

OBSERVATIONS
ON
THE ADMINISTRATION
OF THE
POOR LAWS
IN
AGRICULTURAL DISTRICTS.

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BY REV. C. D. BRERETON, A. M.

RECTOR OF LITTLE MASSINGHAM, NORFOLK.

NESCIA FALLERE VITA.

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THIRD EDITION.
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PREFACE.

THE following Observations on the Administration of the Poor Laws in Agricultural Districts refer, almost exclusively, to that artificial expedient, which is generally known by the name of the Allowance System. That system is said to have been conceived and cradled in the county of Norfolk, where it has now, in many parts, grown up to maturity. The present appears to be a fair opportunity for reconsidering the merits of this practice, and if any information contained in the following pages shall throw any light upon this gloomy subject, and tend to produce a more wholesome state of public feeling respecting it, the Author will not consider his attempt fruitless.

No illusion will be made to general education, religious instruction, or an improved cottage economy. These are the only means by which noblemen, gentlemen, clergymen, or any other persons, not immediately connected with the business of agriculture, can really benefit the labourer;

but they are not necessary parts of the following argument.--No direct attempt has been made to shew the Anti-christian nature of the present practice, partly because that has already been done by an able and eloquent Divine (Dr. Chalmers,) in an inquiry into the principle of the English Poor Laws, and partly because such attempts, made by an humble individual, often pass for professional or visionary opinions. If, however, reliance is placed upon other arguments, which seem indisputable, the Author freely confesses that, if he had not felt a firm persuasion of the *Anti-christian influence of the present system*, he would not have thrown together ten sentences on the subject.

In the course of the inquiry, it will appear that the observations are chiefly addressed to the local magistrates, because, whoever were the authors of this scheme, it must be confessed, that the continuance of it in a time of peace and plenty rests with that body. If in the discussion of the subject, the appeal which is made to the honor and conscience of those who administer the system, should appear too free and bold, it must be recollected that the virtue and happiness of the people are deeply involved in it. It must be recollected too, that the administrators in this case are, from their well known character and honorable intentions, too apt to be easy and secure, especially where their design is the protection of their inferiors.

The Author's apology for any firmness or freedom of expression, which may appear in the following pages, lies in the hope that his argument may lodge in the minds of these honorable gentlemen the conviction which is so firmly fixed in his own, that this system is as unnecessary as it is mischievous and impolitic.

Two questions will naturally occur to the reader of the following remarks—are these practices legal? Are these practices common? The legality of these proceedings was a question which the author did not feel himself competent to discuss, and if he had, the discussion would have diverted him from his purpose. A main part of the question is at present pending a decision in the Courts of Law. It would appear, however, that these practices are not sanctioned by any specific statute, but that they rest for authority on custom, local influence, and certain modern constructions of ancient laws. It is well known that Mr. Pitt in 1797, after the failure of Mr. Whitbread's bill for fixing a minimum of wages in the preceding year, proposed, but afterwards withdrew a bill for the sanction of this very system of allowance, at the joint discretion of overseers and local magistrates. “And be it further enacted, that if any poor person residing in any parish under the authority of this act, and not being able to earn the full rate of wages usually given in such parish, or the parish or parishes united therewith, shall, with

“ the previous consent of the person or persons
 “ appointed to the management of the poor of any
 “ such parish, or parishes, contract and agree to
 “ work at any inferior rate or wages, which wages
 “ shall not be sufficient for the maintenance and
 “ support of such poor person singly, or in con-
 “ junction with his or her family, it shall and may
 “ be lawful for such officers of the poor, with the
 “ approbation of one or more justice or justices of
 “ the peace in the district, to *make up such defi-*
 “ *ciency*, as may be necessary for the support of
 “ such poor person, and his or her family, (regard
 “ being had to the earnings of such family) *out of*
 “ *the rates* made for the relief of the poor, with-
 “ out compelling such poor person to be employed
 “ in any school of industry, or in any other manner
 “ under the authority of this act.”

It appears that on mature reflection, Mr. Pitt did not consider the principles of this bill sound and safe. He certainly did not think them legal, or he would not have introduced a bill to make them so. In the invaluable report from the select committee of the House of Commons on the Poor Laws in 1817, that committee expresses its opinion on the subject.

After proposing certain remedies for the correction of this practice, the report proceeds. “ If,
 “ however, it should be thought wise or even
 “ practicable to persevere in endeavouring to pro-
 “ vide work for all who want it, fresh powers must
 “ certainly be devised for that purpose : the narrow

“ limits and strict specifications by which the exist-
 “ ing authority to set to work is confined, have
 “ made your committee somewhat at a loss to
 “ ascertain on what legal provision the practices
 “ of making up the wages of labour, according to
 “ a certain scale, have been imagined to depend.”
 p. 19.

As to the next question—Are these practices common? Let the county of Norfolk, and especially the Western part of the county, answer it. But I collect, from the last Report of the Committee of the House of Commons, on the Poor Rate Return, the following remarks of the returning officers, published in an appendix to that Report. Many of these remarks shew the benefit of select vestries and parochial management. The following is evidence of an opposite description.

DURHAM.

Stanton and Streatham.—“ A select vestry has
 “ been formed, but it is nearly useless, for the
 “ magistrates still arrogate to themselves (from a
 “ clause in the Act,) the power of ordering what
 “ relief they choose to paupers, and quite against
 “ the opinion and decision of the select vestry.
 “ The less magistrates have to do with parish busi-
 “ ness, the better—orders, summonses, and war-
 “ rants, are issued in countless numbers, for every
 “ silly complaint that may be made to them.”

Sedgefield—“ The township of Sedgefield has

“ not been able to make any reduction in the
 “ expences for the relief of the poor this last year,
 “ on account of the magistrates interfering with
 “ the select vestry, which prevented the most
 “ respectable people attending the meeting. How-
 “ ever, they have declined, and will not meddle
 “ with any thing the vestry may agree upon, and
 “ we have no hesitation in saying the expence this
 “ year will be one-third less than last.”

LINCOLN.

Binbrook St. Gabriel.—“ A select vestry has
 “ been formed, and the greatest benefit was ex-
 “ pected from it, both to the deserving poor, and
 “ the parish ; but the idle and extravagant part of
 “ the poor, finding the magistrates too apt to listen
 “ to them, summon the overseers, on very frivolous
 “ occasions, and put them to the trouble of jour-
 “ nies eight or ten miles, with expences and loss of
 “ time to both parties, when the members of the
 “ vestry are much better able to judge than the
 “ magistrates, as being near neighbours, and
 “ knowing the case. The interference of the ma-
 “ gistrates not only encourages false swearing, but
 “ is often attended with wrong decisions, and a
 “ great expence to the parish.”

NORTHAMPTON.

Moreton Pinkney.—“ Two nominations for a
 “ select vestry, according to the directions of the

act, have taken place, but the magistrates have
“refused to allow it.”

SUFFOLK.

Framlingham.—“On examining the above sum
“of £1991. 5s. it appears that the sum of £973. 10s.
“was actually paid for subsistence to men with
“families, and single men able to work, but could
“not obtain employment.”

NORFOLK.

Congham.—“The rates are increasing from
“the inability of the occupiers to employ the la-
“bourers, from the number of very young men
“marrying without any means of support, and
“the rapid increase of the population, and from
“the system of allowing a rate of maintenance
“for those who are not able, or not willing to
“work, equal to the wages that can be given in
“the present most distressed state of agriculture.
“Allowance to a single lad, 5s. per week—man
“and wife, 7s.—ditto and one child, 8s. 3d. &c.”

These extracts shew, that these practices are
common, are very prevalent in Suffolk and Nor-
folk, and that the Government is anxious to turn
the public attention to the subject.

and have taken place, but the magistrates have refused to allow it.

SUFFOLK.

Mr. Webb. — On examining the above and of 1891 it appears that the sum of £972 10s. was actually paid for assistance to men with families, and might men able to work, but could not obtain employment.

SUFFOLK.

Conclusions. — The rates are increasing from the inability of the occupiers to employ the labourers, from the number of very young men marrying without any means of support, and the rapid increase of the population, and from the system of allowing a rate of maintenance for those who are not able or not willing to work equal to the wages that can be given in the present most distressed state of agriculture. Allowance to a single labourer, his wife, and child, is 1s. 6d. and one child is 6d. These extracts show that the conditions are common, are very prevalent in Suffolk and Norfolk, and that the Government is anxious to draw the public attention to the subject.

INTRODUCTION.

PAUPERISM has been viewed with too much complacency in England. It has been viewed through the humane intentions, with which, from time to time, laws have been enacted, and administered for the relief and protection of the poor. It has been judged of by its patrons, rather than by its subjects, by its name, rather than by its own intrinsic character.

It has been viewed with too much complacency, because it has been confounded with poverty, with that condition of distress and misfortune to which every man is liable from sickness, infirmity, age, past imprudence, or even from long standing bad habits. Poverty in its proper sense, as an object of pity, is involuntary, is in fact as much a misfortune, as any other to which humanity is liable. Pauperism, on the other hand, deserves no pity; but in as much as all vice is pitiable, because it is voluntary.

These two states indeed, in many particular cases, (especially where they are theoretically confounded) may practically approximate. But in all

legislation, and in all inquiries respecting the poor, the outline can never be too strongly delineated. The statutes of Elizabeth especially mark this distinction, providing only for two classes—relief for the impotent, and employment for the unemployed, by which they may relieve themselves. By the best laws of England, the poor are termed the indigent, and paupers the idle and disorderly; whereas modern laws and modern practices have confounded paupers, and other poor persons; have levelled these distinctions, and left one chaotic mass of pauperism a burden upon the country.

As it is desirable to distinguish poverty from pauperism, the state immediately beneath it, so it is desirable to distinguish it from competency, the state immediately above it. Great confusion and mischief have arisen from inattention to this distinction, and many a misguided man, if this distinction had been upheld in his own mind, and in the public mind, would have been content in the state in which Providence had placed him. “The labouring poor,” the “poor labourers,” are very common phrases in conversation, and even in Acts of Parliament; and by this language the bold peasantry of England, whose industry would have supplied them with an honorable and competent maintenance, have been seduced to swell the ranks of the poor, and so to descend by the slippery path of poverty, (often imaginary) into the abyss of pauperism.

Such has been the effect of humane laws, falsely so called, and humane language falsely applied. The whole peasantry of England, in many districts, are at this moment immersed in pauperism, with the means of happiness, competency, and independence around them!!

Such is the melancholy fact. To rescue the multitudes who have thus fallen, must be the object of every man's heart. It is an object of great difficulty, but well worthy the anxiety and perseverance of all.

Evils of every kind are more easily endured than removed; but moral evils, when sanctioned by popular prejudices and long standing habits, are peculiarly difficult of cure. The pauperism of England has grown up by degrees, and by degrees it must, if ever, be removed. Viewed in the mass, it is a frightful and mysterious object; but when separated into its proper parts, it will become more intelligible, and be more easily managed. For this purpose, it is important to begin, not with the original statutes,* (for they are comparatively harmless, when confined to their original design,) but with the practices of the present gene-

* "A plan was formed in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, more humane and beneficial than even feeding and clothing of millions, by affording them the means (with proper industry) to feed and clothe themselves. And the further any subsequent plans for maintaining the poor have departed from this institution, the more impracticable, and even pernicious, their visionary attempts have proved."—*Blackstone*, book iv. c. 32.

ration. It is desirable to separate modern from ancient institutions, local from national regulations, agricultural from trading and commercial districts.

No subject has been more generally discussed than the Poor Laws of England. Some in their zeal (an honorable and patriotic zeal,) against the excesses of pauperism, have levelled an unsparing denunciation against the entire principle of the poor laws, legal provision for want and indigence. On the other hand, while some have ascribed the prosperity of this country to our naval power and maritime situation—some to our free constitution and government by law—some to our trade or commerce, or mines, or agriculture; and some, more wisely, to all these causes combined, there are those who ascribe it all to the system of the Poor Laws. These persons seem so convinced of the beauty and perfection of the system, that they are become absolutely enamoured of pauperism, and use their utmost endeavours to diffuse the blessings of it through every village and hamlet of the country. All useful inquiry, however, must begin, not with the Poor Laws, but with their administration; not with the principle, but with the practice. The real merits of the question lie in the practical details, in an enquiry in every particular case, into the real necessity for legal relief, and the effects of that relief, when expected or afforded, on the comfort and character of the expectant and recipient.

Between three and four years ago, circumstances induced me to remove from the Cure of a large population in the city of Norwich, to the Cure of the village of Little Massingham, in the county of Norfolk. It was natural for a person who had been accustomed to observe the condition of the labourers in the city, to institute some sort of comparison between their habits and characters, and those of the villagers. A very slight observation convinced me that the people of this part of the county were under some peculiar system, to which certain features in their character were to be traced. That conviction has been confirmed by a longer experience. To omit all other peculiarities, the perpetual discontent and irritation of mind, subsisting between the labourers and their employers, is the most remarkable. We occasionally hear of the combinations of workmen and masters, for the regulation of wages; but the habitual feeling that prevails is, I believe, that which ought to prevail between patrons and clients. In these agricultural districts there is a constant inflammation of mind, arising from the slightest fluctuations in the price of corn, and an habitual dislike and suspicion between the labourers and their masters.

This mischief arises from the unnatural interference of the magistracy between work and wages. Whether this interference is or is not necessary, it is quite evident that the principle and happiness of the population are corrupted by it. I may appeal to

common experience in proof of this assertion—to the general feeling of the country—to the yeomen, and even to the poor—to many of the neighbouring and other clergy—to those clergymen especially who introduced select vestries into their respective parishes, from which, after having attended some time, they have been obliged to retire. They have retired, because they discovered a system of imposture which they could not sanction, but which, supported as it is by custom, and local authority, they could not practically resist, without placing themselves in an odious and unprofessional attitude towards the poor. These gentlemen pursue the only prudent course that remains to them under the present administration; but they witness from day to day evils which they lament, and have no power to controul. No upright man, indeed, can long continue an agent in this business, as it is in many cases conducted. Any man, however, may observe the effects of these proceedings, and satisfy himself by patient inquiry as to their real merits.

In general parishes are so large, their interests so adverse and complicated, that it is very difficult, almost impossible, to ascertain, with arithmetical accuracy, the annual amount of labour, and the proportion which it bears to the population dependant on its wages. I am not aware that this point has been ascertained, but on this point the naked merits of those regulations, which affect the

able bodied labourer, must be decided. Whatever can throw light on this practical inquiry, in any specific case, however small, may facilitate a more general investigation into the merits or demerits of a system, under the baneful influence of which the agriculture and the peasantry of this country have been peculiarly depressed.

It has been my main object to ascertain the fund which supplies the annual means of subsistence, as well as the degrees and proportions in which that fund has been distributed among the individuals who compose the society of this place. This will of course lead us at once to the means of comfort which the people might and would enjoy if there were no foreign interference. It will also lead to some more general, practical, and political inferences, which it may be unnecessary for me to draw. It will, however, convince the country that our national blessings are greater than we have supposed or deserved, and that while we have reason in some instances to blame the interfering hand of human regulations, we have only cause to ascribe united praise to the bountiful hand of heaven.

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CHAPTER I.

“No man loves restrictive regulations of any kind less
 “than myself. At best, nine times in ten, they are little
 “better than laborious and vexatious follies ; often as in
 “your case they are great oppressions, as well as great
 “absurdities.”

BURKE.

IN discussing the merits of certain practices in the administration of the Poor Laws in Agricultural Districts, it will be convenient to state first what these practices are—secondly, the mischievous effects arising from them—and thirdly, to offer a refutation of the opinions and assertions by which they are sometimes defended. It is the design of this chapter to state the origin and nature of these practices.

All persons who are acquainted with the history of the poor laws in England, are well aware, that great changes have taken place in the laws them-

selves, and greater still in the administration and execution of them. It is unnecessary to the present purpose to give any history of the various acts of Parliament relating to maintenance, settlements, &c. &c. Every gentleman has some degree of knowledge of that part of the laws of his country. My observations shall begin with the 22 G. 3, commonly known by the name of Gilbert's Act, the principle of which is, the incorporation of parishes and hundreds for the maintenance of the poor. This principle has led to the greatest deviations from the original design of the Poor Laws, and to the greatest errors in practice. That act led to the erection of a great number of Houses of Industry, at an enormous expence, which have in many cases proved a grievous burden to the hundreds, nurseries of vice, receptacles for the shameless, and instruments of oppression to the good. That act was indirectly the means of breaking up and superseding the old excellent English system of parochial management by overseers and vestries. Where there are no Houses of Industry or Guardians, whole hundreds are placed in a state of vassalage to the local magistrates, and subjected to laws and regulations, not only affecting the management of the poor, but the whole business of husbandry, to the great injury of all parties concerned. This kind of local legislation, with the best intention, but with the worst consequences, has been carried to a great extent.

The local magistrates have thus been tempted to undertake, in addition to the proper duties of their honorable office, the laborious and unnecessary task of superintending the management and employment of the labourers of the country.

The Act of 22 G. 3, for the maintenance of the poor by incorporated societies, generally provides, that nothing in that Act should extend to any parish, township, or place, which shall not agree to adopt the provisions therein contained.

In a country like this, all experiments of this sort, good or bad, have a general influence beyond the limits legally prescribed to them. This Act was considered by the most eminent lawyers of the time only as an experiment, to be tried by parishes, townships, and places, that should voluntarily adopt the provisions contained in it—whereas it has introduced a general practice of superseding the duties of parish vestries, churchwardens, and overseers.

