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A PRACTICAL INQUIRY
INTO THE
Number, Means of Employment,
AND
WAGES,
OF
AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS.

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PREFACE.

THE following pages exhibit certain facts respecting the number, means of employment, and wages of agricultural labourers. The evidence deduced from these facts is designed to illustrate that part of the administration of the poor laws, which has during the last thirty years thrown the whole body of agricultural labourers, in certain districts of the country, into a state of pauperism. Till within this period, the object of the English poor laws had been to relieve the poor, impotent, and destitute, and to supply work to those who have no proper calling, or who may be thrown out of employment by any sudden change and revulsion of trade. This interpretation had generally been considered sufficiently ample, but another branch of administration has been annexed to the ancient system, and is still continued by the local magistracy in opposition to the remonstrance of the country and of parliament—viz. the regulation of the employment and wages of those who are actually and necessarily employed in the regular business of the country.

The evils of this system have been thus enumerated in a late parliamentary report.

1st. The employer does not obtain efficient labour from the labourer whom he hires.

2d. Persons who have no need of farm labour are obliged to contribute to the payment of work done for others.

3d. A surplus population is encouraged.

4th. By far the worst consequence of the system is the degradation of the character of the labouring class.

To these four must be added also a fifth—the depression of the wages of labour, notwithstanding an actual increase of charge in the cultivation and consequently in the price of provisions. The first two need only to be mentioned, for they are admitted on all hands. Of the third, it is designed in the following pages to shew that the population is rather corrupt than surplus—that the surplusage is apparent and not real, arising from the confusion created by the intervention of the third party between the buyer and seller of labour. Of the fourth and fifth I have given evidence in a former publication, and some further elucidation of them will be afforded in the following inquiry.

The most important part of this inquiry is undoubtedly to ascertain the moral effects of the practice which prevails in agricultural districts. These effects are however secondary, and dependant upon other secondary causes. The object is therefore to trace these evils to their source, in order that the remedy may be of the proper nature, and applied to the seat of the distemper. There are three states in which the lowest classes in society may be found. The first is a state of misery bordering on starvation, to which many are reduced in savage, and but few in civilized life. The second is a state of slavery, in which maintenance is secured for extorted service. The third is the condition of the free labourers of Europe and of those parts of England where the labourers are not pauperised by system. English able-bodied paupers must be classed as to their condi-

tion with the African negro, the Arabian slave, or the Russian peasant in vassalage. The degree of slavery may vary with the nature of the law, the customs of the country, the force of public opinion, or the character of the master, but the principle is the same, wherever the labourers have not the free power of selling their own labour. The law of settlement in England attaches a certain number of labourers to a certain district of the country, and the proprietors and occupiers of land have the power of regulating the work and wages of those labourers—or to state the case in a more simple form, a country gentleman is the proprietor of one of those divisions of the country which we call parishes. He is put in the commission of the peace. He is the occupier of all the property in the parish. A certain number of agricultural labourers are attached to the soil by the law of settlement. Tables are formed by computations of bread, to fix the *necessary maintenance* of all the families and all the inmates of the families in this village. As proprietor and occupier of the soil, this gentleman requires the labour of these peasants. He offers them the work at his own price; they refuse to accept it, as being below the real and customary value. They then apply to this gentleman as overseer, who refuses them relief because they refuse to work. They then apply to this same personage as magistrate for relief, and he, invested with the unheard of powers of the magistracy, sends them to prison for refusing to do his work. The only difference between the cart whip and the tread wheel is this, that the poor man, with five or six children, may remove, but whither is he to go with the law of removal and settlement staring him in the face? How does this

gentleman differ from a West India planter? How does his estate differ from a sugar plantation? or what *in point of principle* is the difference between the pauper, the negro, the slave, or the vassal?

Whenever any attempt is made to raise these various descriptions of persons from a worse to a better, from the second to the third class, the interested, the timid, and sometimes the benevolent, unite in exciting a fear of that ultimatum of human misery, *starvation*. The abolitionists of colonial slavery are constantly told that if the negroes were free, they would infallibly starve or cut the throats of their masters; that if liberty were offered to them on condition of providing for their own maintenance by their own exertions, the great majority would reject the proffered boon. Any attempts to raise the paupers of our villages from the state of degradation to which they have been reduced is met, by a certain kind of gentry, with a similar threat, that under any other system than the present, the peasants must starve or rebel, and we are told in commendation of this system, that the majority of paupers would prefer their allowance to their wages—their bondage to their freedom. But if this latter assertion be true (and perhaps it is of the negro and the pauper) can any stronger argument be adduced against slavery of every kind and degree, than that it should debase one class of rational creatures to make this abject preference, and another to commend it. Can any stronger proof be adduced of the accuracy of the following charge preferred by an English Bishop—“That the gentry are easily brought to like slavery if they may be the tools for managing it!”

But there are a great many gentlemen who detest

and lament this practice, and there are a great many others who believe it, and most justly believe it, to be expensive and injurious to themselves. If I press the argument of interest, it is with the hope of exciting the feeling of aversion. It has been a matter of charge against me, and even against my argument, that in my own particular case I have considerable self-interest. Now it would not be difficult to shew (perhaps it is self evident) that in a small parish, not over-peopled at present, my argument and my interest are on opposite sides. But be that as it may, in a discussion of this nature the public can be but little interested in the motives of an individual. Had I been stimulated to this inquiry by sordid motives, that circumstance, however it might expose me to uncandid or even to just censure, could not affect the merit of an argument, or alter the nature of facts. When, however, I state that I have not paid for all parochial charges, county, church, highway, and poor rate more than £10 per ann. and not two pounds for that particular part of the rate to which my objection was chiefly formed, I may stand acquitted of those low-minded imputations which some persons have condescended to bestow upon me.

It is not so much with a view of vindicating myself, or of shewing a perfect disregard of senseless and unmerited obloquy, as with the sincere desire of exciting the public attention to a great moral and political evil which afflicts the country, that I give the following candid statement of my experience in an attempt to remove that evil as much as possible from my own village, and from the little flock intrusted to my care. It is a subject of pride and gratification, that in this country, even on questions of political

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economy, moral and religious principles are sure to have their weight, and that no evidence, with respect to the present state of pauperism, has been more generally regarded by men of all parties, than that of the rural clergy. I cannot complain of censure, for more praise has been bestowed upon my humble efforts than I anticipated or deserved.

It is about six years ago since I was presented to the rectory of this parish, Soon after my residence, at the request of the farmers, I attended the parish meeting. I dare not call it a vestry, for we have been informed by the magistrates, that we cannot have a vestry,* not having a sufficient number of occupiers, exclusive of the parish officers, to form a quorum. However we have had a parish meeting, and I have attended it about ten times, chiefly for the purpose of hazarding the same opinions in private

* A neighbouring clergyman, who came to reside in this part of the country a short time before me, has been altogether driven from his vestry by the overbearing insolence and absurd interference of the magistracy. This gentleman I had known before my residence in this part of the country. When in the University he had filled most of the important offices of trust, learning, and discipline. He is rector of a parish containing nearly a thousand persons, he is lord of the manor, and the largest resident landed proprietor. His only object was I believe to relieve the poor, and his only offence that he and the vestry chose to relieve them according to the circumstances of each case, and not according to the invariable scale of the magistracy. The overseers of this parish have also been roughly treated for the like offence. One of them was on one occasion *summarily* dismissed by a magistrate at the petty sessions, with this dignified censure—"that he was no more fit to be an overseer than his groom." I mention these circumstances, with the hope that if they should meet the eye of one of the chairmen of the quarter sessions of the county, they may induce him to tender the same excellent advice to the magistrates which he has offered to overseers and vestries, viz. that reference should be had to character and circumstances in every case of relief.

which I have advanced in public. The farmers have very generally concurred with me in opinion, and for three or four years there has never been a case in which any able bodied labourer, *however large his family, has received any payment, except for sickness, out of the rate.*

Pauperism and not the poor rate has always appeared to me to be the great evil. The poor rate of this parish, compared with most others, was small upon the valuation. But though the rate was not heavy, the pauperism was *universal*. The parish book of this village begins with the century, and the first page is filled with a list of the labourers belonging to the parish, to each of whose names a weekly sum fixed by the magistrates is annexed, under the title of "flour money." This system of pensions continues for twenty years. In 1820, the year of my institution, the names of all the labourers, I believe without a single exception, appear in the parish book. The system therefore was complete, and had been long continued. It has been *gradually* taken down, and year after year the tide of pauperism has receded, and family after family been restored to comparative independence. The following list of the number of entries in the parish book will shew the nature and extent of the change which has been effected, and will also satisfy my readers that it has not been done in a hasty and inconsiderate manner.

| | <i>No. of entries of Relief.</i> |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| In 1820 | 617 |
| 1821 | 587 |
| 1822 | 503 |
| 1823 | 411 |
| 1824 | 366 |
| 1825 $\frac{3}{4}$ year | 230 |

In 1817 the rate was £333. in 1818 £391. in 1821. £181. and in 1824 £253. but in this year the rate was increased by accidents and an unusual church and surveyor's rates. In the three quarters of the present year the rate was £107. in the first half year only £85. Of this £85. the following items form a part.

| | £. | s. | d. |
|-----------------------------------|-------|----|----|
| Prosecution of Thieves | 7 | 7 | 3 |
| Half-year County Rate | 14 | 9 | 0 |
| Half-year Rat and Mole Catcher .. | 7 | 0 | 0 |
| Surveyor | 3 | 9 | 6 |
| Surgeon's Bill | 13 | 7 | 6 |
| | <hr/> | | |
| | £45 | 15 | 3 |
| | <hr/> | | |

I mention these items, not because they are regular, but because they are irregular. They shew, however, that the expenditure for the poor has fallen, while other entries have risen in number and amount. The prosecution of thieves is a new entry. The mole and rat catcher also. The county rate has risen from five pounds in 1820 to nearly thirty in 1825. The surgeon's bill is increased from five pounds to thirteen by accidents.

