

proved that the theory was not accurately true.

I am willing to allow that every voluntary act is preceded by a decision of the mind; but it is strangely opposite to what I should conceive to be the just theory upon the subject, and a palpable contradiction to all experience, to say, that the corporal propensities of man do not act very powerfully, as disturbing forces, in these decisions. The question, therefore, does not merely depend, upon whether a man may be made to understand a distinct proposition, or be convinced by an unanswerable argument. A truth may be brought home to his conviction as a rational being, though he may determine to act contrary to it, as a compound being. The cravings of hunger, the love of liquor, the desire of possessing a beautiful woman, will

urge men to actions, of the fatal consequences of which, to the general interests of society, they are perfectly well convinced, even at the very time they commit them. Remove their bodily cravings, and they would not hesitate a moment in determining against such actions. Ask them their opinion of the same conduct in another person, and they would immediately reprobate it. But in their own case, and under all the circumstances of their situation with these bodily cravings, the decision of the compound being is different from the conviction of the rational being.

If this be the just view of the subject; and both theory and experience unite to prove that it is; almost all Mr. Godwin's reasonings on the subject of coercion in his 7th chapter, will appear to be founded on error. He spends some time in placing in

in a ridiculous point of view, the attempt, to convince a man's understanding, and to clear up a doubtful proposition in his mind, by blows. Undoubtedly it is both ridiculous and barbarous; and so is cock-fighting; but one has little more to do with the real object of human punishments, than the other. One frequent (indeed much too frequent) mode of punishment is death. Mr. Godwin will hardly think this intended for conviction; at least it does not appear how the individual, or the society, could reap much future benefit from an understanding enlightened in this manner.

The principal objects which human punishments have in view, are undoubtedly restraint and example: restraint, or removal of an individual member, whose vicious habits are likely to be prejudicial to the society. And example, which
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by expressing the sense of the community with regard to a particular crime; and by associating more nearly and visibly, crime and punishment, holds out a moral motive to dissuade others from the commission of it.

Restraint, Mr. Godwin thinks, may be permitted as a temporary expedient, though he reprobates solitary imprisonment, which has certainly been the most successful, and, indeed, almost the only attempt, towards the moral amelioration of offenders. He talks of the selfish passions that are fostered by solitude, and of the virtues generated in society. But surely these virtues are not generated in the society of a prison. Were the offender confined to the society of able and virtuous men, he would probably be more improved than in solitude. But is this practicable? Mr. Godwin's
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ingenuity is more frequently employed in finding out evils, than in suggesting practical remedies.

Punishment, for example, is totally reprobated. By endeavouring to make examples too impressive and terrible, nations have, indeed, been led into the most barbarous cruelties; but the abuse of any practice is not a good argument against its use. The indefatigable pains taken in this country to find out a murder, and the certainty of its punishment, has powerfully contributed to generate that sentiment which is frequent in the mouths of the common people, that a murder will sooner or later come to light; and the habitual horror in which murder is in consequence held, will make a man, in the agony of passion, throw down his knife, for fear he should be tempted to use it in the gratification of his revenge.

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In Italy, where murderers by flying to a sanctuary, are allowed more frequently to escape, the crime has never been held in the same detestation, and has consequently been more frequent. No man, who is at all aware of the operation of moral motives, can doubt for a moment, that if every murder in Italy had been invariably punished, the use of the filletto in transports of passion, would have been comparatively but little known.

That human laws, either do, or can, proportion the punishment accurately to the offence, no person will have the folly to assert. From the inscrutability of motives the thing is absolutely impossible: but this imperfection, though it may be called a species of injustice, is no valid argument against human laws. It is the lot of man, that he will fre-

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quently have to chuse between two evils; and it is a sufficient reason for the adoption of any institution, that it is the best mode that suggests itself of preventing greater evils. A continual endeavour should undoubtedly prevail to make these institutions as perfect as the nature of them will admit. But nothing is so easy, as to find fault with human institutions; nothing so difficult, as to suggest adequate practical improvements. It is to be lamented, that more men of talents employ their time in the former occupation, than in the latter.

The frequency of crime among men, who, as the common saying is, know better, sufficiently proves, that some truths may be brought home to the conviction of the mind without always producing the proper effect upon the conduct. There are other truths of a nature

nature that perhaps never can be adequately communicated from one man to another. The superiority of the pleasures of intellect to those of sense, Mr. Godwin considers as a fundamental truth. Taking all circumstances into consideration, I should be disposed to agree with him; but how am I to communicate this truth to a person who has scarcely ever felt intellectual pleasure. I may as well attempt to explain the nature and beauty of colours to a blind man. If I am ever so laborious, patient, and clear, and have the most repeated opportunities of expostulation, any real progress toward the accomplishment of my purpose, seems absolutely hopeless. There is no common measure between us. I cannot proceed step by step: it is a truth of a nature absolutely incapable of demonstration. All that I can say is, that the wisest and best men in all ages had agreed

in giving the preference, very greatly, to the pleasures of intellect; and that my own experience completely confirmed the truth of their decisions; that I had found sensual pleasures vain, transient, and continually attended with tedium and disgust; but that intellectual pleasures appeared to me ever fresh and young, filled up all my hours satisfactorily, gave a new zest to life, and diffused a lasting serenity over my mind. If he believe me, it can only be from respect and veneration for my authority: it is credulity, and not conviction. I have not said any thing, nor can any thing be said of a nature to produce real conviction. The affair is not an affair of reasoning, but of experience. He would probably observe in reply, what you say may be very true with regard to yourself and many other good men, but for my own part I feel very differently upon the subject. I have
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very frequently taken up a book, and almost as frequently gone to sleep over it; but when I pass an evening with a gay party, or a pretty woman, I feel alive, and in spirits, and truly enjoy my existence.

Under such circumstances, reasoning and argument are not instruments from which success can be expected. At some future time perhaps, real satiety of sensual pleasures, or some accidental impressions that awakened the energies of his mind, might effect that, in a month, which the most patient and able expostulations, might be incapable of effecting in forty years.

CHAP. XIV.

Mr. Godwin's five propositions respecting political truth, on which his whole work hinges, not established.—Reasons we have for supposing from the distress occasioned by the principle of population, that the vices, and moral weakness of man can never be wholly eradicated.—Perfectibility, in the sense in which Mr. Godwin uses the term, not applicable to man.—Nature of the real perfectibility of man illustrated.

IF the reasonings of the preceding chapter are just, the corollaries respecting political truth, which Mr. Godwin draws from the proposition, that the voluntary actions of men originate in their opinions, will not appear to be clearly established. These corollaries are, “Sound reasoning and truth, when adequately communicated, must always be victorious over error: Sound reasoning and truth are capable of being so communicated: Truth is omnipotent: The vices and moral weak-

weakness of man are not invincible: Man is perfectible, or in other words, susceptible of perpetual improvement.”

The first three propositions may be considered a complete syllogism. If by adequately communicated, be meant such a conviction as to produce an adequate effect upon the conduct; the major may be allowed, and the minor denied. The consequent, or the omnipotence of truth, of course falls to the ground. If by adequately communicated be meant merely the conviction of the rational faculty; the major must be denied, the minor will be only true in cases capable of demonstration, and the consequent equally falls. The fourth proposition, Mr. Godwin calls the preceding proposition, with a slight variation in the statement. If so, it must accompany the preceding proposition in its fall. But it may be worth while

while to inquire, with reference to the principal argument of this essay, into the particular reasons which we have for supposing, that the vices and moral weaknesses of man can never be wholly overcome in this world.

Man, according to Mr. Godwin, is a creature, formed what he is, by the successive impressions which he has received, from the first moment that the germ from which he sprung was animated. Could he be placed in a situation, where he was subject to no evil impressions whatever, though it might be doubted whether in such a situation virtue could exist, vice would certainly be banished. The great bent of Mr. Godwin's work on political justice, if I understand it rightly, is to shew, that the greater part of the vices and weaknesses of men, proceed from the injustice of their political and social insti-

institutions: and that if these were removed, and the understandings of men more enlightened, there would be little or no temptation in the world to evil. As it has been clearly proved, however, (at least as I think) that this is entirely a false conception, and that, independent of any political or social institutions whatever, the greater part of mankind, from the fixed and unalterable laws of nature, must ever be subject to the evil temptations arising from want, besides other passions; it follows from Mr. Godwin's definition of man, that such impressions, and combinations of impressions, cannot be afloat in the world, without generating a variety of bad men. According to Mr. Godwin's own conception of the formation of character, it is surely as improbable that under such circumstances, all men will be virtuous, as that foxes will come up a hundred times
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following upon the dice. The great variety of combinations upon the dice in a repeated succession of throws, appears to me not inaptly to represent the great variety of character that must necessarily exist in the world, supposing every individual to be formed what he is, by that combination of impressions which he has received since his first existence. And this comparison will, in some measure, shew the absurdity of supposing, that exceptions will ever become general rules; that extraordinary and unusual combinations will be frequent; or that the individual instances of great virtue which have appeared in all ages of the world, will ever prevail universally.

I am aware that Mr. Godwin might say, that the comparison is in one respect inaccurate; that in the case of the
dice,

dice, the preceding causes, or rather the chances respecting the preceding causes, were always the same; and that, therefore, I could have no good reason for supposing that a greater number of sixes would come up in the next hundred times of throwing, than in the preceding same number of throws. But, that man had in some sort a power of influencing those causes that formed character; and that every good and virtuous man that was produced, by the influence which he must necessarily have, rather increased the probability that another such virtuous character would be generated; whereas the coming up of sixes upon the dice once, would certainly not increase the probability of their coming up a second time. I admit this objection to the accuracy of the comparison, but it is only partially
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valid. Repeated experience has assured us, that the influence of the most virtuous character will rarely prevail against very strong temptations to evil. It will undoubtedly affect some, but it will fail with a much greater number. Had Mr. Godwin succeeded in his attempt to prove that these temptations to evil could by the exertions of man be removed, I would give up the comparison; or at least allow, that a man might be so far enlightened with regard to the mode of shaking his elbow, that he would be able to throw axes every time. But as long as a great number of those impressions which form character, like the nice motions of the arm, remain absolutely independent of the will of man; though it would be the height of folly and presumption, to attempt to calculate the relative proportions

portions of virtue and vice at the future periods of the world; it may be safely asserted, that the vices and moral weakness of mankind, taken in the mass, are invincible.