By the seventh section of that Act it is provided,
 “that where guardians are appointed, neither
 “*churchwardens nor overseers shall intermeddle*
 “*in the care and management of the poor*, but that
 “the guardians shall be invested with all powers
 “given by any Act of Parliament to the overseers of
 “the poor, and in all respects, *except in regard to*
 “*the making and collecting the rates, shall be*
 “*overseers—but the churchwardens and over-*
 “*seers shall continue to be liable to collect the poor*
 “*rate, and shall pay the same to the guardians.*”

Here was a death blow to the parochial system of England, a system which has conferred immortal honor on its founder, and the blest blessings for ages on this country.*

This innovation has produced great mischiefs in many parishes and hundreds, where the incorporated societies have been adopted, though there the Guardians being parties concerned, and having a clear knowledge of circumstances, are likely to exercise due prudence in the management of the funds entrusted to their care. But what has been the effect in those parishes and hundreds which have not agreed to adopt the provisions of Gilbert's Act? There the local magistrates are self-appointed guardians. I mean in the sense of that Act. They are guardians who supersede the office of overseers and vestries, and by their periodical decrees declare, in the spirit of this section of the Act,—"that neither churchwardens nor overseers shall intermeddle with the management of the poor; but the churchwardens and overseers shall

* The following remarks of the admirable Blackstone cannot be too frequently recorded :—"When the shires, the hundreds, the tithings, were kept in the same admirable order that they were disposed in by the great Alfred, there were no persons idle, consequently none but the impotent that needed relief; and the statute of the 43 Eliz. seems entirely founded on the same principle: but when this excellent scheme was neglected and departed from, we cannot but observe with concern what miserable shifts and lame expedients have, from time to time, been adopted, in order to patch up the flaws occasioned by this neglect."—*Blackstone, book i, ch. 9.*

be liable to collect the poor rate, and shall expend the same as the magistrates shall, in their wisdom, see fit."

Thus the overseers are made mere publicans and tax gatherers, who pay their own tribute, levy money from their neighbours and equals, and then disburse the rate under the order and will of strangers, in a most ungracious manner, to the poor. This is the reason why we so often hear complaints that overseers are very untractable beings—that they will not do their duty—that the larger occupiers will not undertake the office, but pass it over to the inferior persons of the parish, or to some one hired for the purpose. The office is stripped of its usefulness, discretion, and honor, and then a complaint is made, that respectable people will not act, where in fact they cannot act in a respectable manner.

To the influence of this Act is to be ascribed the impotency of parish officers and parish vestries. There is also another circumstance, very strongly affecting the case in question. In the year 1795, the year of scarcity, a practice was introduced of allowing so much per head to each child. I copy from the Poor Book of the parish of Great Massingham, the following memorandum, made in the year 1795–1796:—

"At a vestry held January 2, 1796, it was
 "agreed to allow to all families wherein there is
 "only one child, at the rate of 6d. per head per

“week, and to those wherein there are more than
“one child, 9d. per head.”

In the year 1760, about the Accession of George the Third, the poor rate was £55, and in the year preceding this regulation the poor rate of the parish of Great Massingham was £182, whereas in the year after the passing of this regulation, the poor rate amounted to £482. It has since varied from that sum to £800, and was, during the last year, £647, through the introduction of a select vestry.

To these two circumstances, the passing of 22 Geo. 3, and other Acts connected with that which superseded the parochial system, and the temporary expedient adopted in 1795, during the scarcity, and since continued, we trace the present practice in the Administration of the Poor Laws in Agricultural Districts, of supporting the population by the allowances of local magistrates.*

The statutes of Henry, Edward, and Elizabeth, at the Reformation, the law of settlement at the Restoration, effected great changes in the management of the poor. These changes were, however, slight, in comparison of that alteration which has taken place since the passing of Mr. Gilbert's Act,

* The farmers in the first instance called in the countenance and sanction of the magistracy, but now the police has assumed the entire and absolute controul. This reminds us of the fable—

*Cervus equum pugna melior communibus herbis
Pellebat, donec minor in cestamine longo
Imploravit opes hominis frænumq; recepit
Sed postquam victor violens discessit ab hoste
Non equitem dorso, non frænum depulit ore.*

and especially since 1795, by the weekly fiats and decrees of the local magistrates. I do not happen to possess a written copy of what is vulgarly but not improperly called the law of the hundred of Freebridge Lynn, in which I reside. It is, however, similar to the laws of the neighbouring hundreds, and as I have a copy (a circular) of one of those of so late a date as the 19th January, 1824, that I may not mistake the case, I here transcribe it :

“ 19th January, 1824.

“ At a meeting of the magistrates in and for the
 “ hundred of —, in the county of Norfolk, this
 “ day held, it was determined that paupers, and
 “ other poor persons, if out of work, or employed
 “ on the roads, should receive the weekly allowances
 “ following, such allowances to commence and be
 “ made the tenth day of January instant :

	s. d.
“ Boys from 16 to 20 years of age	3 6
“ Single Men above 20	4 0
“ Man and Wife	5 6
“ Each Child	1 9
“ Widows	2 6
“ Ditto in cases of great infirmity or age . . .	3 0

“ The earnings of any part of the family to be
 “ considered as part of the allowance.

“ Men to be at work eight hours in the day.
 “ It is recommended by the magistrates that the
 “ above rate of allowance be attended to in all

“ordinary cases of persons employed upon the
 “roads or otherwise, but it is not intended to be
 “applied to extraordinary cases of distress from
 “sickness, or any other cause ; in such cases, far-
 “ther relief, at the discretion of the overseers, will
 “be required, and *if refused by them*, the parish
 “will incur the additional expence of summons
 “and orders for adequate relief.”

: A. B. }
 C. D. } Magistrates.

Without for a moment questioning the *legal powers* of the local magistrates to issue, from time to time, these general orders, it is lawful to ask, is it a wise or constitutional use of such powers? Can such regulations and edicts be in conformity with the institutions of a free country? Are they congenial to the feelings of a people accustomed to a representative government? Are they consistent with the industry, enterprise, and happiness of a thriving, moral, and religious nation? The fact is, such periodical determinations, recommendations, admonitions, and threats of expence, summons and orders, would be felt as intolerable insults, did they not proceed from the kindest intentions of the most amiable and excellent men. It is the private worth of the great body of English magistrates, which has long upheld practices that are in every view unworthy of the good sense and good feeling of the people of England.

But to examine the nature of these decrees, they

are manifestly universal and unrestricted; they include "paupers out of work or unemployed," "poor persons out of work or unemployed"—in fact, "all ordinary cases of persons employed on the roads or otherwise"—i. e. the whole industry of the country comes within this jurisdiction. For these ordinary cases of paupers, poor persons, and all persons employed on the roads or otherwise, there is one law, varying not according to the industry or character of the individual, not according to the discretion of the employer, farmer, overseer, or vestry, but varying only according to the age and relation of life. The whole country knows how to treat a boy or single man, man and wife, widows and children, aged and infirm.—The overseers shall "not intermeddle with the management of these persons, but they shall collect the rate and pay the sums ordered." The decree is comprehensive, universal—it is also unrestricted. "This allowance is not intended to be applied to extraordinary cases from sickness, or any other cause"—but observe, "in such cases further relief, at the *discretion* of the overseers, will be required;" this looks like conceding to the officers a discretionary power, but what follows? "If refused by them, (with a dash under the words in the original MS.) "if refused by them, the parish will incur the additional expence of summons and orders for adequate relief," according to the discretion of the magistrates.

This is said to be the cheapest means of providing for the greatest number of persons. If it were the business of the local magistrates to solve this problem, I trust the solution is not yet necessary in England—I trust that the country is not yet in such a declining and retrograding condition, that it is necessary to place the peasantry of a whole district on the shortest possible allowance. One would hope, that it is not yet necessary to go back to this beautiful simple law of nature and equality! It has been said, “why do you complain of the allowance, since it is little more than “prison allowance?” It certainly is not desirable that people should live better in prisons than they do out of them—but I hope I shall shew that I do not complain of the allowance for bettering the condition of the people, that I do not complain of its amount, but of its principle, application, and mischievous effects.

The great object of the local magistrates in these decrees is to provide maintenance for all the people, and to extend the shield of their protection in behalf of this object over the whole country. The industry, habits, and virtue of the people are not here in contemplation—maintenance is the object. Let it be supposed that that object has been secured, at least that it has not been frustrated;—by what means and by what sacrifices has it been secured, and were those means and sacrifices necessary to secure the maintenance of the labourer

in the most thriving and prosperous country in the world? It is important, for our own sake and for posterity, to mark well the measures to which we have condescended to secure subsistence to the labourer. In laborious efforts to provide maintenance, that has scarcely been effected by the worst means, which the people would have effected for themselves by the best means—their own industry. This practice has thrown back the peasantry of England many degrees. It has not made them slaves, but has reduced them, at least by far too many of them, to a servile condition, and it is to be feared they are descending further and further in the scale of society. While the strongest feelings of the British people are roused for the amelioration and emancipation of the negroes of the West India Colonies, we are substituting in this country colonial regulations for free laws. While we are wishing from our hearts to raise in the scale of society the planter, and in the scale of being the slave, we have taken many steps to steel the heart of the yeoman, and to depress the spirit of the peasant, by substituting the law of maintenance, the law of bondmen, for the wages of labour, the law of freemen.*

* The Quarterly Reviewer, in his endeavour to moderate between the planters and the abolitionists, seems to be describing the desired change from pauperism in the agricultural districts of England, as well as from slavery in the West Indies, in the following language.

“The present system we should designate as a payment of

The price of corn is the standard by which the scales are regulated. In many hundreds the allowance is made out by a certain quantity of wheat, meal, or flour, and is called by the various names of head money, mouth money, meal money, and flour money; it appears under these names in many of the parish books. The allowance is generally a stone of meal for a person of mature age, and half that quantity for a child, with some slight addition for clothing. In examining the merits of this practice, one naturally looks to history, ancient and modern, of our own or of other countries, for precedent and analogy. Modern history, unless it be the history of the West Indies, seems to fail us. There is a practice recorded in ancient history, which strongly resembles, in its nature and effects, this system of allowances—I mean the *congiaria* of the Romans.* The *congiarium* was a Roman measure of about a gallon, and by a kind of metonymy became a term to express the largess of corn given, especially by the Roman Emperors,

“labour by maintenance, while to the desired change we should give the name of payment by wages.”

Again—“When the system shall be changed by placing our negroes in the condition of the labouring poor in Europe, a situation in which, in case of idleness, they would feel the evil of hunger, or the insufficiency of clothing or lodging—in which in short, the degree of comfort they enjoyed would depend on the degree of their exertions.”

* See a most beautiful gallon-scale, or *congiarium*, in the evidence of John Bennett, Esq. before the Select Committee of the House of Commons in 1817, p. 92, 93.

to the populace of Rome. The history of that policy forms a very interesting illustration of the modern practice of allowances in agricultural districts. As historical lessons are of great value on questions of this sort, inasmuch as they come to us with the authority of truth, and divested of interest, prejudice, and passion, the following account of them, selected from the Roman historians, cannot fail to interest. Passing over the accounts given us in the pages of Livy, of the first introduction of the *congiaria*, from benevolent motives, in times of scarcity, and the subsequent adoption of them by the candidates for popular favour at elections, we find an accurate description of them in the reign and hands of the wise and moderate Augustus. The historian has given us a circumstantial account, every word of which is instructive. There is the scale, and the variable nature of that scale, the tickets, and the orders. There is the scale of ages, from manhood to puberty, from puberty to infancy. There is the growing increase of numbers falling upon the lists, who were not originally the objects of the bounty. The whole account indicates the inherent evil of such practices, and their necessary tendency to excite rapacity, and destroy the industry of the country. The historian faithfully describes that curious state of equilibrium which sometimes exists, but exists (like the touch of the balance) only for a moment between the hesitating controul of the executive,

and the morbid impatience of the people.* In the reign of Nero we find that it had become dangerous and impossible to oppose and limit this practice; that it was increasingly burdensome to the state,† and that the higher classes of society felt their security depended on its continuance. The wretched parricide, in his letter to the senate, after the horrible murder of his mother, states, among other charges against her, that she had discounte-

* *Congiararia populo frequenter dedit, sed diversæ fere summæ modo quadragenos, modo tricenos, non unquam ducenos, quinquagenosque nummos, ac ne minores quidem pueros preterit, quamvis non nisi ab undecimo ætatis anno accipere consuessent. Frumentum quoque in annonæ difficultatibus, sape levissimo, interdum nullo pretio, viritim admensus est tesserarumque nummarias duplicavit. Sed ut salubrem magis quam ambitiosum principem scires, querentem de inopiâ et caritate vini populum, severissima coercuit voce. Satis provisum a genere suo Agrippa, perductis pluribus aquis ne homines sitirent. Eidem populo promissum quidem congiarium reposcenti; bonæ fidei se esse respondit, non promissum autem flagitanti, turpitudinem et impudentiam edicto exprobat—affirmavitque non daturum quamvis dare destinarat. Nec minori gravitate atque constantia, cum proposito congiario, multos manumissos, insertosque civium numero comperisset, negavit accepturos quibus promissum non esset, ceterisque minus, quam promiserat dedit, ut destinata summa sufficeret. Magnâ vero quandam sterilitate ac difficili remedio, cum venalities et lanistarum familias peregrinosque omnes, exceptis medicis et preceptoribus, partemque servitiorum urbe expulisset; at tandem annona convaluit “impetum se cepisse, scribit, frumentationes publicas in perpetuum abolendi, quod earum fiducia cultura agrorum cessaret; neque tamen perseverasse, quia certum haberet, posse per ambitionem quandoque restitui.”—Suetonius, lib. ii. 41, 42.*

† Plebei congiarium quadringentii nummi viritim dati, et sestertium quadringentiis ærario inlatum est ad retinendam populi fidem.—Tac. Ann. xii. c. 31.

nanced the congiaria, and endangered the patri-
cians and gentry.*

If we extend the investigation to the reign of
the more virtuous Trajan, we shall observe, in the
panegyric of Pliny, how hopeless all remedy had
become, and how necessary it was for the Emperor
and his panegyrist to make a virtue of necessity.
One would almost imagine that Pliny, glancing a
prophetic eye upon our allowance system, was
describing its universal and unrestricted decrees.†
One would imagine that he had been an eye wit-
ness of our justice rooms and petty sessions' scenes.‡
Unhappily, however, for the patrons of this system,
they have not yet had such an apologist as Pliny.§
The orator was also a philosopher, and could not
but suspect, and delicately express his suspicion of

* *Dissuasisset donativum et congiarium, periculaque viris
illustribus instruxisset.*—Ann. xiv. c. 11.

† *Enimvero quâ benignitate divisum est? quantæ curæ tibi
fuit ne quis expers liberalitatis tuæ fieret? Negotiis aliquis,
valetudine alius, hic mari, illic fluminibus distinebatur; expecta-
tum est provisumque ne quis æger, ne quis occupatus, ne quis denique
longe fuisset, veniret quisque quum vellet, veniret quisque quum
posset.* C. Plin. Paneg. Trajano dectus, 25.

‡ *Adventante congiarii die observare principis egressum.
Labor parentibus erat ostentare parvulos impositosq. cervicibus
adulantia verba blandasq. voces edocere. Et quanquam lætissi-
mum oculis tuis esset, conspectu Romanæ sobolis impleri, omnes
tamen antequam te viderent audirentve recipi incidi jussisti ut jam
inde ab infantiâ parentem publicum educationis experirentur.*
Ib. c. 26.

§ *Quocirca nihil magis in tuâ totâ liberalitate laudaverem,
quam quod congiarium das de tuo, alimenta de tuo; neque a te
liberi civium, ut ferarum catuli, sanguine et cædibus nutriuntur;
quodque gratissimum est accipientibus sciunt dari sibi quod nemini
est ereptum, locupletatisque tam multus pauperiorem esse factum
principem tantum.* Ib. c. 27.

the effects of this practice, in forcing a rabble population, dependant on the executive for support. *

It is unnecessary to make any observation on the comparative impolicy of the Roman and English practices. Those who are interested in the latter will not fail to observe the various features of the former, and to trace one of the causes of the decline and fall of the greatest empire the world ever saw. There is one great and happy point of difference. The Roman practice chiefly prevailed in the metropolis—the English began, and still lurks in the villages of the country. Had it indeed extended to our large manufacturing towns, and to the capital, the evil would have been still more momentous. If at any future time the population of our towns should rise and demand the same system as prevails in the country, it will be difficult to refute the justice of their claim. It is desirable that the present moment should not be lost by any regard to delicacy in a matter of so much importance. We have passed from war to peace, from scarcity to plenty, from high and low to moderate prices of provisions; and this is the desired moment which may never return—“*frumentationes publicas in perpetuum abolendi.*”

* *Super omnia est tamen quod talis es, ut sub te liberos tollere liberiat et expediat, c. ib.* Again—*Nemo jam parens filio nisi fragilitatis humanæ vices horret, nec inter insanabiles morbos principis ira numeratur. Magnum quidem est educandi incitamentum, tollere liberos in spem alimentorum, in spem congiariorum, majus tamen in spem libertatis in spem securitatis, c. 27.*

CHAPTER II.

“Patience, labour, frugality, sobriety, and religion,
“should be recommended to them—all the rest is down-
“right fraud.”

BURKE.

SIMPLE statements of the most familiar facts are of great value both in political and historical inquiries. As chronicles are the best sources of historical information, because events are stated in the order of time and in the manner in which they occur—and as biography and family histories supply us with the best means of judging of the relative positions of the different ranks of society, and of society itself in different countries, so a familiar narrative of what daily occurs in the management of the poor, of the different parishes of England, whether large or small, may afford the best records of the Poor Laws, and of the poor of our own times. A familiar narrative of occurrences may spread a more just public opinion and a more wholesome state of public feeling, which it is desirable should attend the legislative reforma-

tion that awaits the administration of the Poor Laws. It is the design of the present chapter to point out, by homely illustrations, the mischiefs of the system of allowances, chiefly as they have occurred within my own observation and within the limits of my own knowledge.