Of the remaining £40. a considerable portion is to persons who met with accidents. The pauperism of the parish formerly included the whole of the labourers and their families. It was during the last half-year strictly speaking confined to three cases, exclusive of cases of sickness, and one or two of imposition. The three cases were a widow, an old man and his daughter, and an old man. The widow is the mother of one of the labourers who has no family, and who earned in the last year between forty and fifty pounds. She has a pension of £7. 10s. per annum

from the parish, and is allowed to live as she pleases. The old man, who has an infirm daughter, has two sons well situated in London, another servant to a neighbouring clergyman, in whose service he has saved a considerable sum, and another a farmer occupying a farm of £120. per annum. The old man and his daughter have a pension of £25. per annum, and they are allowed to live as they please. The other old man has six or seven children, most of whom could render him some assistance. He has a pension of £10. 10s. Part of his time he spends with his children, and in some parts of the year he earns something. These cases, therefore, the extreme cases, shew that the real amount of poverty in England is much over-rated, and that these persons, if there were no public and even no private charity beyond that of relatives, would not starve. These cases also shew, that we have not sought to deprive the old and infirm of that assistance to which they have been by long habit accustomed. The sick, where the sickness has been undoubted, have received as much and in many cases more than they could earn when employed, and much more than the magistrates' allowance. This is a dangerous rule, and cannot be generally adopted or recommended; but it is the fact. The poor rate, therefore, has been reduced, while the other parochial charges have been increased, and the aged, the infirm, and the sick have been more liberally rewarded. The amount of rate reduced will appear in the increase of earnings, and in the industry and improved morality of the labourers. There is a widow belonging to this parish who was chargeable, but who is now supported by her son, a considerable tradesman in London. In the last year an old man died who had received paro-

chial relief for many years. He died at the house of his son-in-law, who is a tradesman in Lynn. His son also occupies a farm of between two & three hundred acres of excellent land, in a parish not many miles distant. These relatives followed their parent to the grave, which was dug at the expence of the parish, and the overseer is now directed by the magistrates to pay a bill of eight pounds to the children of the pauper, partly for maintenance and partly for funeral expences.

I will now proceed to make a few observations on bastardy, cottage economy, the wages of labour, and crime. As to bastardy, the following facts appear. In 1820 this parish paid for four bastard children, three of whom were the children of married men. In half the cottagers' families there were cases of bastardy. The daughter of fifteen or sixteen years might be seen nursing her father's illegitimate child; the husband the wife's; and the wife the husband's. In this immorality there has been quite a traffic kept up. In some districts the allowance is higher than in others. A man who now works for me pays 1s. 9d. for his own and receives 2s. 6d. for his wife's illegitimate child. We have more than one case of the following kind. A labourer marries, has a family, and is left a widower. During his widowhood he has a bastard child; he then marries another woman, who has an illegitimate child by another man; and he has now another family by his present wife. Some success has attended an attempt to check this profligacy. There is not now a bastard child wholly and only one partially maintained by the parish. In five years preceding 1820 there were three bastard children baptized; in the five subsequent years, with a popula-

tion considerably increased, there has not been one born or baptized. The increase of promiscuous intercourse among the lower orders in villages is doubtless to be ascribed to the sanction which it has received from the law, as well as to the disregard and in some cases the indulgent favour in which it is held by the magistrates. Fornication is classed by Christ with the worst of crimes, murders, adulteries, false witness, blasphemies. In the history of vice it is associated with these crimes. "However," says Dr. Paley, "it be accounted for, the criminal commerce of the sexes corrupts and depraves the mind and moral character more than any single species of vice whatever. That ready perception of guilt, that prompt and decisive resolution against it, which constitutes a virtuous character, is seldom found in persons addicted to these indulgencies. They prepare an easy admission for every sin that seeks it; are in *low life* usually the first stage in men's progress to the most desperate villainies; and in *high life* to that lamented dissoluteness of principle which manifests itself in a *profligacy of public conduct and a contempt of the obligations of religion and of moral probity.*"*

The moral condition of the people must of course

* The increase of this vice among the lower orders is sometimes to be ascribed to bad habitations. During the last century however the cottages in England have been much improved, and it would seem that the increase of profligacy cannot be generally ascribed to this cause. In this village the cottages were certainly not good. Both sexes and of all ages were crowded together in an improper manner. On a representation of this evil to the proprietor of this estate, he allowed me to expend a considerable sum in building and improving the habitations of the labourers, who have now commodious houses, with good gardens, varying from half a rood to half an acre, and at rents varying from 30s. to 3*l.* per annum.

be much affected by the state of education. There are only two labourers in this parish who can read. We have had some difficulty in filling up the parish offices of constable and clerk. It has been a work of difficulty to induce the parents to permit their children to be taught, and in large parishes where the pauper system prevails it must be extremely difficult for the clergy to secure the education of the children. Had I not possessed advantages my attempts must have failed. More than two years passed away before instruction was generally accepted. I ascribe this to the debasing effects of the pauper bread-money system, which teaches the people to cling to every thing low and miserable as their privilege and safeguard. Whatever may improve their condition, and raise them above the level of pauperism, they are taught to esteem as a means of depriving them of the privilege of legal allowance. If good clothing will raise them above the system, rags are to be esteemed not a disgrace, but a recommendation to charity. If education and religious instruction would inspire them with better feelings, these pearls are to be trampled under foot for the worthless husks and scraps of a parish allowance. The scene, however, has begun to alter. The labourers begin to take a pleasure and a pride in their cottages, gardens, families, and even in their work. They subscribe a considerable sum annually to provide themselves clothing—they subscribe a trifle for other benevolent purposes—they increase from year to year, by little and little, their stock and furniture—they embrace the means of instruction for their children, some of whom now teach their parents to read. The chain of pauperism has been broken. Two families have removed to London

and one to a neighbouring county. Some of the young men have provided themselves with creditable employments. The offices of constable and clerk, and the situations of gamekeeper and such like services, which were formerly filled up by strangers, have been occupied, as they became vacant, by the labourers. I state these particulars from a conviction that it is in this way that gentlemen may excite a spirit of improvement in their dependents. It may also satisfy my readers, that attempts to reduce pauperism, however opposed, cannot be rendered ultimately unpopular, when I state that there are now nearly forty children out of a small population in the school, that the number of communicants is doubled, and that nine-tenths of the population attend the parish church. These particulars are mentioned with the hope that they may do some good. I state them however with great reluctance, for it must be remembered that many of the labourers have been men of irregular lives. I state them with great apprehension, because, while every parish is so entirely at the mercy of justices of the peace, it is impossible to predict what degree of mischief and confusion may at any moment be excited by an absurd or misinformed or wrong-headed justiciary. It has been said "that this is one of the greatest and most galling oppressions under which the agriculture of the country labours."* It is a galling oppression to the church, the yeomanry, and the labourers. It is an oppression which may at all times be resisted by oppression, but not always by kindness and justice. It may be resisted by sacrificing the interests and affections of the people, but not always by promoting their welfare. In large parishes,

* Quarterly Review.

with divided interests, it is almost impossible to resist it with effect.

But it will be asked how are the people paid? what is the effect of reducing pauperism on the wages and earnings of the labourers? The improvement of their dress, diet, stock, is a sufficient testimony, that in proportion as the people are weaned from this species of dependence, their industry and earnings rise to a natural and equitable level. Facts in illustration of this will appear in the following pages, but I will give the earnings of eight regular labourers employed on one farm in this parish during the past year.—Seven-eighths of the earnings are by the piece or grate, and I do not doubt that this work has been performed at a cheaper rate than if it had been done by the day. Most practical men confess that a good labourer at piece work will perform twice the work of a pauper day labourer. Indeed it is reasonable to expect that it should be so.

| | £. | s. | d. |
|-------------|----|----|----|
| No. 1 | 42 | 7 | 5 |
| 2 | 38 | 15 | 4 |
| 3 | 47 | 6 | 4 |
| 4 | 46 | 17 | 4 |
| 5 | 40 | 0 | 6½ |
| 6 | 40 | 7 | 1½ |
| 7 | 42 | 6 | 0 |
| 8 | 40 | 2 | 8 |

These earnings are evidently adequate to procure for the labourers comfortable maintenance. They are, I think, adequate to more than this. By benefit societies and such like associations they might secure for themselves a maintenance in age and sickness.

Under the present system and influence any attempt to promote such institutions must fail, but I do not hesitate to express my conviction that if the system were removed, the labourers would pay annually into such associations more than the amount of poor rate.

Of the increase of crime in villages there can be no question. The increase of the population bears no proportion to the increase of crime. Not only are the criminals increasing in number, but in the enormity of their offences. The progress of crimes is sufficiently testified by the great increase of associations for their detection and punishment, as well as by the spaciousness and magnificence of our gaols. There is not a district without such associations. The amount of rewards is greatly augmented, but the agents of these associations assert, that rewards seldom or never lead to information and detection. The following account of offences is taken from a small association in a neighbouring market town.

| | <i>No. of Offences.</i> |
|------------|-------------------------|
| 1821 | 0 |
| 22 | 3 |
| 23 | 7 |
| 24 | 10 |
| 25 | 13 |

In the last year there are five cases of sheep, two of pig, and one of horse stealing, one burglary, and four other offences. The rewards offered amount to £150, but none were claimed. The printers of hand-bills at another neighbouring market town have given me a list of twenty cases, principally of sheep and horse stealing, within a few months. These bills offer rewards, varying from five to seventy guineas, and amounting to £400. In the neighbouring parish

there have been, during the year, cases of burglary, issuing of base coin, sheep, pig, corn, and fowl stealing, besides poaching and other offences. The house of one of the labourers was searched, and in it were found base coin, silver and gold, corn, and other articles, the apparatus of house-breaking, vice, files, dark lantern, and 50 picklock keys, which open almost all the locks in the two parishes. It is known that fifteen or more of the labourers have been at this man's house at a time, and all night gaming.* Three persons have been transported from the same village during the past year, and many others imprisoned. The testimony of the farmers and constables goes to shew that the great body of the labourers have been more or less connected with the notorious offenders. Besides the general association of hundreds and market towns, local associations are also formed in neighbouring villages. A hand-bill published by one formed in this neighbourhood is a curious document.