The fifth proposition, is the general deduction from the four former, and will consequently fall, as the foundations which support it have given way. In the sense in which Mr. Godwin understands the term perfectible, the perfectibility of man cannot be asserted, unless the preceding propositions could have been clearly established. There is, however, one sense, which the term will bear, in which it is, perhaps, just. It may be said with truth, that man is always susceptible of improvement; or that there never has been, or will be, a period of his history, in which he can be said to have reached his possible

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ble achmé of perfection. Yet it does not by any means follow from this, that our efforts to improve man will always succeed; or even, that he will ever make, in the greatest number of ages, any extraordinary strides towards perfection. The only inference that can be drawn, is, that the precise limit of his improvement cannot possibly be known. And I cannot help again reminding the reader of a distinction, which, it appears to me, ought particularly to be attended to in the present question; I mean, the essential difference there is, between an unlimited improvement, and an improvement the limit of which cannot be ascertained. The former is an improvement not applicable to man under the present laws of his nature. The latter, undoubtedly, is applicable.

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The real perfectibility of man may be illustrated, as I have mentioned before, by the perfectibility of a plant. The object of the enterprising florist, is, as I conceive, to unite size, symmetry, and beauty of colour. It would surely be presumptuous in the most successful improver to affirm, that he possessed a carnation in which these qualities existed in the greatest possible state of perfection. However beautiful his flower may be, other care, other soil, or other suns, might produce one still more beautiful. Yet, although he may be aware of the absurdity of supposing that he has reached perfection; and though he may know by what means he attained that degree of beauty in the flower which he at present possesses, yet he cannot be sure that by pursuing similar means, rather increased in strength, he will obtain a more beautiful blossom. By endeavouring

vouring to improve one quality, he may impair the beauty of another. The richer mould which he would employ to increase the size of his plant, would probably burst the calyx, and destroy at once its symmetry. In a similar manner, the forcing manure used to bring about the French revolution, and to give a greater freedom and energy to the human mind, has burst the calyx of humanity, the restraining bond of all society; and, however large the separate petals have grown; however strongly, or even beautifully a few of them have been marked; the whole is at present a loose, deformed, disjointed mass, without union, symmetry, or harmony of colouring.

Were it of consequence to improve pinks and carnations, though we could

have no hope of raising them as large as cabbages, we might undoubtedly expect, by successive efforts, to obtain more beautiful specimens than we at present possess. No person can deny the importance of improving the happiness of the human species. Every, the least advance in this respect, is highly valuable. But an experiment with the human race is not like an experiment upon inanimate objects. The bursting of a flower may be a trifle. Another will soon succeed it. But the bursting of the bonds of society is such a separation of parts as cannot take place without giving the most acute pain to thousands: and a long time may elapse, and much misery may be endured, before the wound grows up again.

As the five propositions which I have been examining may be considered as

the corner stones of Mr. Godwin's fanciful structure; and, indeed, as expressing the aim and bent of his whole work; however excellent much of his detached reasoning may be, he must be considered as having failed in the great object of his undertaking. Besides the difficulties arising from the compound nature of man, which he has by no means sufficiently smoothed; the principal argument against the perfectibility of man and society remains whole and unimpaired from any thing that he has advanced. And as far as I can trust my own judgment, this argument appears to be conclusive, not only against the perfectibility of man, in the enlarged sense in which Mr. Godwin understands the term, but against any very marked and striking change for the better, in the form and structure of general society; by which I

mean, any great and decided amelioration of the condition of the lower classes of mankind, the most numerous; and, consequently, in a general view of the subject, the most important part of the human race. Were I to live a thousand years, and the laws of nature to remain the same, I should little fear, or rather little hope, a contradiction from experience, in asserting, that no possible sacrifices or exertions of the rich, in a country which had been long inhabited, could for any time place the lower classes of the community in a situation equal, with regard to circumstances, to the situation of the common people, about thirty years ago, in the northern States of America.

The lower classes of people in Europe may, at some future period, be much better instructed than they are

at present; they may be taught to employ the little spare time they have in many better ways than at the ale-house; they may live under better and more equal laws than they have ever hitherto done, perhaps, in any country; and I even conceive it possible, though not probable, that they may have more leisure; but it is not in the nature of things, that they can be awarded such a quantity of money or subsistence, as will allow them all to marry early, in the full confidence that they shall be able to provide with ease for a numerous family.

CHAP.

CHAP. XV.

Models too perfect, may sometimes rather impede than promote improvement.—Mr. Godwin's essay on avarice and profusion.—Impossibility of dividing the necessary labour of a society amicably among all.—Invectives against labour may produce present evil, with little or no chance of producing future good.—An accession to the mass of agricultural labour must always be an advantage to the labourer.

MR. Godwin in the preface to his Enquirer, drops a few expressions which seem to hint at some change in his opinions since he wrote the Political Justice; and as this is a work now of some years standing, I should certainly think, that I had been arguing against opinions, which the author had himself seen reason to alter, but that in some of the essays of the Enquirer, Mr. Godwin's peculiar mode of thinking, appears in as striking a light as ever.

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It has been frequently observed, that though we cannot hope to reach perfection in any thing, yet that it must always be advantageous to us, to place before our eyes the most perfect models. This observation has a plausible appearance, but is very far from being generally true. I even doubt its truth in one of the most obvious exemplifications that would occur. I doubt whether a very young painter would receive so much benefit, from an attempt to copy a highly finished and perfect picture, as from copying one where the outlines were more strongly marked, and the manner of laying on the colours was more easily discoverable. But in cases, where the perfection of the model, is a perfection of a different and superior nature from that, towards which we should naturally advance, we shall not only always fail in making any progress towards it, but we shall
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in all probability impede the progress, which we might have expected to make, had we not fixed our eyes upon so perfect a model. A highly intellectual being, exempt from the infirm calls of hunger or sleep, is undoubtedly a much more perfect existence than man: but were man to attempt to copy such a model, he would not only fail in making any advances towards it; but by unwisely straining to imitate what was inimitable, he would probably destroy the little intellect which he was endeavouring to improve.

The form and structure of society which Mr. Godwin describes, is as essentially distinct from any forms of society which have hitherto prevailed in the world, as a being that can live without food or sleep is from a man. By improving society in its present form, we are making no more advances to-
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wards such a state of things as he pictures, than we should make approaches towards a line, with regard to which we were walking parallel. The question, therefore is, whether, by looking to such a form of society as our polar star, we are likely to advance or retard the improvement of the human species? Mr. Godwin appears to me to have decided this question against himself in his essay on avarice and profusion in the Enquirer.

Dr. Adam Smith has very justly observed, that nations, as well as individuals, grow rich by parsimony, and poor by profusion; and that, therefore, every frugal man was a friend, and every spendthrift an enemy to his country. The reason he gives is, that what is saved from revenue is always added to stock, and is therefore taken from the maintenance of labour that is generally unproductive,

tive, and employed in the maintenance of labour that realizes itself in valuable commodities. No observation can be more evidently just. The subject of Mr. Godwin's essay is a little similar in its first appearance, but in essence is as distinct as possible. He considers the mischief of profusion, as an acknowledged truth; and therefore makes his comparison between the avaricious man, and the man who spends his income. But the avaricious man of Mr. Godwin, is totally a distinct character, at least with regard to his effect upon the prosperity of the state, from the frugal man of Dr. Adam Smith. The frugal man in order to make more money, saves from his income, and adds to his capital; and this capital he either employs himself in the maintenance of productive labour, or he lends it to some other person, who will probably employ it in this way.

way. He benefits the state, because he adds to its general capital; and because wealth employed as capital, not only sets in motion more labour, than when spent as income, but the labour is besides of a more valuable kind. But the avaricious man of Mr. Godwin locks up his wealth in a chest, and sets in motion no labour of any kind, either productive or unproductive. This is so essential a difference, that Mr. Godwin's decision in his essay, appears at once as evidently false, as Dr. Adam Smith's position is evidently true. It could not, indeed, but occur to Mr. Godwin, that some present inconvenience might arise to the poor, from thus locking up the funds destined for the maintenance of labour. The only way, therefore, he had of weakening this objection, was to compare the two characters chiefly with regard to their tendency to accelerate the approach

approach of that happy state of cultivated equality, on which he says we ought always to fix our eyes as our polar star.

I think it has been proved in the former parts of this essay, that such a state of society is absolutely impracticable. What consequences then are we to expect from looking to such a point, as our guide and polar star, in the great sea of political discovery? Reason would teach us to expect no other, than winds perpetually adverse, constant but fruitless toil, frequent shipwreck, and certain misery. We shall not only fail in making the smallest real approach towards such a perfect form of society; but by wasting our strength of mind and body, in a direction in which it is impossible to proceed, and by the frequent distress which we must necessarily occasion by

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our repeated failures, we shall evidently impede that degree of improvement in society, which is really attainable.

It has appeared that a society constituted according to Mr. Godwin's system, must, from the inevitable laws of our nature, degenerate into a class of proprietors, and a class of labourers; and that the substitution of benevolence, for self-love, as the moving principle of society, instead of producing the happy effects that might be expected from so fair a name, would cause the same pressure of want to be felt by the whole of society, which is now felt only by a part. It is to the established administration of property, and to the apparently narrow principle of self-love, that we are indebted for all the noblest exertions of human genius, all the finer and more delicate emotions of the soul, for every thing,

thing, indeed, that distinguishes the civilized, from the savage state; and no sufficient change, has as yet taken place in the nature of civilized man, to enable us to say, that he either is, or ever will be, in a state, when he may safely throw down the ladder by which he has risen to this eminence.

If in every society that has advanced beyond the savage state, a class of proprietors, and a class of labourers*, must necessarily

* It should be observed, that the principal argument of this essay, only goes to prove the necessity of a class of proprietors, and a class of labourers, but by no means infers, that the present great inequality of property, is either necessary or useful to society. On the contrary, it must certainly be considered as an evil, and every institution that promotes it, is essentially bad and impolitic. But whether a government could with advantage to society actively interfere to repress inequality of fortunes, may be a matter of doubt.

necessarily exist, it is evident, that, as labour is the only property of the class of labourers, every thing that tends to diminish the value of this property, must tend to diminish the possessions of this part of society. The only way that a poor man has of supporting himself in independence, is by the exertion of his bodily strength. This is the only commodity he has to give in exchange for the necessaries of life. It would hardly appear then that you benefit him, by narrowing the market for this commodity, by decreasing the demand for labour, and lessening the value of the only property that he possesses.

doubt. Perhaps the generous system of perfect liberty, adopted by Dr. Adam Smith, and the French economists, would be ill exchanged for any system of restraint.

