

A
METHOD
OF
IMPROVING THE CONDITION
OF THE
IRISH POOR.

SUGGESTED IN A LETTER TO
SAMUEL WHITBREAD, ESQ. M. P.

οἷτε τὰς οὐσίας ἔχοντες, οὐχ ὅπως ὑπερῶραν τοὺς καταδεδειγμένους
πράττουσας, ἀλλ' ὑπολαμβάνοντες, αἰσχυρὴν αὐτοῖς εἶναι τὴν τῶν
πολίτων ἀπορίαν, ἐπήμυνον ταῖς ἐνδείαις.

ISOC. ORAT. AREOP.

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1810.

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BY
J. B. BARNES, JR.
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PREFACE.

ONE of the arguments employed in defence of the system examined in the following pages is, that although some may *appear* to suffer loss from it, yet all classes of society are *really* gainers.

But were it otherwise, the Author has too high an opinion of the humanity of his Countrymen, whether English, Scotch, or Irish, to fear that the *argumentum ad crumenam* should form a prominent feature of any refutation that may be attempted.

THE HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS

A

METHOD,

&c. &c.

SIR,

AMIDST the struggles for power and emolument in which our Legislators are constantly engaged, it is pleasant to observe even a single individual occasionally turn his mind to subjects of importance to his country, and his species; actuated by no motive but a desire to procure their welfare or a generous ambition to transmit his name to posterity, in union with those of their other benefactors.

Such an one I am happy it is in my power to address with rational hopes of interesting on a subject, affording as fair a field for his philanthropic exertions as any in which they were ever employed, and intimately connected with one which seems to have occupied much of his consideration.

The subject, Sir, to which I allude, is the state of the Irish commonalty; that it is deplorable seems pretty generally admitted, and indeed few of the evils which abound in "this prison-house the world" have been the theme of more dolorous declamation. Numerous expedients have been devised for its amelioration, but none of them, to say the least, of such sovereign efficacy as to render nugatory all further speculation.

My object in now addressing you, is to detail the superior advantages of a new plan, and if I should succeed in convincing you that it is possessed of them, to solicit the exercise of your eloquence and influence in our national councils to procure its adoption, the quantum of efficacy to be found in measures heretofore recommended I may perhaps endeavour to ascertain on some future occasion; but it will
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be perceived that the view I am about to take of the subject precludes the immediate necessity of such an attempt; for my ambition is not confined to the removal of grievances peculiarly Irish, but extends to the obtaining for the poor of this country the comfort enjoyed by their English fellow subjects of the same class, and that they have to aspire to in common with the poor of most other nations on the globe.

A few desultory observations, however, may lead to reflections not unfavourable to the theory, the advantages of which are to be contended for:—

1st. The Irish peasant already enjoys security of property, and lives in a community possessed of equal laws, and these are advantages far outweighing all others that have been hitherto sued for in his favor. Perhaps, indeed, of the latter he cannot always avail himself in the degree it were to be wished he could; but much that militated against a consummation so devoutly to be wished has been removed, and much more is likely to be so, though certainly he can never be completely independent while he is very poor.

2dly. The manufactures and commerce, and wealth of Ireland have been constantly progressive since the revolution, since the year 1782, with unexampled rapidity, but the condition of the peasant has by no means improved in the same ratio—in one most important respect, the quality of his food, it has been even *reduced*.

3dly. Catholic emancipation is, no doubt, a measure fraught with benefits to all classes of people in the United Kingdom, but its most able advocates do not very much insist on its efficacy to remove poverty, and in many countries where unanimity in religious matters subsists, the poor are yet very miserable.

4thly. It is chiefly by checking the exertions of his industry that tithes are prejudicial to the peasant, for no part of the tax really falls upon him but such as affects the *additional produce* resulting from *superior* industry, or an increase from adventitious circumstances in the value of lands during the period of his lease: it is almost superfluous to say that the chief part of the burden is sustained by the landlord.

The extravagance of one proposal that has not infrequently been made, namely, the compelling landlords to lease at fixed rents, has in it this much at least of good, that

that it serves to point out forcibly the extent of the evil for which such a remedy is suggested, even by the most unformed understanding: it is one which, besides the egregious injustice of lodging a burden on the shoulders of one part of the community exclusively, to the great ease and comfort of the rest, would *really* possess all the evil falsely attributed to that now to be considered.

You will probably, sir, be somewhat startled on finding that you are expected to become the patron of poor laws and an agent in their establishment, but if you can bring yourself to examine the arguments by which I shall endeavour to prove them advantageous to society, the candid, philosophical mind you seem to possess removes all solicitude as to the result.

Previous to the discovery with regard to population, which forms so remarkable an æra in the progress of the human mind to useful knowledge, a system of national charity had nothing on which its claims to utility could be rested but the evidence of experience, and spite of that, the murmurs of no mean individuals had been heard against it; murmurs which grew into a loud and universal clamour when the discovery alluded to threw a strong light on the structure of society, and was thought to add immense weight to the objections which had been already urged.