Wages are the stimulus to industry, and whatever regulations interfere between work and wages must interfere with the industry of the country. The advocates of this system indeed say, we do not interfere with the price of labour, we know we cannot legally do so, but by putting our own construction on the law of maintenance, we have an ingenious method of compelling the farmer to pay such and such a sum: for instance, if a man have five children, we can compel the farmer to put out his work to that man at such a rate, that he shall not earn less than twelve or sixteen shillings, or more per week, as the price of corn may be; or if he do, that that sum shall be made up by the overseer. Then this system does virtually interfere with work and wages, which is always an impolitic interference. Look at its effect on the spirit of the man to whom the twelve shillings is assigned. Suppose that man to enter the barn on the Monday morning, with the certain knowledge, that, whether he use his utmost endeavour to earn it or no, there is decreed for him on Saturday night twelve shillings. Suppose him to be aware that his master has an eye upon the scale of al-

lowance, and that if he should earn fourteen shillings his master will make his observation, and (unless he be a liberal man, and above the system under which the country is placed,) will reduce the price of his work then, or at some future time, to the scale of allowance. What is the interest of the poor man to work lightly for eight shillings, fairly for twelve, or indefatigably for fourteen? Certainly he has the strongest inducement to work lightly for eight, and to go to the overseer for four. Suppose him, though an uneducated man, to have so much principle in his breast as will induce him, in spite of this system, to work fairly and earn twelve shillings, with what feelings will he receive that sum? Will he receive it as a gracious payment from his master, or as the sweet reward of his own industry? No, he must feel that he receives the allowance of the law and not the wages of his labour; he must feel that he receives an allowance for hard work, which many idle and worthless men, merely because they are idle and worthless, receive for no work at all. Put any other case (except those cases where the earnings far exceed the allowance, as harvest work,) and the system must operate in the same way, impair the spirit, and relax the virtuous industry of the labourer. The labourer, under this system, does not venture to earn above a certain sum, because he sees the farmer will have the temptation to reduce the price of his work, by the

excess of his earnings above the allowance; and the fact is, that in the task work of a great part of the year, the labourer and the farmer, in various ways, endeavour to adjust the earnings to the allowance. This system then interferes mischievously with the work and wages of the country.

But it will be said, though this system tends to relax the spirit of the workman, it keeps up the price of his work, and so secure his earnings. If the allowance exceed the average earnings then it has a tendency to advance—but if it fall below, then it has a contrary tendency to depress the price of work. I shall shew that the earnings do exceed the allowance by 20 and 30, and 40 per cent. and consequently that so far as the price of work is affected by the allowance, and not by the demand, it is on the whole depressed by it, and to a far greater extent perhaps than it would be by unrestricted competition. So far then as the peasantry are concerned, (and for them every one must be interested in this inquiry) there could scarcely be a system more calculated to depress their spirit, and rob their industry of its just reward.

But it will be said again, if this system tend to depress the price of work, it must be to that extent for the interest of the employer. I answer, the wages of labour is not the farmer's only consideration—the work effected by those wages is a much higher. He has his stock and capital employed, and the profit of this depends on

the efficiency of the manual labour. The tillage of the land and the breeding of cattle are carried to a very high pitch, but the manual labour is divided and applied with less skill and judgment in agriculture than in any employment whatever. In very few employments, however, is it of more consequence. The farmer has his capital employed; the interest of that capital, the wear and tear and waste; and the profit and the loss of all these are affected in a very high proportion by the free or restricted industry of the labourer. The difference between the profit of the labour of the idle and industrious is not to be computed. Besides this is not all, for what the farmer appears to gain by the diminished earnings of the labourer, that sum, many times told, he often pays in poor rate through the overseer.

Two men engaged to thrash some corn for a farmer in this parish—the one a pauper with a stated allowance, the other a man who had saved a little money in early life, and was consequently independent of parochial aid; they had each five children at that time; they worked together for a month, and received on account of their work about 9s. per week each; but the pauper had an allowance exceeding sixteen shillings, and consequently received seven shillings weekly from the overseer. The pauper was removed, and another man with a small allowance put in his place. The two men now in the same barn, and with the same corn,

earn 16s. per week each. What were the advantages of the system in this case to any of the parties concerned? It made the pauper lazy, dishonest to his master, and dishonest to his fellow labourer. He might have earned 7s. per week more. It robbed the honest industrious man of 7s. per week for a month—it made him feel that his little property, the earnings of his former life, was an injury to him. The farmer was obliged to pay for laziness, what he might and would have paid for productive industry.

The magistrates decree that every young man unmarried shall have four or five shillings per week; the young men in consequence are separated from the rest of the labourers; they are put to work which will not improve their skill or judgment; they are paid with reference to this scale, and not according to the value of the work which they can and often do perform. I have heard of two men being put into a barn, the one married and the other single. At the end of the week the wages are divided—one-third to the unmarried, and two-thirds to the married man. I have heard of the same difference being made in hedging and ditching, and all other employments. The wages vary from 8d. to 1s. per day for a single man, and 1s. 6d. to a married man. To say nothing of the direct stimulus which this practice affords to improvident marriages, what must be its effect on the spirit of industry in the youth of the country?

No misrule, Indian, Turkish, or Egyptian, can be more mischievous than that which discourages industry, enterprise, and success in youth.

*Et patiens operum exiguoq. assueta juvenus
Sacra deum, sanctique patres; extrema per illos
Justitia excedens terris vestigia fecit.*

Till the present system be abandoned, industry, frugality, piety and affection to parents, cannot flourish in our land.

This system not only weakens the spirit of industry, in many cases it absolutely destroys it. Hence the number of persons who come under the description given of them in the local edict, "out of work, or employed on the roads or otherwise"—that is, persons whose work is of no value, and who will not work to any good purpose. It is said, why do not the overseers punish such persons and make examples of them? They cannot, because they are so many in number, because punishment is so expensive, and because punishment after all will not compel a man to work; he may assume the appearance, but sickness and weakness are easy excuses. The only compulsion to make such men work seriously is fear of want, which fear the decrees effectually remove.

A few weeks ago, in passing a village between this place and Norwich, I fell into conversation with two farmers on the employment of their poor. They said that the poor were generally employed, but that it was impossible to make some of their

allowance men work. They related the following circumstance, which had occurred at their vestry the day before. Two allowance men had been sent by the parish officers to trench some land as a preparation for planting; they had been at work four days and a half, and had trenched in that time two rods, at 10d. per rod, and had come to the parish to make up their allowance according to the magistrates' scale. I inquired why they did not punish and make an example of such men? They replied that it was very difficult. In this case they did threaten to send the men to the tread mill, but that so many excuses were at hand, that it was found advisable to do nothing. For in the first place, they said, we must have gone several miles for a summons; we must then have appeared at the petty sessions; when we had sent them to the tread wheel we must have maintained their families—and when they came out of prison we must have made them the same allowance as before. In proof of the idleness of these men, they further mentioned, that a small farmer in the parish had undertaken some of the same work in the same field, and, that in addition to the daily business of his own little farm, he had done as much in one day as these two idle men, supported by his industry, and the industry of many like himself, had done in four days and a half. It was not improbable that this industrious farmer had done this additional work to raise money for his poor

rate. "The cultivator of a small farm," says Rev. Joseph Townsend, "rises early, and it is late before he can retire to rest; he works hard and fares hard, yet with all his labour and his care he can scarcely provide subsistence for his numerous family. He would feed them better, but the prodigal must *first* be fed; he would purchase warmer clothing for his children, but the children of the prostitute must first be clothed."*

Besides the general scale, two clauses of the magistrates' decree deserve notice. First—"The earnings of any part of the family are to be considered as part of the allowance." This is only another temptation to that species of cunning which so corrupts the poor. When the earnings of one of the paupers of this parish exceed his allowance, his wife and children earn a great deal of money in addition; but when his wife and children cannot raise his earnings much above his allowance, they are invariably indisposed. In fact, whenever he can obtain by fraud what he might obtain by his industry, he prefers the fraud.

The second article is—"That the men be at work eight hours in the day." This is certainly a very specific regulation. The customary period of labour is ten hours, but in consequence of the extraordinary exertions of paupers and other poor

* Dissertation on the Poor Laws.

persons employed on the roads or otherwise, in consideration of their being under the protection of his Majesty's Justices of the Peace, and of their good example to all others, from motives of humanity and propriety, two hours a day shall be deducted from their stated amount of labour, by order of the magistrates.

Providential are not always associated with industrious habits—they are, however, never the companions of idleness. Of all the departments of industry among the lower orders, none naturally affords the same excitements to frugality as the agricultural. The simplicity and uninterrupted regularity of a country life are peculiarly favourable to industrious, frugal, and honest habits. “*Vita, quam tu agrestem vocas, parsimonice, diligentice, juititice magistra est.*” Yet it is lamentable to observe the great deterioration that has taken place in the agricultural labourers in this respect; formerly, domestic and other servants, selected from the children of this class, were the most valuable. The parsimony and care that were necessary on the part of the parents in bringing up their children, generated in those children corresponding habits; but since the introduction of this system, Scotch bailiffs and Scotch gardeners have supplanted, in these respects, the children of our peasantry. The Scotch, not only better educated, but frugal from early habit, and dependant on their own exertions, are more careful in the manage-

ment and distribution of every thing entrusted to them.

It is more difficult to fathom the improvidence of the poor, than to trace that improvidence to its proper cause. The system of allowances not only generates prodigality, teaches the people to live from hand to mouth, and to look no further than the week's end, but offers direct impediments to saving with a view to secure their future independence.

In proof of the former part of this assertion, I adduce two cases, No. 16 and No. 19, which will appear in the account subjoined of the earnings of each family in this parish.

I first compare No. 16 with himself; his condition in 1821-22, with his condition in 1822-23. In 1821-22, he was one of the principal paupers of this parish; he felt himself dependent on the magistrates for protection. I have not been able to ascertain his actual earnings for the whole of this year, but I have no doubt, that as he was constantly employed, they were equal to his earnings in 1822-23*—that is, £33. 13s. 2½d. He received of the overseer in this year £10. 4s. 2d. making his gross receipts £43. 17s. 4½d. Notwithstanding this relief he was unable to pay his rent; he contracted debts, and in every respect was in an evil condition. He appeared to me to

* The earnings of the people in 1821-22 exceeded their earnings in 1822-23 by between 10 and 20 per cent.

be a misguided rather than a badly disposed man. At Michaelmas, 1822, observing him distressed, I determined to make an experiment, and desired him to come and work for me; he appeared surprised, as I had often reproved him for his conduct; he came; the wages were at that time at their lowest point, 8s. per week; after a short interval I desired my servant to pay him 9s. after a few weeks 10s. 6d. and after another interval 12s. per week. His whole earnings amounted at Michaelmas, 1823, to £33. 13s. 2½d. At Michaelmas, 1822, he had received 10£. 4s. 2d. in addition to his earnings; in this year he had received nothing: in the former year he had been unable to pay his rent; in this year he paid his rent, £4. 10s. and 10s. arrears; in the former year he contracted debts; in this year he discharged debts to the amount of £2, and was in every respect, to use his own words, "a better man." I studiously avoided during this year giving him any assistance in addition to his wages, and he is now employed in my stables, an honest and happy man, through his own efforts. The change in his condition is certainly not to be ascribed to his receipts, but to the satisfaction of his own mind, to a feeling of self respect, and to greater care and economy in the management of his concerns.

I now compare the circumstances of No. 16 with those of No. 19 in the same year, 1822-23; they have both the same number of children. The

earnings of No. 19 were, during this year, £34. 4s. 10d. exceeding the earnings of No. 16 by 10s. 7½d. No. 19 was still a pauper, and he had received allowance of the parish £9. 5s. 4d. making his gross receipts £43. 10s. 2d. that is, nearly £10 more than No. 16; and what was his condition? He could not pay his rent, his goods have been sold, he has been reduced to distress, and the parish has expended upon him since Michaelmas more than £5, in addition to his wages.

No. 19 would have *earned less, and received more of the parish*, if it had not been for the following circumstance:—He was detected in poaching, and though properly discharged, there was no question of his guilt. The magistrates very kindly admonished him on his discharge. He lamented to one of his companions, that though he had escaped, he had lost the good opinion of the magistrates. The consequence was, that he and his family went to work, and received during the remainder of the year a very few shillings in parochial relief.

No. 19 would have *received less of the parish and have earned more*, if he had been detected earlier in the year; for in the account of his earnings it appears that in twenty-one weeks before, and at the time of his detection, he earned 6s. per week; in thirty-one weeks after his detection he earned 18s. per week, so that if he had been the whole year on his industry, he would have received

more than he did, with the additional £10 of the parish.

So much for the first part of this proposition, that the system of allowance leads to prodigality. In proof of the second assertion—that it offers direct impediments to saving, with a view to secure future independence—I mention the following cases :

A clergyman, who was desirous to improve the habits of his parishioners, observed that many of the labourers who had no children, or only one or two, received as much wages as others who had large families. He spoke with one of these persons on the advantage of the Savings Bank, and after some persuasion induced him to promise to intrust him with his summer earnings to deposit. He brought about £8. 0s. 0d. and with a trembling voice begged that the overseers and farmers might not become acquainted with it, for that if they knew he had money they would refuse to relieve him in sickness, and often to employ him. The clergyman added a small sum to his deposit as an encouragement, but after a short time the man became alarmed, and withdrew his money, on the plea that his employment had so fallen off, that he was obliged to do so, though it was well known that in this year his earnings had not diminished.

The Rector of an adjoining parish related to me the following case :—He had obtained a sum of money for a poor woman in his parish, conjointly

with her brother and some other parties. They divided each £230. The clergyman, at the brother's request, deposited for him £200 in Messrs. Gurney's Bank. When the country bankers reduced their interest to $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. it appeared advisable to remove this sum by degrees into the Savings Bank. The clergyman met his client on that occasion, and happened to ask him how he was employed, and expressed a hope that he never went to the overseer. The man candidly replied, "never, but to have my allowance made up." The clergyman pointed out to him the fraudulent nature of his conduct; he promised not to renew his application, but expressed his fear that the overseer would suspect that he had some private means of support, in which case he would not only lose his allowance, but his employment.

Thus in many instances this system not only offers direct impediments to saving, with a view to secure independence, but compels the industrious to have recourse to fraud in self defence. Who would expect to generate providential habits in a state of society where dependance is rewarded, and where the acquisition of property subjects the possessor to great disadvantages? Who would expect veracity or honour, where falsehood is the best passport to success, and concealment the only means of safety?

The system of allowances thrusts its ruthless hand into the hearts of the people, and violates the

ties of nature. Natural affection between parent and child is the corner stone of social happiness. In Scotland, it is said, that the children and relations of persons who are in danger of falling upon the parish, generally use their utmost endeavours to prevent such a disgrace to the family. This was the case in England till the year 1795. Now it has become necessary to make laws to compel parents to maintain their children, and children to maintain their indigent parents. Such enactments are a lamentable proof that the natural affection of the poor has fallen to a low ebb. There were two cases in this small parish, in which the children, though in good business, had neglected their aged parents, merely because the parish had been accustomed to find them bread. The anxiety of a father to provide for his children would stimulate his industry, sweeten his toil, and endear those children to his heart. But if the law will decree that the father and the mother cannot or need not provide for their offspring, then may you expect that natural affection will cool, and lust usurp the dominion of virtuous love over the hearts of the people. If children are taught that from the day of their birth they have been sustained by an allowance from the parish—that as soon as they are able to work they are called upon to do so, not to assist their parents, but to relieve the parish charge—if as soon, or even before they attain the age of discretion, they are released by a decree of the magis-

trates from parental authority, and it becomes the interest of parent and child to separate all mutual connexion and concern, of course one must not expect filial affection or honour to parents. Who can read without pain, and even indignation, articles like the following, blazoned through our villages and cottages, with the signatures of the ministers of justice, and the ministers of religion, in a Christian country?

“Every child 1s. 9d.” “Every boy 3s.”

“All the earnings of any part to be considered as part of the allowance!”

When boys of 13, 14, or 15 years of age, begin to earn more than their allowance, the allowance of the parent is diminished by that excess; and to avoid that diminution, parents turn their children adrift upon the world, just at the time when they most need advice and protection, and when their industry should avail to their parents' comfort. I have seen father, and mother, and daughter, pensioners of the parish, preserving their separate allowance, separate purse, and separate cupboard, and quarrelling with each other who shall provide the fire. It would be tedious to multiply illustrations here; but when puerile and unnecessary regulations violate the ties of blood and the duties of religion, who can regard without detestation such an unrestricted system of pauperism? The rebuke of Jesus to those scribes and priests who, by their own by-laws, perverted the

law of nature, and of nature's God, is very pointed :
 " Ye say, if a man shall say to his father or mother,
 " it is Corban, by whatsoever thou mightest be pro-
 " fited by me, he shall be free, and ye suffer him
 " to do no more for his father and his mother,
 " making the word of God of none effect through
 " your traditions, and many such like things do
 " ye."

Honour and chastity in every rank, and especially among the poor, are intimately connected with natural affection. On this point, however, I will not enter into details, which could be only painful. It is sufficiently notorious, that promiscuous intercourse is become common from early age—that marriage is seldom contracted with honour, and that illegitimacy has greatly increased since the introduction of this system, and the existing laws of bastardy.

I requested the governor of a neighbouring hundred house to furnish me with the number of children born within a certain period, distinguishing the legitimate from the illegitimate. The account was, 77 children born—23 legitimate—54 illegitimate.

There is a woman belonging to this parish who has had four illegitimate children, and is now pregnant with a fifth. During the last year her children have been supported almost entirely by the parish, partly through the running away of the fathers, and partly through the negligence of the

former and the present overseers, who have either lost the orders or neglected to enforce them. The woman has, I believe, received more than the allowance of a widow in similar circumstances, and thus not only is profligacy shielded from punishment, but a bounty is afforded it. If the law of bastardy should continue in its present shape, a few simple regulations would correct many abuses attending it.

Criminal law is introduced for the prohibition of crime. Crimes and punishment, and their just connexion, form the essence of criminal law. But in a moral view of this subject, there is another important connexion—that is, between crime and *temptation* to crime. I may be permitted to moralise on this topic, for it is an important one. Sin was introduced, and is still propagated in this state of trial, by temptation. Poverty, with every other condition, has its temptations. It was the prayer of a man whose wisdom is bound up with that of Solomon's—"Give me not poverty, lest I steal, "and take the name of my God in vain." Dishonesty, falsehood, and false swearing, with a view to present relief, are the temptations of poverty. Extreme poverty, therefore, is an evil greatly to be deprecated; extreme poverty is a state of so much danger as well as misery, that charity, religion, and law, where charity and religion fail, should conspire to provide for its relief. "Destitution," as Hooker declares, "is such an impediment to

“virtue, as, till it be removed, suffereth not the
“mind of man to admit any other care.” It is
sound policy, therefore, to provide relief by law,
when humanity and religion fail to provide for the
destitute and indigent.

