reason seems to be the proper and adequate instrument for effecting so great a purpose. But the truth is, that, though human institutions appear to be the obvious and obtrusive causes of much mischief to mankind; yet, in reality, they are light and superficial, they are mere feathers that float on the surface, in comparison with those deeper seated causes of impurity that corrupt the springs, and render turbid the whole stream of human life.

Mr. Godwin, in his chapter on the benefits attendant on a system of equality, says, "The spirit of oppression, the spirit of servility, and the spirit of

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

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support, and free to expatiate in the field of thought, which is congenial to her. Each would assist the enquiries of all."

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

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

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a single intellect would be left free to expatiate in the field of thought.

How little Mr. Godwin has turned the attention of his penetrating mind to the real state of man on earth, will sufficiently appear from the manner in which he endeavours to remove the difficulty of an overcharged population. He says, "The obvious answer to this objection, is, that to reason thus is to foresee difficulties at a great distance. Three fourths of the habitable globe is now uncultivated. The parts already cultivated are capable of immeasurable improvement. Myriads of centuries of still increasing population may pass away, and the earth be still found sufficient for the subsistence of its inhabitants."

I have already pointed out the error of supposing that no distress and difficulty

would arise from an overcharged population before the earth absolutely refused to produce any more. But let us imagine for a moment Mr. Godwin's beautiful system of equality realized in its utmost purity, and see how soon this difficulty might be expected to press under so perfect a form of society. A theory that will not admit of application cannot possibly be just.

Let us suppose all the causes of misery and vice in this island removed. War and contention cease. Unwholesome trades and manufactories do not exist. Crowds no longer collect together in great and pestilent cities for purposes of court intrigue, of commerce, and vicious gratifications. Simple, healthy, and rational amusements take place of drinking, gaming and debauchery. There are no towns sufficiently large to have

any prejudicial effects on the human constitution. The greater part of the happy inhabitants of this terrestrial paradise live in hamlets and farm-houses scattered over the face of the country. Every house is clean, airy, sufficiently roomy, and in a healthy situation. All men are equal. The labours of luxury are at end. And the necessary labours of agriculture are shared amicably among all. The number of persons, and the produce of the island, we suppose to be the same as at present. The spirit of benevolence, guided by impartial justice, will divide this produce among all the members of the society according to their wants. Though it would be impossible that they should all have animal food every day, yet vegetable food, with meat occasionally, would satisfy the desires of a frugal people, and would be sufficient to pre-
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serve them in health, strength, and spirits.

Mr. Godwin considers marriage as a fraud and a monopoly. Let us suppose the commerce of the sexes established upon principles of the most perfect freedom. Mr. Godwin does not think himself that this freedom would lead to a promiscuous intercourse; and in this I perfectly agree with him. The love of variety is a vicious, corrupt, and unnatural taste, and could not prevail in any great degree in a simple and virtuous state of society. Each man would probably select himself a partner, to whom he would adhere as long as that adherence continued to be the choice of both parties. It would be of little consequence, according to Mr. Godwin, how many children a woman had, or to whom they belonged. Provisions and assistance would spontaneously

flow from the quarter in which they abounded, to the quarter that was deficient*. And every man would be ready to furnish instruction to the rising generation according to his capacity.

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

* See B. 8. Chap. 8. P. 504.

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With these extraordinary encouragements to population, and every cause of depopulation, as we have supposed, removed, the numbers would necessarily increase faster than in any society that has ever yet been known. I have mentioned, on the authority of a pamphlet published by a Dr. Styles, and referred to by Dr. Price, that the inhabitants of the back settlements of America doubled their numbers in fifteen years. England is certainly a more healthy country than the back settlements of America; and as we have supposed every house in the island to be airy and wholesome, and the encouragements to have a family greater even than with the back settlers, no probable reason can be assigned, why the population should not double itself in less, if possible, than fifteen years. But to be quite sure that we do not go beyond the truth, we will only suppose the period of doubling

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ling to be twenty-five years, a ratio of increase, which is well known to have taken place throughout all the Northern States of America.

There can be little doubt, that the equalization of property which we have supposed, added to the circumstance of the labour of the whole community being directed chiefly to agriculture, would tend greatly to augment the produce of the country. But to answer the demands of a population increasing so rapidly, Mr. Godwin's calculation of half an hour a day for each man, would certainly not be sufficient. It is probable that the half of every man's time must be employed for this purpose. Yet with such, or much greater exertions, a person who is acquainted with the nature of the soil in this country, and who reflects on the fertility of the lands already in culti-

cultivation, and the barrenness of those that are not cultivated, will be very much disposed to doubt, whether the whole average produce could possibly be doubled in twenty-five years from the present period. The only chance of success would be the ploughing up all the grazing countries, and putting an end almost entirely to the use of animal food. Yet a part of this scheme might defeat itself. The soil of England will not produce much without dressing; and cattle seem to be necessary to make that species of manure, which best suits the land. In China, it is said, that the soil in some of the provinces is so fertile, as to produce two crops of rice in the year without dressing. None of the lands in England will answer to this description.