How it came to be contemplated in that light may be matter of curious speculation to others as well as me, if it should be shewn that it establishes, instead of impugning a system the effects of which indeed form the practical question of greatest moment that it furnishes the means of discussing; and really so powerful is the support it appears to me capable of affording, that to seek for more may be deemed a work of supererogation.

Mr. Malthus, in the later editions of his work, seems to be verging towards a revolution of opinion, as may be collected from some passages he has introduced, but particularly the following:

“ The most favourable light in which the poor laws can
 “ possibly be placed, is to say, that under all the circum-
 “ stances with which they have been accompanied, they do
 “ *not encourage* marriage, and *undoubtedly* the returns of
 “ the population act seem to warrant this assertion. Should
 “ this be true, *many of the objections which have been urged*
 “ *in the Essay against the poor laws will of course be re-*
 moved,

“ moved, but I wish to press on the attention of the reader
 “ that they will in that case be removed in *strict conformity*
 “ to the *general principles of the work*, and in a manner to
 “ confirm rather than to *invalidate* the main positions which
 “ it has attempted to establish.”

If sir, you compare this passage with others scattered throughout the work and hostile to poor laws, you must observe a curious dissonance, which can be only accounted for by supposing that no portion of the author's attention has been devoted to the subject since the edition in which it first appeared. Had not the workings of his acute and candid mind suffered a pause, there is every reason to presume that a change in his sentiments would have obviated the necessity of my now addressing you. As it is, my task resolves itself into a defence of poor laws in opposition to his doctrines; for if they have produced most salutary effects in England, it will follow that their establishment here and elsewhere is to be desired. Mr. Malthus indeed thinks that the idle habits of our peasantry would render their pressure intolerable, but if my reasonings be correct, those habits would have altogether an opposite tendency.

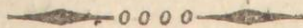
The discovery of Mr. Malthus is perhaps of greater importance to mankind than any other that has ever been effected; none has ever been promulgated with greater modesty or defended with less acrimony, and none has ever called forth a more numerous host of those scribblers, who with a natural affection for darkness, rail against all such as, by communicating an accession of light, thereby confound instead of assist the imperfect organs of their mental vision. In becoming the antagonist of so eminent a philosopher, I trust I shall never be found to deviate from that respect which is due to him, but this one inculpatory reflection I shall permit myself both with regard to you and him—that where the path leading from error was obvious, your feelings should have forced you into it.

The objections to poor laws, more particularly springing from the principle of population, may be reduced to five.

In the first place, the relief afforded to the poor is little more than nominal, for the stock of provisions within the reach of every community being limited, a donation in money does not enable the receiver to purchase a greater quantity than before, for the rich will be always able to satisfy their wants, and leave as small a surplus in the one case as in the other.

LETTERS,

&c.



YOU will remember that some extracts from Barnes's statistical Survey of Ireland, which were published with great approbation in the *Waterford Mirror*, excited our curiosity to read the whole work. You procured it; read it; and sent it to me with your marginal notes. I have read it and intend to give you my opinion in a series of letters, which I shall submit to the public, for it is the duty of every friend to the Country, however arduous the task, to counteract the baneful influence of the errors in fact and in judgment with which the work abounds. To do this I must enter into much detail; but first of all, it may be well to take such a view of the Author as he affords of himself in his work; for it appears to me that a mere perusal thereof ought to convince Irishmen that he is ill qualified to inform them and still less to guide their judgments on the political interests of their Country.

Let us look at him then: a first impression of any subject is apt to influence every other, and often (tho' not always) it affords such a view as is fully confirmed by further inspection. Mr. Barnes, writing the panegyric of Ireland, and printing it at the *Hibernia Press*, presents

the relief, so far from being merely nominal, has effected, in the scale of moral worth and physical comfort, a chasm between the peasantry of England and that of other countries, unblessed by national charity, greater than that which divides them from the upper classes in their own. Whatever quantity of provisions is deducted from the consumption of the middle class, in consequence of the retrenchment that individuals composing it are compelled to have recourse to, must necessarily go to increase the stock destined for the use of the poor. The distribution is not equalized indeed in the ratio of the sums levied. To a certain extent the contributions only cause a transfer of property: food is perhaps the last article in which most people will feel disposed to retrench, and no retrenchment can be expected above the middle class, but so soon as it begins there so soon does the condition of the poor begin to improve.

A familiar example will illustrate this: A and B eat each six penny worth of bread per diem, and C four penny worth; they repair on a given morning to a baker's shop, whose stock does not exceed the ordinary demand of his customers, A possessed of three shillings, B of one, and C of four pence. Let us suppose the entrance of D, a person of authority, who, with that spirit of injustice attributed to the framers of poor laws, thinking C not likely to have sufficient food to support nature, orders contributions by A and B; this however only raising the price of bread, and of course the baker being the only person benefited, they are increased till B begins to think that if he should not be satisfied to eat less, he must want something, the privation of which might mortify him more than a slight reduction in the quantity of his food, and at this conjuncture C begins to feel the beneficial effects of the regulator's interference.