But a sense of destitution may be increased by cer-
tain treatment. All men, and poor men especially,
may have their feelings worked upon. To sustain
the virtue of persons who are in difficulty, it is ne-
cessary to sustain their courage. When the panic
is struck the battle is lost. What are these pro-
clamations of allowance, issued from time to time
by his Majesty's Justices of the Peace, but pro-
clamations to the labourers of England, that they
are in a destitute condition—that they cannot live
by their wages—that the farmers will not employ
them, or not pay them their just hire—that, unless
the magistrates interfered, they, their innocent
wives and helpless children, would starve and die
for want of maintenance. Those who have ob-
served the character and condition of the labourers
who are under this treatment, well know that this
panic, this feeling of destitution, this fear of oppres-
sion, is spread among them by these means. The
poor, from the nature of the case, must be often
pressed, and it requires no eloquence to work them
up to a feeling of distress. The difficulty and the
kindness is to sooth and allay those feelings, to
encourage them to struggle through the trials of
their lot with clean hands, and in dependance on

the blessing of Providence. The kindness is, to assist them through their own endeavours, to benefit them through their own industry, to assist them in distress, and to let them feel, that so long as distress shall last, aid shall not be wanting. But to call all Norfolk to wit, that the labourers in agricultural districts are in a forlorn and helpless condition is, one would suppose, the most likely means to stir up a feeling of distress, where it did not exist, and to aggravate it where it did.

Retaliation, especially where it has the appearance of self defence, (though not a Christian disposition,) is very natural. If an impression is generally given to the poor, as is the case, that they cannot live by their own industry, that the farmer withholds part of their just wages, it is natural for them to feel little hesitation and guilt in helping themselves, and in robbing the robber in return. In numberless cases the temptation to dishonesty, a temptation peculiarly strong, in all cases of poverty, real or imaginary, is increased by the effect of this system. Half the dishonesty, and more than half the insensibility to this crime, which is so common in the present day, must be ascribed to this cause.

Mr. Colquhoun, speaking of the Poor Laws, observes, "that the effects of that system incontestably prove, that with respect to the mass of the poor, there is something radically wrong in

“their execution.” Such was Mr. Colquhoun’s opinion, expressed after long experience.

What is the opinion of the magistracy and of the county of Norfolk, when they read the weekly lists of commitments in our county papers? Does it occur to the public that there is something radically wrong in the execution of the Poor Laws? At the very time these remarks are made, the Norfolk journals contain a list of well nigh one hundred persons, committed in the first fortnight of the month of February, to our gaols and houses of correction. The greater part of these persons come under the denomination (which every one understands) of rogues, vagabonds, idle and disorderly persons.* If punishments were extended to

* It may be observed that this system peculiarly encourages all irregular modes of living, by plunder and chance. The poacher and the smuggler will generally be found upon its lists. I could enumerate, within my own knowledge, many parishes which are remarkable for poaching, smuggling, robbery, and excessive poor rate.

During the past year five persons in the parish have been detected in offences against the game laws, and all of them pensioners on the allowance lists.

At a village on the sea coast, implicated as such villages generally are in smuggling, thirty or forty fishermen had been, during the winter, on their allowances. As their services were not wanted, or not valuable in agriculture, the guardians of the poor, from a full conviction of their ability to support themselves, offered them an asylum in the hundred house. Hoping to intimidate, they went in a body to the house of industry, but after a short time, there being no supply of gin, tobacco, and such luxuries, they returned to their boats and to their homes.

“Mox reficit rates,

“ — Indocilis pauperiem pati.”

all cases of fraud, cozenage, and false swearing, our gaols, enlarged and beautified as they are, must soon be pulled down and larger still constructed in their stead. If these cases could be discovered and recorded, the Norfolk journals would not contain the weekly lists. The public can never too highly estimate the benevolent exertions of those noblemen and gentlemen who have devoted their time and talents to the reformation of the criminal law, the improvement of prisons and prison discipline. They have, like practical men, whose heart is in their object, gone into our gaols and examined them cell by cell. Let them go still further, and trace back to their sources the various streams which supply these reservoirs of crime, and sure I am that in agricultural districts, they will be found to have their spring and fountain head in the present administration of the Poor Laws.*

It must excite feelings of compassion to the poor,

* Gentlemen must recollect, that the tread wheel is only an expedient, and that when the people shall become familiar with it, it will, like the gibbet, whipping-post, and pillory, lose its power as an instrument of terror and discipline. Besides it may, like these expedients, become unpopular; it may have so many regulators that it will become innocuous. Lord Chief Justice Hale very carefully and benevolently, like a Christian as he was, studied the condition of the poor, the principle of the poor laws, and the effect of punishment on the people. His verdict on these points is important. "Prevention of poverty," says he, "and idleness, would do more good than all the gibbets, whipping-posts, and gaols in the kingdom." On prevention, not punishment, must always rely our best hopes for preserving the virtue of the population.

to see them committed by fifties and by hundreds to a degrading punishment, however necessary. But how many punishments are there unseen and unknown, through the galling vexations of this system. Suspicion and contempt are punishments. The visitations of conscience for lying and perjury are punishments. A poor man in this parish had a dispute with his master, respecting some work. The dispute originated in a mistake in both parties. The farmer coming from another part of the country, estimated his work by the statute rod of five yards and a half—the labourer by the local measure of seven yards. The price was considered, by the poor man and his fellow labourers, as an attack upon the custom of the country. A consultation was held, and the poor man, excited by his own feelings and the prejudices of his companions, flew to his allowance and to the magistrates for protection. He had been employed some time at his work before the question of value arose, and had taken on account of his work, a few pence short of his allowance, (for two weeks before his application for relief.) The pauper therefore stated his case accordingly. The overseer, on his part, stated that the man could not tell what his earnings were, as the work was not admeasured. The pauper replied, that he was quite sure he had taken the full value of his work. The oath was administered, and an order founded upon it, for him to receive an allowance of eleven shillings per week.

When he returned his work was measured up, and it was found that his earnings exceeded the allowance ordered, and consequently that the oath had been falsely taken, and that the order was nugatory.

I did not hear of these circumstances till after they had taken place. It appeared to be my duty to speak to the man, who, though in this instance infatuated and misguided, is a good sort of person. I read over to him his oath, and the order founded upon it. He appeared shocked and astonished, and said with great agitation that he had not sworn to any thing of the kind; that he had sworn that he had not received his allowance, and that he could not live without that. I happened to be called from home for some weeks after this time. On my return I found that this man had been ill. I visited him, and observed something peculiar in the state of his mind. My conversation with his wife still further excited my suspicion. I then asked the respectable surgeon who attends the poor of this parish, what he thought of this person's state of health. He replied, that he had no bodily disease whatever, but that his spirits were strongly affected, and that he was a melancholy man.

Let not any reader, however accustomed he may be to the administration of oaths, think lightly of this narrative. The following vivid description of the effects of perjury on the conscience is from the pen of one equally eminent as a theologian and

philosopher:—" From the impulse of passion,
 " perhaps, or self interest, or the fear of punish-
 " ment, or the power of persuasion, or from mere
 " levity and infatuation, a man is led to swear
 " falsely, and he contrives for a while to confound
 " or delude his conscience ; but a time comes when
 " passion and delusion vanish, and rational reflec-
 " tion takes their place. Then awakens conscience,
 " who is an arbitrary personage, and so far from
 " being on such occasions obsequious to our wishes
 " and inclinations, that the more we strive to silence
 " her the more violent becomes her opposition,
 " until it terminates either in melancholy or mad-
 " ness. The unhappy man has now no rest either
 " day or night. The reproaches of conscience
 " break even his sleep ; for it is in the silence and
 " solitude of the night that she raises her awful
 " voice to the loudest pitch, and then he is at last
 " led to wish that he had it in his power to retract
 " his perjury."

I felt much interested for him, and induced him,
 after some persuasion, to come and work in my
 garden. In a few weeks he recovered his spirits.
 I begged one of the farmers to give him the best
 employment he could find. He did so, and the
 man has continued ever since in his service. I
 sincerely hope that this man, more honest than
 many, has only suffered in the temporary loss of
 peace what so many suffer in the permanent loss of
 all principle.

The magistrates regard themselves, and perhaps justly in all other cases, only as officers before whom the oath is administered: but I must think, that in this case, when they undertake the direction and management of the poor, they are still further implicated. Many conscientious magistrates feel this subject very strongly, but they can never extricate themselves from the difficulty till they cease to act in a double capacity, till they cease to act in a business for which, through their utter ignorance of existing circumstances, they are altogether unqualified. If the system were in itself right and necessary, no one can possibly blame the adopting an invariable rule—no other rule is practicable; but on the other hand, the impracticability of the rule, on any just and equitable principle, is the strongest possible refutation of it.*

No one can be surprized to hear, that the general character of the population, where such a system is pursued, is greatly depressed. These decrees consign the peasantry, and their children after them, to a very low condition. Improvident habits, regardlessness of consequences, and despair of success, deprive them of all qualifications for any

* The execution of the Poor Laws (says Lord Kames) would be impracticable, were a distinction between virtue and vice attempted by an enquiry into the conduct and character of every pauper. Where is a judge to be found who will patiently follow out such a dark and intricate expiscation? To accomplish the task a man must abandon every other concern.—*Sketches of Man.*

other situation in life. It is well known that every farmer on a considerable scale generally employs a labourer as a foreman and superintendant. The qualifications for such a situation are industry, care, and such a degree of integrity as will not only refrain, but restrain others from acts of dishonesty. Not one of the labourers belonging to the parish has ever been employed for any length of time in such a capacity, except No. 16, the man who is employed on my small farm. All the men in such situations are brought from other parts, where pauperism is not so rank and general as it is here. Since my residence in this parish applications have been made to me by some friends in London, to send up young men as labourers in gardens, and similar situations. Anxious as I should have been to recommend the youth of this place to such situations, I have not known one on whose demeanour, desire to please, and to succeed, I could sufficiently rely. I have, however, known young men sent up to these situations from other parts of this county. One who went up a few years ago is now in a situation in the receipt of between £100. and £200. per annum. Another, after remaining in his place a few years, has returned and taken a small farm in his native village. A third, who went up about two years ago, as a labourer in a garden, was soon after removed to an inferior situation in a counting-house, from which, by his good conduct, he has risen to a situation of considerable

confidence and respectability, with a very handsome salary.

These instances form a delightful contrast to the story of the poor of those districts over which pauperism is universally spread. They excite, however, painful regret in the mind of any one who is interested for the character and happiness of the people among whom his lot is cast, who feels a strong persuasion that there is truth in the assertion of Defoe—"that no man in England of sound limbs and senses, need be poor merely for want of work." There is scarcely a family in England but from it might arise some individual, who, by his skill and enterprize in trade or commerce, might raise himself and become the protector of his family. It is painful to witness the splendour of our cities, the increase of our commerce and wealth, the beautiful face of the country cultivated like a garden, and yet to behold whole districts cut off, by capricious regulations, from the privileges of their country, and consigned, generation after generation, to pauperism and degradation.*

Having noticed the effect of this system upon

* To entail irreversible poverty, (says our British moralist, with his characteristic feeling,) to entail irreversible poverty on generation after generation, merely because their ancestors happened to be poor, is in itself cruel, if not unjust, and utterly contrary to the maxims of a commercial nation, which always support and promote a rotation of property, and offer to every individual a chance of mending his condition by his diligence.—*Dr. Johnson's Review of a Free Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil.*

the poor, it would be almost unfair not to notice its effects on the other classes of society—the administrators and agents. Who can recollect without pride and pleasure that beautiful epoch of our history, the Revolution, when nobles and bishops, gentry and clergy, yeomen and people, all uniting in that glorious cause, rescued themselves and their posterity from superstition and from slavery? Whoever contrasts that state of civil union with the present must regret the change. The hearty attachment of the yeomen to the gentlemen and clergy, has been discouraged, and for the easy yoke of good will and mutual respect, an absurd and galling interference has been introduced, which has spread on many occasions disloyalty to the King, disaffection to the church, and mutual animosities among the respective classes of society.*

* “We cannot forbear to say, that some legislative remedy is immediately requisite to correct, not the original principle of the Poor Laws, but the mistaken policy of the last fifty years. Until we retrace these false steps, until some of the recent enactments are repealed, or rather some of the practical regulations now in force are prohibited, especially those which vest in the local magistrates the arbitrary adjustment of this tax, the mischief will increase from year to year at an alarming rate. While a power is given to gentlemen not residing, not even possessing property in a parish, to dictate the rate of allowance which the farmer is bound to pay—while every discontented pauper may procure this compulsory relief, by telling his tale to a rich neighbour, whose benevolence costs him nothing, we may be sure that the average allowance will exceed the necessity of the case, and will tend to a continual and indefinite increase. This is one of the greatest and most galling oppressions under which agriculture now labours, and if not speedily checked, it will convert this sweet and cheerful country into an immense arena, on which the fierce passions and conflicting interests of

The change that has taken place in the character of the yeomen and farmers, as it appears in the treatment of their labourers, is the most to be lamented. Formerly every thing between the farmer and his men was managed by a kind, conventional, good understanding, whereas every thing is now transacted by reference to legal regulations from both parties. The labourer has been tempted to throw off the natural protection of his master, to set up an independent interest, to fight the weak with the strong, and has of course suffered for his imprudence. Before the introduction of this system the whole practice of English agriculture was in the benevolent spirit of the Hebrew statute—"Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn." Then the labourer of the country welcomed the return of seasons as the return of joy. Seed time and harvest, summer and winter, brought with them a succession of customary acts of kindness. Every employment began and ended with a dinner or a supper, or a festive entertainment. The master paid his servants, not in part, but in full. The overseer and the magistrate had no business in this matter. Society was well cemented in civil and social union. The master's interest was in the labourer's comfort, and the labourer's happiness in the master's success. These customen will be engaged in hopeless warfare, and the voice of reason be drowned amidst their mutual clamour."—*Quarterly Review*, LIII, p. 267.

toms, however, so natural and useful in agriculture, are nearly by gone. A strange and foreign influence has been introduced, which has disunited the master and his servant. Strangers indeed have interposed with great professions of kindness to the weaker party, but these professions have altogether deceived their votaries. Before the patrons of this system flatter themselves as benefactors to the poor, let them reflect what the system has done, and of what it has deprived the English labourers. It has not given them that with which their own industry would have supplied them—a comfortable maintenance. It has deprived them of those indulgences which hard labour peculiarly requires, to which hard labour gives a peculiar relish, and which none but their employers can bestow. For that noble beneficence which grants those indulgencies has been substituted a cold charity, that doles out maintenance, and for the festive board the humiliating pittance of eleemosynary allowances. There is some reason to hope that this system is about to fall by the solemn decisions of the senate, and the recorded verdicts of the courts of law. It is desirable that the public mind should be prepared for the happy change, and that it should be met with the acclamations of all parties. The industrious poor are perfectly safe—they will infallibly meet their reward in an increased demand for labour. The labourer will require no allowance ; he will require work and wages, and these

will supply his necessities. He may need kind and generous treatment, to allay his apprehensions, and I cannot but believe that there are many benevolent persons connected with the cultivation of the soil, who, being easy in their present circumstances, will revive those friendly practices which never fail to give satisfaction to the labourer, and to promote their own interest. A few good examples of this sort will soon produce a general influence, and with the revival of good will the mischiefs of the present system will disappear, like the ravages of a winter storm with the return of a warm and genial summer.

CHAPTER III.

I look upon it in an evil light. I think it not advisable.

I am sure it is not necessary.

BURKE.

MORAL evils, like those mentioned in the foregoing chapter, are more intimately connected with political errors than is usually imagined. The practice which has been disclosed, as well as the evils resulting from that practice, are so manifestly at variance with common sense, and with the plainest principles of political science, that a direct refutation of them seems scarcely to be required. The refutation has, however, engaged the attention of the greatest men of our age, and notwithstanding the prejudices and slander which self-love and plebeian cant have thrown around this subject, they have avowed and vindicated those principles in which human happiness is involved, and which can never be departed from without letting in upon society a most pernicious tide of evils. These great men, like all the great masters of science, are content with tracing out the main outlines, and

having established their principles by arguments which they judge to be conclusive, have left others to apply those principles, and to illustrate them for the benefit of common readers. This is certainly an inferior but important department of the subject, and one which is, in many respects, still open to those who, sensible of their inferiority, claim only the rewards of usefulness. Besides, these principles may be qualified or extended when they are applied to many unthought-of particulars. Experiments and observations, however humble, may alter the plausible appearances of things, may controvert or confirm conclusions which must always be stronger or weaker as the induction is more or less general and complete. The thinking part of the community is satisfied on this question; the difficulty remains with the unthinking, always the largest mass, and on that account the most difficult to move. This difficulty is greatly increased when persons of rank or education are induced, from popular or better motives, to join the side of prejudice and clamour.

The strongest argument against the practice in question lies in its immoral, mischievous, and degrading tendency. The very existence of evils like those detailed ought to be sufficient, in a country like this, to decide the case for ever. But as there are some scrupulous persons, who affect not to see these evil results, or who pretend that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages, or that a

system which is in itself* unjust, impolitic, and cruel, is practically necessary, it may be desirable to offer a refutation of another description, corresponding, as much as possible, to the familiar illustrations already given of this practice and its effects.

This system is first of all defended on the plea of humanity. There can be little humanity in robbing the industrious man of the reward of his labour, or in encouraging the slothful in his idleness. These humane advocates of this system will, I hope, be shocked at its inhumanity, and abandon it for ever. An anonymous, but well-known and distinguished writer, has so ably refuted this plea, that I cannot forbear to quote his admirable remarks at length :

“The fundamental error to which I allude is
 “the confusion of moral duty with the task of
 “legislation. That what all individuals *ought to*
 “do, it is the business of the laws to *make them*
 “do, is a very plausible position, and has actually

* See Appendix (II.) Report from Select Committee of the House of Commons, 1817. This memorial does the noblemen and gentlemen of Suffolk great honour, and it is to be hoped that they never have lent or will lend their authority to a system which they have so fully shewn to be unjust, impolitic, and cruel. This memorial represents the injustice in a point of view in which it has not fallen under my observation—viz. in throwing the wages of labour upon persons who derive no benefit from that labour, the tradesmen and others not engaged in the business of agriculture. In this view it is in fact a rate for the employer, not for the labourer, and a most outrageous act of injustice.