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

During the next period of doubling, where will the food be found to satisfy the importunate demands of the increasing numbers. Where is the fresh land to turn up? where is the dressing necessary to improve that which is already in cultivation? There is no person with the smallest knowledge of land, but would say, that it was impossible that the average produce of the country could be increased during the second twenty-five years by a quantity equal to what it at present yields. Yet we will suppose this increase, however improbable, to take place. The exuberant
strength

strength of the argument allows of almost any concession. Even with this concession, however, there would be seven millions at the expiration of the second term, unprovided for. A quantity of food equal to the frugal support of twenty-one millions, would be to be divided among twenty-eight millions.

Alas! what becomes of the picture where men lived in the midst of plenty: where no man was obliged to provide with anxiety and pain for his restless wants: where the narrow principle of selfishness did not exist: where Mind was delivered from her perpetual anxiety about corporal support, and free to expatiate in the field of thought which is congenial to her. This beautiful fabric of imagination vanishes at the severe touch of truth. The spirit of benevolence, cherished and invigorated by plenty, is
repressed

repressed by the chilling breath of want. The hateful passions that had vanished, reappear. The mighty law of self-preservation, expels all the softer and more exalted emotions of the soul. The temptations to evil are too strong for human nature to resist. The corn is plucked before it is ripe, or secreted in unfair proportions; and the whole black train of vices that belong to falsehood are immediately generated. Provisions no longer flow in for the support of the mother with a large family. The children are sickly from insufficient food. The rosy flush of health gives place to the pallid cheek and hollow eye of misery. Benevolence yet lingering in a few bosoms, makes some faint expiring struggles, till at length self-love resumes his wonted empire, and lords it triumphant over the world.

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No human institutions here existed, to the perverseness of which Mr. Godwin ascribes the original sin of the worst men*. No opposition had been produced by them between public and private good. No monopoly had been created of those advantages which reason directs to be left in common. No man had been goaded to the breach of order by unjust laws. Benevolence had established her reign in all hearts: and yet in so short a period as within fifty years, violence, oppression, falsehood, misery, every hateful vice, and every form of distress, which degrade and sadden the present state of society, seem to have been generated by the most imperious circumstances, by laws inherent in the nature of man, and absolutely independent of all human regulations.

* B. 8. C. 3. P. 340.

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

This is undoubtedly a very different view of the difficulty arising from population,

pulation, from that which Mr. Godwin gives, when he says, "Myriads of centuries of still increasing population may pass away, and the earth be still found sufficient for the subsistence of its inhabitants."

I am sufficiently aware that the redundant twenty-eight millions, or seventy-seven millions, that I have mentioned, could never have existed. It is a perfectly just observation of Mr. Godwin, that, "There is a principle in human society, by which population is perpetually kept down to the level of the means of subsistence." The sole question is, what is this principle? Is it some obscure and occult cause? Is it some mysterious interference of heaven, which at a certain period, strikes the men with impotence, and the women with barrenness? Or is it a cause, open to
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our researches, within our view, a cause, which has constantly been observed to operate, though with varied force, in every state in which man has been placed? Is it not a degree of misery, the necessary and inevitable result of the laws of nature, which human institutions, so far from aggravating, have tended considerably to mitigate, though they never can remove.

It may be curious to observe, in the case that we have been supposing, how some of the laws which at present govern civilized society, would be successively dictated by the most imperious necessity. As man, according to Mr. Godwin, is the creature of the impressions to which he is subject, the goadings of want could not continue long, before some violations of public or private stock would necessarily take place. As these violations increased

increased in number and extent, the more active and comprehensive intellects of the society would soon perceive, that while population was fast increasing, the yearly produce of the country would shortly begin to diminish. The urgency of the case would suggest the necessity of some immediate measures to be taken for the general safety. Some kind of convention would then be called, and the dangerous situation of the country stated in the strongest terms. It would be observed, that while they lived in the midst of plenty, it was of little consequence who laboured the least, or who possessed the least, as every man was perfectly willing and ready to supply the wants of his neighbour. But that the question was no longer, whether one man should give to another, that which he did not use himself; but whether he should give to his neighbour

bour the food which was absolutely necessary to his own existence. It would be represented, that the number of those that were in want very greatly exceeded the number and means of those who should supply them: that these pressing wants, which from the state of the produce of the country could not all be gratified, had occasioned some flagrant violations of justice: that these violations had already checked the increase of food, and would, if they were not by some means or other prevented, throw the whole community in confusion: that imperious necessity seemed to dictate that a yearly increase of produce should, if possible, be obtained at all events: that in order to effect this first, great, and indispensable purpose, it would be adviseable to make a more complete division of land, and to secure every man's stock against violation

lation by the most powerful sanctions, even by death itself.

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

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should throw away the rest; but that even if he exchanged his surplus food for the labour of others, and made them in some degree dependent on him, this would still be better than that these others should absolutely starve.

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

The next subject that would come under discussion, intimately connected with the preceding, is, the commerce between the sexes. It would be urged by those who had turned their attention to the true cause of the difficulties under which the community laboured, that
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while every man felt secure that all his children would be well provided for by general benevolence, the powers of the earth would be absolutely inadequate to produce food for the population which would inevitably ensue: that even, if the whole attention and labour of the society were directed to this sole point, and if, by the most perfect security of property, and every other encouragement that could be thought of, the greatest possible increase of produce were yearly obtained; yet still, that the increase of food would by no means keep pace with the much more rapid increase of population: that some check to population therefore was imperiously called for: that the most natural and obvious check seemed to be, to make every man provide for his own children: that this would operate in some respect, as a measure and guide, in the increase of population;

lation; as it might be expected that no man would bring beings into the world, for whom he could not find the means of support: that where this notwithstanding was the case, it seemed necessary, for the example of others, that the disgrace and inconvenience attending such a conduct, should fall upon that individual, who had thus inconsiderately plunged himself and innocent children in misery and want.