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Mr. Godwin would perhaps say, that the whole system of barter and exchange, is a vile and iniquitous traffic: If you would essentially relieve the poor man, you should take a part of his labour upon yourself, or give him your money, without exacting so severe a return for it. In answer to the first method proposed, it may be observed, that even if the rich could be persuaded to assist the poor in this way, the value of the assistance would be comparatively trifling. The rich, though they think themselves of great importance, bear but a small proportion in point of numbers to the poor, and would, therefore, relieve them but of a small part of their burdens by taking a share. Were all those that are employed in the labours of luxuries, added to the number of those employed in producing necessaries; and could these necessary labours be amicably divided

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among all, each man's share might indeed be comparatively light; but desirable as such an amicable division would undoubtedly be, I cannot conceive any practical principle* according to which it could take place. It has been shewn, that the spirit of benevolence, guided by the strict impartial justice that Mr. Godwin describes, would, if vigorously acted upon, depress in want and misery the whole human race. Let us examine what would be the consequence, if the proprietor were to retain a decent share for himself; but to give the rest away to

* Mr. Godwin seems to have but little respect for practical principles; but I own it appears to me, that he is a much greater benefactor to mankind, who points out how an inferior good may be attained, than he who merely expatiates on the deformity of the present state of society, and the beauty of a different state, without pointing out a practical method, that might be immediately applied, of accelerating our advances from the one, to the other,

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the poor, without exacting a task from them in return. Not to mention the idleness and the vice that such a proceeding, if general, would probably create in the present state of society, and the great risk there would be, of diminishing the produce of land, as well as the labours of luxury, another objection yet remains.

It has appeared that from the principle of population, more will always be in want than can be adequately supplied. The surplus of the rich man might be sufficient for three, but four will be desirous to obtain it. He cannot make this selection of three out of the four, without conferring a great favour on those that are the objects of his choice. These persons must consider themselves as under a great obligation to him, and as dependent upon him for their support.

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The rich man would feel his power, and the poor man his dependence; and the evil effects of these two impressions on the human heart are well known. Though I perfectly agree with Mr. Godwin therefore in the evil of hard labour; yet I still think it a less evil, and less calculated to debase the human mind, than dependence; and every history of man that we have ever read, places in a strong point of view, the danger to which that mind is exposed, which is intrusted with constant power.

In the present state of things, and particularly when labour is in request, the man who does a days work for me, confers full as great an obligation upon me, as I do upon him. I possess what he wants; he possesses what I want. We make an amicable exchange. The
poor

poor man walks erect in conscious independence; and the mind of his employer is not vitiated by a sense of power.

Three or four hundred years ago, there was undoubtedly much less labour in England, in proportion to the population, than at present; but there was much more dependence: and we probably should not now enjoy our present degree of civil liberty, if the poor, by the introduction of manufactures, had not been enabled to give something in exchange for the provisions of the great Lords, instead of being dependent upon their bounty. Even the greatest enemies of trade and manufactures, and I do not reckon myself a very determined friend to them, must allow, that when they were in-
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troduced into England, liberty came in their train.

Nothing that has been said, tends in the most remote degree to undervalue the principle of benevolence. It is one of the noblest and most godlike qualities of the human heart, generated perhaps, slowly and gradually from self-love; and afterwards intended to act as a general law, whose kind office it should be, to soften the partial deformities, to correct the asperities, and to smooth the wrinkles of its parent: and this seems to be the analogy of all nature. Perhaps there is no one general law of nature that will not appear, to us at least, to produce partial evil; and we frequently observe at the same time, some bountiful provision, which acting as another general law, corrects the inequalities of the first.

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The proper office of benevolence is to soften the partial evils arising from self-love, but it can never be substituted in its place. If no man were to allow himself to act, till he had completely determined, that the action he was about to perform, was more conducive than any other to the general good, the most enlightened minds would hesitate in perplexity and amazement; and the unenlightened, would be continually committing the grossest mistakes.

As Mr. Godwin, therefore, has not laid down any practical principle, according to which the necessary labours of agriculture might be amicably shared among the whole class of labourers; by general invectives against employing the poor, he appears to pursue an unattainable good through much present evil. For if every man who employs the poor, ought to be

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considered as their enemy, and as adding to the weight of their oppressions; and if the miser is, for this reason, to be preferred to the man who spends his income, it follows, that any number of men who now spend their incomes, might, to the advantage of society, be converted into misers. Suppose then, that a hundred thousand persons who now employ ten men each, were to lock up their wealth from general use, it is evident, that a million of working men of different kinds would be completely thrown out of all employment. The extensive misery that such an event would produce in the present state of society, Mr. Godwin himself could hardly refuse to acknowledge; and I question whether he might not find some difficulty in proving, that a conduct of this kind tended more than the conduct of those who spend their incomes to “place
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human beings in the condition in which they ought to be placed.”

But Mr. Godwin says, that the miser really locks up nothing; that the point has not been rightly understood; and that the true development and definition of the nature of wealth have not been applied to illustrate it. Having defined therefore wealth, very justly, to be the commodities raised and fostered by human labour, he observes, that the miser locks up neither corn, nor oxen, nor clothes, nor houses. Undoubtedly he does not really lock up these articles, but he locks up the power of producing them, which is virtually the same. These things are certainly used and consumed by his contemporaries, as truly, and to as great an extent, as if he were a beggar; but not to as great an extent, as if he had employed his wealth, in turning up more land, in breeding more
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oxen, in employing more taylors, and in building more houses. But supposing, for a moment, that the conduct of the miser did not tend to check any really useful produce, how are all those, who are thrown out of employment, to obtain patents which they may shew in order to be awarded a proper share of the food and raiment produced by the society? This is the unconquerable difficulty.

I am perfectly willing to concede to Mr. Godwin that there is much more labour in the world than is really necessary; and that, if the lower classes of society could agree among themselves never to work more than six or seven hours in the day, the commodities essential to human happiness might still be produced in as great abundance as at present. But it is almost impossible to
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conceive that such an agreement could be adhered to. From the principle of population, some would necessarily be more in want than others. Those that had large families, would naturally be desirous of exchanging two hours more of their labour for an ampler quantity of subsistence. How are they to be prevented from making this exchange? It would be a violation of the first and most sacred property that a man possesses, to attempt, by positive institutions, to interfere with his command over his own labour.

Till Mr. Godwin, therefore, can point out some practical plan according to which the necessary labour in a society might be equitably divided; his invectives against labour, if they were attended to, would certainly produce much present evil, without approximating us
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to that state of cultivated equality to which he looks forward as his polar star; and which, he seems to think, should at present be our guide in determining the nature and tendency of human actions. A mariner guided by such a polar star is in danger of shipwreck.

Perhaps there is no possible way in which wealth could, in general, be employed so beneficially to a state, and particularly to the lower orders of it, as by improving and rendering productive that land, which to a farmer would not answer the expence of cultivation. Had Mr. Godwin exerted his energetic eloquence in painting the superior worth and usefulness of the character who employed the poor in this way, to him who employed them in narrow luxuries, every enlightened man must have applauded his efforts. The increasing demand

demand for agricultural labour must always tend to better the condition of the poor; and if the accession of work be of this kind, so far is it from being true, that the poor would be obliged to work ten hours, for the same price, that they before worked eight, that the very reverse would be the fact; and a labourer might then support his wife and family as well by the labour of six hours, as he could before by the labour of eight.

The labour created by luxuries, though useful in distributing the produce of the country, without vitiating the proprietor by power, or debasing the labourer by dependence, has not, indeed, the same beneficial effects on the state of the poor. A great accession of work from manufactures, though it may raise the price of labour even more than an increasing demand for agricultural labour;

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yet, as in this case, the quantity of food in the country may not be proportionably increasing, the advantage to the poor will be but temporary, as the price of provisions must necessarily rise in proportion to the price of labour. Relative to this subject, I cannot avoid venturing a few remarks on a part of Dr. Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*; speaking at the same time with that diffidence, which I ought certainly to feel, in differing from a person so justly celebrated in the political world.

CHAP.

CHAP. XVI.

Probable error of Dr. Adam Smith in representing every increase of the revenue or stock of a society as an increase in the funds for the maintenance of labour.—Instances where an increase of wealth can have no tendency to better the condition of the labouring poor.—England has increased in riches without a proportional increase in the funds for the maintenance of labour.—The state of the poor in China would not be improved by an increase of wealth from manufactures.

THE professed object of Dr. Adam Smith's inquiry, is, the nature and causes of the wealth of nations. There is another inquiry, however, perhaps still more interesting, which he occasionally mixes with it; I mean an inquiry into the causes which affect the happiness of nations, or the happiness and comfort of the lower orders of society, which is the most numerous class in every nation. I am sufficiently aware of the
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near connection of these two subjects, and that the causes which tend to increase the wealth of a State, tend also, generally speaking, to increase the happiness of the lower classes of the people. But perhaps Dr. Adam Smith has considered these two inquiries as still more nearly connected than they really are; at least, he has not stopped to take notice of those instances, where the wealth of a society may increase (according to his definition of wealth) without having any tendency to increase the comforts of the labouring part of it. I do not mean to enter into a philosophical discussion of what constitutes the proper happiness of man; but shall merely consider two universally acknowledged ingredients, health, and the command of the necessaries and conveniences of life.

Little

Little or no doubt can exist, that the comforts of the labouring poor depend upon the increase of the funds destined for the maintenance of labour; and will be very exactly in proportion to the rapidity of this increase. The demand for labour which such increase would occasion, by creating a competition in the market, must necessarily raise the value of labour; and, till the additional number of hands required were reared, the increased funds would be distributed to the same number of persons as before the increase, and therefore every labourer would live comparatively at his ease. But perhaps Dr. Adam Smith errs in representing every increase of the revenue or stock of a society as an increase of these funds. Such surplus stock or revenue will, indeed, always be considered by the individual possessing it, as an additional

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fund from which he may maintain more labour: but it will not be a real and effectual fund for the maintenance of an additional number of labourers, unless the whole, or at least a great part of this increase of the stock or revenue of the society, be convertible into a proportional quantity of provisions; and it will not be so convertible, where the increase has arisen merely from the produce of labour, and not from the produce of land. A distinction will in this case occur, between the number of hands which the stock of the society could employ, and the number which its territory can maintain.