“ been adopted by some of the ablest and most
“ virtuous men. But nothing in reality is more
“ fallacious—nothing less congruous with the na-
“ ture of man, and with that state of discipline and
“ trial which his present existence is clearly designed
“ to be. In the first place, it destroys the very
“ essence, not only of benevolence, but of all virtue,
“ to make it compulsory, or to speak more properly,
“ it is a contradiction in terms. An action to be
“ virtuous must be voluntary. It requires a living
“ agent to give it birth. If we attempt to trans-
“ plant it from our own bosoms to the laws, it
“ withers and dies. The error is fostered by the
“ promiscuous application of words to individuals
“ and to the laws, which in their proper application
“ belong to the former only. We talk of mild, of
“ merciful, of benevolent, of humane laws. The
“ professed object of such laws is to do what mild,
“ and merciful, and benevolent men are disposed
“ to do. But even to suppose them capable of
“ *effecting* this, a point which will presently be
“ discussed, yet the humanity is lost, as soon as
“ the act proceeds from a dead letter, not from
“ the spontaneous impulse of any individual. And
“ in fact this endeavour to invest the laws with
“ the office of humanity, inconsistent and imprac-
“ ticable as it is, when attempted from the purest
“ motive, does in reality often originate from an
“ imperfect sense of moral obligation, and a low
“ degree of benevolence in men themselves. Absurd

“ as the thought is when expressed in words, man
 “ would be virtuous, be humane, be charitable *by*
 “ *proxy*. This, however, not only the divine pur-
 “ pose and the declared end of our being, but com-
 “ mon sense itself forbids. To throw off the care
 “ of want, and disease, and misery, upon the ma-
 “ gistrate, is to convert humanity into police, and
 “ religion into a statute-book.”*

Omitting, therefore, all apologies of this sort, there are two assertions (and they are no more than assertions) on which this practice is generally defended; the first is an assertion of its usefulness, the second an assertion of its necessity. It is useful, say its advocates, because it adjusts the wages of labour to the price of provisions—it is necessary because the population in the agricultural districts of England presses upon the means of subsistence. The first of these assertions is founded in a speculative error, and both involve a practical falsehood.

As to the first, that this system adjusts the wages of labour to the price of provisions, this looks plausible; it looks particularly plausible in agricultural society, because provisions and the necessities of life are the immediate produce of the labourer's work. But *ought* the price of provisions to be the standard of the wages of labour? And

* A second Letter to the Right Hon. Robert Peel, by one of his constituents, p. 17.

can laws make it so? Is the price of provisions the standard by which the employer *can afford* to pay, or by which the labourer *has a right* to expect wages? If this principle, which it has been attempted to force upon agriculture, had, by the same tyrannical means, been forced upon the hardware, or woollen, or cotton, or shipping trade of England, could our manufactures or commerce have thriven? This simple rule, if it were possible to confirm it, might at any moment throw out of work all the labourers employed in our manufacturing towns. If for a time it could provide them maintenance, it could not permanently raise their wages. This indeed is a sufficient reason why the labourer ought not to expect the wages of labour to fluctuate with the market of provisions, because such a rule would manifestly interfere with the success of the trade on which he depends, with the profit of his employer, with the demand for his labour, and with his own permanent interest.

But it will be said, this may be true of trade and commerce, and quite consistent with the maxims of political economy, but we gentlemen of the country do not profess to be political economists; we do not trouble our minds with investigations of that sort—but we conclude, with the vulgar around us, that the farmer ought to pay his labourer according to the price at which he sells his corn, and we will make him do so. Under the influence of this rustic impression, it has been

attempted in agriculture to *force* the wages of labour to vary with the price of corn, without any respect to the crop, supply, or demand. The attempt has altogether failed of its object, but it has not failed to interfere with the supply and demand of labourers—it has not failed to attach the same number to agriculture at all times and under all fluctuations—to increase that number progressively, where necessity might require their diminution, and at various times to rob the landlord of his rent, the farmer of his profit, the labourer of his wages, and the consumer of his comfort.

Wages in agriculture would more, than in any other business, if left to their natural course, vary in some degree with the price of provisions, because the profit of the farmer and the demand for labour would *generally* vary with the price of corn. If no attempts had been made by the police of the country to *force* the wages of labour, with every advance in the price of corn, and consequently by the farmer to diminish them with every fall, the wages of agricultural labourers would, like those of manufacturers, have found their level; some mean value, which would enable them to support themselves and families, notwithstanding the common variations in the price of provisions. This mean value would have been more for the interest of all parties than any chimerical scheme, however plausible at first sight, of forcing the

wages of labour to vary with the fluctuating prices of wheat, meal, and flour.*

The Mosaic dispensation enacted no regulations respecting the price of wages; it did, however, require, that the hire which might be agreed upon between the contracting parties should be paid every night to the day labourer, and for this reason—"that he is poor and his heart is in it." Can any folly or madness exceed that which would, from week to week, and from one petty sessions to another, tamper with the feelings and passions of the labourers on this point? If the wages of labour could be made to vary with the assize of bread, or any other fluctuating standard, it is certainly very undesirable that they should do so. The passions of the people would be kept in a continual state of agitation, and discontent and confusion could be the only result.

Such is the result, to a very great extent, in those districts where any thing of this sort is attempted. No sooner is there a change in the

* The influence of this system, so far as it extends, not only interferes with the interest of the parties immediately concerned, but with the general good, tending to increase consumption in time of scarcity and to diminish it in time of plenty. "The price of labour, when left to find its natural level, is a most important political barometer, expressing the relation between the supply of provisions and the demand for them—between the quantity to be consumed and the number of consumers. Instead, however, of considering it in this light, we consider it as something which we may raise or depress at pleasure, something which depends principally upon his Majesty's Jussives of the Peace."—*Malthus, book iii. c. 5.*

price of corn, (and such changes are very frequent) than there are meetings and consultations. The whole Sunday, a day of leisure, and a day which generally falls between the payment of the masters and the sessions of the magistracy, is devoted to discussion and debate; a general ferment and irritation ensues; the scale of the magistrates is looked for with anxiety, and the poor are deluded by the merest mockery that ever was invented. The following is a very common article in these decrees:

“ When a rise or fall takes place of *two-pence* per stone in the price of bread, a corresponding alteration to be made of a *penny* per head, at the next sitting of the magistrates, after such rise or fall. At the time of setting the above scale, *bread* was 2s. per stone.”*

Justice and policy seem then to deny this law. What is the testimony of experience? Did the wages of labour ever vary with the price of provisions? Can laws and regulations ever enforce any thing like a fixed ratio between them? A very cursory historical view will determine this point. We read of great changes in the price of provisions in the history of every country—we do

* “ Their benevolence,” (says Mr. Malthus, speaking of these proceedings of the local magistrates) “ must be either childish play or hypocrisy; it must be either to amuse themselves, or to pacify the minds of the common people by a mere shew of attention to their wants.”

not read of frequent changes in the price of labour. In the days of Solon, the price of a sheep was an attic drachma, and the price of corn 4s. 6d. per quarter, and the daily pay of a soldier commonly about the same as of a day labourer, was a drachma, about $7\frac{3}{4}$, nearly the value of the denarius, which was the pay of the Roman soldiery at almost all periods of their history.*

The following table,† collected from Sir F. Eden's History of the Poor, will clearly shew that the wages of labour did not vary during a long period of our own history with the price of provisions.

* Without giving much credit to the following rabbinical story, we may collect from it that the Jews and Egyptians had not much notion of a fluctuating price of labour. The Egyptians sued the Jews for the gold and silver vessels carried off by their ancestors at their departure from Egypt, and insisted on their making restitution; the Jews did not plead prescription; they readily admitted the claim, and offered restitution, but at the same time preferred a counter claim in their turn. For 210 years, said they, we were in Egypt to the number of 600,000 men; we therefore demand day wages for that period, at the rate of a denarius for each man, and our account stands thus—

$$365 \times 210 = 76,650 \text{ days.}$$

600,000

45,990,000,000 denarii.

The Egyptians of course dropt the suit.

† Second Letter to the Right Hon. Robt. Peel.

PRICE OF PROVISIONS.				PRICE OF LABOUR.			
		Value in present Money.		Daily Wages appointed II. Hen. VII. A. D. 1495.		Value in present Money.	
		£. s. d.	£. s. d.		£. s. d.	£. s. d.	
1549. From 1500 to 1511. 1500.	Wheat, per Quarter	0 3 4	0 5 0½	A Mower, with diet	0 0 4	0 0 5½	
	Average of ditto ..	0 5 2½	0 8 0½	Ditto without	0 0 6	0 0 9½	
	Average of Barley	0 3 4	0 5 0½	A Reaper or Carter with diet	0 0 3	0 0 4½	
	An Ox	0 11 8	0 18 0½	Ditto without	0 0 5	0 0 7½	
	A Sheep	0 1 8	0 2 6½	Woman Labourer, or other Labourers, with diet ..	0 0 2½	0 0 3½	
				Ditto without	0 0 4	0 0 6½	
1531.	A large Ox	1 6 8	1 16 9	No account of the Wages of labour till 1575.			
	A Sheep	0 2 10	0 3 10¾				
	Wheat, average ..	0 5 4	0 7 3¾				
	Barley	0 2 4	0 3 2½				
1533.	Beef and Mutton, per lb.	0 0 0½	0 0 0½	748			
1549.	Best fat wether ...	0 4 4	0 5 0½				
1550.	Best Wheat	0 13 4	0 15 6½				
1560.	Wheat, from	0 8 0	0 8 3½				
	to	1 6 0	1 9 5½	0. 105			
	Beef, per lb.	0 0 1	0 0 1				
1575.	Wheat	1 0 0	1 0 8				
1587.	Wheat, from	1 0 0	1 0 8	Labourer without diet	0 0 8	0 0 8½	
	to	4 0 0	4 2 8	Thresher, ditto ...	0 0 8	0 0 8½	
1589.	Wheat	0 18 6	0 19 1½	Ditcher, with diet	0 0 4	0 0 4½	
	Barley	0 13 4	0 13 10½	Thresher, without	0 0 6	0 0 6½	
	A Wether	0 6 8	0 6 10¾	Labourer in a garden	0 0 3	0 0 3½	
1590.	Sheep	0 6 8	0 6 10¾	Ditto in an orchard	0 0 4	0 0 4½	
	Wheat	1 1 0	1 1 8½	Thatcher	0 0 5	0 0 5½	
	Barley	0 13 4	0 13 10¾	Labourer in York-shire.			
1593.	Wheat, exportation price	1 0 0	1 0 8	Summer, with diet	0 0 2	0 0 2	q. 2
	Barley	0 12 0	0 12 4½	without	0 0 5	0 0 5½	
				Winter, with diet	0 0 1½	0 0 1	q. 2. 8
				without	0 0 4	0 0 4½	
				In Chester.			
				Servant Carpenter, or Thatcher, with diet	0 0 1	0 0 1	q. 1
1596.	Wheat	2 2 0	2 3 4½	Smith or Sawyer In Chester.	0 0 2	0 0 2	q. 2
	Rye	1 4 0	1 4 9½	The same as in 1593.			
	Beef, the stone ..	0 1 9	0 1 9¾				
	A fat Wether	0 15 0	0 15 6				
1597.	A fat Bullock	5 19 6	6 3 6				
	A fat Sheep	0 14 6	0 14 11½				
1598.	Wheat	0 18 0	0 18 7½				
1599.	Ditto	1 7 0	1 7 11				
1601.	.....	.....	.....	Labourer, without diet	0 0 10	0 0 10	q. 8

During the last forty years of the seventeenth century, and the first twenty of the eighteenth, the average price of corn was such, as compared with the wages of labour, would enable the labourer to purchase, with a day's earnings, two-thirds of a peck of wheat. From 1720 to 1750, the price of wheat had so fallen, while wages had risen, that instead of two-thirds the labourer could purchase the whole of a peck of wheat with a day's labour.*

If we take the period since 1795, when the allowance system was introduced, we shall find that these regulations of police have altogether failed in their object of adjusting the wages of labour to the price of provisions. During that period the price of corn has been quadrupled—the wages of labour have never been doubled—the price of corn has again fallen three-fourths—the wages of labour have never fallen one-half. If we take only the three last years, in 1821 wheat was selling in the market at 16s. the coomb, and day labour was 1s. 4d.—in 1823 wheat has been 35s. the coomb, and day labour 1s. 6d. which clearly shews that these regulations fail of their purposes, and do not adjust the wages of labour to the price of provisions. “Experience,” says the highest authority on this question, “seems to

* The average price of wheat from 1595 to 1764 was equal to the average price of wheat in this county, from 1821 to 1823, nearly.—See *Adam Smith*, book 1, c. xi. p. 303.

“shew, that law can never regulate wages properly, though it has often pretended to do so.”*

A schedule which will follow, exhibiting an account of the labour, poor rate, price of wheat, wages per day, annual amount of day wages, and total annual amount of wages, supplied me by a gentleman who has kept his accounts very accurately for more than twenty years, is a very useful document, and will clearly shew, that wages have fluctuated from the influence of demand through the profit of the farmer, and fallen through the check to that demand from the loss of the farmer; but that in no instance have these decrees of the local magistrates made the wages of labour, *or even the poor rate*, vary according to the pretended scale.†

More attention perhaps has been bestowed upon this argument than it deserved, but as the county of Norfolk has the peculiar honour of inventing the system, this argument, on which it is founded, seemed to require the utmost respect. “The “squires of Norfolk,” says Mr. Burke, “had dined, “when they gave it as their opinion that the rate “of wages ought to rise and fall with the market “of provisions.”‡ If the squires of Norfolk were

* Adam Smith, book 1, c. 8.

† A more full examination of the poor rate returns entirely confirms this fact.

‡ Thoughts and Details on Scarcity.—*Burke's Works*, vol. 7, p. 397.

among the first to introduce, we will hope they will not be among the last to abandon this system and to remedy the evils that have followed from its adoption. If in an *unguarded* moment, under the influence of some *generous* but *misguiding* impulse, they fell into a great error, we will hope, that in their more sober moments, they will plead the frailty of their nature, confess their error, and make the only atonement in their power.*

We come now to the second assertion, the strong hold of this system—the assertion of its necessity. The supply of labour, it is said, so far exceeds the demand—in other words, the population presses so much upon the means of subsistence and employment—that it is necessary to adopt this measure in agricultural districts. I repeat these words—in *agricultural districts*.

These decrees of the local magistracy carry on the face of them many strong presumptions against their necessity. As there are more direct refutations, it is unnecessary to mention these presumptions, though they would form a considerable list. One may be mentioned, and that is, the *variable*

* I have heard that this system was introduced not altogether under the influence of the generous Bacchus, or of his preceptor Silenus; it is said that it originated with a mean rather than a benevolent motive. The garb of benevolence was and is still thrown around it—but it is said that gentlemen during the war were afraid that the price of labour should rise to a ruinous height, from which it would be impossible again to reduce it, and therefore they invented this fly wheel to check its advance.

and capricious nature of these decrees. A road, a rivulet, a heath, a parish, hundred, or county boundary, and especially a select vestry or work-house, will make these decrees vary 30 and 40 per cent. vary till the allowance becomes evanescent. These variations, too, are often in a ratio the inverse of that which the argument for them supposes, the allowance being the most universal and the poor rate the heaviest, where the population is least in comparison of the demand for labour. This certainly does not look like necessity, but rather like caprice and misrule.

It will be asked, how can you pretend to say that this system is not necessary, when it is actually adopted on that presumption in so many places, sanctioned by so many respectable individuals, and we know that eight millions have been spent in one year, over and above the wages of labour, in the maintenance of the poor. The eight millions, at least so much of it as has been spent in this way, is a powerful proof of the extent to which this system has been carried, but no proof of its necessity; it would be begging the case to bring it as such, where the necessity is the point in question. It may be only a proof that the practitioners in this case have been mistaken. It may be only a proof that the agriculture of England, which has spent so large a sum for unprofitable and mischievous purposes, could afford to spend a much larger for more honourable and beneficial uses, the proper

reward of the labourer's work, and the improved cultivation of the soil.

If a physician were called to attend a patient, and from a full conviction that the complaint was hepatic, should prescribe medicine accordingly; if after a length of time the patient should grow worse under this treatment, and he and his friends, suspecting some error in judgment, should call in another physician; if the latter in his consultation should express his suspicion that the complaint was pulmonary, or of some other character, and his Esculapian brother should still persist in his opinion, that the patient was labouring under a liver complaint, on the ground that he had for months taken calomel, and was actually in a state of salivation, the logic of this man would of course throw a strong suspicion on his skill. But he would in fact reason as justly as those who assert that because pauperism in England has absorbed so much under the present system, the disease was therefore real, and the management necessary. But what must we say of the empiricism of the man who, having as he supposed, ascertained the nature of the disease, should apply the very medicines which were calculated to provoke and aggravate it? If it were true, which it is not, that the fund for the maintenance of labour in this country is insufficient for the supply of work and food for the labourers, this system is the most directly calculated at the same

time to increase the number, diminish the demand, and accumulate the evil.

There are sources from which the most important and accurate information may be obtained, and though the investigation may be tedious, the result must be certain and satisfactory.

Dr. Adam Smith has given the following reasons, supported by the strongest facts, for concluding that the wages of labour in England are amply sufficient for the maintenance of the labourer. The reasons are peculiarly applicable to agriculture, and were never more convincing than at the present moment. "There are," he observes, "many plain symptoms that the wages of labour are no where in this country regulated by the lowest rate which is consistent with humanity."*

First. In almost every part of Great Britain there is a distinction, even in the lowest species of labourers, between summer and winter wages. Summer wages are always highest; but on account of the extraordinary expence of fuel, the maintenance of a family is most expensive in winter. Wages, therefore, being highest when this expence is lowest, it seems evident that they are not regulated by what is necessary for this expence. A labourer, it may be said indeed, ought to save part of his summer wages, in order to defray his winter

* Of course this political economist did not contemplate the benevolent allowance system.

expenditure; and that through the whole year they do not exceed what is necessary to maintain their families through the whole year. *A slave, however, or one absolutely dependent on us for immediate subsistence,** would not be treated in this manner. His daily subsistence would be proportioned to his daily necessities.

Secondly. The wages of labour do not in Great Britain fluctuate with the price of provisions.

Thirdly. As the price of provisions rises more from year to year than the wages of labour, so on the other hand the wages of labour vary more from place to place than the price of provisions.