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

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

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

That a woman should at present be almost driven from society, for an offence, which men commit nearly with impunity, seems to be undoubtedly a breach of natural justice. But the origin of the custom, as the most obvious and effectual method of preventing the frequent recur-

recurrence of a serious inconvenience to a community, appears to be natural, though not perhaps perfectly justifiable. This origin, however, is now lost in the new train of ideas which the custom has since generated. What at first might be dictated by state necessity, is now supported by female delicacy; and operates with the greatest force on that part of society, where, if the original intention of the custom were preserved, there is the least real occasion for it.

When these two fundamental laws of society, the security of property, and the institution of marriage, were once established, inequality of conditions must necessarily follow. Those who were born after the division of property, would come into a world already possessed. If their parents, from having too large a family, could not give them sufficient for their

their support, what are they to do in a world where every thing is appropriated? We have seen the fatal effects that would result to a society, if every man had a valid claim to an equal share of the produce of the earth. The members of a family which was grown too large for the original division of land appropriated to it, could not then demand a part of the surplus produce of others, as a debt of justice. It has appeared, that from the inevitable laws of our nature, some human beings must suffer from want. These are the unhappy persons who, in the great lottery of life, have drawn a blank. The number of these claimants would soon exceed the ability of the surplus produce to supply. Moral merit is a very difficult distinguishing criterion, except in extreme cases. The owners of surplus produce would in general seek some more obvious mark of distinction.

And

And it seems both natural and just, that except upon particular occasions, their choice should fall upon those, who were able, and professed themselves willing, to exert their strength in procuring a further surplus produce; and thus at once benefiting the community, and enabling these proprietors to afford assistance to greater numbers. All who were in want of food would be urged by imperious necessity to offer their labour in exchange for this article so absolutely essential to existence. The fund appropriated to the maintenance of labour, would be, the aggregate quantity of food possessed by the owners of land beyond their own consumption. When the demands upon this fund were great and numerous, it would naturally be divided in very small shares. Labour would be ill paid. Men would offer to work for a bare subsistence, and the rearing of families would be
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checked by sickness and misery. On the contrary, when this fund was increasing fast; when it was great in proportion to the number of claimants; it would be divided in much larger shares. No man would exchange his labour without receiving an ample quantity of food in return. Labourers would live in ease and comfort; and would consequently be able to rear a numerous and vigorous offspring.

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

And thus it appears, that a society constituted according to the most beautiful
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form that imagination can conceive, with benevolence for its moving principle, instead of self-love, and with every evil disposition in all its members corrected by reason and not force, would, from the inevitable laws of nature, and not from any original depravity of man, in a very short period, degenerate into a society, constructed upon a plan not essentially different from that which prevails in every known State at present; I mean, a society divided into a class of proprietors, and a class of labourers, and with self-love for the main-spring of the great machine.

In the supposition I have made, I have undoubtedly taken the increase of population smaller, and the increase of produce greater, than they really would be. No reason can be assigned, why, under the circumstances I have supposed,

population should not increase faster than in any known instance. If then we were to take the period of doubling at fifteen years, instead of twenty-five years; and reflect upon the labour necessary to double the produce in so short a time, even if we allow it possible; we may venture to pronounce with certainty, that if Mr. Godwin's system of society was established in its utmost perfection, instead of myriads of centuries, not thirty years could elapse, before its utter destruction from the simple principle of population.

I have taken no notice of emigration for obvious reasons. If such societies were instituted in other parts of Europe, these countries would be under the same difficulties with regard to population, and could admit no fresh members into their bosoms. If this beautiful society were

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confined to this island, it must have degenerated strangely from its original purity, and administer but a very small portion of the happiness it proposed; in short, its essential principle must be completely destroyed, before any of its members would voluntarily consent to leave it, and live under such governments as at present exist in Europe, or submit to the extreme hardships of first settlers in new regions. We well know, from repeated experience, how much misery and hardship men will undergo in their own country, before they can determine to desert it; and how often the most tempting proposals of embarking for new settlements have been rejected by people who appeared to be almost starving.

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CHAP.

CHAP. XI.

Mr. Godwin's conjecture concerning the future extinction of the passion between the sexes.—Little apparent grounds for such a conjecture.—Passion of love not inconsistent either with reason or virtue.

WE have supposed Mr. Godwin's system of society once completely established. But it is supposing an impossibility. The same causes in nature which would destroy it so rapidly, were it once established, would prevent the possibility of its establishment. And upon what grounds we can presume a change in these natural causes, I am utterly at a loss to conjecture. No move towards the extinction of the passion between the sexes has taken place in the five or six thousand years that the world has existed. Men in the decline of life have, in all ages, declaimed against a passion which

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they have ceased to feel, but with as little reason as success. Those who from coldness of constitutional temperament have never felt what love is, will surely be allowed to be very incompetent judges, with regard to the power of this passion, to contribute to the sum of pleasurable sensations in life. Those who have spent their youth in criminal excesses, and have prepared for themselves, as the comforts of their age, corporal debility, and mental remorse, may well inveigh against such pleasures as vain and futile, and unproductive of lasting satisfaction. But the pleasures of pure love will bear the contemplation of the most improved reason, and the most exalted virtue. Perhaps there is scarcely a man who has once experienced the genuine delight of virtuous love, however great his intellectual pleasures may have been, that does not look back to the period, as the sunny spot

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spot in his whole life, where his imagination loves to bask, which he recollects and contemplates with the fondest regrets, and which he would most wish to live over again. The superiority of intellectual, to sensual pleasures, consists rather, in their filling up more time, in their having a larger range, and in their being less liable to satiety, than in their being more real and essential.