* The County Court has during this year issued an order for the discontinuance of the presentments which it has been customary for the petty constables to make. It is stated that this measure is adopted with the sanction of his Majesty's Secretary for the Home Department. It is not my intention to dispute the propriety or wisdom of this resolution, but it may be observed, that the denunciation of the constable, without information of an offence enquirable in the court to which it is presented, is an ancient part of the law and of the parish system. No doubt many of the items in the customary forms were obsolete, but might not this practice be rendered more congruous to the present state of society? In my own case I must state, that the only good I ever knew done by the constable of this village was by his voluntary threat of presentment to a man who had a disorderly house. One night when a number of persons were assembled in one of the cottages in revelry, the constable went of his own accord and read the articles of presentment, upon which the parties dispersed, and I have not heard of a similar case of disorder.

It is signed by two magistrates, and the most respectable yeomanry and farmers. I cannot approve it, for it is a species of blood-money, but it is a sufficient proof of the state of crime. It sets forth that the association is formed "with a view to counteract the alarming increase of theft," and that the parties signing pledge themselves "to leave no means untried to accomplish that object." It offers "a reward of 100 guineas for burglary where the sentence is death or transportation"—the same reward "for horse, cattle, or sheep stealing, for the like sentence"—the same reward "for corn and fowl stealing, for the like sentence"—"but where the sentence only amounts to imprisonment, the reward shall be apportioned to the magnitude of the offence."

At the present time there is a heavy levy upon the hundred to reimburse the loss which an overseer has sustained by the burning of his stacks. There was not long ago a similar case of arson in a neighbouring hundred. A great proportion of the commitments to the county gaols are for offences under the poor laws, and a still greater proportion for crimes springing immediately out of those laws. The number of commitments under the following heads is yearly increasing—"for refusing to work"—for "absenting himself from service"—for "disobeying master's orders"—for "leaving family chargeable," and many others, on the oath of overseers, as idle and disorderly persons. Who can express surprise at these facts? The wonder is, that there is any virtue or honesty in a state of society where the local administration of justice disbands every social tie, and sets at defiance all moral and political prin-

principles. It is absurd to suppose that any degree or severity of human punishment can counteract such a pernicious influence.

The foregoing facts have been stated with a view of shewing that a diminution of crime, a reformation of morals, or a permanent amendment of the administration of the poor laws, are impossible without a reformation of the present system of provincial justice. The following inquiry, in all its parts, has been directed to this point, from a firm conviction that such a reformation of the inferior courts is the only adequate remedy for the present gross maladies in rural society. The great number of summary convictions, the increase of crime, judges, courts, and decisions of spurious equity, discretion abused into usurpation of power, nice and interested distinctions between questions of law and matters of fact, which forbid all appeal to higher courts, loudly call for some reformation, or at least for some regulation of the present system. I am quite incompetent to enter into details, but perhaps it may be suggested, whether it would not be advantageous to the country that the legislative part of the aristocracy (if I may make such a distinction) should be separated from and made superior to that part of the gentry who administer the laws and the bye-laws of the country. What would be the consequence if the twelve judges were to make all the laws, or if the legislators were to be the only judges? Why then should noblemen and members of parliament be justiciaries, and why should justiciaries be members of parliament? If the superior aristocracy had no share in administering the laws, it is reasonable to suppose that many affecting rural economy would be blotted out of the statute

book—that the decisions of the inferior courts would not be so loose, contradictory, and arbitrary as they now are ; and that the powers of the local, like the powers of all other magistrates, would be more accurately defined, strictly limited, and jealously watched. A reformation of this sort might perhaps be effected by making a broader distinction between the lieutenancy and magistracy of the county, and by giving to the former a greater control and check over the latter.

The common gentry, whom to preserve from perfect idleness, it may be desirable to interest in the affairs of their neighbourhood, might not relish a stipendiary magistracy, but perhaps many of the advantages of this system might be secured if the sheriff's office were made in some respects to resemble that of Scotland, where the Sheriffs are provincial judges, and lawyers of certain standing and practice at the bar. In Scotland there are a great many rural justices, who, however, seldom act but in concert with the sheriff and his substitutes. Within a few years the sheriffs and their substitutes have been interdicted by law from holding any factory or agency in the county in which they act. They are therefore independent and responsible judges. Some good might be effected by making the justices' clerks in England stipendiary, by commanding their exclusive attention to public business, and by abolishing or commuting the fees of petty and quarter sessions. During the present year certain questions relative to fees have come before the court of the county. The magistrates' clerks also have been disputing the amount of fees and remunerations to which they are entitled. Public appeals have been made in the news-

papers by these officers to the "high-minded magistracy of the county." It is certainly most desirable that these questions should be settled, and that the public mind should not be discomposed and agitated by controversies which necessarily raise suspicions of the present course of justice in the country.

A commission of inquiry into these and similar points might effect much good—might ascertain whether the present system, in which the magistrates are unpaid, be not more expensive than any other, and whether those expences might not be considerably reduced by annexing to it a few stipendiary officers. A quarter of a million and more (including expences not reported) is a serious sum for one county, in comparison of which the salaries of a few professional judges would be quite inconsiderable. To reduce these expences is manifestly an important object with those who would wish to see the price of corn and provisions in this approximate more nearly to that of other countries. The present patronage of the magistrates, their assumed power of dispensing pensions and bounties at other men's expence, has arisen out of the disordered state of the currency, or rather has been perhaps one of the great means of aggravating those evils, by absorbing, in such distribution, a large portion of the one and two-pound notes of the country. In a correct state of the currency, it must be quite as impracticable to maintain this system as it is unjust and impolitic to attempt it. The influence of this system is however one of the great obstacles to returning cheapness of provisions.

But expence is not the only consideration. A commission of inquiry might ascertain how far it is desirable that many of the persons who are now in

commission of the peace should, or should not, continue to be so. It is not too much to assert, that a great proportion of these gentlemen are, from habit and education, ignorant of the spirit, the principles, and the forms of law, and yet what extraordinary powers have been extended to them during the last half century, over the property, reputation, and liberties of their fellow subjects!

There are among the magistrates men of great talent, indefatigable industry, and of the strictest integrity. It is well for the country that there are such. But there are others in the commission of the peace who are incapable of managing their own private affairs. It is often very galling to the practical sensible men of the country to find persons who are incapable of managing a small patrimony or a glebe, permitted in virtue of their office to dictate in the management of their farms—to administer lectures and admonitions which schoolboys could not tolerate—to break down, by the most whimsical jerks of authority, the subordinations of society, and reduce whole districts to an ill-connected mass. The magistrates seem to consider themselves in many cases dispensators of bounty, rather than executors of the law. Their courts are no longer courts of law and appeal, but of dictation and direction. Some check must be applied to this case. A commission of inquiry is appointed to examine into the evils which have, by the natural course of every thing human, accumulated in the Court of Chancery, over which a most laborious, learned, and upright judge has for many years presided; but these spurious courts of equity, which trample under foot the common law and scrutinize every man's private affairs, must not

be touched. The superior courts, over which the twelve judges have presided almost without a censure for half a century, have been the subject of investigation, regulation, and reform, while the lowest courts which are intrusted to unprofessional and interested judges, are allowed to proceed without inquiry, notwithstanding repeated complaints and remonstrances.

If I have presumed to add to the number of these complaints, it has been from a conviction, which experience has confirmed, that the present system of rural jurisprudence is hostile to the social and Christian virtues which it is my charitable and necessary duty, in common with my brethren the clergy, to inculcate. My reasons for this conviction and my experience itself I have candidly stated; if they are unworthy of regard they will meet with neglect; if they are improperly stated they will expose me to disgrace; but if they shall attract any degree of attention, and lead those who have influence to apply the remedies which the case seems to demand, my object will be obtained. His Majesty's Secretary for the Home Department has turned his attention to this subject, and has begun with his accustomed delicacy and good sense to introduce many valuable reformatations. That Right Hon. Gentleman possesses in the most ample measure the confidence of the clergy and of all the middle ranks of society. The name of Mr. Peel begins to be whispered among the justices and at Quarter Sessions with an ominous kind of awe. There is reason to hope that he will at the convenient season grapple with this subject in a way which may excite the apprehensions of a few, but which will meet the wishes of the great majority even of the aristocracy. In this happy country, through our consciousness of liberty, evils

will more naturally grow up to a certain extent than in others which enjoy a less degree of political and constitutional freedom. This can be no subject of complaint so long as we feel assured that tyranny cannot for any length of time prevail over law, or law over right. When the grievance becomes palpable and the season favourable, redress is at hand. In the present case we may fairly anticipate that the natural aristocracy of the country will be disposed to shake off some of its present excrescences and deformities—that the middle ranks will assert their independence and defend their property—that the Legislature and the Government will enact such laws and secure such a system of justice as may assure to the labourer the fruit and profit of his labour. This is the only way to render him industrious, and without industry it is not in the power of any religion to preserve the virtues, nor of any laws to secure the prosperity or even the employment and subsistence of the people.

ERRATA.

- P. 1. for *has* read *have*.
22. *four—three*.
28. *delapidation—dilapidation*.
47. *immence—immense*.
51. *serves—serve*.
52. *farmer—farmers*.
56. whole population—whole *labouring*
population.
58. *have kept—has kept*.
61. *sonsiderable—considerable*.
84. which *has*—which *have*.
99. *capracious—capricious*.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE MORAL TENDENCY OF AGRICULTURAL AND PASTORAL EMPLOYMENTS.