Fourthly. The variations in the price of labour not only do not correspond, either in place or time with the price of provisions, but they are frequently quite opposite.

But besides these conclusive reasons against the alleged necessity for "this meddling of authority," there is one other proof which seems to admit of

* Let the patrons of the law of maintenance observe the approximation of pauperism to a state of slavery. Let the advocates of emancipation in the West Indies, and for bondage in England, observe it. The country gentlemen who seem to be pretty unanimous in lifting up their voice against West Indian slavery, (and who will not raise his voice against it?) are the last persons who should complain of the economy of the planters, on those estates at least where the Negroes are moderately worked, humanely treated, supplied with food and raiment, and provided with a medical attendant, for this seems to be the very beautiful ideal of their own system.

as little limitation as possible, being founded upon indisputable facts.

The annual expenditure of the farmers, for *manual labour* in the cultivation of the soil, is the annual revenue of the labourers. That fund supplies them with the necessaries and comforts which, when agriculture is free, they annually consume and enjoy. If therefore we can ascertain with any degree of precision the amount of this fund, which the necessary cultivation of the soil supplies, and especially if we can arrive with any tolerable degree of accuracy at the degrees and proportions in which this fund is distributed, we shall obtain what might be the actual condition of the labourers.

If the present departure from the acknowledged rules of morals and policy, of justice and business, can be justified in agriculture on the ground of necessity, that necessity will appear as the annual expenditure in labour bears, a small or greater proportion to the number of persons, who are to perform and receive the wages of that labour.

It is of great importance to ascertain these facts, and I shall endeavour to trace them out—first, in my own small parish—secondly, in the case of this village, conjoined with a larger neighbouring village, with which it is a good deal connected in the business of agriculture—thirdly, in the case of Freebridge Lynn, the hundred in which this parish is situated—and fourthly, in the case of

the county of Norfolk—and fifthly, in the case of England and Wales.

FIRST CASE.

It will be necessary to go into details, in order to ascertain the fact with as much precision as possible.

The parish of Little Massingham contains, by admeasurement, two thousand, two hundred, and seventy-eight acres, of which about seventy are wood, eight acres waste, and the rest cultivated land—two thousand two hundred. The land is farmed on the Norfolk four-course system of husbandry, which it is well known demands a large amount of manual labour. It would not be difficult by estimation to arrive, with a practical approximation, at the amount of labour necessarily required in any particular case. I shall have occasion hereafter to employ this description of evidence as collateral, but it will be first desirable to ascertain the matter from an actual account of payments and receipts.

The population of Little Massingham is one hundred and fifty-two, of whom one hundred and fourteen are labourers, and the wives and children of labourers. I take all the labourers, both those who belong to the parish by the law of settlement and those who do not, because the distinction is not necessary to the present purpose ; besides there are resident in the parish of Great Massingham,

belonging to Little Massingham, twelve families, and fifty-two men, women, and children ; so that the whole number of persons, old and young, dependant upon the wages of labour, in the cultivation of the soil for their support, is one hundred and sixty-six. There are besides fourteen aged and infirm persons, part resident and part not, making a total of one hundred and eighty persons. This population I shall distribute into three classes : first class, the single men and boys above the age of fifteen ; second class, married and able bodied men ; third class, aged, infirm, &c. &c.

CLASS 1st.

Single Men, the greater part of whom are children of the married.

No.		Magistrates' Allowance.				Actual Earnings.		
1	.....	£10	8	0	.....	£23	19	4
2	.....	10	8	0	.....	21	7	0
3	.....	10	8	0	.....	20	9	0
4	.....	10	8	0	.....	19	10	6
5	.....	10	8	0	.....	23	0	7
6	.....	10	8	0	.....	20	17	4½
7	.....	7	16	0	Boy	9	19	6
8	.....	10	8	0	.....	20	9	6
9	.....	10	8	0	.....	22	0	0
10	.....	10	8	0	.....	20	0	0
11	.....	7	16	0	Boy	10	10	0
12	.....	10	8	0	.....	20	0	0
13	.....	10	8	0	.....	19	12	8
14	.....	10	8	0	.....	19	10	0
15	.....	10	8	0	.....	18	14	0
16	.....	10	8	0	.....	24	3	10
17	.....	10	8	0	.....	27	0	0
18	.....	10	8	0	.....	20	0	0
19	.....	10	8	0	.....	19	10	0
		<hr/> £192 8 0 <hr/>						
					<hr/> £380 13 3½ <hr/>			

CLASS 2d.

MARRIED MEN.

No. of Fam.	No. of Child.	Allowance ordered.			Earnings.			Paid by Overseers.			Total Receipts.		
		£.	s.	d.	£.	s.	d.	£.	s.	d.	£.	s.	d.
1	6	33	16	0	46	9	0	0	16	6	47	5	6
2	5	31	4	0	50	6	11	0	0	0	50	6	11
3	5	31	4	0	50	11	6	0	0	0	50	11	6
4	5	31	4	0	39	10	0	0	0	0	39	10	0
5	5	31	4	0	38	7	3 $\frac{1}{2}$	0	15	9	39	3	0 $\frac{1}{2}$
6	5	31	4	0	30	3	1 $\frac{1}{2}$	4	13	2	34	16	3 $\frac{1}{2}$
7	5	31	4	0	35	12	0	0	0	0	35	12	0
8	4	28	12	0	30	19	3	2	5	11	35	5	2
9	4	28	12	0	35	19	4	0	10	0	36	9	4
10	4	28	12	0	35	19	8	0	0	0	35	19	8
11	4	28	12	0	36	13	1 $\frac{1}{2}$	4	14	0	41	7	1 $\frac{1}{2}$
12	3	26	0	0	34	13	8 $\frac{1}{2}$	0	7	0	35	0	8 $\frac{1}{2}$
13	3	26	0	0	32	16	9 $\frac{1}{2}$	0	9	4	33	6	1 $\frac{1}{2}$
14	3	26	0	0	29	12	0	0	5	0	29	17	0
15	3	26	0	0	30	3	0	0	0	0	30	3	0
16	3	26	0	0	33	13	2 $\frac{1}{2}$	0	0	0	33	13	2 $\frac{1}{2}$
17	3	26	0	0	35	13	1 $\frac{1}{2}$	0	0	0	35	13	1 $\frac{1}{2}$
18	3	26	0	0	33	9	2	0	0	0	33	9	2
19	3	26	0	0	34	4	10	9	5	4	43	10	2
20	2	23	8	0	34	1	4 $\frac{1}{2}$	0	7	0	34	8	4 $\frac{1}{2}$
21	2	23	8	0	33	13	4	0	0	0	33	13	4
22	1	20	16	0	34	5	8 $\frac{1}{2}$	0	0	0	34	5	8 $\frac{1}{2}$
23	1	20	16	0	34	18	2 $\frac{1}{2}$	0	0	0	34	18	2 $\frac{1}{2}$
24	1	20	16	0	28	5	6	0	0	0	28	5	6
25	1	20	16	0	30	5	11	0	0	0	30	5	11
26	1	20	16	0	25	5	6	0	0	0	25	5	6
27	1	20	16	0	26	4	4 $\frac{1}{2}$	0	0	0	26	4	4 $\frac{1}{2}$
28	1	20	16	0	41	12	0	0	0	0	41	12	0
29	0	18	4	0	36	0	0	0	0	0	36	0	0
30	0	18	4	0	25	17	0	1	9	0	27	6	0
87		772	4	0	1045	5	11 $\frac{1}{2}$	25	18	0	1071	4	0 $\frac{1}{2}$

CLASS 3d.
AGED AND INFIRM.

	Magistrates Allowance.	Earnings.	Overseers.	Receipts.
	£. s. d.	£. s. d.	£. s. d.	£. s. d.
1. Man and Wife	18. 4 0	19 17 0 $\frac{1}{2}$	2 12 2	22 9 2 $\frac{1}{2}$
2. Man & Wife } and lame Dau. }	20 16 0	5 3 6	20 16 10	25 10 4
3. Man & Wom. } and 1 Child }	20 16 0	7 12 8	17 17 6	25 10 2
4. Old Men	10 8 0	5 12 1	6 7 8	11 19 9
*3. Widows and } Bastardy ... }	32 10 0	7 10 6	35 3 0	40 0 6
+1. Old Man	0 0 0	0 0 0	5 0 0	0 0 0
	102 14 0	45 15 9 $\frac{1}{2}$	87 17 2	125 9 11 $\frac{1}{2}$

	Allowance.	Earnings.	Pd. Overseers.	Receipts.
	£. s. d.	£. s. d.	£. s. d.	£. s. d.
1st Class	192 8 0	380 13 3 $\frac{1}{2}$	0 0 0	380 13 3 $\frac{1}{2}$
2d Class	772 4 0	1045 5 11 $\frac{1}{2}$	25 18 0	1071 3 11 $\frac{1}{2}$
3d Class	102 14 0	45 15 9 $\frac{1}{2}$	87 17 2	125 9 11 $\frac{1}{2}$
	1067 6 0	1471 15 0 $\frac{1}{2}$	113 15 2	1577 7 2 $\frac{1}{2}$

SUMMARY.

£.	s.	d.	
1067	6	0	Magistrates' Allowance
1471	15	0 $\frac{1}{2}$	Earnings of the People
113	15	2	Payments of Overseers in Allowance
1577	7	2 $\frac{1}{2}$	Total Receipts of the People.

* The Widows are non-resident.

+ The parish allows £5. and the son, a farmer, engaged to pay him some additional allowance, which I understand he has neglected to do.

The amount spent in manual labour in the parish of Little Massingham, from Michaelmas, 1822, to Michaelmas, 1823, is

	£2117	13	0 $\frac{1}{2}$	
The amount of rate for maintenance of the poor & other purposes	217	4	6 $\frac{1}{2}$	
	£2334	17	7	Total Expenditure.
	1577	7	2 $\frac{1}{2}$	Total receipts of the people
	£757	10	4 $\frac{1}{2}$	Surplus.

This account is as accurate as it could be made. The amount expended in labour and in poor rate is below the average expenditure of former years; and I have no doubt that in the present year, with an increase of the price of wages and an increase of demand for labour, the expenditure for manual labour will alone amount nearly to the sum expended in poor rate and labour jointly during the past year.

It must be observed, that in obtaining the distribution of the above fund, it was not possible to obtain accurately the earnings of each person at all times, when that could not be done for any week, as every one was constantly employed, day wages were then computed—so that the earnings of the people are taken at the lowest point, and in fact, the people belonging to the parish did, I dare say, take up another fifty pounds of the surplus above stated.

The poor rate is a gross return, and includes

church rate, county rate, and other bills, amounting to about £50.

After making these deductions, there remains a surplus of six hundred and fifty pounds expended by the farmers of Little Massingham for foreign labour—i. e. the labour of persons not belonging to the parish.

It appears, also, that the actual earnings of the single men are double the allowance of the magistrates ; that the actual earnings of the married men are *fifty per cent.* and the receipts of the aged, widows, and infirm, are *five and twenty per cent.* above that allowance—and that on the whole of this account, the receipts of the people of all classes are *fifty per cent.* and the total expenditure a *hundred per cent.* above the decreed standard.

The following schedule, exhibiting the earnings of five labourers, from the year 1812 to 1822, will clearly shew that in 1822 the receipts of the labourers were unusually low, and consequently that the above account is made under circumstances unfavourable to my argument :

The Earnings of five Labourers themselves only from

Date.	No. 1.			No. 2.			No. 3.			No. 4.			No. 5.		
	£.	s.	d.	£.	s.	d.	£.	s.	d.	£.	s.	d.	£.	s.	d.
1812	40	12	6	50	4	11	44	10	0						
1813	37	7	9	43	7	4									
1814	31	1	6	36	5	6							40	12	11
1815	32	7	3	38	11	0									
1816	37	0	0	40	16	3							35	15	8
1817	40	7	4	40	17	3	40	7	0	35	11	3	41	10	9
1818	39	12	1	43	4	2	38	1	0	44	10	0	39	6	6
1819	37	5	10	41	2	6	37	2	6	40	7	0	39	4	6
1820	34	8	0	38	11	9	34	1	6	34	4	3	36	18	2
1821	29	0	9½	35	17	9	31	18	4	33	17	11	35	13	10
1822	27	13	7	32	5	10½	28	17	11½	31	3	1	31	0	11½
										29	3	7	30	15	11

About two years ago, one of the farms in this parish, in the time of distress, fell upon the hands of the proprietor of this estate. The management of it was entrusted to his agent. This person is employed in the same capacity by many gentlemen and noblemen in the counties of Suffolk, Essex, Hertford, Kent, Surrey, Sussex, Worcester, Derby, &c. &c. and of course well acquainted with the affairs of agriculture. He soon found the labourers upon the allowance system, and naturally disposed, on all occasions, to threaten a reference to the magistrates. He instructed the young man, who was appointed to manage the farm under his direction, to throw all the men upon the allowance system. I spoke to him on that occasion, and endeavoured to shew him that it would be injurious to the poor and inconvenient to the management of his business; he replied, that he had well considered the matter, and that he found it in all cases the most convenient plan to accept the allowance scale of the magistrates, and then to get his labour done at as cheap a rate as possible; that he felt it his duty to adopt this plan in the present case, as the entire management was intrusted to him—but that if the proprietor should choose to over-rule his opinion, he would with pleasure fulfil his wishes. I must contend that the agent in this case did only that which, with his view of the question, it was his duty to do, and which ninety-nine men of business out of a hundred would have done under

similar circumstances. The proprietor, however, did in this instance, at my request, very kindly overrule the opinion, and I certainly think with advantage to his estate, because free must always be cheaper than servile labour. In that instance, and in that quarter, and in every quarter, and to the face of the poor, I have felt it a duty to use my utmost endeavour to discourage this practice, and I shall ever feel it my duty to do so, from a firm and justified persuasion that it is injurious to the morals, happiness, and receipts of the poor, to the peace of the village, and the interest of all. Suppose this system had been acted upon in this parish, it appears that the receipts are £1500. and the allowance £1000. in round numbers. Of course one, two, or three hundred a year might have been ground out of the poor, though that sum would have been of no benefit to the occupier of the soil, the labour of persons under such a system being equally diminished in value.

It is no proof of the advantage of this system, that the labourers are disposed to cleave to it. It excites and gratifies their passions; it appears to protect them, but under that appearance it in fact robs them of their character, and of all their comforts. "Though the interest of the labourer is
 "strictly connected with that of the society, he is
 "incapable either of comprehending that interest,
 "or of understanding its connexion with his own.
 "His condition leaves him no time to receive the

“necessary information, and his education and
 “habits are commonly such as to render him unfit
 “to judge, even though he was fully informed.
 “In the public deliberations, therefore, his voice is
 “little heard and less regarded, except upon some
 “particular occasions, when his clamour is ani-
 “mated, set on, and supported by his employers,
 “not for his but their own particular purpose.”*

I have no question that on many occasions this clamour is excited by cunning and interested persons, and that magistrates and the poor are equally gulled and deluded by it.

The poor of this parish have on many occasions been so deluded. *I have never known a single instance of interference on the part of the magistrates in which the poor man has not greatly suffered in every way.* There appears only one case among all the able-bodied men of this parish, in which the earnings, exclusive of the receipts from the overseers, do not exceed the allowance—that is No. 6, whose case I have, in a former page, adverted to. It appears that his allowance is £31.—his earnings £30. He received of the overseer £4. making his receipts £34. On examining his account, I find that he was 28 weeks employed by the farmers, and 24 weeks on his allowance. In the 28 weeks he received rather less than 16s. per week; in the 24 weeks he

* Wealth of Nations, book 1, c. xi.

received his allowance, 11s. Had he continued in his employment with the farmers at the same rate throughout the year, his earnings would have been £41. 12s. 6d.

There is another person (No. 12) who appears to have received 7s. from the overseer in allowance. I do not know whether he summoned the overseer seven times for that sum, but he certainly did several times, and on one occasion was ordered relief upon oath. His allowance is £26. his earnings are £34. 13s. 8½d. He is a man of a litigious temper, but I do not know one who could earn more wages. He has been in the present year again ordered his allowance, and it appears from his account, that for twenty-one weeks before his application he received 16s. 6d. per week, on an average. Since he has been upon his allowance he has received 10s. per week, and his companions whom he left have received 14s. per week, nearly, for some months during the depth of winter.

The other person who appears to have received the largest sum of the overseer is No. 19, the man who was detected in poaching, and who for 21 weeks, while depending upon the overseer, earned 6s. per week, and for 31 weeks, when depending upon his industry, earned 18s. per week. The other cases need no comment—they speak for themselves.

Such is the force of custom, prejudice and local authority, that the poor have been unquestionably

often misguided to their own injury. The law has its influence on all parties concerned; it teaches the farmer to look to the earnings of the labourer, rather than to the work executed, which ought to be his only concern; and it teaches the labourer to measure the power of his industry, and the necessity for putting forth his exertions by the standard of allowance. Had not this influence prevailed, I have no doubt whatever that the labourers of this parish would have taken up, by their unrestricted industry, a large share of the surplus fund, to their own comfort, and to the benefit of their employers.

Whether, therefore, this system be viewed in its influence on individuals, or on the virtue, happiness, and comfort of the community, I must look upon it in an evil light. I must think it not advisable—I am sure it is not necessary. The population does not press upon the means of subsistence—the supply of labour does not exceed the demand. I therefore regard this meddling of authority as a laborious and vexatious folly, as a great oppression as well as a great absurdity.

SECOND CASE.

Great and Little Massingham.

The parish of Great Massingham contains seven hundred and thirty-eight inhabitants, of whom three hundred and fifty-two are dependent

on the wages of manual labour, besides the fifty-two already accounted for as belonging to the parish of Little Massingham. The parish of Great Massingham contains about four thousand acres of land; so that the two parishes conjoined contain thus—

Great Massingham,	4000	
Little Massingham,	2278	
	<hr/>	6278 Acres
Deduct $\frac{1}{7}$ Waste	897	
	<hr/>	5381 Statute Acres.
	<hr/>	

It will not be convenient, perhaps not possible, to ascertain the fund supplied by the cultivation of the soil by manual labour, or the distribution of it with the same accuracy as in the former case, but a practical approximation may be obtained.