But in the general amelioration which must accrue to society from that of one of its component parts, that class is chiefly benefited, by the reduction of which it would seem to be purchased. The rich, if they have more to protect from the dishonesty which is seldom separated from the lowest stage of poverty, have also more power to protect it. Though not placed altogether beyond the reach of base example, are much farther removed from it; and indeed receive every advantage resulting from the improvement with diminished force. The depression therefore of which Mr. Malthus complains, if it take place, is accompanied with important and peculiar advantages to the class it affects. That it does
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take place, however, is to say the least problematical; many cases might be mentioned in which the acquirement of industrious habits among the poor, resulting from their elevation, makes compensation to the class above them for the sums levied for their use, and the competition into which they are thereby enabled to enter: For the present let one suffice; it may be safely assumed that the saving of a female servant's board and wages must be of very great consequence to a family striving to make their annual expenditure tally with a stinted income, and one English woman in that capacity is just as serviceable as two Scotch or Irish, as every one who has made the experiment can testify.

But even if the depression does exist, it can be called an evil to society in general, only as it is felt; and except in years of scarcity, of which more hereafter, the fluctuation is imperceptible; but should the right of the legislator to divert, in *any measure*, the current of property from its natural channel be questioned, it would be easy to point out many instances where a similar interference promotive of the general good has met with universal approbation.

By a desire to give the third objection all possible weight, Mr. Malthus has been led into a series of strange errors, and of such easy detection, (see Vol. 2d, page 84, 4th Edit.) as would render them unworthy of notice in the work of an inferior writer; but coming from the pen of the first political philosopher of the age, they have a reflected title to refutation.

It is maintained that a scarcity of provisions has a tendency to increase the circulating medium, and that such increase is greatly extended by the ability to purchase retained by the poor in consequence of the augmentation of the parish allowances proportioned to the price of corn.

That a bank restriction might render scarcity prices permanent, and that the prices in the last scarcity would very possibly *have* continued, had not the necessary increase been derived from private banks, and therefore admitted of being returned on the restoration of plenty, which could not have taken place till the removal of the bank restriction, had the issue been from the bank of England.

The first of these errors has led to the rest. The only money by which that in circulation could be increased is such as, before the supposed necessity of increase, had been lying unproductive: now this must be so very trifling
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in the present state of society, that in order to simplify the discussion it may be assumed that a scarcity does not necessarily produce *any* increase of circulating medium, as for purposes of illustration, the elliptical orbit of the earth is represented by astronomers as a circle.

Let then a part of the new money, supposed to be brought into market for the purpose of purchasing provisions according to the increased price, be traced.

An individual supports himself on a hundred pounds per annum, and owns a capital of fifty pounds, which is in the hands of a merchant who pays interest for it and employs it in his business, i. e. as *circulating medium*. A year of dearth obliges the owner to call in this money, and apply it to the purchase of provisions. It is now perhaps transferred to a farmer, who by no means allows it to lie idle, but if he does not chuse to apply it to the extension of his own business, puts it out at interest, possibly with the very merchant from whom it had been withdrawn. The windings of another sum might be more intricate, but whoever should be disposed to take the trouble of tracing it, would find it circulating medium in its source and at every stage of its progress. Thus a transfer of property, and possibly a slight change in the nature of commodities imported, grown, or manufactured, suited to the wants of the new proprietors, is effected, but not the supposed augmentation.

If it should be said that the merchant, instead of reducing his capital, would pay his creditor with bank paper issued to him for the purpose, no other being withdrawn from circulation. The banker's credit it may be allowed might possibly cause it to circulate, but the increase would be undue. As the effects however produced by so small a sum would be imperceptible, for illustration sake it will be necessary to dilate the features of the transaction.

Suppose then provisions raised to ten times their present price, and all the supplementary sums by which they are to be purchased formed by the new created currency in question: it must be allowed that a general and proportionate rise of other commodities would follow that of provisions, inasmuch as a competition would arise from the new money brought into market, and which should not be supposed to lie unproductive in the hands of the new capitalists.

Under these circumstances, a merchant who was accustomed to export goods to the amount, say of one hundred pounds

pounds in value, sell them in a foreign country for a profit of ten, and import others, now finds that he must pay one thousand for the same quantity, which he should sell on exportation at a loss of eight hundred and ninety. According to all known principles in human nature, he would not long continue this mode of traffic, but would soon think of purchasing his foreign wares with specie, to obtain which to the amount of one hundred pounds he would offer an equal sum in paper: If this should fail of obtaining it, he might go much higher, and still look to considerable profit: Others in similar circumstances would adopt the same expedient, and thus a competition would commence that in a very short time would, if the factitious currency had proceeded from private banks, send it back to its source without waiting for the return of plenty, and, if from the bank of England, cause a depreciation proportioned to the redundancy.