Intemperance in every enjoyment defeats its own purpose. A walk in the finest day, through the most beautiful country, if pursued too far, ends in pain and fatigue. The most wholesome and invigorating food, eaten with an unrestrained appetite, produces weakness, instead of strength. Even intellectual pleasures, though certainly less liable than others to satiety, pursued with too little intermission, debilitate the body, and

impair the vigour of the mind: To argue against the reality of these pleasures from their abuse, seems to be hardly just. Morality, according to Mr. Godwin, is a calculation of consequences, or, as Archdeacon Paley very justly expresses it, the will of God, as collected from general expediency. According to either of these definitions, a sensual pleasure, not attended with the probability of unhappy consequences, does not offend against the laws of morality: and if it be pursued with such a degree of temperance, as to leave the most ample room for intellectual attainments, it must undoubtedly add to the sum of pleasurable sensations in life. Virtuous love, exalted by friendship, seems to be that sort of mixture of sensual and intellectual enjoyment particularly suited to the nature of man, and most powerfully calculated to awaken

the sympathies of the soul, and produce the most exquisite gratifications.

Mr. Godwin says, in order to shew the evident inferiority of the pleasures of sense, "Strip the commerce of the sexes of all its attendant circumstances*, and it would be generally despised." He might as well say to a man who admired trees; strip them of their spreading branches and lovely foliage, and what beauty can you see in a bare pole? But it was the tree with the branches and foliage, and not without them, that excited admiration. One feature of an object, may be as distinct, and excite as different emotions, from the aggregate, as any two things the most remote, as a beautiful woman, and a map of Madagascar. It is "the symmetry of person,

* B. i. C. 5. P. 73.

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the vivacity, the voluptuous softness of temper, the affectionate kindness of feelings, the imagination and the wit" of a woman that excite the passion of love, and not the mere distinction of her being a female. Urged by the passion of love, men have been driven into acts highly prejudicial to the general interests of society; but probably they would have found no difficulty in resisting the temptation, had it appeared in the form of a woman, with no other attractions whatever but her sex. To strip sensual pleasures of all their adjuncts, in order to prove their inferiority, is to deprive a magnet of some of its most essential causes of attraction, and then to say that it is weak and inefficient.

In the pursuit of every enjoyment, whether sensual or intellectual, Reason, that faculty which enables us to calculate

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consequences, is the proper corrective and guide. It is probable therefore that improved reason will always tend to prevent the abuse of sensual pleasures, though it by no means follows that it will extinguish them.

I have endeavoured to expose the fallacy of that argument which infers an unlimited progress from a partial improvement, the limits of which cannot be exactly ascertained. It has appeared, I think, that there are many instances in which a decided progress has been observed, where yet it would be a gross absurdity to suppose that progress indefinite. But towards the extinction of the passion between the sexes, no observable progress whatever has hitherto been made. To suppose such an extinction, therefore, is merely to offer an unfounded conjecture.

ture, unsupported by any philosophical probabilities.

It is a truth, which history I am afraid makes too clear, that some men of the highest mental powers, have been addicted not only to a moderate, but even to an immoderate indulgence in the pleasures of sensual love. But allowing, as I should be inclined to do, notwithstanding numerous instances to the contrary, that great intellectual exertions tend to diminish the empire of this passion over man; it is evident that the mass of mankind must be improved more highly than the brightest ornaments of the species at present, before any difference can take place sufficient sensibly to affect population. I would by no means suppose that the mass of mankind has reached its term of improvement; but the principal argument of this essay tends to place in a strong

strong point of view, the improbability, that the lower classes of people in any country, should ever be sufficiently free from want and labour, to attain any high degree of intellectual improvement.

CHAP.

CHAP. XII.

Mr. Godwin's conjecture concerning the indefinite prolongation of human life.—Improper inference drawn from the effects of mental stimulants on the human frame; illustrated in various instances.—Conjectures not founded on any indications in the past, not to be considered as philosophical conjectures.—Mr. Godwin's and Mr. Condorcet's conjecture respecting the approach of man towards immortality on earth, a curious instance of the inconsistency of scepticism.

MR. Godwin's conjecture respecting the future approach of man towards immortality on earth, seems to be rather oddly placed in a chapter, which professes to remove the objection to his system of equality from the principle of population. Unless he supposes the passion between the sexes to decrease faster, than the duration of life increases, the earth would be more encumbered than ever. But leaving this difficulty to Mr. Godwin,

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win, let us examine a few of the appearances from which the probable immortality of man is inferred.