ONE of the most remarkable changes which has taken place in the relative position of the different ranks of society in England, is found in the condition and character of the working classes employed in trade and agriculture. Artificers, weavers, journeymen of every description, soldiers and sailors, have risen very considerably in the scale of society, and are every day improving in knowledge, comfort, and conduct. The peasantry, on the other hand, have been depressed, and have lost to a considerable degree their ancient reputation for freedom, independence, and moral deportment. So manifest and entire has the change become, that the public are now taught to believe that there never has been a period in the history of our own, or of other countries, when this was not the natural and actual order of things. Not only are poverty and ignorance assigned to the country, but vice also and crime; and if we are to credit implicitly the declarations of many writers upon this subject,

who profess to confirm their statements by an appeal to the history of all ages, we must dismiss our early impressions of rural virtue and happiness as idle, romantic, and poetical delusions. In many recent publications we find it asserted, that agricultural labourers are in a state of indigence and degradation, that such always *has been*, and always *must be* their condition in civil society. This assertion is made, too, by persons who have been practically employed in the administration of the Poor Laws, and who therefore take what is generally, though perhaps inaccurately, termed the practical view of this question. It is true that this view of the case has arisen out of the modern practice, and is in that sense practical, but it may be suspected, and as I conceive proved, that the indigence and dependence which we at present witness in agricultural labourers, are to a great extent the simple and natural result of the practice of the last fifty years, and of the laws and regulations for the maintenance and employment of these labourers, which we dignify with the name of Poor Laws. So far from its being true in the history of mankind, that the cultivators of the soil have always held the lowest rank in the scale of being and society, it would rather appear from the history of our own, and of every other country, that the present depression of the peasantry in many of the agricultural districts of England is altogether modern and anomalous. That they have been de-

pressed in condition, character, and morals, there is too much evidence, but that the depression is inevitable and inherent, and must be provided against by specific and permanent legislation, is a position of too much importance to be admitted before it has been well canvassed and established. That this opinion has been generally entertained for the last thirty years is apparent, from the whole course of legislation and government respecting the peasantry during that period. Mr. Pitt's bill, with its 130 sections and 68 amendments, Mr. Whitbread's, with its countless regulations, and the edicts and orders of magistrates, are sufficient proofs of the existence and extravagance of this opinion.

In general discussions affecting this class of persons, it is now commonly assumed, "that the most indigent class in every society seems to have always consisted of those whose labour is exerted in the cultivation of the soil," and that "the average price of agricultural wages will generally be lower than the sum which can support the average number of a family;" and that "*with respect to England*, if the children exceed three in number, the maintenance of the fourth, under ordinary circumstances, will devolve on the State."* Moreover we are told, that "*in agriculture*, in sharing the gains labour is allowed to abstract directly no more than what is sufficient for its

* The principle of the English Poor Laws illustrated and defended by Frederic Page, Esq.

maintenance.”* It is represented on all sides, that agriculture, with all its monopolies, does not supply sufficient wages for the maintenance of the labourer, and therefore that it is necessary for the law and the magistracy to interfere, both to employ these labourers and to make up their wages to the standard of a bare maintenance. As a consequence of these positions, as we have no slaves in England, the persons who take their place, or paupers must be found in greater abundance in agriculture than in any other pursuit. All our practical regulations, and many of our modern laws, are in accordance with these opinions. It is become, therefore, curious and highly important to inquire, how far this degraded and immoral condition of the peasantry, which has been ascertained by unquestionable evidence before Parliament,† and which is indeed notorious, is to be ascribed to laws and regulations, and how far it is the natural result of employment in agriculture, not only in this country at this time, but in every country and in every age. This is the first step in this question, so far as it affects the labouring population in agriculture. But not only have the peasantry fallen in the scale of society, the public press teems with assertions, that the middle classes in agricul-

* Letter to the Right Honourable George Canning on the principle and the administration of the English Poor Laws. By a Vestryman of Putney.

† See Appendix.

ture are inferior in intelligence and good feeling to the corresponding classes employed in trade. The same inferiority is declared of the rural to the civic magistracy, and the invidious observation is often extended to borough and county members of Parliament. Declamations of this sort, however unqualified they may be, indicate some defects in the constitution of rural society, and some great revolution in the relative positions of trade and agriculture, and of the persons engaged in the pursuit of them.

In confirmation of the opinion that the lowest must always be considered the proper place for the peasantry in civil society, the history of Athens, Sparta, Rome, ancient and modern Europe, has been referred to. "The great distinction we are told subsisting between freemen and slaves at Athens and Sparta and Rome, in common with other states of antiquity, prevented the *existence* of a class of indigent persons, analogous to that designated in this country by the name of the poor." These representations, which are common in books, and almost universal in conversation, appear to be, however, libels upon husbandry, and upon those who, in every age except our own, (if our own be an exception) have been employed in the pursuit of it. Jewish, Grecian, Roman history would teach us rather that the art of husbandry was accounted the most virtuous and honourable. Patriarchs and Princes, Statesmen

and Poets, Consuls and Dictators, were the ancient farmers. Husbandmen and shepherds were taken from the plough and from the sheep-folds to defend and govern their country. Some of these illustrious men returned to the cultivation of their small farms laden with the honour of a triumph and the praises of the people. The most beautiful and cultivated of ancient poets was employed during his earlier days in the business of his small farm, and devoted the prime of his life, under the patronage of the Emperor, to restore the ancient spirit of husbandry which had declined in Italy during the civil wars. History would certainly encourage the conviction, that it is not in the nature of the humblest agricultural or pastoral pursuits to depress the intellect, corrupt the taste, or impair the virtuous feeling of those who are engaged in them.

We have not only the testimony of historians and poets, who may be suspected of painting particular stories, but the sentiments of ancient politicians and moralists, who have discussed this subject on general principles, are equally decisive. "The best class of working people (says Aristotle) are those employed in the rural labours of agriculture and pasturage, especially the former, and the manners and habits of husbandmen are also best adapted to counteract the evil tendency of democratic institutions." From the same author we learn the comparative estimation in which the in-

habitants of towns and villages were anciently held. "The properties and habits of husbandmen, he says, as distinguished from mercenary labourers on the one hand, and from manufacturers, merchants, and tradesmen, on the other, are so eminently conspicuous and so incomparably better to the peaceful enjoyment of every species of freedom, that even in countries, where a great proportion of the inhabitants subsist by arts and commerce, the city tribes ought never to assemble separately; every convention to be lawful, ought to be attended by deputies from the country, so that the noxious humours, engendered by market places and courts of justice, may be sweetened and purified by a due mixture of more wholesome materials." Alas, how is this picture reversed! Cicero too, in his treatise on morals, expresses exactly the same opinion as to the comparative merits of persons employed in trade and agriculture, and represents the latter as the most excellent, lucrative, agreeable, manly, and gentlemanly occupation from which gain can be derived.

It is true, indeed, that in the decline of the Grecian and Roman power, the cultivators of the soil were slaves; but in the case of the latter especially, the vast importation of slaves for domestic use, as well as for tillage and agriculture, contributed essentially to spread the most vicious habits, and to destroy both virtue and industry among the free citizens. Of the state of morals

under this order of things we may judge from the following speech of a Roman Censor: "If it were possible (he says) entirely to go without wives, we should deliver ourselves at once from this evil; but as the laws of nature have so ordered it, that we can neither live happy with them, nor continue the species without them, we ought to have more regard for our lasting security than for our transient pleasures." I do not mean to compare the state of morals among the peasantry with the corruption of manners among the Romans at that time, but it is of use to observe the tendency of things. In the following examination of the state of the population, and in the evidence of most respectable men before the House of Commons,* we do find that the peasantry have begun to adopt the sentiments of the Roman Censor, so far as to go without wives till they are forced by the threats of the overseers, or seduced by the *congiaria*, and the law of the magistrates, to marry.

The cultivation of the soil by slaves was accompanied with an immense importation of corn for gratuitous distribution, and for cheap sale among the citizens. The *congiaria* became a part of the national policy, and each individual had his portion fixed by periodical decrees. With the decline of Roman virtue the practice was extended to all the great cities of the empire. Mr. Gibbon concludes

* See Appendix.

the first volume of his history with recording a remarkable fact, for the knowledge of which we are indebted to ecclesiastical history. "We have (he observes) the knowledge of a very curious circumstance, of some use, perhaps, in the melancholy calculation of human calamities. An exact register was kept at Alexandria of all the citizens entitled to receive the distribution of corn. It was found that the ancient number of those comprised between the ages of forty and seventy had been equal to the whole sum of claimants, from fourteen to four score years of age, who remained alive after the reign of Gallienus." Mr. Gibbon and Mr. Hume, in one of his essays, ascribe the famines which depopulated the Roman empire to the cultivation of the soil by slaves, and the consequent neglect of agriculture, and decline of industry and morals.

The cultivation of the soil by slaves among the Romans has been referred to, in order to reconcile the public mind to the abject state of the peasantry, and to justify our Poor Laws. But the whole history of the cultivation of the soil by *slaves*, the importation of corn for popular distribution or cheap sale, the languishing state of tillage and agriculture, and the consequent corruption of manners during the reign of the Emperors, should teach us to regard with some suspicion the increase of pauperism, the progress of luxury, the cheap importation of grain, the depressed and degenerate condition of the cultivators

of the soil. Happily with us the evil admits of remedy; but there is enough mischief already apparent to arouse the country, to arrest the plague which has begun and spread in our tents.

The history of modern Europe clearly shews that the progress of society has been to raise the cultivators of the soil from a state of slavery and dependence to the condition of free labourers. But I will not enter into details of evidence. It may be sufficient briefly to shew, from the history of England, that the present condition of the peasantry is altogether of recent date, and subsequent to the laws and regulations which have been introduced for their maintenance and employment. Sir F. Eden, Dr. Burn, and most writers on the state of the poor, have either altogether omitted, or very slightly touched the history of the peasantry during the Anglo-Saxon Government. They generally begin their inquiry with the conquest and the feudal tyranny, though the previous history is on every account replete with interest and information. Lord Coke and Mr. Justice Blackstone deem this the most important period of our legal history. Professor Miller, in his *Historical View of the English Government*, has given a very valuable sketch of the peasantry during the Anglo-Saxon Government, as well as in the subsequent periods of our history. We may judge of the general esteem in which the different occupations of life were held at that time, from the following

remark: "As the mechanical employments were accounted more unwarlike and contemptible than the exercise of husbandry, there was less probability that any freemen would be willing to engage in them." During the feudal tyranny, the forest laws, and others of a similar tendency, very much depressed the condition of the peasantry. But at the close of the fourteenth century they began their own emancipation. At that time Wat Tyler, Jack Straw, Hob Carter, and Tom Miller, names assumed by these spirited leaders of the peasantry, to denote their origin and employments, committed with a mutinous populace great violence on the gentry and nobility. Those leaders, however, shewed by their conduct to the King, that they were loyal, by their reasonable demands that they had a just sense of rational liberty, and though they were betrayed, and forfeited their lives, the insurrection of Wat Tyler, Jack Straw, Hob Carter, and Tom Miller, was the great means of shaking off the servitude and oppression of the Norman and feudal tyranny. We have had in the nineteenth century insurrections and reports of insurrections among the peasantry, arising from similar causes, though not directed with the same intelligence and good sense. A few years ago some of the peasantry in this county attacked the house of a magistrate, and committed other acts of violence, in consequence, I believe, of some misunderstanding respecting the modern

semi-feudal regulations for their maintenance. Three of these unfortunate men were executed at Norwich. I happened to attend them in their condemned cell, with the late worthy Chaplain of Norwich Castle. Their sentence was just for they were guilty of great violence, but at that time, though I was then unacquainted with the nature of rural regulations, I felt, in common with the Chaplain, that they were misguided rather than depraved men. I can now understand how they fell a sacrifice, as much to a mistaken interference with their liberties and wages, as to evil passions or abandoned lives.