As therefore no increase of circulating medium can be produced by a scarcity, it cannot produce a permanency of scarcity prices.

Mr. Malthus's mistake arose from his not recollecting, when writing the passage above commented on, that the present system of pecuniary affairs does not admit of much money lying unproductive. If hoarding were customary the increase might take place, though not in the ratio supposed.

It must be admitted that provisions are dearer in England than in most other parts of Europe, but this is a circumstance altogether independent of a bank restriction. The following is an extract from a work published long before such a measure was thought of:

“ Dans un état où d'un côté, l'opulence seroit extreme, et de l'autre les impôts excessifs on ne pourroit guère vivre sans industrie avec une fortune bornée.

“ Bien des gens, sous pretexte de voyages ou de santé s'exileroient de chez eux, et iroient chercher l'abondance dans les pays de la servitude même.”—(Montesquieu Esprit des Loix, Liv. 17. Ch. 27.)

On the first enactment of poor laws in a country a rise in the price of provisions might take place, and continue if they had a tendency to promote population; but if, on the contrary, they were to call the preventive check into action, the decrease of mouths would soon reduce the evil, if it be
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one, assisted by the improved industry of well dieted and comfortably lodged working people, together with an increased economy in the middle class, to the adoption of which the contributions levied on them would act as an incitement, although they should receive more than remuneration, through channels not within the sphere of their observation. Were not this the case, provisions would be out of all proportion dearer in England than in this country or Scotland, but in no part of it are they much dearer, and in some of the northern counties they are even cheaper.

The only evils however that could arise from the high price of provisions are the depression of the middle class, and obstructions to commerce, proceeding from the incapacity of the manufacturer to bring his goods to market sufficiently cheap to allow of an extensive sale. An attempt has been already made to ascertain the weight of the former, and the latter is surely not much to be regarded if England be confessedly the first manufacturing nation in Europe, notwithstanding that she has been so long exposed to its influence.

Mr. Malthus seems aware that cheapness of provisions is not likely to beget cheapness of manufactures, if caused by the low price of labour. (Essay, vol. 2. page 386.) And deprecates a reduction in the wages of the English peasant while labouring to effect it, for their present high rate may be very clearly traced to the operation of those laws he is so urgent to have abrogated. It is true he wishes it to proceed altogether from a scarcity of labour, growing out of the action of the preventive check to population; indeed, were it attributable to that, it would be the great object to the attainment of which he thinks the exertions of the legislator should be directed.

To what extent it is so attributable, in the system now under consideration, it might be difficult to ascertain, for parish rates have an obvious and immediate tendency to produce it, which must in some degree anticipate the more remote though more powerful influence they possess in the character of an efficient and wholesome check to population. The enquiry, however, is of little moment, for it is not contended that any thing in the shape of wages can have the debasing influence attributed to charity, nor is there any quarrel with the numbers of the human race, except when their increase is attended by that of vice and misery.

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The fourth objection, the most solid that has been urged, applies only to the undue increase of the parochial allowances in a time of dearth, leaving the general question untouched. It must be granted that such an increase, besides the evils it is calculated to bring on the rest of the community, may cause the poor themselves to suffer more ultimately than if relief were administered with a more sparing hand. Mr. Malthus's proposal to give any additional bounty in the form of cheap food seems unexceptionable.

With such a modification, poor laws would furnish means of mitigating the pressure of famine like the distillation of corn, or any other drain of provisions that may be stopped on its approach, and another might be added to the many vast benefits to society, which an admirable dispensation of Providence has caused to flow through a channel hitherto unobserved from *national benevolence*.

But the impolicy is not less obvious than the inhumanity of suffering one part of the community to labour under the immediate pressure of absolute famine with a view to obtain a mitigation of it for another at some subsequent period, the arrival of which may be possibly anticipated by the return of plenty.

To avoid one evil of uncertain recurrence another would be engendered in the shape of epidemic disease, which would not confine its ravages to the class from whose sufferings it had originated. The bark of trees, &c. on which the Swedish peasantry are sometimes reduced to feed, no doubt sends many a corse from the palace as well as from the cottage.

The last objection remains to be considered, and possibly to have noticed the others may be deemed superfluous, for on this they chiefly depend, and any weight they may possess extrinsic of it is of such comparative insignificance, that on the discussion of the question "does the system promote or check population" the whole matter may be said to rest.

Mr. Malthus, as was before observed, has begun to entertain doubts of its tendency to promote, and assigns as the cause why it fails to do so, a paucity of cottages arising from it, a species of tenement which landlords and parish officers never lose a favourable opportunity of demolishing; but this is but a meagre method of accounting for influence, the extent of which is suggested by the great and acknowledged

ledged comfort enjoyed by the English peasantry, and the not less evident, though unaccountably disallowed virtues which they practise. Whether other causes now to be developed are not more satisfactory, it is for you, sir, and the public to judge.

Parish rates, as was before observed, have an obvious and immediate tendency to raise the wages of labour.