The cultivation of the land during the year 1822-23, was greatly checked. It appears that the general expenditure was twenty per cent. below an average of years, and the earnings of individual labourers more. In this year, in Little Massingham, the expenditure in labour approached, under some local disadvantages, to one pound sterling per acre. As I calculate nothing for nearly nine hundred acres of waste, nothing for highways, nothing for gleaning, &c. the necessary expence for cultivating an acre of land by manual labour may fairly be estimated at £1. per acre. As this

is a point of great consequence and convenience, in the following calculations I shall confirm it by a variety of direct and collateral evidence. Of course, as a common observer, I can only judge of this point on the evidence before me, and on the opinion of practical men. From that evidence, and from that authority, I have no doubt that persons best acquainted with the subject will conclude, that this estimate is within the truth.

The following is an estimation given by a person of considerable experience:—

Yearly expence of manual labour, on a farm of one thousand acres, on a moderate soil, wages being 1s 4d per day—

210 Acres of Wheat, £1. 16s. per Acre	£.	s.	d.
	378	0	0
210 Ditto Barley, £0. 15s. 0d. do.	157	10	0
210 Ditto Hay, £0. 2s. 6d. do.	26	5	0
210 Ditto Turnips, £0. 14s. 0d. do.	147	0	0
160 Ditto Pasture, Fencing,* &c. &c.	300	0	0
1000	1008	15	0

The next is a calculation for a light soil. Labour 1s. 4d. per day, and is more particular :

TURNIPS.	£.	s.	d.
Four Ploughings	0	4	0
Carting and Grinding Rape Cake	0	2	0
Harrowing and Cleaning	0	2	0
Hoeing	0	6	0
	0	14	0

* This head of expence includes shepherd, yardmen, horse-men, thatching, chaff-cutting, and other minute particulars.

BARLEY.

	£.	s.	d.
Ploughing, Harrowing, and Drilling ..	0	2	6
Harvesting	0	6	0
Thrashing and Carting	0	7	6
	<hr/>		
	0	16	0
Hay, per acre	0	2	6
	<hr/>		

WHEAT.*

Ploughing, per acre	0	1	6
Harrowing and Drilling	0	1	0
Filling, Carting, and Spreading Muck	0	4	6
Hoeing and Weeding	0	5	0
Harvesting	0	8	0
Thrashing, Carting, &c. &c.	0	10	0
	<hr/>		
	1	10	0
	<hr/>		

100 ACRES of PASTURE & EXTRA WORK.

Shepherd and help	40	0	0
Yardman and do.	40	0	0
Horsemen and do.	30	0	0
Fencing	30	0	0
Thatching, Chaff-cutting, and inci- dental labour	90	0	0
	<hr/>		
	230	0	0

* Where the wheat is dibbled, the expence is increased from 6s. to 8s. per acre—and where the land grows from eight to ten coombs per acre, the expences of reaping and thrashing are of course increased. A great variety of these calculations have been given by farmers, and though they all vary in the items, some expending more on one course in the tillage and some on another, yet they all approximate according to the respective qualities of the *soil* in the result.

Acres.		£.	s.	d.
225 Turnips, 14s.	=	157	10	0
225 Barley, 16s.	=	180	0	0
225 Layers, 2s. 6d.	=	28	2	6
225 Wheat, 30s.	=	337	10	0
100 Pasture & extra Work		230	0	0
		<u>933</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>6</u>

The following account is copied from the Norwich Mercury, for the year 1820. The intelligent Editor of that Journal informs me that the information was collected in the neighbourhood of Norwich, from practical men, and from the most authentic sources—

The Out-goings of a Light Land Farm, in Norfolk, during 1790, compared with those in 1820.

1790.	£.	s.	d.	1820.	£.	s.	d.
Rent per Acre ...	0	8	3	Rent per Acre ...	0	16	0
Tithe ditto	0	1	6	Tithe ditto	0	4	0
Labour ditto	0	14	0	Labour ditto	1	6	6½
Rates ditto	0	1	0	Rates ditto	0	4	9
Direct Taxes ditto	0	0	3	Direct Taxes ditto	0	1	1
Farming Bills ditto	0	6	7	Farming Bills ditto	0	11	6
Inter. of Capital do.	0	4	4½	Inter. of Capital do.	0	7	6
	<u>1</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>11½</u>		<u>3</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>4½</u>

Account of a Farm of 92 Acres of good Wheat Land, five of which are Meadow, the rest under a four-course Shift.

1820.

£.	s.	d.		£.	s.	d.
Rent & Taxes, &c.	320	1	3	Corn	375	3 9
Labour	214	9	2	Stock and Poultry	146	1 11
Tradesmen's Bills	57	14	3			
Rates	51	16	0		521	5 8
Ditto County	5	6	11	Loss	158	1 11
Tithes	30	0	0			
	679	7	7		679	7 7

In the Norfolk Chronicle of June 4th, 1822, the following valuation and estimate of labour were given by a respectable land agent and farmer: he takes two farms, of 400 acres each.—The first “consisting of good convertible land”—the second “of strong, retentive, clay land, which requires “underdraining, consequently a greater expence “for labour.” When wheat is at 80s. and barley at 36s. per quarter, he estimates the labour of the first at £536. or 27s. per acre nearly, and the second at £670. or 33s. per acre nearly. When wheat is 40s. and barley 18s. per quarter, he estimates the labour of the first at £402. or 20s. nearly, and the second at £502. 10s. or 25s. nearly.

In a cause lately tried in this county, valuations of labour were given by respectable land agents on both sides. Two on one side, estimating the

labour of 230 acres, when wheat is 48s. and barley 24s. per quarter, returned the amount £224. per annum. Two on the other side, taking the price of wheat 44s. and barley 22s. per quarter, returned an estimate for labour £209. 18s. or 29s. per acre nearly in both cases, and corn at a very low value, and every department of the business depressed.

The following appears to me a very valuable document in many points of view. It shews the amount annually expended in manual labour for 21 years, on a light land farm of 1050 acres. It specifies the amount of poor rate, the price of day wages, and the annual amount of day wages. This farm is very favourably situated for cheap management, being well inclosed, &c. As much of the work as possible is performed by machinery, with horse power, so that of course the manual labour is considerably less than it would otherwise be. When the thrashing is performed by machinery, the labour is paid by the day. This circumstance alone is sufficient to raise the amount of day wages £50. as if the corn were thrashed by hand, the labour would be paid by the piece. In this case the day labour would not be above one tenth of the annual amount of labour. It appears at present about a seventh. This shews that the day wages

are a very imperfect criterion of the actual condition of the agricultural labourers. If the thrashing and other work were performed by manual labour, and not by horse power, the whole amount of labour would be increased at least £70. annually; and this would make the annual cost of a 1050 acres of land £1050. for manual labour.

From	Annual amount of Labour.	Poor Rate	Price of Wheat per Quarter.			Price of Day Wages.			Annual amount paid in Day Wages.		
	£.	£.	£.	s.	d.	£.	s.	d.	£.	s.	d.
1802 ..	1052 ..	89 ..	3	15	6 ..	0	2	0 ..	115	0	0
1803 ..	884 ..	72 ..	2	17	1 ..	0	1	10 ..	107	0	0
1804 ..	792 ..	149 ..	2	12	3 ..	0	2	0 ..	137	0	0
1805 ..	960 ..	112 ..	4	6	2 ..	0	2	0 ..	205	0	0
1806 ..	858 ..	124 ..	3	15	11 ..	0	2	0 ..	141	0	0
1807 ..	856 ..	127 ..	3	16	9 ..	0	2	0 ..	121	0	0
1808 ..	870 ..	121 ..	3	9	5 ..	0	2	0 ..	132	0	0
1809 ..	983 ..	137 ..	4	10	4 ..	0	2	0 ..	120	0	0
1810 ..	1094 ..	157 ..	5	2	6 ..	0	2	0 ..	155	0	0
1811 ..	1211 ..	133 ..	4	14	7 ..	0	2	6 ..	228	0	0
1812 ..	1220 ..	167 ..	5	6	7 ..	0	2	6 ..	187	0	0
1813 ..	1071 ..	98 ..	5	19	10 ..	0	2	6 ..	170	0	0
1814 ..	1114 ..	108 ..	3	16	7 ..	0	2	0 ..	176	0	0
1815 ..	922 ..	105 ..	3	5	8 ..	0	1	8 ..	142	0	0
1816 ..	1103 ..	156 ..	2	13	7 ..	0	2	0 ..	162	0	0
1817 ..	1074 ..	122 ..	5	4	10 ..	0	2	0 ..	216	0	0
1818 ..	1088 ..	132 ..	4	5	4 ..	0	2	0 ..	184	0	0
1819 ..	1083 ..	129 ..	3	18	10 ..	0	1	9 ..	203	0	0
1820 ..	1010 ..	126 ..	3	7	2½ ..	0	1	8 ..	159	0	0
1821 ..	855 ..	143 ..	2	16	2½ ..	0	1	4 ..	159	0	0
1822 ..	833 ..	122 ..	2	4	0 ..	0	1	6 ..	145	0	0
20,933			21) 2			1	3	21) 3364	0	0	0
						0	1	11½	160	4	0

On this evidence I conclude, that deducting $\frac{1}{7}$ for waste, and allowing nothing for the repair of highways, occasional public works, gleaning, &c. I do not compute at too high a rate the cultivation of the soil by manual labour, when I take it at twenty shillings per acre.

Then 5381 acres of cultivated land, at £1 per acre, supply a fund of £5381.

There are dependent on this fund, for the supply of their necessities and comforts—

In Great Massingham 352

In Little Massingham 180

532* men, women, and children.

The allowance of Mr. Bennett's scale, according to the price of wheat last year, and taking the inhabitants of Little Massingham as the basis of the calculation, would be £4. 10s. per annum for each man, woman, and child. The average allowance of the magistrates in this neighbourhood would be about £6. per head.† $532 \times 6 = 3192$, the magistrates' allowance. But the fund supplied by the agriculture of the two parishes is £5381. Consequently there remains a sum of £2189, unap-

* This account contains many non-residents, and many residents, not belonging by the law of settlement.

† The last Report of the House of Commons states that the maintenance of each pauper (exclusive of children) is about £7 per annum. If the children were added, I suppose it would be about £4. 10s.

propriated for maintenance. Does not this shew that there is no necessity for the interference of the police? does it not shew that such interference must be injurious to the honest and industrious labourer, on the ground of maintenance.

But we have taken no account of the poor rate of the two parishes. This has been £1200 per annum. It was last year £864.

Now it is remarkable that, according to the scale reported by the Select Committee of the House of Commons, the poor rate of the two parishes is more than sufficient to maintain the whole population of Little Massingham in perfect idleness. One hundred and eighty persons, at £4. 10s. per head, is £800.

I conclude, therefore, that as far as the parishes of Great and Little Massingham are concerned, the interference is unnecessary—that it is a great dishonour to the farmer, and a great injustice to the labourer, to exhibit before the country this beggarly law of maintenance.*

I understand that farmers in general would not object to pay £1. per annum for the free and cheerful labour of the peasantry, and that they do not expect to cultivate the land at less expence. There appears then to be £5381. or £10. per

* The parishes of Great and Little Massingham are more exclusively agricultural, and have fewer farmers and freeholders than any with which I am acquainted.

head for each man, woman, and child; and taking the family at $4\frac{1}{2}$ persons, which appears to be the case here, there would be £45. per annum for each labourer's family. This was the sum calculated by Mr. Colquhoun as the earnings of an agricultural labourer's family, when wheat was (in the year 1813) £5. 19s. 10d. and day wages 2s. 6d. The poor rate is about £1. 13s. per head, or £7. 8s. 6d. per family, which, if added to the former sum, would give to each family £52. 8s. 6d.

It will be naturally asked, does not this fund put the labourers of these parishes in as good and cheerful a condition as you can generally expect persons in that station of life to be? Certainly not; and if I were further asked why it does not? I should reply, because it passes through the sieve of pauperism—because those labourers receive this sum as a kind of distribution for maintenance, and not as the reward of their skill, industry, and personal exertions.*

It will be asked, does so much depend upon the mode and manner in which the labourer is paid? Can his condition be so much affected by the manner, provided he receives the same sum? The

* “When revenues superabound (says Aristotle), it is now usual with demagogues to divide the surplus among the poor; but this is to pour water into a sieve. A good statesman, instead of occasionally relieving the wants of the poor, who quickly return to be again relieved, will continually strive to better their permanent condition.”—*Pol. book vi. c. 5.*

unhappiness of the labourers in England arises not so much from the scantiness of their receipts as from the manner in which they are obtained ; not from the want of funds to employ and maintain them, for they are maintained and employed, but from misgovernment and mismanagement in the distribution of those funds.*

THIRD CASE.

Freebridge Lynn.

The remaining cases will not detain us long. The hundred of Freebridge Lynn contains thirty-five parishes, ten thousand, five hundred, and

* "There are many modes by which the compulsory application, under the provisions of a statute, of the funds which provide the maintenance of labour, would tend most materially to place the labouring classes in a much worse condition than that in which they could otherwise be situated.

"1st. An increased demand for labour is the only means by which the wages of labour can ever be received ; and there is nothing which can increase the demand, but the increase of the wealth by which labour is supported ; if therefore the compulsory application of any part of this wealth tends (as it always must tend) to employ the portion it distributes less profitably than it would have been if left to the interested superintendence of its owners. It cannot fail by thus diminishing the funds, which would otherwise have been applicable to the maintenance of labour, to place the whole body of labourers in a worse situation than that in which they would otherwise have been placed.

"2dly. The effects of holding out to the labouring community, that all who require it shall be provided with work at adequate wages is such as to lead them to form false views of the circumstances in which they are likely to be placed."—*Report from S. C. House of Commons, 1817, p. 17.*

thirty-seven inhabitants, and about seventy thousand acres of land. Deducting $\frac{1}{7}$ for waste, there will remain sixty thousand acres of cultivated land. There are 2122 families, of which 460 are employed in trade, and 1652 in agriculture. The usual calculation is about $\frac{5}{12}$ for freeholders and farmers, and $\frac{7}{12}$ for the families of labourers; so that there will be 931 families of labourers, and, at $4\frac{1}{4}$ to a family, 4000 persons nearly dependent on the cultivation of 60,000 acres of land by manual labour—that is, £15. to each person, or £63. 15s. to each family.

The poor rate of the hundred of Freebridge Lynn is £12,475, that is, £1. 2s. 6d. for each person, £3. 5s. for each labourer, men, women, and children, and £13. 16s. 6d. for each family, which, added to the wages of labour, gives to each family £77. 11s. 6d. The poor rate for England and Wales is 11s. per head, for the county of Norfolk 15s. for the county of Sussex, the highest, £1. 2s. The following schedule will shew that the poor rate of this hundred is higher than that of any county in England:—

APPENDIX (D. 2.)

Report of the Select Committee of the House of Commons, 1823.

<i>Counties.</i>	<i>Rate per Head.</i>	<i>Counties.</i>	<i>Rate per Head.</i>	<i>Counties.</i>	<i>Rate per Head.</i>
	£. s.		£. s.		£. s.
Sussex	1 2	Lincoln	0 12	Northumberl.	0 8
Northampton	0 18	Surrey	0 12	Nottingham.	0 8
Buckingham	0 17	Rutland	0 11	Somerset . . .	0 8
Essex	0 17	Montgomery.	0 11	Stafford . . .	0 8
Kent	0 17	Middlesex ..	0 10	Denbigh . . .	0 8
Oxford	0 17	Warwick . . .	0 10	Merioneth . .	0 8
Suffolk	0 17	Westmorland	0 10	Cumberland	0 7
Bedford . . .	0 16	E.RidingYork	0 10	Monmouth . .	0 7
Huntingdon.	0 16	Radnor	0 10	W.Rdg.York	0 7
Berks	0 15	Devon	0 9	Brecon	0 7
Norfolk . . .	0 15	Durham	0 9	Flint	0 7
Cambridge . .	0 14	Gloucester ..	0 9	Glamorgan . .	0 7
Leicester . .	0 14	Salop	0 9	Anglesey . .	0 6
Wilts	0 14	Worcester . .	0 9	Carmarthan.	0 6
Hertford . . .	0 13	N.RidingYork	0 9	Lancaster . .	0 5
Southampton	0 13	Chester	0 8	Cardigan . .	0 5
Dorset	0 12	Cornwall . . .	0 8	Carnarvon. .	0 5
Hereford . .	0 12	Derby	0 8	Pembroke. .	0 5

I would be the last person to complain of the amount of poor rate, provided it were paid out of the pockets of the rich, for useful and honourable purposes to the poor; but neither of these conditions obtain in this case. It is not paid by the rich so much as by the poor, by the industrious and infirm to the strong and lazy. There are only two funds that supply the means of subsistence to the people—the fund for labour and the fund for charity. The former should be sacred to industry, the latter to indigence. But the equalizing system of allowances has bred up a race of idle and disorderly persons, who draw with one hand from the

resources of the industrious, and with the other from the scanty pittance of the aged, the widow, and the orphan.

FOURTH CASE.

*County of Norfolk.**

The county of Norfolk contains 2092 square miles, equal to 1,338,880 statute acres (reckoning 640 statute acres to a mile.)

1,338,880 Statute Acres

Deduct 191,268 $\frac{1}{7}$ Waste

1,147,612 Cultivated Acres.

The county of Norfolk, including Norwich, contains 344,368 persons, and

36,368 Families employed in agriculture

26,201 In trade, manufacture, and handicraft

11,928 Other families

74,497 Families, nearly $4\frac{1}{4}$ to a family.

Mr Colquhoun computes the large and small farmers and freeholders at $\frac{1}{12}$, and the labouring poor at $\frac{7}{12}$. There are, then, in the county of Norfolk, 88,123 persons dependent on the wages of manual labour in agriculture; and the cultiva-

* These particulars of the county of Norfolk are extracted from Mr. Matchett's Norfolk and Norwich Remembrancer. The author of that little but valuable work has collected his materials with great care and accuracy.

tion of the soil, at £1. per acre, supplies a fund of £1,147,612, or £13. per head, or £55. 5s. per family, and this without the poor's rate.

FIFTH CASE.

England and Wales.