To explain myself by an instance. Dr. Adam Smith defines the wealth of a nation to consist in the annual produce of its land and labour. This definition evidently includes manufactured
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produce, as well as the produce of the land. Now supposing a nation, for a course of years, was to add what it saved from its yearly revenue, to its manufacturing capital solely, and not to its capital employed upon land, it is evident, that it might grow richer according to the above definition, without a power of supporting a greater number of labourers, and therefore, without an increase in the real funds for the maintenance of labour. There would, notwithstanding, be a demand for labour, from the power which each manufacturer would possess, or at least think he possessed, of extending his old stock in trade, or of setting up fresh works. This demand would of course raise the price of labour; but if the yearly stock of provisions in the country was not increasing, this rise would soon turn out to be merely nominal, as the price of pro-

visions must necessarily rise with it. The demand for manufacturing labourers might, indeed, entice many from agriculture, and thus tend to diminish the annual produce of the land; but we will suppose any effect of this kind to be compensated by improvements in the instruments of agriculture, and the quantity of provisions therefore to remain the same. Improvements in manufacturing machinery would of course take place; and this circumstance, added to the greater number of hands employed in manufactures, would cause the annual produce of the labour of the country to be upon the whole greatly increased. The wealth therefore of the country would be increasing annually, according to the definition, and might not, perhaps, be increasing very slowly.

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The question is, whether wealth, increasing in this way, has any tendency to better the condition of the labouring poor. It is a self-evident proposition, that any general rise in the price of labour, the stock of provisions remaining the same, can only be a nominal rise, as it must very shortly be followed by a proportional rise in provisions. The increase in the price of labour therefore, which we have supposed, would have little or no effect in giving the labouring poor a greater command over the necessaries and conveniences of life. In this respect they would be nearly in the same state as before. In one other respect they would be in a worse state. A greater proportion of them would be employed in manufactures, and fewer, consequently, in agriculture. And this exchange of professions will be allowed, I think, by

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all, to be very unfavourable in respect of health, one essential ingredient of happiness, besides the greater uncertainty of manufacturing labour, arising from the capricious taste of man, the accidents of war, and other causes.

It may be said, perhaps, that such an instance as I have supposed could not occur, because the rise in the price of provisions would immediately turn some additional capital into the channel of agriculture. But this is an event which may take place very slowly, as it should be remarked, that a rise in the price of labour, had preceded the rise of provisions, and would, therefore, impede the good effects upon agriculture, which the increased value of the produce of the land might otherwise have occasioned.

It might also be said, that the additional capital of the nation would enable it to import provisions sufficient for the maintenance of those whom its stock could employ. A small country with a large navy, and great inland accommodations for carriage, such as Holland, may, indeed, import and distribute an effectual quantity of provisions; but the price of provisions must be very high, to make such an importation and distribution answer in large countries, less advantageously circumstanced in this respect.

An instance, accurately such as I have supposed, may not, perhaps, ever have occurred; but I have little doubt that instances nearly approximating to it may be found without any very laborious search. Indeed I am strongly inclined to think, that England herself, since the

revolution, affords a very striking elucidation of the argument in question.

The commerce of this country, internal, as well as external, has certainly been rapidly advancing during the last century. The exchangeable value, in the market of Europe, of the annual produce of its land and labour, has, without doubt, increased very considerably. But, upon examination, it will be found, that the increase has been chiefly in the produce of labour, and not in the produce of land; and therefore, though the wealth of the nation has been advancing with a quick pace, the effectual funds for the maintenance of labour have been increasing very slowly; and the result is such as might be expected. The increasing wealth of the nation has had little or no tendency to better the condition of the
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labouring poor. They have not, I believe, a greater command of the necessaries and conveniences of life; and a much greater proportion of them, than at the period of the revolution, is employed in manufactures, and crowded together in close and unwholesome rooms.

Could we believe the statement of Dr. Price, that the population of England has decreased since the revolution, it would even appear, that the effectual funds for the maintenance of labour had been declining during the progress of wealth in other respects. For I conceive that it may be laid down as a general rule, that if the effectual funds for the maintenance of labour are increasing, that is, if the territory can maintain, as well as the stock employ, a greater number of labourers, this additional number will quickly spring up,
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even in spite of such wars as Dr. Price enumerates. And, consequently, if the population of any country has been stationary, or declining, we may safely infer, that, however it may have advanced in manufacturing wealth, its effectual funds for the maintenance of labour cannot have increased,

It is difficult, however, to conceive that the population of England has been declining since the revolution; though every testimony concurs to prove that its increase, if it has increased, has been very slow. In the controversy which the question has occasioned, Dr. Price undoubtedly appears to be much more completely master of his subject, and to possess more accurate information than his opponents. Judging simply from this controversy, I think one should say, that Dr. Price's point is nearer being

ing proved than Mr. Howlett's. Truth, probably, lies between the two statements, but this supposition makes the increase of population, since the revolution, to have been very slow, in comparison with the increase of wealth.

That the produce of the land has been decreasing, or even that it has been absolutely stationary during the last century, few will be disposed to believe. The inclosure of commons and waste lands, certainly tends to increase the food of the country; but it has been asserted with confidence, that the inclosure of common fields, has frequently had a contrary effect; and that large tracts of land, which formerly produced great quantities of corn, by being converted into pasture, both employ fewer hands, and feed fewer mouths, than before their inclosure. It is, indeed, an acknowledged truth,

truth, that pasture land produces a smaller quantity of human subsistence, than corn land of the same natural fertility; and could it be clearly ascertained, that from the increased demand for butchers meat of the best quality, and its increased price in consequence, a greater quantity of good land has annually been employed in grazing, the diminution of human subsistence, which this circumstance would occasion, might have counterbalanced the advantages derived from the inclosure of waste lands, and the general improvements in husbandry.

It scarcely need be remarked, that the high price of butchers meat at present, and its low price formerly, were not caused by the scarcity in the one case, or the plenty in the other, but by the different expence sustained at the different periods, in preparing cattle for the market.

market. It is, however, possible, that there might have been more cattle a hundred years ago in the country, than at present; but no doubt can be entertained, that there is much more meat of a superior quality brought to market at present, than ever there was. When the price of butchers meat was very low, cattle were reared chiefly upon waste lands; and except for some of the principal markets, were probably killed with but little other fattening. The veal that is sold so cheap in some distant counties at present, bears little other resemblance than the name, to that which is bought in London. Formerly, the price of butchers meat would not pay for rearing, and scarcely for feeding cattle on land that would answer in tillage; but the present price will not only pay for fattening cattle on the very best land, but will even allow of the rearing many, on land

land that would bear good crops of corn. The same number of cattle, or even the same weight of cattle at the different periods when killed, will have consumed (if I may be allowed the expression) very different quantities of human subsistence. A fatted beast may in some respects be considered, in the language of the French economists, as an unproductive labourer: he has added nothing to the value of the raw produce that he has consumed. The present system of grazing, undoubtedly tends more than the former system to diminish the quantity of human subsistence in the country, in proportion to the general fertility of the land.

I would not by any means be understood to say, that the former system either could, or ought, to have continued. The increasing price of butchers meat,
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is a natural and inevitable consequence of the general progress of cultivation; but I cannot help thinking, that the present great demand for butchers meat of the best quality, and the quantity of good land that is in consequence annually employed to produce it, together with the great number of horses at present kept for pleasure, are the chief causes, that have prevented the quantity of human food in the country, from keeping pace with the generally increased fertility of the soil; and a change of custom in these respects, would, I have little doubt, have a very sensible effect on the quantity of subsistence in the country, and consequently on its population.

The employment of much of the most fertile land in grazing, the improvements in agricultural instruments, the increase of large farms, and particularly

cularly, the diminution of the number of cottages throughout the kingdom, all concur to prove, that there are not probably, so many persons employed in agricultural labour now, as at the period of the revolution. Whatever increase of population, therefore, has taken place, must be employed almost wholly in manufactures; and it is well known, that the failure of some of these manufactures, merely from the caprice of fashion, such as, the adoption of muslins instead of silks, or of shoe-strings, and covered buttons, instead of buckles and metal buttons, combined with the restraints in the market of labour arising from corporation, and parish laws, have frequently driven thousands on charity for support. The great increase of the poor's rates, is, indeed, of itself, a strong evidence, that the poor have not a greater command of the necessaries and conveniences

niences of life; and if to the consideration, that their condition in this respect is rather worse than better, be added the circumstance, that a much greater proportion of them is employed in large manufactories, unfavourable both to health and virtue, it must be acknowledged, that the increase of wealth of late years, has had no tendency to increase the happiness of the labouring poor.

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

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

It is evident, that if trade and foreign commerce were held in great honour in China; from the plenty of labourers, and the cheapness of labour, she might work up manufactures for foreign sale to an immense amount. It is equally evident, that from the great bulk of provisions, and the amazing extent of her inland territory, she could not in return
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import such a quantity, as would be any sensible addition to the annual stock of subsistence in the country. Her immense amount of manufactures, therefore, she would exchange, chiefly, for luxuries collected from all parts of the world. At present, it appears, that no labour whatever is spared in the production of food. The country is rather over peopled in proportion to what its stock can employ, and labour is, therefore, so abundant, that no pains are taken to abridge it. The consequence of this, is, probably, the greatest production of food that the soil can possibly afford: for it will be generally observed, that processes for abridging labour, though they may enable a farmer to bring a certain quantity of grain cheaper to market, tend rather to diminish, than increase the whole produce; and in agriculture, therefore, may, in some respects, be considered

rather as private, than public advantages. An immense capital could not be employed in China in preparing manufactures for foreign trade, without taking off so many labourers from agriculture, as to alter this state of things, and in some degree to diminish the produce of the country. The demand for manufacturing labourers would naturally raise the price of labour; but as the quantity of subsistence would not be increased, the price of provisions would keep pace with it; or even more than keep pace with it, if the quantity of provisions were really decreasing. The country would be evidently advancing in wealth: the exchangeable value of the annual produce of its land and labour, would be annually augmented; yet the real funds for the maintenance of labour, would be stationary, or even declining; and, consequently, the increasing wealth of the

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

The argument, perhaps, appears clearer when applied to China, because it is generally allowed, that the wealth of China has been long stationary. With regard to any other country it might be always a matter of dispute, at which of the two periods, compared, wealth was increasing the fastest; as it is upon the rapidity of the increase of wealth at any particular period, that Dr. Adam Smith says the condition of the poor depends. It is evident, however, that two nations might

increase, exactly with the same rapidity, in the exchangeable value of the annual produce of their land and labour; yet if one had applied itself chiefly to agriculture, and the other chiefly to commerce, the funds for the maintenance of labour, and consequently the effect of the increase of wealth in each nation, would be extremely different. In that which had applied itself chiefly to agriculture, the poor would live in great plenty, and population would rapidly increase. In that which had applied itself chiefly to commerce, the poor would be comparatively but little benefited, and consequently population would increase slowly.

CHAP.

CHAP. XVII.