There are comparatively few parishes in England, a considerable proportion of the inhabitants of which does not consist of farmers or manufacturers: in many the whole population is composed of farmers and labourers, with the exception only of the parson and his family. It must fall within the observation of employers in those of the former description, that as wages fall, poor rates increase in a certain proportion, and as a considerable part of the contributions is levied on themselves, the temptation to reduce the wages of their workmen is much diminished; in the other case there is scarcely any temptation: Besides, the wages of labour will be generally regulated by opinion as to what constitute the necessities of life, and poor laws are so well adapted to raise this standard, that the holiday regale of a Scotch or Irish is not equal to the ordinary fare of an English peasant.

Now the mere increase of the peasant's means tend to prevent his marrying. What! if a man who has sixpence a day be inclined to do so foolish a thing as to beget beings to share and increase his misery, will his inclination be diminished by raising his income to a shilling or two? So it is, and, until it comes to a certain amount much removed from this, the inclination will diminish in the ratio of the increase.

There surely cannot be many more effectual methods devised for inducing that relish for the conveniencies and comforts of life, on which Mr. Malthus grounds his hopes of promoting celibacy and consequent improvement among the poor, than placing the objects of it within their reach*.

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* Were Mr. Malthus's hypothesis just, that a donation from the parish does not enable the peasant to command an increase of food, yet it would by no means follow that the whole of it, together with what he was able to earn antecedent to his receiving it, would be applied to the purchase of provisions. He would now find himself enabled, at the expence of a small retrenchment in the article of food, to become the owner of much he might have often wished for, but could not obtain except by drawing too near starvation, and the opportunity would not be passed. Hence, in the increase of parish rates in a time of scarcity, there will be found a principle repressive of undue consumption, although certainly outweighed by that which promotes it.

Among a peasantry at the lowest ebb of poverty celibacy is scarcely known, witness that class in this country and the Scotch, (See Malthus, vol. 1, page 449,) whom, even you sir, have been led into the extravagance of holding up as an example for their southern neighbours. What has the individual to fear from marrying? It is in vain to talk to him about the cruelty of imparting existence when that existence is to be miserable; his mind is too gross to be moved by sentiments of this kind, and if it were otherwise, he does not think existence a curse to himself notwithstanding all his privations, and therefore will not think it can be so to others.

The point then to consider is, what has he to risk by marrying? and that is a descent from a clay house, potatoes and labour, to beggary with idleness and better diet; a mode of life which is often regarded in the light of promotion and embraced upon the slightest pretext.

If you wish him to remain single, give him something to apprehend the loss of; let him have to exchange a decent vestment for rags and a comfortable dwelling for a pig-stye. A man may be easily persuaded to leap off a table, whom no rhetoric could urge down a precipice.

But whatever degree of vigour the augmented means of the poor may impart to the preventive check when arising from any other cause, when derived from poor laws, their influence is prodigiously increased in a manner which shall be now described, and to which, sir, I beg leave to direct your attention, as furnishing an argument in their favor sufficient in itself to invalidate, or counterbalance every objection that has been made to them.

The assumption of Mr. Malthus, that a money bounty does little more than cause misery to shift its ground, though by no means true if the bounty were general cannot be denied, if it flow from a no more copious source than private charity. Even that tends to equalize the distribution of provisions, but in so slight a degree, that perhaps the retrenchment it thereby effects in the general mass of misery is more than counterbalanced by the transfer of no inconsiderable part of what remains from the idle to the industrious, from the vicious to the virtuous, and if that be the case, its best effects on society, no doubt, proceed from its tendency to refine and soften the minds of those who exercise it.

Mr. Malthus, by allowing of private charity on this principle and others *comparatively* trivial, strives to soften

the revolting doctrine, that no charity is capable of affording relief from misery but at the expence of throwing it elsewhere, perhaps where less deserved. Surely a belief in this must annihilate the pleasure resulting from acts of benevolence with every motive to practise them, and therefore the feeling calculated to produce them must be accompanied by ignorance, or else feeling is not susceptible of being regulated by reason. The variance created between these sources of human actions I am endeavouring, I hope not unsuccessfully, to remove. It seems derogatory, from the wisdom of the deity, to represent him as employing so complex and intricate a method of ameliorating our hearts, impelling us by feeling, and enjoining us by precept* to bestow alms useless as to their object, or worse than useless.

The one impulse depending on our ignorance or irrationality, for all it may possess of vigour, and the other subjected by an access of knowledge to the cavillings of the unbeliever.

With the head renewing hydra, however, which private charity is incompetent to subdue, public charity maintains a more successful contest, for stopping successively *every* avenue of misery by which a redundant population struggles to throw off its superfluity, it *forcibly* removes the office of keeping it down to the level of subsistence from the positive to the preventive check.

In every society there exist some individuals cautious of subjecting themselves to the multifold privations consequent on matrimony with slender means of support, and on this class the obstruction of the drain to population by misery would force the task of reducing the too rapid increase.