But we may be satisfied of the relative condition of the labourers in trade and agriculture, from the Conquest to the Reformation, by Sir F. Eden's opinion. He ascribes the introduction of that class of persons who are denominated by the legislature the *poor*, to the rise and spread of manufactures. He sums up this first period of his history with this observation: "The result of this investigation seems to lead to this inevitable conclusion—that manufactures and commerce are the true parents of our national poor." His laborious investigation into the condition of the poor to a period so late and important as 1794, he concludes with this memorable remark: "In tracing the causes which lead to poverty, and to the necessity of soliciting parochial relief, it is not merely a matter of curiosity, but of real moment, to ascertain

from what classes of society paupers most generally originate, and therefore it became an object with me to learn from authentic documents what were the occupations of the people who were the immediate objects of the inquiry. And if it shall appear, as I think it clearly will, from a review of the following reports, *that paupers, comparatively speaking, are but rarely found among those employed in agriculture*, the public are thus put in possession of an important fact, from which they cannot but draw interesting conclusions."

It is worthy of remark also that at this time, the expenditure for the poor in Scotland is chiefly in trading and manufacturing districts. In the Report of the Committee of the general assembly on an inquiry into the management of the poor, in 1818, under the 11th head of information is the following remark:—"In the districts where the *population is chiefly agricultural and pastoral* there are no assessments, and particularly in the Western and Northern counties, it appears that an idea of enforcing an increase of the sessions allowance is entirely unknown, and that the pauper receives with thankfulness the sum allotted to him; indeed the gift of charity is often obliged to be disguised under the shape of a loan, before he is prevailed on, even while in very distressing difficulties, to accept of assistance from the session."

It appears, therefore, that rural pauperism which prevails in some districts of England (for it is not

universal even in England) is modern and peculiar. It appears that there is nothing (as has been asserted) in the nature of agricultural employments, which can account for the depression of persons employed in agriculture, in society, and in the public estimation at this time. But there are many vigilant and intelligent inquirers who admit this change in the relative condition of the working classes in trade and agriculture; trace it to its proper date, and mark with sufficient precision its peculiarity, who are in some degree mistaken in the causes to which they seem satisfied to ascribe it. The causes to which this change is usually imputed, and which, if they were real, would tend to produce a similar effect, are a surplus population, insufficient means of employment, and inadequate wages. How far these have been the real and efficient causes can only be ascertained by an enumeration of the numbers of agricultural labourers, by an inquiry into the increase or decrease of the means of employment during this period, and by detailed accounts of the actual wages of agricultural labourers, and their distribution where they are and where they are not disturbed by national or local regulations. These topics will form the subject of brief inquiry in the following pages. They may perhaps explain the nature and policy of our law of employment.— They certainly involve the question of the present condition of the peasantry, their morals and hap-

piness, and therefore I have gone into them with some degree of patience and care. This inquiry I first instituted, and the following particulars, collected for my own private satisfaction upon this important question. They have been sufficient to remove many prejudices and erroneous impressions with which I began this investigation. My object will be secured if the publication of them shall convey any practical information, and tend in the slightest degree to mitigate our rural pauperism, which, like a mildew, taints the morals and blasts the happiness of the peasantry.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE NUMBER OF AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS.

No subject has excited greater attention of late years than the theory or principle of population. An hypothesis, respecting the relative increase of population and of the means of subsistence, has been supported by arguments which appear every day to be more generally admitted. As it respects the poor and the poor laws, two very opposite conclusions have been drawn from this theory by persons who admit the same principle. Some have inferred from it the great impolicy of our poor law system as tending to force a redundant and immoral population, while others in great alarm have concluded that indigence must continually increase, and that increasing relief, by poor laws, must be afforded to a redundant population.

Within the present century very important details, exhibiting a general view of the population, have been collected and published by parliamentary authority. From these documents we are now enabled to compare the population at different periods. The actual enumeration of the numbers of the people, as compared with the

means of their employment, must afford evidence of some value, and serve to bring theory to the test of facts and experiment. An increase of the numbers would not necessarily prove an increase of indigence, unless it could be shewn that there was not a corresponding increase in the accessible means of subsistence, and on the other hand an increase of food would not prove a decrease of indigence, unless it could be shewn that there was an increase of employment and productive labour, which would enable the labourer to procure an equal quantity of that food. Food may be abundant and not accessible. In Ireland labour has been of no value, and yet food, as appears by the exportation of it, most abundant. In Scotland food has been less abundant, perhaps insufficient, and yet the supply of labour has not exceeded the demand. In those counties of England, where food is superabundant, labour has been depressed in value, and in those where the local supply of food is insufficient, the price of labour has risen. In the former of these cases, however, the law has interfered to regulate the market of labour—in the latter the supply and demand have been uninterrupted by any legislative or executive authority.

But as the necessity for the present regulations with respect to the labourers in agriculture has been asserted and defended on the ground of an increased and surplus population, as well as on the ground of a dearth of employment, it may be

of some use to examine these points in practical detail.

First with regard to the amount of population at different periods. As our inquiry respects the poor laws, it may be sufficient to examine this point at the Revolution, (since which period the evil of pauperism has become so great,) and at the present time. Dr. Adam Smith* supposed that in Great Britain and most other European countries the inhabitants did not double in less than five hundred years. The parliamentary details of the population exhibit however a very different rate of increase during the last century. The population of England and Wales is thus stated in the population returns at different periods.

| | |
|------------|------------|
| 1700 | 5,475,000 |
| 1801 | 9,168,000 |
| 1811 | 10,502,500 |
| 1821 | 12,218,500 |

According to these returns, therefore, the population has doubled in one hundred years. The gross amount of population in the last three periods is so confirmed by the baptisms, burials, and marriages, and in particular places by many other circumstances, that it must be received as sufficiently accurate for all practical inquiry. The *distribution* of the population into the several classes and employments, is certainly vague and inaccurate. But a question naturally arises as to the accuracy of the amount of population in 1700,

This seems to be erroneous. It is computed by a rule of proportion founded upon the returns of registers of baptisms, on an average medium of five years, 1797–1801, and the baptisms of 1700. Though the proportion may hold true of the three periods during which the registers have been carefully kept and returned, yet as the registers of 1700 were less accurately kept, and very incompletely returned, it is manifest that this calculation cannot be altogether depended upon. But it happens, that we have an enumeration of the population, and of the population of each county in England and Wales, founded upon parliamentary and other documents, which were likely to be correct, and made by an individual who was competent to the task, and who took great pains to be accurate. In 1695, Dr. Davenant computed the population of England and Wales at 7,915,290, and it may be of some importance to justify the accuracy or probable accuracy of this computation. It is founded upon several returns made with respect to the land-tax, excise, and especially upon the number of houses in each county, according to the hearth-book of Lady-day, 1690. As this enumeration of the houses was for the purpose of taxation, it is not probable that it was excessive. The number of houses in England and Wales at that time was 1,319,215. Dr. Davenant computes that the proportion of the number of persons to the number of houses would be as 6 : 1, or

six persons to a house. Sir F. Eden considered that this proportion was rather too high, and in 1695 Mr. Howlett estimated the average of persons to a house at $5\frac{2}{3}$. It appears by the parliamentary returns that Dr. Davenant was not inaccurate in his computation. For in 1811, in England, Wales, and Scotland, there were 2,101,597 inhabited houses, and 12,596,803 persons; that is six persons to a house nearly; and in 1821 there were 2,429,630 inhabited houses, and 14,391,631, or six persons to a house nearly.

Dr. Davenant had before him the calculation of Mr. Gregory King, who computed the population of England at 5,500,520. If we add to this half a million for Wales, Mr. King's computation would be six millions for England and Wales. This is certainly too low. Mr. King computes scarcely more than one family to a house, and only $\frac{1}{13}$ to a family; so that the number to a house is little more than $\frac{1}{13}$. He also computes the cottagers' families at only $3\frac{1}{4}$, which must be too low. In 1811 there were 2,544,215 families, or about $\frac{9}{10}$ to a family. In 1821 there were 2,941,383 families, or $\frac{7}{8}$ to a family. The sudden increase of the population and the recent marriages would account for a smaller number to a family in 1821 than in 1811. When it is considered therefore that at the time Dr. Davenant wrote, the system of lodgers was common, that it was generally recommended as

cheaper for the poor, that it might be resorted to in order to avoid a tax, that vagrancy was more frequent, and moreover, when we see that the principles of this computation are confirmed by the population returns, we may conclude that this amount of the population of England and Wales is established on very strong and conclusive evidence.

The population has increased considerably since 1700; but does it not appear from accurate computations that the amount of increase has been exaggerated? Is not this result more natural than the statement in the population returns, which it must be confessed is made upon incomplete premises? Is it not more reasonable to suppose that the population should have increased, during the last century, from 7 or 8 millions, than from 5 or 6 to 10 or 12 millions?

Dr. Davenant has given us also a computation of the poor rate of England and Wales, at the same period, which he says was collected with great labour and expence. This he computes for England and Wales to have amounted to £665,362. So that the population and poor rate in 1695 will be to the population and poor rate in 1821 as follow :

Population 1695. Population 1821.