Question of the proper definition of the wealth of a state. —Reason given by the French Economists for considering all manufacturers as unproductive labourers, not the true reason. —The labour of artificers and manufacturers sufficiently productive to individuals, though not to the state. —A remarkable passage in Dr. Prices's two volumes of observations. —Error of Dr. Price in attributing the happiness and rapid population of America, chiefly, to its peculiar state of civilization. —No advantage can be expected from shutting our eyes to the difficulties in the way to the improvement of society.

A QUESTION seems naturally to arise here, whether the exchangeable value of the annual produce of the land and labour, be the proper definition of the wealth of a country; or, whether the gross produce of the land, according to the French economists, may not be a more accurate definition. Certain it is, that every increase of wealth, according to the definition of the Economists, will

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be an increase of the funds for the maintenance of labour, and consequently will always tend to ameliorate the condition of the labouring poor; though an increase of wealth, according to Dr. Adam Smith's definition, will by no means invariably have the same tendency. And yet it may not follow from this consideration, that Dr. Adam Smith's definition is not just. It seems in many respects improper, to exclude the cloathing and lodging of a whole people from any part of their revenue. Much of it may, indeed, be of very trivial and unimportant value, in comparison with the food of the country; yet still it may be fairly considered as a part of its revenue: and, therefore, the only point in which I should differ from Dr. Adam Smith, is, where he seems to consider every increase of the revenue or stock of a society, as an increase of the funds for

for the maintenance of labour, and consequently, as tending always to ameliorate the condition of the poor.

The fine silks and cottons, the laces, and other ornamental luxuries, of a rich country, may contribute very considerably to augment the exchangeable value of its annual produce; yet they contribute but in a very small degree, to augment the mass of happiness in the society: and it appears to me, that it is with some view to the real utility of the produce, that we ought to estimate the productiveness, or unproductiveness of different sorts of labour. The French Economists consider all labour employed in manufactures as unproductive. Comparing it with the labour employed upon land, I should be perfectly disposed to agree with them; but not exactly for the reasons which they give. They

They say, that labour employed upon land is productive, because the produce, over and above completely paying the labourer and the farmer, affords a clear rent to the landlord; and that the labour employed upon a piece of lace is unproductive, because it merely replaces the provisions that the workman had consumed; and the stock of his employer, without affording any clear rent whatever. But supposing the value of the wrought lace to be such, as that besides paying in the most complete manner the workman and his employer, it could afford a clear rent to a third person; it appears to me, that in comparison with the labour employed upon land, it would be still as unproductive as ever. Though according to the reasoning used by the French Economists, the man employed in the manufacture of lace would, in this case, seem to be a productive

ductive labourer; yet according to their definition of the wealth of a state, he ought not to be considered in that light. He will have added nothing to the gross produce of the land: he has consumed a portion of this gross produce, and has left a bit of lace in return; and though he may sell this bit of lace for three times the quantity of provisions that he consumed whilst he was making it, and thus be a very productive labourer with regard to himself; yet he cannot be considered as having added by his labour to any essential part of the riches of the state. The clear rent, therefore, that a certain produce can afford, after paying the expences of procuring it; does not appear to be the sole criterion, by which to judge of the productiveness or unproductiveness to a state, of any particular species of labour.

Suppose,

Suppose, that two hundred thousand men, who are now employed in producing manufactures, that only tend to gratify the vanity of a few rich people, were to be employed upon some barren and uncultivated lands, and to produce only half the quantity of food that they themselves consumed; they would be still, more productive labourers with regard to the state, than they were before; though their labour, so far from affording a rent to a third person, would but half replace the provisions used in obtaining the produce. In their former employment, they consumed a certain portion of the food of the country, and left in return, some silks and laces. In their latter employment, they consumed the same quantity of food, and left in return, provision for a hundred thousand men. There can be little doubt, which

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really beneficial to the country; and it will, I think, be allowed, that the wealth which supported the two hundred thousand men, while they were producing silks and laces, would have been more usefully employed in supporting them, while they were producing the additional quantity of food.

A capital employed upon land, may be unproductive to the individual that employs it, and yet be highly productive to the society. A capital employed in trade on the contrary, may be highly productive to the individual, and yet be almost totally unproductive to the society: and this is the reason why I should call manufacturing labour unproductive, in comparison of that which is employed in agriculture, and not for the reason given by the French Economists. It is, indeed, almost impossible, to see the

the great fortunes that are made in trade, and the liberality with which so many merchants live, and yet agree in the statement of the Oeconomists, that manufacturers can only grow rich by depriving themselves of the funds destined for their support. In many branches of trade the profits are so great, as would allow of a clear rent to a third person: but as there is no third person in the case, and as all the profits centre in the master manufacturer, or merchant, he seems to have a fair chance of growing rich, without much privation; and we consequently see large fortunes acquired in trade by persons who have not been remarked for their parsimony.

Daily experience proves, that the labour employed in trade and manufactures, is sufficiently productive to individuals; but it certainly is not productive in the same degree

degree to the state. Every accession to the food of a country, tends to the immediate benefit of the whole society; but the fortunes made in trade, tend, but in a remote and uncertain manner, to the same end, and in some respects have even a contrary tendency. The home trade of consumption, is by far the most important trade of every nation. China is the richest country in the world, without any other. Putting then, for a moment, foreign trade out of the question, the man, who by an ingenious manufacture, obtains a double portion out of the old stock of provisions, will certainly not be so useful to the state, as the man who, by his labour, adds a single share to the former stock. The consumable commodities of silks, laces, trinkets, and expensive furniture, are undoubtedly a part of the revenue of the society; but they are the revenue only of the rich, and not

not of the society in general. An increase in this part of the revenue of a state, cannot, therefore, be considered of the same importance, as an increase of food, which forms the principal revenue of the great mass of the people.

Foreign commerce adds to the wealth of a state, according to Dr. Adam Smith's definition, though not according to the definition of the economists. Its principal use, and the reason, probably, that it has in general been held in such high estimation, is, that it adds greatly to the external power of a nation, or to its power of commanding the labour of other countries; but it will be found, upon a near examination, to contribute but little to the increase of the internal funds for the maintenance of labour, and consequently but little to the happiness of the greatest part of society. In the natural progress

progress of a state towards riches, manufactures, and foreign commerce; would follow, in their order, the high cultivation of the soil. In Europe, this natural order of things has been inverted; and the soil has been cultivated from the redundancy of manufacturing capital, instead of manufactures rising from the redundancy of capital employed upon land. The superior encouragement that has been given to the industry of the towns, and the consequent higher price that is paid for the labour of artificers, than for the labour of those employed in husbandry, are probably the reasons why so much soil in Europe remains uncultivated. Had a different policy been pursued throughout Europe, it might undoubtedly have been much more populous than at present, and yet not be more incumbered by its population.

I cannot quit this curious subject of the difficulty arising from population; a subject, that appears to me, to deserve a minute investigation, and able discussion, much beyond my power to give it, without taking notice of an extraordinary passage in Dr. Price's two volumes of Observations. Having given some tables on the probabilities of life, in towns and in the country, he says,* "From this comparison, it appears, with how much truth great cities have been called the graves of mankind. It must also convince all who will consider it, that according to the observation, at the end of the fourth essay, in the former volume, it is by no means strictly proper to consider our diseases as the original intention of nature. They are, without doubt, in general our own creation. *Were there a country where the*

* Vol. 2, page 243.

inhabitants

inhabitants led lives entirely natural and virtuous, few of them would die without measuring out the whole period of present existence allotted to them; pain and distemper would be unknown among them, and death would come upon them like a sleep, in consequence of no other cause than gradual and unavoidable decay."

I own, that I felt myself obliged to draw a very opposite conclusion from the facts advanced in Dr. Price's two volumes. I had for some time been aware, that population and food, increased in different ratios; and a vague opinion had been floating in my mind, that they could only be kept equal by some species of misery or vice; but the perusal of Dr. Price's two volumes of Observations, after that opinion had been conceived, raised it at once to conviction. With so many facts in his view, to prove the

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extraordinary rapidity with which population increases, when unchecked; and with such a body of evidence before him, to elucidate, even the manner, by which the general laws of nature repress a redundant population; it is perfectly inconceivable to me, how he could write the passage that I have quoted. He was a strenuous advocate for early marriages, as the best preservative against vicious manners. He had no fanciful conceptions about the extinction of the passion between the sexes, like Mr. Godwin, nor did he ever think of eluding the difficulty in the ways hinted at by Mr. Condorcet. He frequently talks of giving the prolific powers of nature room to exert themselves. Yet with these ideas, that his understanding could escape from the obvious and necessary inference, that an unchecked population would increase, beyond comparison, faster than the earth,

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by the best directed exertions of man, could produce food for its support, appears to me as astonishing, as if he had resisted the conclusion of one of the plainest propositions of Euclid.

Dr. Price, speaking of the different stages of the civilized state, says, "The first, or simple stages of civilization, are those which favour most the increase and the happiness of mankind." He then instances the American colonies, as being at that time in the first, and happiest of the states, that he had described; and as affording a very striking proof of the effects of the different stages of civilization on population. But he does not seem to be aware, that the happiness of the Americans, depended much less upon their peculiar degree of civilization, than upon the peculiarity of their situation, as new colonies, upon their having a

great plenty of fertile uncultivated land. In parts of Norway, Denmark, or Sweden, or in this country, two or three hundred years ago, he might have found perhaps nearly the same degree of civilization; but by no means the same happiness, or the same increase of population. He quotes himself a statute of Henry the Eighth, complaining of the decay of tillage, and the enhanced price of provisions, "whereby a marvellous number of people were rendered incapable of maintaining themselves and families." The superior degree of civil liberty which prevailed in America, contributed, without doubt, its share, to promote the industry, happiness, and population of these states; but even civil liberty, all powerful as it is, will not create fresh land. The Americans may be said, perhaps, to enjoy a greater degree of civil liberty, now they are an independent people, than while they

they were in subjection to England; but we may be perfectly sure, that population will not long continue to increase with the same rapidity as it did then.