On the first enactment of poor laws, such persons would be found altogether in the middle class, and perhaps they might be thus more truly said to suffer than from any descent in the scale of society, but according as foresight and prudence would extend to the poor, the natural accompaniments to the amelioration of their condition, they would share the hardship if not sustain its entire pressure.

It is doubtful however if it be desirable that it should be confined to them, the more if it would devolve on persons
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* Mr. Malthus quotes scripture in favour of his doctrine. He will permit me to point out to his observation some passages that militate against it. St. Mark, ch. 10. v. 21. Ditto, ch. 12. v. 41, 2, 3, 4. St. Luke, ch. 12. v. 63.

of better education and more refined sentiments, the more would moral restraint be practised, the only unexceptionable form of the preventive check.

Be that as it may, the superior prudence of such as would abstain from marriage, furnishes a reason in support of experience, to justify the apparently paradoxical assertion, that an increased action of the preventive check is not necessarily attended by an increase of illicit intercourse between the sexes; but Mr. Malthus has saved me the trouble of obviating any objection that an over nice moralist might make upon this ground—(Essay, v. 2. page 417.)

On a superficial view of the subject it might reasonably enough appear, that the certainty of support held forth by the system must necessarily act as a spur to population and a bar to industry. Enough has been said to shew, that if it invites to matrimony it also contains some principles well adapted to prevent the invitation from being accepted.

But the fact is, that a prospect of the abridgment of his right to self-government consequent on a peasant's acceptance of parochial assistance, much more effectually quenches desire and quickens industry than the fear of want, however strong a stimulus that may be. Mr. Malthus has but a slight transition to make in coming over to this opinion, as the following passage will testify:

“ The scanty relief granted to persons in distress, the capricious and insulting manner in which it is sometimes distributed by the overseers, and the *natural and becoming pride, not yet quite extinct* (qu; when was it formed) among the peasantry of England, have deterred the more thinking and virtuous part of them from venturing on marriage without some better prospect of maintaining their families than mere parish assistance. The desire of bettering our condition, and the fear of making it worse, like the *vis medicatrix naturæ* in physic, is the *vis medicatrix republicæ* in politics, and is continually counteracting the disorders arising from narrow humanæ institutions.

How happens it that this powerful principle, not having the influence of poor laws to counteract in Scotland, Ireland, Spain, France, &c. has not made angels of the peasants of those countries.

“ In spite of the prejudices in favor of population, and the direct encouragements to marriage from the poor laws,

“ laws, it operates as a preventive check to increase, and
 “ happy for this country is it that it does so. But, besides
 “ the spirit of independence and prudence which checks the
 “ frequency of marriage, notwithstanding the encourage-
 “ ments of the poor laws, those laws occasion a check of
 “ no inconsiderable magnitude, and thus counteract with
 “ one hand what they encourage with the other. As each
 “ parish is obliged to maintain its own poor, it is naturally
 “ fearful of increasing their number; and every landholder
 “ is in consequence more inclined to pull down than to
 “ build cottages, except when the demand for labourers is
 “ really urgent.”—(Malthus, vol. 2. page 105.)

I do not mean to say that *certain starvation* is deemed preferable to restraint, but if the poor laws be repealed, the right of the poor to beg must be acknowledged. This would extend the horizon of a peasant's hopes of warding off absolute famine, and a life of vagrant freedom is too consonant to the nature of man to suffer us to suppose that any disgrace attached to the occupation of a mendicant, or a fear of the occasional privations likely to accompany it, could have so powerful an influence to overcome the evil propensities in question, as a certainty of restraint, accordingly in no country upon earth can there be found a peasantry of more industrious habits than the English, or more averse to depend on charity for any part of their subsistence.

Not to bring forward on this occasion, my volatile and unthinking countrymen, it may be perceived by a reference to Mr. Malthus's work, (v. 1. page 419.) how little influence the fear of beggary has in preventing an undue increase of population among the learned and prudent Scotch, whom the writers of their country of all degrees of ability, from Adam Smith and Dr. Currie *down* to the author of the Account of Paisley*, are not ashamed to contrast with the English, while Mr. Bull, who is a person of great good nature and wondrous credulity, has gone great lengths towards a belief that the fabled happiness and innocence of Arcadia are realized in the northern division of his island.

The ingenious Miss Hamilton, it must be allowed, is an exception, and to her last work, “The Cottagers of Glenbunie,” I refer you, sir, for a just picture of the state of morals,

* This enlightened and unprejudiced person informs us, that the condition of the English poor “in comparison of the poor of other countries, is “truly most miserable.”

morals, manners, &c. among the poor of her country, whose diseases she is wise and humane enough to wish cured, even at the expence of exposure.

I would also wish you, sir, to look into Mr. Cobbett's Register for 1807, I think, under the head of Poor Laws, for a beautiful and correct picture of the manners of your own country folk, and for the only able attempt that I know of to repel the mischievous pretensions above alluded to.