To prove the power of the mind over the body, Mr. Godwin observes, "How often do we find a piece of good news dissipating a distemper? How common is the remark that those accidents which are to the indolent a source of disease, are forgotten and extirpated in the busy and active? I walk twenty miles in an indolent and half-determined temper, and am extremely fatigued. I walk twenty miles full of ardour, and with a motive that engrosses my soul, and I come in as fresh and as alert as when I began my journey. Emotions excited by some unexpected word, by a letter that is delivered to us, occasions the most extraordinary revolutions in our frame, accelerates the circulation, causes

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the heart to palpitate, the tongue to refuse its office, and has been known to occasion death by extreme anguish or extreme joy. There is nothing indeed of which the physician is more aware than of the power of the mind in assisting or retarding convalescence."

The instances here mentioned, are chiefly instances of the effects of mental stimulants on the bodily frame. No person has ever for a moment doubted the near, though mysterious connection, of mind and body. But it is arguing totally without knowledge of the nature of stimulants to suppose, either that they can be applied continually with equal strength, or if they could be so applied, for a time, that they would not exhaust and wear out the subject. In some of the cases here noticed, the strength of the stimulus depends upon

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its novelty and unexpectedness. Such a stimulus cannot, from its nature, be repeated often with the same effect, as it would by repetition lose that property which gives it its strength.

In the other cases, the argument is from a small and partial effect, to a great and general effect, which will in numberless instances be found to be a very fallacious mode of reasoning. The busy and active man may in some degree counteract, or what is perhaps nearer the truth, may disregard those slight disorders of frame, which fix the attention of a man who has nothing else to think of; but this does not tend to prove that activity of mind will enable a man to disregard a high fever, the small-pox, or the plague.

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The man who walks twenty miles with a motive that engrosses his soul, does not attend to his slight fatigue of body when he comes in; but double his motive, and set him to walk another twenty miles, quadruple it, and let him start a third time, and so on; and the length of his walk will ultimately depend upon muscle and not mind. Powel, for a motive of ten guineas, would have walked further probably than Mr. Godwin, for a motive of half a million. A motive of uncommon power acting upon a frame of moderate strength, would, perhaps, make the man kill himself by his exertions, but it would not make him walk an hundred miles in twenty-four hours. This statement of the case, shews the fallacy of supposing, that the person was really not at all tired in his first walk of twenty miles, because he did not appear to be so, or, perhaps, scarcely felt

felt any fatigue himself. The mind cannot fix its attention strongly on more than one object at once. The twenty thousand pounds so engrossed his thoughts, that he did not attend to any slight soreness of foot, or stiffness of limb. But had he been really as fresh and as alert, as when he first set off, he would be able to go the second twenty miles with as much ease as the first, and so on, the third, &c. which leads to a palpable absurdity. When a horse of spirit is nearly half tired, by the stimulus of the spur, added to the proper management of the bit, he may be put so much upon his mettle, that he would appear to a stander-by, as fresh and as high spirited, as if he had not gone a mile. Nay, probably, the horse himself, while in the heat and passion occasioned by this stimulus, would not feel any fatigue; but it would be strangely contrary

trary to all reason and experience, to argue from such an appearance, that if the stimulus were continued, the horse would never be tired. The cry of a pack of hounds will make some horses, after a journey of forty miles on the road, appear as fresh, and as lively, as when they first set out. Were they then to be hunted, no perceptible abatement would at first be felt by their riders in their strength and spirits, but towards the end of a hard day, the previous fatigue would have its full weight and effect, and make them tire sooner. When I have taken a long walk with my gun, and met with no success, I have frequently returned home feeling a considerable degree of uncomfortableness from fatigue. Another day, perhaps, going over nearly the same extent of ground with a good deal of sport, I have come home fresh, and alert. The
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difference in the sensation of fatigue upon coming in, on the different days, may have been very striking, but on the following mornings I have found no such difference. I have not perceived that I was less stiff in my limbs, or less foot-sore, on the morning after the day of sport, than on the other morning.

In all these cases, stimulants upon the mind seem to act rather by taking off the attention from the bodily fatigue, than by really and truly counteracting it. If the energy of my mind had really counteracted the fatigue of my body, why should I feel tired the next morning? If the stimulus of the hounds had as completely overcome the fatigue of the journey in reality, as it did in appearance, why should the horse be tired sooner than if he had not gone the forty miles? I happen to have a very bad fit

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of the tooth-ache at the time I am writing this. In the eagerness of composition, I every now and then, for a moment or two, forget it. Yet I cannot help thinking that the process which causes the pain, is still going forwards, and that the nerves, which carry the information of it to the brain, are even during these moments demanding attention, and room for their appropriate vibrations. The multiplicity of vibrations of another kind, may perhaps prevent their admission, or overcome them for a time when admitted, till a shoot of extraordinary energy puts all other vibrations to the rout, destroys the vividness of my argumentative conceptions, and rides triumphant in the brain. In this case, as in the others, the mind seems to have little or no power in counteracting, or curing the disorder, but merely

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possesses a power, if strongly excited, of fixing its attention on other subjects.

I do not, however, mean to say, that a sound and vigorous mind has no tendency whatever to keep the body in a similar state. So close and intimate is the union of mind and body, that it would be highly extraordinary, if they did not mutually assist each others functions. But, perhaps, upon a comparison, the body has more effect upon the mind, than the mind upon the body. The first object of the mind is to act as purveyor to the wants of the body. When these wants are completely satisfied, an active mind is indeed apt to wander further, to range over the fields of science, or sport in the regions of imagination, to fancy that it has "shuffled off this mortal coil," and is seeking its kindred element. But all these efforts are like

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the vain exertions of the hare in the fable. The slowly moving tortoise, the body, never fails to overtake the mind, however widely and extensively it may have ranged, and the brightest and most energetic intellects, unwillingly as they may attend to the first or second summons, must ultimately yield the empire of the brain to the calls of hunger, or sink with the exhausted body in sleep.