7,915,290 : 11,978,875 :: £665,362 : £6,959,249

Or 2 : 3 :: 1 : 10 nearly.

Or the population has increased one-third, and the poor-rate has increased ten-fold.

But it will also be important to observe the rate of increase in the population and poor rate in manufacturing and agricultural districts, in towns and villages. For this purpose it may be sufficient to compare the two trading and manufacturing counties of Middlesex and Lancashire, and the two agricultural and maritime counties of Sussex and Norfolk.

In 1690 the following was the state of these four counties.

| | <i>No. Houses.</i> | <i>Population.</i> | <i>Poor Rate.</i> |
|--|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Lancashire | 46,961 | 281,766 | 7,200 |
| Middlesex, London } and Westminster } | 111,215 | 667,290 | 56,380 |
| Sussex | 23,451 | 140,701 | 18,720 |
| Norfolk | 56,579 | 339,474 | 46,200 |

In 1821 the following was the state of these counties :

| | <i>No. Houses.</i> | <i>Population.</i> | <i>Poor Rate.</i> |
|---|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Lancashire | 176,449 | 1,052,859 | 143,535 |
| Middlesex, London, } and Westminster } | 152,969 | 1,144,531 | 615,494 |
| Sussex | 36,283 | 233,019 | 276,469 |
| Norfolk | 62,274 | 344,368 | 267,869 |

Thus it appears, that while the population has increased four-fold in Lancashire, and two-fold in Middlesex, the increase in the population of the two agricultural and maritime counties of Sussex and Norfolk is inconsiderable, and especially of Norfolk. The gross increase of the population is three millions, and nearly one half of these three

millions is found in the increase of population in the two counties of Lancashire and Middlesex. And if we take the increase of population in Yorkshire, Cumberland, Durham, Northumberland, and in the manufacturing districts of Staffordshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, and the West of England, it is manifest that, even on the supposition that the increase of population is much greater in England and Wales than here appears, there must be a decrease of labourers in some of the districts which are purely agricultural.

This will be still more apparent, if we examine somewhat more minutely the history of the counties of Sussex and Norfolk. First we will take the number of houses and the population in Sussex in 1690, 1811, 1821. They are as follows:

| | <i>No. of Houses.</i> | <i>Population.</i> | <i>Poor Rate.</i> |
|------|-----------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| 1690 | 23,451 | 140,701 | 18,720 |
| 1811 | 29,560 | 190,083 | 236,058 |
| 1821 | 36,283 | 232,019 | 276,469 |

Here appears to be an increase of 50,000 in the population of Sussex from 1690 to 1811; but is that increase in the villages or in the towns? It appears that the increase is, perhaps, altogether in the towns, for in ten years, from 1801 to 1811, while on an average of England and Wales, the inhabitants increased 2 per cent. in the towns beyond the augmentation of the country population; the increase in Sussex was SIXTEEN per cent. in favour of the towns. The increase in Lancashire

was only 2 per cent. in favour of the towns. In Yorkshire it was 2 per cent. in favour of the country. It appears also that only one half of the population of Sussex is employed in agriculture. Brighton, which has risen from a small fishing village to its present size within a few years, now contains more than 25,000 inhabitants. There has been also a great increase in the other towns—Hastings, Eastbourne. &c. It may fairly be questioned, therefore, whether any, or certainly any considerable increase has taken place in the number of agricultural labourers in the county of Sussex since 1690.

It is remarkable, also, that the counties of Lancashire and Sussex contain nearly the same number of families employed in agriculture—the number being 22,723 in Lancashire, and 21,920 in Sussex. The total *population* of Lancashire is *five times*, and the total *poor rate one half*, that of Sussex. It may also be worthy of notice, that with this great disproportion in the number of inhabitants, there are the same number of divisional meetings of petty Sessions—viz. sixteen. In Lancashire there are only 100 acting county magistrates. In Sussex 134 justices. The area of Lancashire is 1831 square miles, of Sussex 1463. It appears, therefore, that pauperism varies inversely, as the number of the people, and extent of territory, and directly as the number of acting county magistrates.

But the history of the county of Norfolk is still

more remarkable. The number of houses, the population and poor rate of this county, in 1690, 1811, 1821, were as follows :

| | <i>No. of Houses.</i> | <i>Population.</i> | <i>Poor Rate.</i> |
|------|-----------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| 1690 | 56,579 | 339,474 | 46,200 |
| 1811 | 51,776 | 291,999 | 214,211 |
| 1821 | 62,274 | 344,368 | 267,869 |

Thus it appears that in 1811, there was a *decrease* in the population of Norfolk and Norwich of 50,000 persons from the population of 1695, and in 1821 an increase of only 5000 persons. Nor is this the whole of the case, for in 1693, two years before Dr. Davenant published his *Essay on Ways and Means*, we have an accurate account of the population of the city of Norwich. In 1693 the number of souls in Norwich was 28,881, and in 1821 the population of Norwich was 50,288. Thus while it appears that in the population of Norfolk and Norwich there was in 1811 a decrease of 50,000, and in 1821 an increase of only 5000 souls; in the city alone, there was an increase in 1821 of nearly 22,000.

I cannot trace the population of Yarmouth to an earlier period than 1784, when it was accurately taken and found to contain 12,608 souls. From the intimate connexion of England with Holland, Hanover, and the free towns of Germany, after the Revolution, it is probable that the population of Yarmouth had increased from 1690 to 1784. In 1821 the population of Yarmouth was 18,040,

being an increase of one-third or 6000 upon 1784.

Not to mention the increase in the other borough and market towns, and sea-ports of this large agricultural and maritime county, it is manifest that the population of the villages has considerably decreased, and that the decrease was very great from 1690 to 1794, when the present regulations for the maintenance and employment of agricultural labourers became so general in this county, when too an unusual number of the male population was subtracted for the war, both as soldiers and sailors.

This account though it is astonishing is not altogether inexplicable. For during the last century it must be observed, that a great change took place in the woollen trade of this county. The combing and spinning of wool, which were during that period performed entirely by hand, are now done by machinery, and this trade has been transferred almost entirely from Norfolk and the Eastern districts to Lancashire, Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire, and Leicestershire. Though the earnings from the spinning of yarn and knitting of stockings were very small, yet a great part of the *female* population was employed in those humble arts. But I shall shew that unless the female population had been disengaged from these employments, and been turned to the labours of the field, the land of this county could not have been cultivated as it has been, by the *male* population of the

last thirty years. I am not speaking of the comparative merits of field or domestic employment for women, but only of the fact. Within my own memory, which extends about five and twenty or thirty years, I can recollect that there were many aged persons who were distinguished as combers and weavers, even after those employments had ceased in the villages. These circumstances may account for the decrease of population in many of the villages, especially in the eastern and middle parts of the county.

The poor laws have no doubt contributed to depopulate many of the smaller villages. Many of the estates in this county are of large extent, and many whole parishes are the property of individuals. Of course, under the existing system, it is the interest of the landed proprietor to destroy the habitations for the labourers, who must become a burden to his estate, and to take his labourers from neighbouring parishes, where the property being divided such a system of exclusion cannot be preserved. Such parishes have a double advantage, for they may not only drive their labourers to other parishes, and so avoid the charge of them arising from the poor laws, but where the magistrates fix a scale of maintenance below the natural rate of wages, the farmers of one parish, who have an insufficient population, may hire the labourers of another parish, where there is a surplus population, at their own price, and send them to their neigh-

hours to have their wages made up out of the rates. There are therefore many delapidated churches and depopulated villages,* and consequently many crowded villages with high rents and supernumerary labourers. The apparent surplus population arises simply from these laws and regulations. Dr. Burn states this to have been the case at the time he wrote, but he charges it, as he does many other offences, most erroneously upon the overseers, who have not usually the power which he ascribes to them—"to pull down cottages, to drive out as many inhabitants and admit as few as possible, that is to depopulate the parish in order to lessen the poor rate."†

The Western part of the county of Norfolk was not so much engaged in the woollen manufacture as the Eastern and middle parts. The removal of that trade, therefore, would not so much affect the population in this as in the other districts of the county.

* Camden observes, that this was a very populous county, in consequence of its containing so many market towns and villages. In the book of rates of taxes to the King we find 32 market towns and 711 villages mentioned. There are now 20 market towns and 702 villages and hamlets, and many of the latter are entirely without cottages.

† Henry Drummond, Esq. who appears to think that it is quite impossible that the labourers should ever be again independent, seems to ascribe the increase of population and misery to the pulling down of cottages. The honour of these measures he divides between the gentry and the farmers—to the latter, that of pulling down mud huts, and to the former that of destroying well-built cottages.—*See Report on Labourers' Wages.*

The parish registers of Little Massingham, in which I reside, have been accurately kept from the first years of Elizabeth to the present time. The registers of the parish of Great Massingham are neither so accurate nor so ancient. The inhabitants of these two parishes have always, I conceive, been engaged in agricultural or pastoral employments, and in the trades necessarily connected with them. The number, therefore, would not be much affected by the state of the woollen trade. Other important circumstances there are affecting the means of employment, which it will be necessary to notice, but my principal object in this chapter is to examine the actual state of the population, and how far pauperism is to be ascribed to a surplus population, arising from an increase in the number of agricultural labourers.

I have given on a former occasion the existing population, men, women, and children, in these two parishes, and I shall here exhibit the births, burials, and marriages, in the case of Little Massingham, from Elizabeth to the present century, that is to the introduction of the present system of village pauperism. These will shew a natural and slow increase, but (though there had been no increase of capital employed, and though the means of employment had remained stationary) not such a frightful surplus as should render it necessary to desert the dictates of common sense, and the essential principles of common justice. I shall

give the tables in decennial periods, and in periods of 50 years.