A person who contemplated the happy state of the lower classes of people in America twenty years ago, would naturally wish to retain them for ever in that state; and might think, perhaps, that by preventing the introduction of manufactures and luxury, he might effect his purpose; but he might as reasonably expect to prevent a wife or mistress from growing old by never exposing her to the sun or air. The situation of new colonies, well governed, is a bloom of youth that no efforts can arrest. There are, indeed, many modes of treatment in the political, as well as animal body, that contribute to accelerate or retard the approaches of age:

but there can be no chance of success, in any mode that could be devised, for keeping either of them in perpetual youth. By encouraging the industry of the towns more than the industry of the country, Europe may be said, perhaps, to have brought on a premature old age. A different policy in this respect, would infuse fresh life and vigour into every state. While from the law of primogeniture, and other European customs, land bears a monopoly price, a capital can never be employed in it with much advantage to the individual; and, therefore, it is not probable that the soil should be properly cultivated. And, though in every civilized state, a class of proprietors and a class of labourers must exist; yet one permanent advantage would always result from a nearer equalization of property. The greater the number of proprietors, the smaller must be

be the number of labourers: a greater part of society would be in the happy state of possessing property; and a smaller part in the unhappy state of possessing no other property than their labour. But the best directed exertions, though they may alleviate, can never remove the pressure of want; and it will be difficult for any person who contemplates the genuine situation of man on earth, and the general laws of nature, to suppose it possible that any, the most enlightened efforts, could place mankind in a state where "few would die without measuring out the whole period of present existence allotted to them; where pain and distemper would be unknown among them; and death would come upon them like a sleep, in consequence of no other cause than gradual and unavoidable decay."

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It is, undoubtedly, a most disheartening reflection, that the great obstacle in the way to any extraordinary improvement in society, is of a nature that we can never hope to overcome. The perpetual tendency in the race of man to increase beyond the means of subsistence, is one of the general laws of animated nature, which we can have no reason to expect will change. Yet, discouraging as the contemplation of this difficulty must be, to those whose exertions are laudably directed to the improvement of the human species, it is evident, that no possible good can arise from any endeavours, to flur it over, or keep it in the back ground. On the contrary, the most baleful mischiefs may be expected from the unmanly conduct of not daring to face truth, because it is unpleasing. Independently of what relates to this great obstacle,

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sufficient yet remains to be done for mankind, to animate us to the most unremitting exertion. But if we proceed without a thorough knowledge, and accurate comprehension of the nature, extent, and magnitude, of the difficulties we have to encounter, or if we unwisely direct our efforts towards an object, in which we cannot hope for success; we shall not only exhaust our strength in fruitless exertions, and remain at as great a distance as ever from the summit of our wishes; but we shall be perpetually crushed by the recoil of this rock of Sisyphus.

CHAP. XVIII.

The constant pressure of distress on man, from the principle of population, seems to direct our hopes to the future.—State of trial inconsistent with our ideas of the foreknowledge of God.—The world, probably, a mighty process for awakening matter into mind.—Theory of the formation of mind.—Excitements from the wants of the body.—Excitements from the operation of general laws. Excitements from the difficulties of life arising from the principle of population.

THE view of human life, which results from the contemplation of the constant pressure of distress on man from the difficulty of subsistence, by shewing the little expectation that he can reasonably entertain of perfectibility on earth, seems strongly to point his hopes to the future. And the temptations to which he must necessarily be exposed, from the operation of those laws of nature which we have been examining,

examining, would seem to represent the world, in the light in which it has been frequently considered, as a state of trial, and school of virtue, preparatory to a superior state of happiness. But I hope I shall be pardoned, if I attempt to give a view in some degree different of the situation of man on earth, which appears to me, to be more consistent with the various phenomena of nature which we observe around us, and more consonant to our ideas of the power, goodness, and foreknowledge of the Deity.

It cannot be considered as an unimproving exercise of the human mind to endeavour to

“Vindicate the ways of God to man.”

If we proceed with a proper distrust of our own understandings, and a just sense

sense of our insufficiency to comprehend the reason of all that we see; if we hail every ray of light with gratitude; and when no light appears, think that the darkness is from within, and not from without; and bow with humble deference to the supreme wisdom of him, whose "thoughts are above our thoughts," "as the heavens are high above the earth."

In all our feeble attempts, however, to "find out the Almighty to perfection," it seems absolutely necessary, that we should reason from nature up to nature's God, and not presume to reason from God to nature. The moment we allow ourselves to ask why some things are not otherwise, instead of endeavouring to account for them, as they are, we shall never know where to stop; we shall be led into the
grossest,

grossest, and most childish absurdities; all progress in the knowledge of the ways of Providence must necessarily be at an end; and the study will even cease to be an improving exercise of the human mind. Infinite power is so vast and incomprehensible an idea, that the mind of man must necessarily be bewildered in the contemplation of it. With the crude and puerile conceptions which we sometimes form of this attribute of the Deity, we might imagine that God could call into being myriads, and myriads of existences; all free from pain and imperfection; all eminent in goodness and wisdom; all capable of the highest enjoyments; and unnumbered as the points throughout infinite space. But when from these vain and extravagant dreams of fancy, we turn our eyes to the book of nature, where alone we can read God as he is, we see a constant

stant succession of sentient beings, rising apparently from so many specks of matter, going through a long and sometimes painful process in this world; but many of them attaining, ere the termination of it, such high qualities and powers, as seem to indicate their fitness for some superior state. Ought we not then to correct our crude and puerile ideas of Infinite Power from the contemplation of what we actually see existing? Can we judge of the Creator but from his creation? And, unless we wish to exalt the power of God at the expence of his goodness, ought we not to conclude, that even to the Great Creator, Almighty as he is, a certain process may be necessary, a certain time, (or at least what appears to us as time) may be requisite, in order to form beings with those exalted qualities of mind which will fit them for his high purposes?

A state of trial seems to imply a previously formed existence, that does not agree with the appearance of man in infancy, and indicates something like suspicion and want of foreknowledge, inconsistent with those ideas which we wish to cherish of the Supreme Being. I should be inclined, therefore, as I have hinted before in a note, to consider the world, and this life, as the mighty process of God, not for the trial, but for the creation and formation of mind; a process necessary, to awaken inert, chaotic matter, into spirit; to sublimate the dust of the earth into soul; to elicit an æthereal spark from the clod of clay. And in this view of the subject, the various impressions and excitements which man receives through life, may be considered as the forming hand of his Creator, acting by general laws, and awakening his sluggish existence,

existence, by the animating touches of the Divinity, into a capacity of superior enjoyment. The original sin of man, is the torpor and corruption of the chaotic matter, in which he may be said to be born.

It could answer no good purpose to enter into the question, whether mind be a distinct substance from matter, or only a finer form of it. The question is, perhaps, after all, a question merely of words. Mind is as essentially mind, whether formed from matter, or any other substance. We know, from experience, that soul and body are most intimately united; and every appearance seems to indicate, that they grow from infancy together. It would be a supposition attended with very little probability, to believe that a complete and full formed spirit existed in every infant;

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but that it was clogged and impeded in its operations, during the first twenty years of life, by the weakness, or hebetude, of the organs in which it was enclosed. As we shall all be disposed to agree, that God is the creator of mind as well as of body; and as they both seem to be forming and unfolding themselves at the same time; it cannot appear inconsistent either with reason or revelation, if it appear to be consistent with the phenomena of nature, to suppose that God is constantly occupied in forming mind out of matter, and that the various impressions that man receives through life, is the process for that purpose. The employment is surely worthy of the highest attributes of the Deity.

This view of the state of man on earth will not seem to be unattended with probability, if, judging from the little

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experience we have of the nature of mind, it shall appear, upon investigation, that the phenomena around us, and the various events of human life, seem peculiarly calculated to promote this great end: and especially, if, upon this supposition, we can account, even to our own narrow understandings, for many of those roughnesses and inequalities in life, which querulous man too frequently makes the subject of his complaint against the God of nature.

The first great awakers of the mind seem to be the wants of the body*.

* It was my intention to have entered at some length into this subject, as a kind of second part to the essay. A long interruption, from particular business, has obliged me to lay aside this intention, at least for the present. I shall now, therefore, only give a sketch of a few of the leading circumstances that appear to me to favour the general supposition that I have advanced.

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They are the first stimulants that rouse the brain of infant man into sentient activity: and such seems to be the sluggishness of original matter, that unless, by a peculiar course of excitements, other wants, equally powerful, are generated, these stimulants seem, even afterwards, to be necessary, to continue that activity which they first awakened. The savage would slumber for ever under his tree, unless he were roused from his torpor by the cravings of hunger, or the pinchings of cold; and the exertions that he makes to avoid these evils, by procuring food, and building himself a covering, are the exercises which form and keep in motion his faculties, which otherwise would sink into listless inactivity. From all that experience has taught us concerning the structure of the human mind, if those stimulants to exertion, which arise from the wants of the body, were removed

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from

from the mass of mankind, we have much more reason to think, that they would be sunk to the level of brutes, from a deficiency of excitements, than that they would be raised to the rank of philosophers by the possession of leisure. In those countries, where nature is the most redundant in spontaneous produce, the inhabitants will not be found the most remarkable for acuteness of intellect. Necessity has been with great truth called the mother of invention. Some of the noblest exertions of the human mind have been set in motion by the necessity of satisfying the wants of the body. Want has not unfrequently given wings to the imagination of the poet; pointed the flowing periods of the historian; and added acuteness to the researches of the philosopher: and though there are undoubtedly many minds at present, so far improved by the various excitements of

knowledge, or of social sympathy, that they would not relapse into listlessness, if their bodily stimulants were removed; yet, it can scarcely be doubted, that these stimulants could not be withdrawn from the mass of mankind, without producing a general and fatal torpor, destructive of all the germs of future improvement.

Locke, if I recollect, says, that the endeavour to avoid pain, rather than the pursuit of pleasure, is the great stimulus to action in life: and that in looking to any particular pleasure, we shall not be roused into action in order to obtain it, till the contemplation of it has continued so long, as to amount to a sensation of pain or uneasiness under the absence of it. To avoid evil, and to pursue good, seem to be the great duty and business of man; and this world appears to be

peculiarly calculated to afford opportunity of the most unremitting exertion of this kind: and it is by this exertion, by these stimulants, that mind is formed. If Locke's idea be just, and there is great reason to think that it is, evil seems to be necessary to create exertion; and exertion seems evidently necessary to create mind.

The necessity of food for the support of life, gives rise, probably, to a greater quantity of exertion, than any other want, bodily or mental. The supreme Being has ordained, that the earth shall not produce food in great quantities, till much preparatory labour and ingenuity has been exercised upon its surface. There is no conceivable connection to our comprehensions, between the seed, and the plant, or tree, that rises from it. The Supreme Creator might, undoubtedly, raise

raise up plants of all kinds, for the use of his creatures, without the assistance of those little bits of matter, which we call seed, or even without the assisting labour and attention of man. The processes of ploughing and clearing the ground, of collecting and sowing seeds, are not surely for the assistance of God in his creation; but are made previously necessary to the enjoyment of the blessings of life, in order to rouse man into action, and form his mind to reason.