It seems as if one might say with certainty, that if a medicine could be found to immortalize the body, there would be no fear of its being accompanied by the immortality of the mind. But the immortality of the mind by no means seems to infer the immortality of the body. On the contrary, the greatest conceivable energy of mind would probably exhaust and destroy

the strength of the body. A temperate vigour of mind appears to be favourable to health; but very great intellectual exertions tend rather, as has been often observed, to wear out the scabbard. Most of the instances which Mr. Godwin has brought to prove the power of the mind over the body, and the consequent probability of the immortality of man, are of this latter description, and could such stimulants be continually applied, instead of tending to immortalize, they would tend very rapidly to destroy the human frame.

The probable increase of the voluntary power of man over his animal frame, comes next under Mr. Godwin's consideration, and he concludes by saying, that the voluntary power of some men, in this respect, is found to extend to various articles in which other

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men are impotent. But this is reasoning against an almost universal rule from a few exceptions: and these exceptions seem to be rather tricks, than powers, that may be exerted to any good purpose. I have never heard of any man who could regulate his pulse in a fever; and doubt much, if any of the persons here alluded to, have made the smallest perceptible progress in the regular correction of the disorders of their frames, and the consequent prolongation of their lives.

Mr. Godwin says, "Nothing can be more unphilosophical, than to conclude, that, because a certain species of power is beyond the train of our present observation, that it is beyond the limits of the human mind." I own my ideas of philosophy are in this respect widely different from Mr. Godwin's. The only

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distinction that I see, between a philosophical conjecture, and the assertions of the Prophet Mr. Brothers, is, that one is founded upon indications arising from the train of our present observations, and the other has no foundation at all. I expect that great discoveries are yet to take place in all the branches of human science, particularly in physics; but the moment we leave past experience as the foundation of our conjectures concerning the future; and still more, if our conjectures absolutely contradict past experience, we are thrown upon a wide field of uncertainty, and any one supposition is then just as good as another. If a person were to tell me that men would ultimately have eyes and hands behind them as well as before them, I should admit the usefulness of the addition, but should give as a reason for my disbelief of it, that I

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say no indications whatever in the past, from which I could infer the smallest probability of such a change. If this be not allowed a valid objection, all conjectures are alike, and all equally philosophical. I own it appears to me, that in the train of our present observations, there are no more genuine indications that man will become immortal upon earth, than that he will have four eyes and four hands, or that trees will grow horizontally instead of perpendicularly.

It will be said, perhaps, that many discoveries have already taken place in the world that were totally unforeseen and unexpected. This I grant to be true; but if a person had predicted these discoveries, without being guided by any analogies or indications from past facts, he would deserve the name of seer or prophet, but not of philosopher.

pher. The wonder that some of our modern discoveries would excite in the savage inhabitants of Europe in the times of Theseus and Achilles, proves but little. Persons almost entirely unacquainted with the powers of a machine, cannot be expected to guess at its effects. I am far from saying, that we are at present by any means fully acquainted with the powers of the human mind; but we certainly know more of this instrument than was known four thousand years ago; and therefore, though not to be called competent judges, we are certainly much better able, than savages, to say what is, or is not, within its grasp. A watch would strike a Savage with as much surprize as a perpetual motion; yet one, is to us a most familiar piece of mechanism, and the other, has constantly eluded the efforts of the most acute intellects. In many

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instances, we are now able to perceive the causes, which prevent an unlimited improvement in those inventions, which seemed to promise fairly for it at first. The original improvers of telescopes would probably think, that as long as the size of the specula, and the length of the tubes could be increased, the powers and advantages of the instrument would increase: but experience has since taught us, that the smallness of the field, the deficiency of light, and the circumstance of the atmosphere being magnified, prevent the beneficial results that were to be expected from telescopes of extraordinary size and power. In many parts of knowledge, man has been almost constantly making some progress; in other parts, his efforts have been invariably baffled. The Savage would not probably be able to guess at the causes of this mighty difference. Our further ex-

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perience has given us some little insight into these causes, and has therefore enabled us better to judge, if not, of what we are to expect in future, at least, of what we are not to expect, which, though negative, is a very useful piece of information.

As the necessity of sleep seems rather to depend upon the body than the mind, it does not appear how the improvement of the mind can tend very greatly to supersede this "conspicuous infirmity." A man who by great excitements on his mind, is able to pass two or three nights without sleep, proportionably exhausts the vigour of his body: and this diminution of health and strength, will soon disturb the operations of his understanding; so that by these great efforts, he appears to have made no real progress whatever,

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in superseding the necessity of this species of rest.