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

We cannot suppose that this spirit of independence was felt to any great extent by the English peasantry during the influence of the feudal system, and that influence was not completely reduced before the enactment of poor laws—so that our Author would have been more correct in saying. " fortunately for England a spirit of independence has been " *formed* among the peasantry spite of the poor laws which " are, &c." But then the proposition would have been too glaringly extravagant.

The following passages of Mr. Malthus's work, if viewed along with the many, hostile to poor laws, would furnish a curious instance of how the most powerful reason can bow before pre-conceived opinion.

" About 1 in 40, this must appear to be the lowest proportion of deaths that can well be supposed, considering " the circumstances of the country, i. e. England, and, if " true, would indicate a most *astonishing superiority* over " the generality of other states, either in the habits of the " people, with respect to prudence and cleanliness, or in " natural healthiness of situation. Indeed it seems to be " nearly ascertained that both these causes, which tend to " diminish mortality, operate in this country to a considerable degree. The small proportion of annual marriages " mentioned before indicates, that *habits of prudence extremely favourable to happiness prevail through a large " part of the community in spite of the poor laws; and it " appears from the clearest evidence, that the generality of* " *our*

"our country parishes are very healthy." Essay, vol. 1. page 457.

"Dr. Heberden draws a striking picture of the *favourable change* observed in the health of the people of England since this period, (the period of the extinction of the plague), and justly attributes it to *the improvements* which have gradually taken place, not only in London but in all great towns, and in the manner of living throughout the kingdom, particularly with regard to *cleanliness and ventilation*. But these causes would not have produced the effect observed if they had not been accompanied by an *increase of the preventive check*; and probably the *spirit of cleanliness*, and better mode of living, which then began to prevail, by spreading more generally a *decent and useful pride*, principally contributed to this increase." Essay, vol. 2. p. 289.

I beg you to bear in mind that all this mass of improvement, extinction of the plague, cleanliness, increase of the preventive check, &c. has taken place in spite of poor laws, and began to take place just about the time it might be expected, if they were the source.

Erasmus furnishes us with a very valuable account of the cleanliness of the English just before they were enacted.

"Their floors" says he, "are commonly strewn with rushes, under which lie concealed a collection of beer, grease, fragments, bones, spittle, excrements of cats and dogs, and every thing that is nauseous." Epist. 402. But to return to our author:—

"But above all, throughout a very large class of the (English) people, a decided taste for the conveniencies and comforts of life, a strong desire of bettering their condition, that master spring of public prosperity, and in consequence a most laudable spirit of industry and foresight are observed to prevail. Essay, vol. 2. p. 331.

"When the common people of a country live principally upon the dearest grain, as they do in England on wheat, they must have great resources in a scarcity." Essay, v. 2. p. 380.

The most plausible reasons Mr. Malthus assigns for comfort, the existence of which he cannot deny, and virtues which he one minute denies and the next admits, are the freedom enjoyed by Britons, and the fertility of the English soil.

If what Hume has said be just, that it is ridiculous to consider the English constitution as a regular plan of liberty previous to the accession of the Stuarts, the Scotch have received in as full a measure as the English the benefits that can flow from the former of these causes; and be not deceived, sir, there are no people who furnish more ample proof of its inefficacy to produce the imputed effects.

Observe, if you please, the sort of contrast in which they are placed by a bigotted Caledonian, Dr. Smollett, with the people who are now to be *promoted* to an *equal* rank in the scale of existence.

"The boors of Northumberland are lusty fellows, fresh complexioned, cleanly, and well clothed, but the labourers in Scotland are generally lank, lean, hard featured, sallow, soiled, and shabby."

Northumberland is, no doubt, more fertile than Berwickshire, but Cumberland is less so than Roxburgshire, and the contrast on the western side of the island being not less forcible than on the eastern, serves to dispose of the other factitious cause, to which moreover it would not be reasonable to attribute the cleanliness and other good habits which the peasantry in the barren districts of North Wales possess in a degree not much inferior to their neighbours.

As I have mentioned this part of the United Kingdom, it may not be amiss to notice some other particulars relative to it, which furnish no inconsiderable items on the credit side of our present account. The laws in question are there so well administered, that in many parishes a *work-house* is *not found necessary*.

The Welch and Irish are of the same stock, both Celtic people, as the affinity of their languages and the similarity of their countenances, and in many respects of their characters, abundantly testify. An earlier civilization may account for much of the difference to be found in the habits of the peasantry of the two countries, but leaves much more attributable to no other apparent cause than poor rates.

Previous to the date of the income tax, it was very usual for persons of small income to emigrate from the rich plains of Meath and the fertile vallies of Wicklow, for the sole purpose of reducing their expences, by a residence amongst the sterile rocks of Anglesea or Caernarvonshire. The practice is not altogether discontinued, even now, and this circumstance

circumstance is in itself an answer to the objections founded on the high price of provisions and the depression of the middle class.