LITTLE MASSINGHAM.

| <i>Years.</i> | <i>Periods of Ten Years.</i> | | | <i>Periods of Fifty Years.</i> | | |
|---------------|------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| | <i>Births.</i> | <i>Burials.</i> | <i>Marriag.</i> | <i>Births.</i> | <i>Burials</i> | <i>Marriag.</i> |
| 1558 .. 1567 | 21 | 19 | 10 | | | |
| 1568 .. 1577 | 13 | 9 | 9 | | | |
| 1578 .. 1587 | 21 | 19 | 6 | | | |
| 1588 .. 1597 | 23 | 18 | 11 | | | |
| 1598 .. 1607 | 29 | 21 | 7 | 107 | 86 | 43 |
| 1608 .. 1617 | 18 | 22 | 4 | | | |
| 1618 .. 1627 | 25 | 26 | 10 | | | |
| 1628 .. 1637 | 29 | 16 | 4 | | | |
| 1638 .. 1647 | 24 | 15 | 5 | | | |
| 1648 .. 1657 | 20 | 24 | 4 | 116 | 103 | 27 |
| 1658 .. 1667 | 10 | 15 | 8 | | | |
| 1668 .. 1677 | 16 | 13 | 5 | | | |
| 1678 .. 1687 | 19 | 17 | 10 | | | |
| 1688 .. 1697 | 26 | 13 | 2 | | | |
| 1698 .. 1707 | 19 | 22 | 7 | 90 | 80 | 32 |
| 1708 .. 1717 | 15 | 19 | 3 | | | |
| 1718 .. 1727 | 25 | 22 | 16 | | | |
| 1728 .. 1737 | 34 | 30 | 12 | | | |
| 1738 .. 1747 | 36 | 29 | 5 | | | |
| 1748 .. 1757 | 35 | 23 | 7 | 145 | 123 | 43 |
| 1758 .. 1767 | 18 | 17 | 4 | | | |
| 1768 .. 1777 | 36 | 23 | 16 | | | |
| 1778 .. 1787 | 32 | 38 | 12 | | | |
| 1788 .. 1797 | 18 | 23 | 15 | | | |
| 1798 .. 1807 | 31 | 13 | 9 | 135 | 114 | 56 |

But though the regulations which have been adopted in agriculture have tended undoubtedly to check a virtuous population, they have (as might be expected from such tyrannical measures) encouraged and forced an ignorant, brutal, and disorderly popu-

lation. We hear a great deal of this enlightened age, of the progress of education, the march of intellect, and the diffusion of knowledge, moral, religious, and political. The parish registers of our villages are faithful records, but we can trace in them not even the outlines of this happy picture. The footsteps of crime and demoralization are too plain and legible. The parish register books of Great Massingham include a period of one hundred years, from 1724 to 1824. In the first 70 years of that century, by no means a good æra, there were 52 illegitimate children baptized, and in the remaining 30 years 57. But the registers of my own parish are still more remarkable in this particular. They include a period of two centuries and three-quarters of a century, and the last quarter of a century contains more illegitimate births than the preceding two centuries and a half. For from the first year of Elizabeth, 1558, to 1794, there are seven entries of illegitimate baptisms, and from 1794 to 1819, there are nine entries of base-born children. This march of morals in this little retired village does not arise, it appears, from an overgrown population, but from a vicious and immoral system of administration, with respect to the peasantry.

It is very difficult to ascertain the progress of education among the peasantry, but here again the marriage register throws some light upon the subject. For in the 26th of Geo. II. an act was

passed, entitled an Act for the better Preventing Clandestine Marriages. This act prescribed a form for entering the marriages in the register, which required the *signatures* of the contracting parties, of the officiating minister, and of two witnesses. Now the signatures of the contracting parties will throw some light upon the state of education since the passing of this act. From 1754 to 1813, a period of 60 years, there were 250 marriages in the parish of Great Massingham. There were nearly 50 in each period of twelve years. To each 50 marriages there were 100 signatures of the contracting parties. Those who could write signed their names, those who could not write made their mark. Of the first hundred, beginning from 1754, 30 could write, of the second 27, of the third 26, of the fourth 21, and of the fifth 30 could write their names. Now when we consider that with the increase of wealth there would be an increase of small tradesmen and confidential servants, who can generally write, it is manifest that education has declined among the peasantry.

The marriage register book likewise throws some light upon another important subject, the law of settlement and the free circulation of labour. The 26 Geo. II. provides, that the form of entry shall express the *residences* of the contracting parties. In the first 39 marriages, from 1721 to 1732, nearly 40 names of different places are men-

tioned as the residences of the contracting parties. Some of these places are near, others more remote; some in this and others in the adjoining counties, clearly shewing a wider intercourse, and a more free and unfettered circulation of labour through the country.* The marriages among the peasantry are now very much confined to their respective villages, or to villages immediately adjoining each other. The close intermarriage of near relatives, a civil and ecclesiastical matter not unimportant, is of course more frequent. We have in this parish four old men, none of whom are natives of this village. One was born near Norwich, another near Yarmouth, a third near the sea coast, and the fourth in the center of the county. I am informed that this is the case of the oldest inhabitants in the adjoining villages, and that they mi-

* The folly and injustice of checking the free circulation of labour cannot be more forcibly expressed than they have been by Mr. Scarlett. "These," he observes, "are the necessary results of a system which is at perpetual war with the best interests of the state, and the most sacred rights of the poor. If a law were passed to oblige the owners of any particular commodity to confine the use or the sale of it to their respective parishes; if a band of parish officers or vestrymen were constantly engaged in driving back the corn, the cotton, or the wool, that invaded their limits, what clamours would be raised against a species of civil warfare so inconsistent with the prosperity of commerce, so injurious to the rights of property. But has not the poor man as great a right and as great an interest in his labour as the man of wealth in his stores? Has not the state as deep an interest in the free circulation of labour as in the free circulation of what labour produces? There is scarcely any degree of inconvenience or absurdity which may not find defenders amongst those whom habit and practice have reconciled to the system out of which it has gradually arisen."

grated in early life, in quest of employment and improvement. Whereas now the people are virtually villains, *adscripti glebæ*, and where they have been born, there they usually (to use the common phrase) belong; there they seem to think they are to be fed, clothed, worked, exist, and die. 'This is not only inconsistent with freedom and the desire and hope of improvement, but where the people are degenerate and dishonest, it tends in a very high degree to produce conventional immorality and dishonest practices, both to encourage crime and prevent its detection.

This view of the state of the population of England and Wales at different periods—of the increase in towns, trade, and commerce, and the comparative decrease in villages and agriculture—of the moral condition of the peasantry at the present moment as compared with former times, may supply to the politician, the patriot, and the philanthropist, plentiful matter of reflection and regret, and at the same time of hope and encouragement. These details may be deemed by hasty practitioners frivolous and unimportant, but reflecting men, who are really interested in this inquiry, may derive from these simple materials political information of some consequence, in forming a practical and decisive judgment on this question. The first and most essential element in every political association is the number of the partners. For the well-being and happiness of the community, edu-

cation, and virtuous habits, are the next in order and importance. A society may be numerous, weak, and wretched, but if the associated members are intelligent and virtuous, the increase of the numbers would constitute an increase of strength, comfort, and power. We have seen that the wretchedness of the peasantry, their ignorance, and demoralization, have not arisen from any unnatural superfluity, occasioned by the actual increase of the numbers. I know of only two other causes that could contribute to produce these effects on one particular class of persons in a prosperous county, viz. the withdrawment of property and capital, or tyranny and misrule. To make a civil partnership prosperous, where the numbers are considerable, capital or property must co-operate, in order to excite and reward the industry and productive labour of inferior classes. I shall hope to shew in the next chapter that capital employed in agriculture, and consequently the means of employment, have greatly increased, and that the wretchedness of the labouring classes is not to be ascribed to that cause, but rather to a departure from the principles of justice, and to the exercise of power for the purpose of oppression and not of relief.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE EMPLOYMENT SUPPLIED BY AGRICULTURE TO AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS.

It is evident, from the foregoing statement of facts, respecting the number of the people employed in agriculture, that an unnecessary panic has been excited of a rapid and overflowing supply of agricultural labourers. Many reason on the principle of population, and omitting the consideration of the checks and encouragements which have tended to diminish the number of workmen in some departments of the State, and to increase them in others, have arrived at once at the conclusion, that rural pauperism is to be ascribed to a surplus population. The fact appears to be, that pauperism and population have varied in an inverse and not in a direct proportion. In those districts of the country where the population has increased most rapidly, the pauperism is relatively the least, and in those where the population has been slowly increasing, or stationary, or even declining, the pauperism is relatively the greatest. This is manifest from an analysis and comparative view of the actual numbers of the people in

different districts, counties, cities, and villages, at different periods. This is at the same time the most simple and the most conclusive evidence that can be adduced on this part of the question.

But there are other reasoners who ascribe the enormous increase of our rural pauperism to a *dearth of employment*. It may be important therefore to meet this part of the question by an investigation of this simple problem—What are the means of employment supplied by husbandry to agricultural labourers, and how far are the disorders which have arisen in rural society to be ascribed to retarded and diminished means of employment, and how far to the changes which have been adopted in the administration of the poor laws for the regulation of the peasantry, and which have been cotemporaneous with their demoralization? We have seen that the prevalence of pauperism in our villages does not arise from an actual increase of the inhabitants, it is of importance, therefore, now to inquire how far it is the consequence of a diminished supply of work and employment. If the number of workmen had greatly increased, we might have supposed that the market of labour had been disturbed from an unnatural supply, or if the means of employment supplied by agriculture had decreased, we might have argued that the disturbance arose from a defect of demand; but if there has been no augmented supply, and a greatly augmented demand, we must look to some

other quarter for the causes of the mischiefs which have arisen.

The quantity of employment supplied by agriculture at different periods might form the basis of a very extensive enquiry. To elucidate this point, the following particulars may be sufficient: the quantity of land in cultivation, the mode of tillage, and the produce of the soil. These three topics I shall illustrate chiefly by facts relating to the county of Norfolk, which is not only famous for its agriculture and improvements in that art, but also for its pauperism. The county of Norfolk contains 1,338,880 statute acres, and is the fifth county in extent, and the eighth in England as to population. It is also remarkable for containing a large number of subdivisions, there being 33 hundreds, 20 market towns, and 702 parishes and hamlets. Norfolk contains a hundred parishes more than Yorkshire, or any other county in England, and more than the whole of Scotland. These divisions are of very ancient date, and have perhaps rather decreased than increased during the last century. The question of parochial management is therefore of very great consequence, as it respects this county. The law of settlement also is a peculiar evil, for it is manifest, that if that law is the occasion of litigation, the causes of dispute must increase with the number of parishes. Nearly ten thousand pounds have been spent in some years in this county, in law expences, respecting removals and settlements.