There is certainly a sufficiently marked difference in the various characters of which we have some knowledge, relative to the energies of their minds, their benevolent pursuits, &c. to enable us to judge, whether the operations of intellect have any decided effect in prolonging the duration of human life. It is certain, that no decided effect of this kind has yet been observed. Though no attention of any kind, has ever produced such an effect, as could be construed into the smallest semblance of an approach towards immortality; yet of the two, a certain attention to the body, seems to have more effect in this respect, than an attention to the mind. The man who takes his temperate meals, and his bodily exercise, with scrupulous

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regularity, will generally be found more healthy, than the man who, very deeply engaged in intellectual pursuits, often forgets for a time these bodily cravings. The citizen who has retired, and whose ideas, perhaps, scarcely soar above, or extend beyond his little garden, pudling all the morning about his borders of box, will, perhaps, live as long as the philosopher whose range of intellect is the most extensive, and whose views are the clearest of any of his contemporaries. It has been positively observed by those who have attended to the bills of mortality, that women live longer upon an average than men; and, though I would not by any means say that their intellectual faculties are inferior, yet, I think, it must be allowed, that from their different education, there are not so many women as men, who
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are excited to vigorous mental exertion. As in these and similar instances, or to take a larger range, as in the great diversity of characters that have existed during some thousand years, no decided difference has been observed in the duration of human life from the operation of intellect, the mortality of man on earth seems to be as completely established, and exactly upon the same grounds, as any one, the most constant, of the laws of nature. An immediate act of power in the Creator of the Universe might, indeed, change one or all of these laws, either suddenly or gradually; but without some indications of such a change, and such indications do not exist, it is just as unphilosophical to suppose that the life of man may be prolonged beyond any assignable limits,

mits, as to suppose that the attraction of the earth will gradually be changed into repulsion, and that stones will ultimately rise instead of fall, or that the earth will fly off at a certain period to some more genial and warmer sun.

The conclusion of this chapter presents us, undoubtedly, with a very beautiful and desirable picture, but like some of those landscapes, drawn from fancy, and not imagined with truth, it fails of that interest in the heart which nature and probability can alone give.

I cannot quit this subject without taking notice of these conjectures of Mr. Godwin and Mr. Condorcet, concerning the indefinite prolongation of human life, as a very curious instance of

of the longing of the soul after immortality. Both these gentlemen have rejected the light of revelation which absolutely promises eternal life in another state. They have also rejected the light of natural religion, which to the ablest intellects in all ages, has indicated the future existence of the soul. Yet so congenial is the idea of immortality to the mind of man, that they cannot consent entirely to throw it out of their systems. After all their fastidious scepticisms concerning the only probable mode of immortality, they introduce a species of immortality of their own, not only completely contradictory to every law of philosophical probability, but in itself in the highest degree, narrow, partial, and unjust. They suppose that all the great, virtuous, and exalted minds, that have ever existed, or that may exist for some thousands, per-

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haps millions of years, will be sunk in annihilation; and that only a few beings, not greater in number than can exist at once upon the earth, will be ultimately crowned with immortality. Had such a tenet been advanced as a tenet of revelation, I am very sure that all the enemies of religion, and probably Mr. Godwin, and Mr. Condorcet among the rest, would have exhausted the whole force of their ridicule upon it, as the most puerile, the most absurd, the poorest, the most pitiful, the most iniquitously unjust, and, consequently, the most unworthy of the Deity, that the superstitious folly of man could invent.

What a strange and curious proof do these conjectures exhibit of the inconsistency of scepticism! For it should be observed, that there is a very striking

ing and essential difference, between believing an assertion which absolutely contradicts the most uniform experience, and an assertion which contradicts nothing, but is merely beyond the power of our present observation and knowledge*. So diversified are the natural objects

* When we extend our view beyond this life, it is evident that we can have no other guides than authority, or conjecture, and perhaps, indeed, an obscure and undefined feeling. What I say here, therefore, does not appear to me in any respect to contradict what I said before, when I observed that it was unphilosophical to expect any specific event that was not indicated by some kind of analogy in the past. In ranging beyond the bourne from which no traveller returns, we must necessarily quit this rule; but with regard to events that may be expected to happen on earth, we can seldom quit it consistently with true philosophy. Analogy has, however, as I conceive, great latitude. For instance, man has discovered many of the laws of nature: analogy seems to indicate that he will

objects around us, so many instances of mighty power daily offer themselves to our view, that we may fairly presume, that there are many forms and operations of nature which we have not yet observed, or which, perhaps, we are not capable of observing with our present confined inlets of knowledge. The resurrection of a spiritual body from a natural body, does not appear in itself a more wonderful instance of power, than the germination of a blade of wheat from the grain, or of an oak from an acorn. Could we conceive an intelligent being, so placed, as to be conversant only with inanimate, or full grown objects, and never to have witnessed the process of vegetation or growth; and were ano-

discover many more; but no analogy seems to indicate that he will discover a sixth sense, or a new species of power in the human mind, entirely beyond the train of our present observations.

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ther being to shew him two little pieces of matter, a grain of wheat, and an acorn, to desire him to examine them, to analyze them if he pleased, and endeavour to find out their properties and essences; and then to tell him, that however trifling these little bits of matter might appear to him, that they possessed such curious powers of selection, combination, arrangement, and almost of creation, that upon being put into the ground, they would chuse, amongst all the dirt and moisture that surrounded them, those parts which best suited their purpose, that they would collect and arrange these parts with wonderful taste, judgment, and execution, and would rise up into beautiful forms, scarcely in any respect analogous to the little bits of matter which were first placed in the earth. I feel very little doubt that the imaginary being which I have

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supposed, would hesitate more, would require better authority, and stronger proofs, before he believed these strange assertions, than if he had been told, that a being of mighty power, who had been the cause of all that he saw around him, and of that existence of which he himself was conscious, would, by a great act of power upon the death and corruption of human creatures, raise up the essence of thought in an incorporeal, or at least invisible form, to give it a happier existence in another state.