Mr. Malthus also assigns various causes for the superior condition of the Dutch peasantry, the inefficiency of which I shall not stop here to remark on—and points to the peasantry of Switzerland, Norway, and the duchies of Holstein and Sleswick, as being very well provided for by their own exertions.

He has himself noticed the causes which have brought the preventive check into action, in Norway, (Essay, vol. 1. p. 308. 10, 13, &c. and on inspecting them, you will find they are inherent in the peculiar circumstances of the country, and do not, nor could be made to exist in Great Britain or Ireland.

Of Holstein and Sleswick I am not prepared to speak, farther than this, that I am informed the Danish government is the most paternal in existence, that is, that it is much addicted to compel the rich to contribute to the welfare of the poor; but neither in those countries nor in Norway are the comforts enjoyed by that class attributable to a good political constitution.

In Switzerland there *were* poor rates.

“ Though there is no absolute provision for the poor in
“ Switzerland, yet each parish generally possesses some
“ seignorial rights, and property in land for the public,
“ and is expected to maintain its own poor. These funds,
“ however, being limited, will of course often be totally
“ insufficient, and occasionally *voluntary* collections are
“ made for the purpose; but the whole of the supply being
“ comparatively scanty and uncertain, it has not the same
“ bad effects as the parish rates in England. Of late years
“ much of the common lands belonging to parishes has been
“ parcelled out to individuals, &c. &c.” Essay, v. 1. p. 421.

The expectation that each parish should support its own poor, we must suppose to be entertained by the government, and this must in fact render compulsory collections, supposed to proceed from pure volition. Accordingly we find in Rousseau's *Heloise*, a female peasant in distress, mentioning a public fund as a *certain*, though disgraceful resource.

“ Je pourrois bien aussi recourir a la bourse des pauvres,
“ *mais on est si meprisé, qu' il vaut mieux patir: et puis*
“ Claude Anet a trop de cœur pour vouloir d' une fille as-
“ sistée.” *La Nouvelle Heloise*, 1 part. let. 40.

Julie

Julie answers :—" Tu as bien fait de n'avoir pas recours
 " a la *bourse publique* : c'est ce qu'il ne faut jamais faire
 " tant qu'il reste quelque chose dans celle des bonnes gens."

It may be collected from the above passages, (for Rousseau must have observed the feelings he describes,) that parish bounty *may* be felt as more disgraceful than actual beggary.

This appears a little strange, if we consider that in the first case the individual requires what a decree of the legislature of his country has made his *absolute right*. It is only to be accounted for by supposing, that the *really smaller* disgrace is constantly held up to his view by those whose interest it is that he should maintain his independence.

It may be also inferred, that the poor in Switzerland had a prescriptive right to support, although no laws had been expressly enacted in their favor; and the incipient misery and disposition to early marriages which Mr. Malthus observed in his tour in that country are, no doubt, fairly attributable to the parcelling out of the parish lands, or, in other words, to the abolition of poor rates.

I have now, sir, in examining the objections to the system arising from the principle of population, accomplished what appears to me sufficient to establish its utility. The amelioration of society is sought, here are the means of procuring it. They contain nothing of intricacy or contrivance, nothing surely more than the means by which we achieve another great undertaking, the defence of our country.

If in their worst form they can beget all the improvement Mr. Malthus describes, what may be expected from them under a rigid and exact administration, which *may* exist, as you will find on perusing in Mr. Cobbett's Register for 1808, (I do not just remember the number,) a detail of the reformation effected by the useful exertions of a certain Mr. Hardy.

To complete the design I had originally proposed to myself, it would be necessary to notice such objections as are not immediately connected with the discovery of Mr. Malthus, and also to shew the comparative inefficacy of such schemes of improvement as have been suggested; but these are matters of inferior importance, and yet would occupy as much space as what has been already done, I shall therefore now forbear touching on them; but if the present attempt should be fortunate enough to obtain as much of the attention of the public as may justify me in having recourse a
 second

second time to the press, they shall receive full examination. Above all, sir, I pledge myself to repel, if they should be persisted in, the ludicrous and extravagant pretensions of Scottish writers, as to the superiority of the peasantry of their country, which have been occasionally glanced at in the course of the preceding pages. Yet let it not be conceived that I am actuated by any illiberal feeling towards that brave and lettered people, on the contrary, I am persuaded there are few persons who, on a view of the aggregate of their character, are more disposed to admire and respect them.

But let them be satisfied (and surely well they may) with the lustre shed around them by their Humes and their Robertsons, their Mackenzies and their Scotts, their Abercrombies and their Moores, for poor is the satisfaction that can result from the assent of prejudice and error.

Sincerely do I hope that I may be the humble instrument by which the attention of their philosophers may be turned from seeking the degradation of the English peasantry to the improvement of their own. It is much, very much wanting, and perhaps there exists not on earth a people with minds so well adapted to assist the ameliorating influence of Poor Laws.

I am, Sir,

Your most obedient,

Humble servant,

THE AUTHOR.

FINIS.