The area of England and Wales, as measured by a trigonometrical survey, contains 57,960 statute square miles. England and Wales therefore contain—

	Stat. Acres.
57,960+640 (acres in a square mile)	37,094,400
Deduct for waste land $\frac{1}{7}$	5,299,200
Number of acres cultivated	31,795,200

There are in England and Wales about 800,000* families employed in agriculture; of these families about $\frac{1}{2}$ are freeholders of various descriptions, and farmers, and $\frac{1}{2}$ labourers; and taking the labourers' families at $4\frac{1}{4}$ each family, there will be 1,983,313 persons, men, women, and children, dependent on the cultivation of the soil by manual labour. Taking the number at two millions, there would appear to be more than £15. for each person, or £63. 15s. for each family, supplied by the necessary cultivation of the soil, exclusive of poor's rate.

There appears to be no fair objection to this mode of calculation. I may have fallen into some

* I deduct 47,957 for mines and minerals.

errors and inaccuracies. Particular cases may need qualifications and limitations; but allowing for all possible discoveries that might be made in a more accurate analysis, the induction seems to stand triumphant, that the agriculture of England supplies a fund for the maintenance of persons dependant upon the wages of labour—large, steady, and abundant. It would appear, that even in the present imperfect state of agriculture, (and very imperfect it is) England is not over-peopled. It would appear that the agricultural labourers would have, if there were no interference of the police, a fair command of the market of labour, and I must think that the assertion, with which these observations began, is borne out by evidence, that the peasantry of whole districts are immersed in pauperism, with the means of happiness, competency, and independence around them!!! I must think that the assertion of necessity, on which the present administration of the poor laws is sometimes defended, is disproved by evidence, in particular cases, and in a more general view of the question. This view has at least the advantage of being cheering and consolatory. It opens a bright prospect for the labouring people of this country, I hope and firmly believe that it is not visionary. When restrictive regulations shall be removed from our Agriculture as they have been from our currency, trade, and commerce, when the immense sum so mischievously diverted into the channel of

poor rate shall be poured into the fund for the maintenance of labour, and flow through the hearts of the people: when the industry of the country shall be free, skilfully applied and honestly rewarded, then will the Agriculture of England, like her trade and manufactures, defy the competition of the world.

This survey of the allowance system adopted in agricultural districts might have been fortified by more copious statistical documents. My object, however, has not been to compile all the information that might be collected, but to adduce so much as might trace the origin, mark the effects, and prove the unnecessary nature of the practice. I throw the onus and responsibility of this system upon the magistrates, not because other parties concerned are innocent, but simply because, with my view of the question, the system never could have been upreared or continued without their authority. I ascribe to that body no other authority than that which they assume, and which many consider as a privilege and sacred right. I hold no argument with the *amount* of allowances, for if they could or ought to affect the price of wages, they certainly are too low. The magistracy attempt to do that by law which law never can do; they place* within the power of the cunning oppressor the means of cheating his equals and op-

* I mean inasmuch as they *appoint or sanction* a certain specific known scale of allowance, for to that point these observations are directed.

pressing his inferiors ; they derange the whole system of social life, discourage the humane, depress the virtuous, and rob the industrious, the young, and the aged, to support the lazy, the healthy, and the worthless.

They certainly intend to give no such encouragements, but the question is, do they or do they not lend their authority to these purposes ? None of the foregoing observations have been made with any invidious intention ; I cannot believe that they will be so understood by an order of men who always prefer a manly line of action. What would be the use of addressing flattering words to the magistracy, and hard words to the farmers and to the poor ? If the evils lie in the principles of the system and in the errors of the practice, arguments must of course be directed to the administrators, if those arguments are to be of any avail. There are only two quarters from which reformation can proceed—the magistracy and the legislature ; all other parties are mere instruments and accessories. The legislature has done something, and will do more—the magistracy has done almost nothing to introduce a more wholesome system. The time is come for that body to move, to second the legislature, and to adopt a decided and liberal course. Their influence is great in supporting this system—it may be still greater in removing it.

But after all, legislative will be the only effectual remedy in this case. By legislative remedy, I

mean no new plans and schemes for managing and maintaining the poor; they are sufficiently abundant already. The legislative remedy must be applied to wipe out these schemes, and especially that of supporting the population by a scale of allowances. The great object is to retrace our steps, and to fall back to the wisdom of our forefathers. Happily this scheme is not immemorial—the age of man has not yet passed over it—it is not yet a precedent in law, but it bids fair to become one if it be not speedily interdicted.—Twenty and eight years it has been a bane to the poor and a nuisance to the country; seven years it has been refuted on the most substantial principles and clearest evidence before the House of Commons—and what has been done? It still lives and thrives among us, and so it will continue to do while the legislature shall be satisfied with secret and select committees and with select vestries. These may check and controul the expenditure, may reduce the poor rate a few hundreds, or thousands, or millions, but the system will not fall till it shall receive a more full and free discussion, which may rouse the enthusiasm of public virtue, give free scope to industry, and restore the parochial system of England.

The main object of the foregoing pages has been to give fresh evidence upon this question, which may encourage some immediate remedial application. The public documents with which I am

acquainted exhibit, in various forms, the proportions subsisting between the amount of poor rate, the population, the number of paupers at several periods, the price of provisions, the property-tax assessments, &c. but though important inferences may be drawn from these tables, they do not decide the actual necessity which may or may not exist, for setting to work and supporting, by a scale of allowance, the able-bodied labourers. These documents do not decide the question in a general view of it—certainly not in particular instances. The only table of proportion which is decisive upon this point is that which exhibits the expenditure in the cultivation of the soil by manual labour, and the number of recipients. This investigation was begun in my own small parish, with a view to ascertain the real necessities and condition of the labourers. This inquiry has afforded me great satisfaction, and I cannot but believe that the immediate abandonment of this system would yield instant benefit to the labourer, the farmer, and the country.

The legislature has been discouraged by the uniform representations that are made of the low wages of agricultural labourers. Day wages are not the standard by which their earnings can be ascertained, and these have been greatly depressed by the scale of allowance. I have no doubt that when their industry is not restricted by the

allowance system, their earnings are higher than those of the weavers, shoe-makers, tailors, and artizans of the city of Norwich. I subjoin in an appendix (A.) a document in proof of this, collected with care by some master manufacturers. The agricultural labourers need more support than persons employed in sedentary occupations—they need more of what has been called vulgar happiness, and which they would have in greater abundance, if their industry were unrestricted, and rewarded out of the fund which the necessary cultivation of the soil supplies.

A strong impression was undoubtedly made upon the country by the publication of Mr. Malthus' Essay on the Principle of Population; it struck a panic which confirmed the very errors he so ably refuted in the Administration of the Poor Laws. Of the truth of that principle there can be no question. The division of property, the necessity for exertion in the great mass of the people, and poverty under every form of government, are sufficient proofs. But this principle by no means establishes the fact that England is more over-peopled than any other country. Mr. Malthus' own words are—"I can easily conceive that this country, with a proper direction of the national industry, might, in the course of some centuries, contain two or three times its present population, and yet every man in the kingdom

“be much better fed and clothed than he is at present.”*

A subsequent writer, who has beautifully illustrated the divine goodness in an examination of the effects of the principle of population on the moral and political state of mankind, seems to state too generally his inference from the fact.

“The result of such observations cannot fail to be, “that in every department of national industry “there are more claimants for employ than employers; that the demand is for labour rather “than for labourers; that there are somewhat “more manufacturers, more artificers, more agriculturists, than can be usefully or profitably, “under the existing circumstances, kept in activity “from the funds destined to their maintenance.”†

This argument of course applies as much to any former period of our history as to the present—to every other country as to our own—to every other department of industry as to agriculture. “Always “in every inhabited country, in every department “of industry,” are very general terms. Mr. Sumner, however observes, in another passage, “that “this is not meant to argue that England is over-peopled.”

In a recent and useful publication, by one of his Majesty’s Deputy Lieutenants for the county of

* Book iv. c. 4.

† Sumner’s Records of the Creation, vol. ii. c. 5.

Berkshire,* the author, in illustrating and defending the principle of the English Poor Laws, by an historical view of indigence in civil society, sets out with the following position :—“ The most indigent class in every society seems to have always consisted of those whose labour is exerted in the cultivation of the soil.”† The opinion of this gentleman respecting the cultivators of the soil, their wages and condition, is, I believe, a common one, but I have never seen that opinion supported by any evidence in detail. The evidence which has fallen within my experience and observation is of an opposite description. The wages of individuals in trades and manufacture will rise high, because skill, and not labour, is in those instances rewarded. But I believe that the agriculture of England supplies a larger and more steady fund for the support of the labourers dependent upon it than any other large branch of business. It would appear, too, that during the last twenty-one years, while corn has quadrupled its price, and again fallen to one-fourth, the fund for the maintenance of labour has never varied more than twenty per cent. above and below the average amount. While the land continues in a state of cultivation there

* Frederic Page, Esq.

† The object of this publication was to shew that the relief of the poor should be strictly confined to cases of indigence, and that point the author seems not only to have proved, but secured. See *Report from the county of Berks. Report of the House of Commons, Appendix (E.)*

must be a steady fund for employment, whereas in particular trades the whole body of labourers dependent on particular branches have been, and may be, at various times, thrown out of employment. Besides, will not the cultivation of 2000 acres of land amply support 30 families, as in the case of Little Massingham? Will not 70,000 acres support 1000 families, as in the case of Freebridge Lynn? Will not a million and more of acres in the county of Norfolk support 20,000 families, and thirty millions and more in England and Wales 460,000 families.

As far as regards English Agriculture, it does appear that the English labourers are not, and need not be, the most indigent class of the community. The ascertaining of this fact is of more consequence than proposing ten thousand remedies and regulations. If this be the fact, or any thing like the fact, the only remedy required is to release, by legislative enactment, the agriculture of the country from the present thralldom of the police, to give hope to the labourer, and full scope to his honest industry.

I have said nothing on the subject of the disabled and impotent poor, for there is little or no difficulty in that part of the question.

Levare functum

Pauperem laboribus

Vocatus atque non vocatus audit.

If the fund for charity, which is now mixed up

with the fund for labour, were devoted to its proper objects, they would be in a far better condition ; the hoary head would be respected, and grey hairs descend with honour to the grave. Our aged poor would not walk about our lanes and streets in tattered garments, the badges of ignominy, but with cheerful countenances and in decent clothing. The expenditure for these purposes, far more liberal than it is at present, would be felt only a pleasure. All that is required here is a better *method*, and the regulations of Mr. Nolan's bill, as to the management of parochial affairs, will be of essential service. The management should become parochial, friendly, and ecclesiastical.

A great deal has been said respecting the difference of the principle of the English and Scotch Poor Laws. The original laws themselves are of a very kindred nature ; but while the Scotch have preserved the practice within, we have extended ours far beyond the intentions of the law. They, like wary mariners, have kept well to windward, but we, easy and secure, have flung away all our reckoning, and now find the vessel amid shoals and quick-sands. The ship is well and tightly built, and has borne the beating of the storm. The Government hitherto has, perhaps, pursued the wisest plan in unlading part of the burden while the waters were low, but now that the spring tide of prosperity flows around us, and the vessel floats above the sand, the skilful pilots may come

on board, refit the rudder, spread the sails, and steer her, amid the acclamations of the crew, into deep and more tranquil waters. We may not at once reach the course in which the wiser and more hardy sailors of the North have navigated; we may, however, and that immediately, imitate their tactics and their discipline. (*Appendix B.*)

APPENDIX. (A.)

The following is an account of the earnings of the weavers of Norwich, collected by the most experienced manufacturers. There are four main branches of weaving. Ten are taken from each class. The actual receipts of the weavers are given :

FIRST CLASS,

Narrow Bombasins, 7000 weavers.

			£.	s.	d.
Middle rate	1	..... one year ...	20	0	0
	2	..... ditto	26	0	0
	3	.....	23	6	0
	4	.....	15	11	0
	5	.....	25	0	0
Fine rate	6	.....	22	15	0
	7	.....	42	0	0
	8	.....	26	0	0
Low rate	9	.....	9	0	0
	10	.....	21	10	0
			10)232	0	0
			23	4	0
Deduct, bobbin filling, candles, twisting, & beaming on, 2s. per week }			5	4	0
			£18	0	0

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This being a very large class, I take another ten from a person who is supposed to employ more than any other manufacturer.

		£.	s.	d.	
Middle rate	1	20	0	0	} 52 Weeks.
	2	18	0	0	
	3	21	0	0	
	4	20	0	0	
	5	22	0	0	
	6	28	0	0	
	7	18	0	0	
	8	24	0	0	
	9	19	0	0	
	10	20	0	0	

10)210 0 0

21 0 0

Deduct as before 5 4 0

£15 16 0

The average earnings appear to be £17 each; there is also another large class below these.

Broad White or Camlet, 1000 weavers.

		£.	s.	d.	
	1 average of three years	33	15	0	} 52 Weeks.
	2 ditto	34	13	4	
	3	36	0	0	
	4	35	0	0	
	5	44	15	0	
	6	18	15	0	
	7	23	10	0	
	8	29	0	0	
	9	39	15	0	
	10	47	6	8	

10)342 10 0

34 5 0

Deduct as before 5 4 0

£29 1 0

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Broad Bombasins, on average of three years, yearly wages.

	£.	s.	d.
1	57	10	0
2	37	0	0
3	40	0	0
4	46	0	0
5	60	15	0
6	67	0	0
7	33	10	0
8	38	0	0
9	30	0	0
10	37	5	0
11	35	15	0
12	65	10	0

12)548 5 0

45 13 9

Deduct rather more in this case, 2s. 6d. 6 10 9

39 3 0

Average earnings of ten crape weavers £. s. d. 35 5 0

Deduct out-goings 6 10 0

28 15 0

	£.	s.	d.	£.
7000 Narrow Bombasins at 17	0	0	0	119,000
1000 Camlets at 29	0	0	0	29,000
500 Broad Bombasins at 39	0	0	0	19,500
2000 Crapes at 28 15	0	0	0	57,500
10,500				225,000

Average yearly earnings £21 6

There cannot be less than three persons dependant upon each loom, which would give about £7 per head to 31,500 weavers.—It is curious to compare this with the poor rate of Freebridge Lynn.

APPENDIX (B.)

But how, it will be asked by our English readers, are the poor in Scotland really maintained? We answer, by the private alms of individuals, and by certain funds under the management of the kirk sessions. It is the universal practice, each Lord's Day, in every parish, for such of the audience as are in easy circumstances, to give to the poor such an offering of alms as they shall deem proper. This offering is generally dropped into a bason, placed at the church door, and under the immediate care of an elder. When the service is begun, the elder removes the bason, which he keeps under his charge till the congregation be dismissed. The session then meets, and the money is told over, its amount marked down in the session account book, and deposited in a box kept for that purpose. This box has usually a small slit in the top, through which the pieces of money can be dropped without opening it—and it is closed with two locks, the key of one of which is usually kept by the minister, and the other by the kirk treasurer, *so that it can never be opened but in the presence of these two at least.*

A kirk session, when regularly constituted, must always consist of the minister, elders, session clerk, and kirk treasurer. None of these ever receive any salary, except the session clerk, who is usually the schoolmaster of the parish, and has a small salary allowed for minuting the transactions. The kirk treasurer is for the most part one of the elders, and he is an important member of this court: without his intervention no distribution of the poor's funds is deemed legal, nor can any payments be made, receipts granted, or money transferred, but by him, the minister and session being personally liable to make good all money that may otherwise be given away, should it ever afterwards be challenged by any heritor in the parish. The precautions taken for the distribution of the poor's funds are likewise simple and excellent, and are as follows:

No money can be legally issued from the poor's funds even by the treasurer and session, unless legal proof can be brought that public intimation has been given from the pulpit immediately after divine service, and before the congregation has dispersed, that a distribution of the poor's money is to be made by the session, at such a time and place, specifying the same, and inviting all who have interest in the case to attend if they shall incline. This intimation must be made a full fortnight before the time of distribution—and as every heritor (owner of

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landed property) in the parish has a right to vote in the distribution of the poor's funds, they may all, if they so incline, then attend and exercise that right—but if none of them should attend, which is often the case, the session has then a right to proceed, and whatever they shall thus do is deemed strictly legal, and is liable to no challenge. But should they proceed without having given this previous intimation, they may, if the heritors should afterwards challenge it, be made to repay out of their own pockets every shilling they shall have so issued. It sometimes happens that young ministers, through heedlessness in this respect, expose themselves and families to considerable trouble and loss, which by attention might be easily avoided. In the same way should a minister and session, without the intervention of a treasurer regularly constituted, lend upon bond or otherwise any of the poor's funds—and should the person so borrowing afterwards fail, these lenders are personally liable to make good the whole, and any heritor in the parish who chooses it can compel him to do so.

The members of the session are also liable to pay all losses, and to account for all sums that it can be instructed they received; if they neglected to keep regular books, in which every transaction shall be entered, or if these books have not been revised and approved of by the presbytery—but if they shall have been so revised, they cannot be challenged for omission of forms, and can only be made to account for errors or frauds, or evident dilapidations.

Under this wise and economical system of management, it has been found, by the experience of more than 200 years, that in the low parts of the country, where the parishes are in general of such moderate extent as to admit of the people of every part of the parish generally to attend divine service every Lord's day, the ordinary funds have been amply sufficient to supply all the real demands of the poor, and in most parishes a fund has been accumulated from the savings of ordinary years to help the deficiencies that may arise in years of uncommon scarcity.

Besides the weekly collections, the extra offerings at the administration of the Lord's supper, the pious donations of charitable individuals, which are all voluntary, together with some small fees paid for the use of a mort-cloth (a black velvet pall) at funerals, which is generally purchased with the poor's money, go to make up this parochial fund. Nor must any one believe that the money which comes through the hands of the administrators of the poor's funds is all that is bestowed upon the poor in Scotland—far from it; there are a thousand other channels through which the indigent derive consolation and support, all of them tending to produce the happiest effects upon society.

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A son feels himself ashamed to think that his parents should require the assistance of another to support them—he therefore strains every nerve, when in the vigour of life, to spare a little of his earning, to render their old age more easy than it might have been—and sweet to a parent is the bread that is given by the pious attention of a child. If there are several children they become emulous who shall discover most kindness. It is a pious contention, which serves to unite them the closer to each other, by commanding their mutual esteem.

Encyclopedia Britannica.—Article, Poor's Rate.