The only difference, with regard to our own apprehensions, that is not in favour of the latter assertion, is, that the first miracle* we have repeatedly seen, and

* The powers of selection, combination, and transmutation, which every seed shews, are truly miraculous. Who can imagine that these wonderful faculties

and the last miracle we have not seen. I admit the full weight of this prodigious difference; but surely no man can hesitate a moment in saying, that putting Revelation out of the question, the faculties are contained in these little bits of matter? To me it appears much more philosophical to suppose that the mighty God of nature is present in full energy in all these operations. To this all powerful Being, it would be equally easy to raise an oak without an acorn as with one. The preparatory process of putting seeds into the ground, is merely ordained for the use of man, as one among the various other excitements necessary to awaken matter into mind. It is an idea that will be found, consistent equally with the natural phenomena around us, with the various events of human life, and with the successive Revelations of God to man, to suppose that the world is a mighty process for the creation and formation of mind. Many vessels will necessarily come out of this great furnace in wrong shapes. These will be broken and thrown aside as useless; while those vessels whose forms are full of truth, grace, and loveliness, will be wafted into happier situations, nearer the presence of the mighty maker.

urrection of a spiritual body from a natural body, which may be merely one among the many operations of nature which we cannot see, is an event indefinitely more probable than the immortality of man on earth, which is not only an event, of which no symptoms or indications have yet appeared, but is a positive contradiction to one of the most constant of the laws of nature that has ever come within the observation of man.

I ought perhaps again to make an apology to my readers for dwelling so long upon a conjecture, which many I know will think too absurd and improbable, to require the least discussion. But if it be as improbable, and as contrary to the genuine spirit of philosophy as I own I think it is, why should it not be shewn to be so in a candid examination? A conjecture, however improbable on the first

first view of it, advanced by able and ingenious men, seems at least to deserve investigation. For my own part I feel no disinclination whatever, to give that degree of credit to the opinion of the probable immortality of man on earth, which the appearances that can be brought in support of it deserve. Before we decide upon the utter improbability of such an event; it is but fair impartially to examine these appearances; and from such an examination I think we may conclude, that we have rather less reason for supposing that the life of man may be indefinitely prolonged, than that trees may be made to grow indefinitely high, or potatoes indefinitely large*.

* Though Mr. Godwin advances the idea of the indefinite prolongation of human life, merely as a conjecture, yet as he has produced some appearances, which in his conception favour the supposition, he must certainly intend that these appearances should be examined; and this is all that I have meant to do.

CHAP.

CHAP. XIII.

Error of Mr. Godwin in considering man too much in the light of a being merely rational.—In the compound being, man, the passions will always act as disturbing forces in the decisions of the understanding.—Reasonings of Mr. Godwin on the subject of coercion.—Some truths of a nature not to be communicated from one man to another.

IN the chapter which I have been examining, Mr. Godwin professes to consider the objection to his system of equality from the principle of population. It has appeared I think clearly, that he is greatly erroneous in his statement of the distance of this difficulty; and that instead of myriads of centuries, it is really not thirty years, or even thirty days, distant from us. The supposition of the approach of man to immortality on earth, is certainly not of a kind to soften the difficulty. The only argument,

gument, therefore, in the chapter, which has any tendency to remove the objection, is the conjecture concerning the extinction of the passion between the sexes; but as this is a mere conjecture, unsupported by the smallest shadow of proof, the force of the objection may be fairly said to remain unimpaired; and it is undoubtedly of sufficient weight of itself completely to overturn Mr. Godwin's whole system of equality. I will, however, make one or two observations on a few of the prominent parts of Mr. Godwin's reasonings, which will contribute to place in a still clearer point of view, the little hope that we can reasonably entertain of those vast improvements in the nature of man and of society, which he holds up to our admiring gaze in his political justice.

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Mr. Godwin considers man too much in the light of a being merely intellectual. This error, at least such I conceive it to be, pervades his whole work, and mixes itself with all his reasonings. The voluntary actions of men may originate in their opinions; but these opinions will be very differently modified in creatures compounded of a rational faculty and corporal propensities, from what they would be, in beings wholly intellectual. Mr. Godwin, in proving that sound reasoning and truth, are capable of being adequately communicated, examines the proposition first practically; and then adds, "Such is the appearance which this proposition assumes, when examined in a loose and practical view. In strict consideration it will not admit of debate. Man is a rational being, &c*." So far

* B. I. C. 5. P. 89.

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from calling this a strict consideration of the subject, I own I should call it the loosest, and most erroneous way possible, of considering it. It is the calculating the velocity of a falling body in vacuo; and persisting in it, that it would be the same through whatever resisting mediums it might fall. This was not Newton's mode of philosophizing. Very few general propositions are just in application to a particular subject. The moon is not kept in her orbit round the earth, nor the earth in her orbit round the sun, by a force that varies merely in the inverse ratio of the squares of the distances. To make the general theory just in application to the revolutions of these bodies, it was necessary to calculate accurately, the disturbing force of the sun upon the moon, and of the moon upon the earth; and till these disturbing forces were properly estimated, actual observations on the motions of these bodies, would have proved