To furnish the most unremitting excitements of this kind, and to urge man to further the gracious designs of Providence, by the full cultivation of the earth, it has been ordained, that population should increase much faster than food. This general law, (as it has appeared in the former parts of this essay) undoubtedly produces much partial evil; but a little reflection

fection may, perhaps, satisfy us, that it produces a great overbalance of good. Strong excitements seem necessary to create exertion; and to direct this exertion, and form the reasoning faculty, it seems absolutely necessary, that the Supreme Being should act always according to general laws. The constancy of the laws of nature, or the certainty, with which we may expect the same effect, from the same causes, is the foundation of the faculty of reason. If in the ordinary course of things, the finger of God were frequently visible; or to speak more correctly, if God were frequently to change his purpose, (for the finger of God is, indeed, visible in every blade of grass that we see) a general and fatal torpor of the human faculties would probably ensue; even the bodily wants of mankind would cease to stimulate them to exertion, could they not reasonably expect,

expect, that if their efforts were well directed, they would be crowned with success. The constancy of the laws of nature, is the foundation of the industry and foresight of the husbandman; the indefatigable ingenuity of the artificer; the skilful researches of the physician, and anatomist; and the watchful observation, and patient investigation, of the natural philosopher. To this constancy, we owe all the greatest, and noblest efforts of intellect. To this constancy, we owe the immortal mind of a Newton.

As the reasons, therefore, for the constancy of the laws of nature, seem, even to our understandings, obvious and striking; if we return to the principle of population, and consider man as he really is, inert, sluggish, and averse from labour, unless compelled by necessity, (and it is surely the height of folly to talk of man,

man, according to our crude fancies, of what he might be) we may pronounce, with certainty, that the world would not have been peopled, but for the superiority of the power of population to the means of subsistence. Strong, and constantly operative as this stimulus is on man, to urge him to the cultivation of the earth; if we still see that cultivation proceeds very slowly, we may fairly conclude, that a less stimulus would have been insufficient. Even under the operation of this constant excitement, savages will inhabit countries of the greatest natural fertility, for a long period, before they betake themselves to pasturage or agriculture. Had population and food increased in the same ratio, it is probable that man might never have emerged from the savage state. But supposing the earth once well peopled, an Alexander, a Julius Cæsar, a Tamerlane, or a bloody revolution, might irrecoverably thin the human

human race, and defeat the great designs of the Creator. The ravages of a contagious disorder would be felt for ages; and an earthquake might unpeople a region for ever. The principle, according to which population increases, prevents the vices of mankind, or the accidents of nature, the partial evils arising from general laws, from obstructing the high purpose of the creation. It keeps the inhabitants of the earth always fully up to the level of the means of subsistence; and is constantly acting upon man as a powerful stimulus, urging him to the further cultivation of the earth, and to enable it, consequently, to support a more extended population. But it is impossible that this law can operate, and produce the effects apparently intended by the Supreme Being, without occasioning partial evil. Unless the principle of population were to be altered,

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according to the circumstances of each separate country, (which would not only be contrary to our universal experience, with regard to the laws of nature, but would contradict even our own reason, which sees the absolute necessity of general laws, for the formation of intellect;) it is evident, that the same principle, which, seconded by industry, will people a fertile region in a few years, must produce distress in countries that have been long inhabited.

It seems, however, every way probable, that even the acknowledged difficulties occasioned by the law of population, tend rather to promote, than impede the general purpose of Providence. They excite universal exertion, and contribute to that infinite variety of situations, and consequently of impressions, which seems, upon the whole, favourable

ble to the growth of mind. It is probable, that too great, or too little excitement, extreme poverty, or too great riches, may be alike unfavourable in this respect. The middle regions of society seem to be best suited to intellectual improvement; but it is contrary to the analogy of all nature, to expect that the whole of society can be a middle region. The temperate zones of the earth, seem to be the most favourable to the mental, and corporeal energies of man; but all cannot be temperate zones. A world, warmed and enlightened but by one sun, must, from the laws of matter, have some parts chilled by perpetual frosts, and others scorched by perpetual heats. Every piece of matter lying on a surface, must have an upper, and an under side: all the particles cannot be in the middle. The most valuable parts of an oak, to a timber merchant, are not either the roots,

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or the branches; but these are absolutely necessary to the existence of the middle part, or stem, which is the object in request. The timber merchant could not possibly expect to make an oak grow without roots or branches; but if he could find out a mode of cultivation, which would cause more of the substance to go to stem, and less to root and branch, he would be right to exert himself in bringing such a system into general use.

In the same manner, though we cannot possibly expect to exclude riches, and poverty, from society; yet if we could find out a mode of government, by which, the numbers in the extreme regions would be lessened, and the numbers in the middle regions increased, it would be undoubtedly our duty to adopt it. It is not, however, improbable, that

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as in the oak, the roots and branches could not be diminished very greatly, without weakening the vigorous circulation of the sap in the stem; so in society, the extreme parts could not be diminished beyond a certain degree, without lessening that animated exertion throughout the middle parts, which is the very cause, that they are the most favourable to the growth of intellect. If no man could hope to rise, or fear to fall, in society; if industry did not bring with it its reward, and idleness its punishment, the middle parts would not certainly be what they now are. In reasoning upon this subject, it is evident, that we ought to consider chiefly the mass of mankind, and not individual instances. There are undoubtedly many minds, and there ought to be many, according to the chances; out of so great a mass, that, having been vivified early, by a peculiar

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course

course of excitements, would not need the constant action of narrow motives, to continue them in activity. But if we were to review the various useful discoveries, the valuable writings, and other laudable exertions of mankind; I believe we should find, that more were to be attributed to the narrow motives that operate upon the many, than to the apparently more enlarged motives that operate upon the few.

Leisure is, without doubt, highly valuable to man; but taking man, as he is, the probability seems to be, that in the greater number of instances, it will produce evil rather than good. It has been not unfrequently remarked, that talents are more common among younger brothers, than among elder brothers; but it can scarcely be imagined, that younger brothers are, upon an average, born with
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a greater original susceptibility of parts. The difference, if there really is any observable difference, can only arise from their different situations. Exertion and activity, are in general absolutely necessary in the one case, and are only optional in the other.

That the difficulties of life, contribute to generate talents, every days experience must convince us. The exertions that men find it necessary to make, in order to support themselves or families, frequently awaken faculties, that might otherwise have lain for ever dormant: and it has been commonly remarked, that new and extraordinary situations generally create minds adequate to grapple with the difficulties in which they are involved.

CHAP. XIX.

The sorrows of life necessary to soften and humanize the heart.—The excitements of social sympathy often produce characters of a higher order than the mere possessors of talents.—Moral evil probably necessary to the production of moral excellence.—Excitements from intellectual wants continually kept up by the infinite variety of nature, and the obscurity that involves metaphysical subjects.—The difficulties in Revelation to be accounted for upon this principle.—The degree of evidence which the scriptures contain, probably, best suited to the improvement of the human faculties, and the moral amelioration of mankind.—The idea that mind is created by excitements, seems to account for the existence of natural and moral evil.

THE sorrows and distresses of life form another class of excitements, which seem to be necessary, by a peculiar train of impressions, to soften and humanize the heart, to awaken social sympathy, to generate all the Christian virtues, and to afford scope for the ample exertion of benevolence. The general tendency

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of an uniform course of prosperity is, rather to degrade, than exalt the character. The heart that has never known sorrow itself, will seldom be feelingly alive, to the pains and pleasures, the wants and wishes, of its fellow beings. It will seldom be overflowing with that warmth of brotherly love, those kind and amiable affections, which dignify the human character, even more than the possession of the highest talents. Talents, indeed, though undoubtedly a very prominent and fine feature of mind, can by no means be considered as constituting the whole of it. There are many minds which have not been exposed to those excitements, that usually form talents; that have yet been vivified to a high degree, by the excitements of social sympathy. In every rank of life, in the lowest, as frequently as in the highest, characters are to be found, overflowing with the

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milk of human kindness, breathing love towards God and man; and though without those peculiar powers of mind called talents, evidently holding a higher rank in the scale of beings, than many who possess them. Evangelical charity, meekness, piety, and all that class of virtues, distinguished particularly by the name of Christian virtues, do not seem necessarily to include abilities; yet a soul possessed of these amiable qualities, a soul awakened and vivified by these delightful sympathies, seems to hold a nearer commerce with the skies, than mere acuteness of intellect.

The greatest talents have been frequently misapplied, and have produced evil proportionate to the extent of their powers. Both reason and revelation seem to assure us, that such minds will be condemned to eternal death; but while on earth,

earth, these vicious instruments performed their part in the great mass of impressions, by the disgust and abhorrence which they excited. It seems highly probable, that moral evil is absolutely necessary to the production of moral excellence. A being with only good placed in view, may be justly said to be impelled by a blind necessity. The pursuit of good in this case, can be no indication of virtuous propensities. It might be said, perhaps, that Infinite Wisdom, cannot want such an indication as outward action, but would foreknow, with certainty, whether the being would chuse good or evil. This might be a plausible argument against a state of trial; but will not hold against the supposition, that mind in this world is in a state of formation. Upon this idea, the being that has seen moral evil, and has felt disapprobation and disgust at it, is essentially

different from the being that has seen only good. They are pieces of clay that have received distinct impressions: they must, therefore, necessarily be in different shapes; or, even if we allow them both to have the same lovely form of virtue, it must be acknowledged, that one has undergone the further process, necessary to give firmness and durability to its substance; while the other is still exposed to injury, and liable to be broken by every accidental impulse. An ardent love and admiration of virtue seems to imply the existence of something opposite to it; and it seems highly probable, that the same beauty of form and substance, the same perfection of character, could not be generated, without the impressions of disapprobation which arise from the spectacle of moral evil.

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When the mind has been awakened into activity by the passions, and the wants of the body, intellectual wants arise; and the desire of knowledge, and the impatience under ignorance, form a new and important class of excitements. Every part of nature seems peculiarly calculated to furnish stimulants to mental exertion of this kind, and to offer inexhaustible food for the most unremitting inquiry. Our immortal Bard says of Cleopatra—

———“ Custom cannot stale

“ Her infinite variety.”

The expression, when applied to any one object, may be considered as a poetical amplification, but it is accurately true when applied to nature. Infinite variety, seems, indeed, eminently her characteristic feature. The shades that are here and there blended in the picture, give spirit,

spirit, life, and prominence to her exuberant beauties; and those roughnesses and inequalities, those inferior parts that support the superior, though they sometimes offend the fastidious microscopic eye of short sighted man, contribute to the symmetry, grace, and fair proportion of the whole.

The infinite variety of the forms and operations of nature, besides tending immediately to awaken and improve the mind by the variety of impressions that it creates, opens other fertile sources of improvement, by offering so wide and extensive a field for investigation and research. Uniform, undiversified perfection, could not possess the same awakening powers. When we endeavour then to contemplate the system of the universe; when we think of the stars as the suns of other systems, scattered throughout infinite space; when we reflect, that we

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do not probably see a millionth part of those bright orbs, that are beaming light and life to unnumbered worlds; when our minds, unable to grasp the immeasurable conception, sink, lost and confounded, in admiration at the mighty incomprehensible power of the Creator; let us not querulously complain that all climates are not equally genial; that perpetual spring does not reign throughout the year; that all God's creatures do not possess the same advantages; that clouds and tempests sometimes darken the natural world, and vice and misery, the moral world; and that all the works of the creation are not formed with equal perfection. Both reason and experience seem to indicate to us, that the infinite variety of nature, (and variety cannot exist without inferior parts, or apparent blemishes) is admirably adapted to further the high purpose of the creation, and to produce the greatest possible quantity of good.

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The obscurity that involves all metaphysical subjects, appears to me, in the same manner peculiarly calculated, to add to that class of excitements which arise from the thirst of knowledge. It is probable that man, while on earth, will never be able to attain complete satisfaction on these subjects; but this is by no means a reason that he should not engage in them. The darkness that surrounds these interesting topics of human curiosity, may be intended to furnish endless motives to intellectual activity and exertion. The constant effort to dispel this darkness, even if it fail of success, invigorates and improves the thinking faculty. If the subjects of human inquiry were once exhausted, mind would probably stagnate; but the infinitely diversified forms and operations of nature, together with the endless food for speculation which metaphysical sub-

jects offer, prevent the possibility that such a period should ever arrive.

It is by no means one of the wisest sayings of Solomon, that "there is no new thing under the sun." On the contrary, it is probable, that were the present system to continue for millions of years, continual additions would be making to the mass of human knowledge; and yet, perhaps, it may be a matter of doubt, whether, what may be called the capacity of mind, be in any marked and decided manner increasing. A Socrates, a Plato, or an Aristotle, however confessedly inferior in knowledge to the philosophers of the present day, do not appear to have been much below them in intellectual capacity. Intellect rises from a speck, continues in vigour only for a certain period, and will not, perhaps, admit, while on earth, of above
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a certain number of impressions. These impressions may, indeed, be infinitely modified, and from these various modifications, added probably to a difference in the susceptibility of the original germs*, arise the endless diversity of character that we see in the world; but reason and experience seem both to assure us, that the capacity of individual minds does not increase in proportion to the mass of existing knowledge. The finest minds seem to be formed rather by efforts at original

* It is probable that no two grains of wheat are exactly alike. Soil undoubtedly makes the principal difference in the blades that spring up; but probably not all. It seems natural to suppose some sort of difference in the original germs that are afterwards awakened into thought; and the extraordinary difference of susceptibility in very young children seems to confirm the supposition.

thinking,

thinking; by endeavours to form new combinations, and to discover new truths; than by passively receiving the impressions of other men's ideas. Could we suppose the period arrived, when there was no further hope of future discoveries; and the only employment of mind was to acquire pre-existing knowledge, without any efforts to form new and original combinations; though the mass of human knowledge were a thousand times greater than it is at present; yet it is evident that one of the noblest stimulants to mental exertion would have ceased; the finest feature of intellect would be lost; every thing allied to genius would be at an end; and it appears to be impossible, that, under such circumstances, any individuals could possess the same intellectual energies, as were possessed by a Locke, a Newton,

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or a Shakespear, or even by a Socrates, a Plato, an Aristotle, or a Homer.

If a revelation from heaven, of which no person could feel the smallest doubt, were to dispel the mists that now hang over metaphysical subjects; were to explain the nature and structure of mind, the affections and essences of all substances, the mode in which the Supreme Being operates in the works of the creation, and the whole plan and scheme of the Universe; such an accession of knowledge, so obtained, instead of giving additional vigour and activity to the human mind, would, in all probability, tend to repress future exertion, and to damp the soaring wings of intellect.

For this reason I have never considered the doubts and difficulties that

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involve

involve some parts of the sacred writings, as any argument against their divine original. The Supreme Being might, undoubtedly, have accompanied his revelations to man by such a succession of miracles, and of such a nature, as would have produced universal overpowering conviction, and have put an end at once to all hesitation and discussion. But weak as our reason is to comprehend the plans of the Great Creator, it is yet sufficiently strong, to see the most striking objections to such a revelation. From the little we know of the structure of the human understanding, we must be convinced, that an overpowering conviction of this kind, instead of tending to the improvement and moral amelioration of man, would act like the touch of a torpedo on all intellectual exertion, and

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would

would almost put at end to the existence of virtue. If the scriptural denunciations of eternal punishment were brought home with the same certainty to every man's mind, as that the night will follow the day, this one vast and gloomy idea would take such full possession of the human faculties, as to leave no room for any other conceptions: the external actions of men would be all nearly alike: virtuous conduct would be no indication of virtuous disposition: vice and virtue would be blended together in one common mass; and, though the all-seeing eye of God might distinguish them, they must necessarily make the same impressions on man, who can judge only from external appearances. Under such a dispensation, it is difficult to conceive how human beings could be formed to

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a detestation of moral evil, and a love and admiration of God, and of moral excellence.

Our ideas of virtue and vice are not, perhaps, very accurate and well-defined; but few, I think, would call an action really virtuous, which was performed simply and solely from the dread of a very great punishment, or the expectation of a very great reward. The fear of the Lord is very justly said to be the beginning of wisdom; but the end of wisdom is the love of the Lord, and the admiration of moral good. The denunciations of future punishment, contained in the scriptures, seem to be well calculated to arrest the progress of the vicious, and awaken the attention of the careless; but we see, from repeated experience, that they are not accom-

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panied with evidence of such a nature, as to overpower the human will, and to make men lead virtuous lives with vicious dispositions, merely from a dread of hereafter. A genuine faith, by which I mean, a faith that shews itself in all the virtues of a truly christian life, may generally be considered as an indication of an amiable and virtuous disposition, operated upon more by love than by pure unmixed fear.

When we reflect on the temptations to which man must necessarily be exposed in this world, from the structure of his frame, and the operation of the laws of nature; and the consequent moral certainty, that many vessels will come out of this mighty creative furnace in wrong shapes; it is perfectly impossible to conceive, that any of these creatures

creatures of God's hand can be condemned to eternal suffering. Could we once admit such an idea, all our natural conceptions of goodness and justice would be completely overthrown; and we could no longer look up to God as a merciful and righteous Being. But the doctrine of life and immortality which was brought to light by the gospel, the doctrine that the end of righteousness is everlasting life, but that the wages of sin are death, is in every respect just and merciful, and worthy of the Great Creator. Nothing can appear more consonant to our reason, than that those beings which come out of the creative process of the world in lovely and beautiful forms, should be crowned with immortality; while those which come out misshapen, those whose minds are not suited to a purer and

happier state of existence, should perish, and be condemned to mix again with their original clay. Eternal condemnation of this kind may be considered as a species of eternal punishment; and it is not wonderful that it should be represented, sometimes, under images of suffering. But life and death, salvation and destruction, are more frequently opposed to each other in the New Testament, than happiness and misery. The Supreme Being would appear to us in a very different view, if we were to consider him as pursuing the creatures that had offended him with eternal hate and torture, instead of merely condemning to their original insensibility those beings, that, by the operation of general laws, had not been formed with qualities suited to a purer state of happiness.

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Life is, generally speaking, a blessing independent of a future state. It is a gift which the vicious would not always be ready to throw away, even if they had no fear of death. The partial pain, therefore, that is inflicted by the Supreme Creator, while he is forming numberless beings to a capacity of the highest enjoyments, is but as the dust of the balance in comparison of the happiness that is communicated; and we have every reason to think, that there is no more evil in the world, than what is absolutely necessary as one of the ingredients in the mighty process.

The striking necessity of general laws for the formation of intellect, will not in any respect be contradicted by one or two exceptions; and these evidently not intended for partial purposes, but cal-

calculated to operate upon a great part of mankind, and through many ages. Upon the idea that I have given of the formation of mind, the infringement of the general laws of nature, by a divine revelation, will appear in the light of the immediate hand of God mixing new ingredients in the mighty mass, suited to the particular state of the process, and calculated to give rise to a new and powerful train of impressions, tending to purify, exalt, and improve the human mind. The miracles that accompanied these revelations when they had once excited the attention of mankind, and rendered it a matter of most interesting discussion, whether the doctrine was from God or man, had performed their part, had answered the purpose of the Creator; and these communications of the divine will were afterwards left to make their way

way by their own intrinsic excellence; and by operating as moral motives, gradually to influence and improve, and not to overpower and stagnate the faculties of man.

It would be, undoubtedly, presumptuous to say, that the Supreme Being could not possibly have effected his purpose in any other way than that which he has chosen; but as the revelation of the divine will, which we possess, is attended with some doubts and difficulties; and as our reason points out to us the strongest objections to a revelation, which would force immediate, implicit, universal belief; we have surely just cause to think that these doubts and difficulties are no argument against the divine origin of the scriptures; and that the species of evidence which they possess is best suited to

to the improvement of the human faculties, and the moral amelioration of mankind.

The idea that the impressions and excitements of this world are the instruments with which the Supreme Being forms matter into mind; and that the necessity of constant exertion to avoid evil, and to pursue good, is the principal spring of these impressions and excitements, seems to smooth many of the difficulties that occur in a contemplation of human life; and appears to me, to give a satisfactory reason for the existence of natural and moral evil; and, consequently, for that part of both, and it certainly is not a very small part, which arises from the principle of population. But, though upon this supposition, it seems highly improbable, that evil should ever be removed from
the

the world; yet it is evident, that this impression would not answer the apparent purpose of the Creator; it would not act so powerfully as an excitement to exertion, if the quantity of it did not diminish or increase, with the activity or the indolence of man. The continual variations in the weight, and in the distribution of this pressure, keep alive a constant expectation of throwing it off.

“Hope springs eternal in the human breast,
“Man never is, but always to be blest.”

Evil exists in the world, not to create despair, but activity. We are not patiently to submit to it, but to exert ourselves to avoid it. It is not only the interest, but the duty of every individual, to use his utmost efforts to remove evil from himself, and from as large a circle as he can influence;
and

and the more he exercises himself in this duty, the more wisely he directs his efforts, and the more successful these efforts are; the more he will probably improve and exalt his own mind, and the more completely does he appear to fulfil the will of his Creator.

F I N I S.