Here also, and in Suffolk, the effects of the incorporating system are more manifest. Suffolk has been represented to me, by a clergyman residing in that county, as the land of incorporations and workhouses. In Norfolk more than half the population are under the workhouse system. Two hundred and ninety-four parishes, and those of course of the larger sort, maintain, or rather subjugate their poor under this system. The merits of the parochial system, therefore, are not to be ascertained by the state of pauperism in Norfolk, as compared with other counties, because in the greater part of the county that system is superceded by incorporations, and in the other parts, as far as the management of the poor is concerned, by the modern justice of the peace system.

But while the number of parishes and even the number of inhabitants in villages decreased during the last century, the quantity of land in cultivation greatly increased. Within the last fifty years more than half the parishes have been inclosed by Acts of Parliament, and brought into a high state of cultivation. Many of the parishes of Norfolk are the exclusive property of individuals, and in most of these inclosures of heath and waste lands have taken place to a great extent without the sanction of Parliament. Since the Revolution the greater part of this western district of the county has been converted from sheep's-walk, of trifling value, to the highest pitch of cultivation. Some of the old inha-

bitants inform me that their fathers used to tell them that in this district there was scarcely a bush or brier, meaning that it was uninclosed and unfenced. The timber and the fences themselves are sufficient indications of the date of this change. An old shepherd of this parish, and whose forefathers have been immemorially gamekeepers and shepherds (the principal employments of the peasantry of former days), informs me that his father used to point out to him some of the best farms of this part of the country, as the walks over which he as a shepherd boy used to lead his flocks.

Whatever may have been the effects of this change on the habits of the people or the state of society, it is manifest that, as far as the question of work and of the means of employment is concerned, there must have been a great increase of demand for labour. More cattle, no doubt, are now fed in this district upon the fallows, than were at that time supported upon the whole in a state of pasturage and waste. Land in such a state of waste and pasturage, which requires neither draining nor fencing, must of course supply the smallest possible quantity of work. The cattle also being of less value, required in proportion to their number less care and fewer hands. Besides these high and light soils, there is in Norfolk a great deal of *fen and marsh land*, which has been embanked and drained during this period, and the cultivation of which must of course supply a great increase of employ-

ment. A considerable quantity of *salt marsh* also has been embanked and redeemed from the sea. The great improvement of the county may also be observed from the erection of all the principal mansions during this period—Holkham, Houghton, Wolterton, Gunton, and many others.

These few particulars may be sufficient to establish a conviction that by an increased quantity of land in cultivation there must be an increased demand for the labour of the peasantry. It is to be remarked too, that the clamour of the dearth of employment, and of the overflowing supply of labourers has taken place, while these improvements in the country have been in progress. Not only has there been a great increase in the means of employment by the increased quantity of land in cultivation, but the process of bringing it into a cultivated state, fencing, draining, and improving, which require in many cases labour to the amount of more than half the value of the land, must have enormously increased the fund which supplies the wages of labour.

The quantity of employment supplied by agriculture has been still further augmented by the changes which have taken place in the *mode of tillage*. It seems probable that the proportion of arable land to pasture was greater before than for some time after the Reformation. During the reign of Elizabeth, and for some time after, the inclosure of pasture was discouraged. Arable land

was in fact converted into pasture, and the produce of corn increased by an improved husbandry. A greater supply of meat, the consumption of which greatly increased after the Reformation, was afforded by attention to pastures. Blomefield gives the following account of several estates at different periods:

| | | | |
|------|-----------------------------------|---|-------------------------|
| 1324 | A messuage, in Norfolk, contained | { | 131 arable |
| | | | 7 meadow |
| | | | 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ pasture |
| 1370 | Ditto | { | 140 arable |
| | | | 6 meadow |
| | | | 30 pasture |
| | | | 30 heath |
| 1567 | Ditto | { | 200 arable |
| | | | 100 meadow |
| | | | 300 pasture |
| | | | 10 wood |
| 1569 | Ditto | { | 60 arable |
| | | | 20 meadow |
| | | | 40 pasture |
| | | | 300 furze & heath |

In the adjoining parish of Grimston, Blomefield records the following account of the same manor, 1448 and in 1615. In 1448 it contained 20 messuages, 500 acres of arable land, 100 meadow, 500 pasture, 20 of wood, and 200 moor. In 1615 it contained 26 messuages, 10 tofts, 26 gardens, 800 acres of arable land, 100 meadow, 300 pasture, 20 of wood, and 3000 of heath. In the former account much of the pasture was probably heath, as no heath is mentioned.

Thus it appears that at and after the Reformation, the quantity of arable land, in proportion to

heath and pasture, decreased. It did not much increase till after the Revolution, from which time, as we have seen, there has been a great quantity of land inclosed and brought into cultivation. At the Revolution, I suppose not above half or perhaps a third of this parish, was cultivated as arable land; a much greater proportion was pasture, and a more considerable part heath and sheep's-walk. The ancient names of the fields, and many other local proofs, establish this fact. But now of 2238 acres there are only 152 pasture and 2086 arable. The quantity of labour, therefore, required since the Revolution, has greatly increased from the increased quantity of land converted from pasture to arable land. This is also to be observed in some of the richest soils of the county, for many of the fens and marsh lands have undergone the same change.

There have been also great changes in the mode of cultivating the arable land, which very much affect the means of employment, and the quantity of manual labour required. It is manifest that the demand for labour must very much depend upon the system of husbandry. Mr. Kent mentions five different courses of farming in this county. They are now, I believe, chiefly reducible to the four and the six-course system. In both these the quantity of labour required is the greatest. In the four-course half the land is sown with corn, and in the six-course, four sixths or two thirds. The latter

course can only be adopted when the land is of the finest quality, and admits the growth of beans, but the former is now said to be almost universal in the middling and inferior soils. Two improvements in husbandry have chiefly contributed to the adoption of these courses—viz. the marling of land and the field culture of turnips. The marling of land requires a great deal of manual labour, and that of the highest value. But the field culture of turnips has produced the greatest effect in agriculture, and especially upon the quantity of employment. This system was introduced into this county and neighbourhood by Lord Viscount Charles Townsend, Secretary to George I. and II. By this improvement, and the residence of Sir R. Walpole, Lord Townsend, and Lord Leicester, in this part of Norfolk, the West and North-west parts of the county were brought into a high state of cultivation, which required a great increase of manual labour. From these changes in the course of tillage, the quantity of employment must have doubled. The general culture of turnips introduced the use of the hoe in agriculture, which had till then been confined to gardening. When this system was first introduced it was predicted that it never could become general, because it required the skill and wages of gardeners to carry it into effect. Now turnips, and Swedish turnips, are universally cultivated. The land on which they grow is hoed over twice, and often three times in

the year. By the system of drilling also the hoe is very generally used ; and thus a number of acres, equal perhaps to nearly half this extensive county, is hoed over by hand, like a garden, in the course of the year.

The introduction of these improvements has also had a great effect in *distributing* the means of employment through the year. The distribution of work through the successive months may be seen in Mr. Kent's and other Treatises on Practical Norfolk Farming. When the market of labour is not interrupted by workhouse oppression and the meddling of authority, our present system of husbandry is remarkably salutary and beneficial to the labourer. Formerly the peasantry must, during long intervals, have been unemployed, but now it would be the *interest* of the farmer, if he were allowed to consult that interest without interruption, to distribute his work in such a manner during the different months of the year, as would employ (except in harvest,) the same number of workmen. A most experienced and extensive farmer in this neighbourhood employs the same number of labourers during the whole year, except in harvest. If farmers were, like all other masters, allowed freely to arrange their own affairs, if parish was not mixed up with private business, if labourers were employed and masters obtained by choice and not compulsion, if the farmers were not *compelled* to employ workmen that are unsuitable or unwor-

thy of trust, this would, in the present state of husbandry, be the general custom, and would, of course, have the happiest effect in establishing the mutual interest and good will of master and servant.

The distribution of work is a matter of vast consequence to the labourers. Here it is that the peasantry of modern times have so much advantage over their forefathers. The harvest, which now extends from a month to six weeks, was formerly performed in one or two days. Sir J. Cullum, in his history of the village of Hawsted, in Suffolk, gives us an accurate account of a harvest at the latter end of the fourteenth century. There were 200 acres of corn, and 250 reapers and labourers employed in one day, and above 200 in another, when the harvest was completed. Not only was the corn ingathered in this rapid manner, but very often a great part of it was thrashed in the field by a corresponding multitude of labourers. There are many statutes of a much later date than this, which allowed the farmers to put the whole country in requisition during harvest, and to compel all the petty tradesmen to join in the work, at a certain price per day. The harvest was collected in a very irregular and hasty manner till the end of the last century. In passing through the North of France during the autumn of last year, I observed that the harvest in many parts was collected in this fashion. Almost every considerable corn field and farm house had its thrashing floor in the open air.

In many places I saw large companies thrashing out at once the crop of the farmer. The small farm houses are not surrounded like ours in England with stacks of corn and barns, but with large piles of straw from which the corn has been obtained in the most hasty manner. Under such a husbandry it is manifest that the demand for agricultural labour must be irregular, and confined very much to seed time and harvest. Under our improved husbandry, by the immense growth of corn, the regular method of thrashing it, the cultivation of turnips and their consumption by cattle, the preparation of the soil for the succeeding crops, the hoeing of corn and turnips, the hay harvest from artificial as well as natural grasses, and by an abundant capital, a succession of employment, during the intermediate months of summer and winter, between seed time and harvest, is supplied to the peasantry of this country, from which they derive advantages, which neither their forefathers nor the free labourers of any country have enjoyed.

The increase of employment will still further appear, if we consider the change which has taken place by an improved husbandry, in *the produce of the soil*. Before the Reformation, it is probable that the average production per acre, of all kinds of grain, did not exceed 12 bushels. From the Reformation to the Revolution husbandry improved, and the produce greatly increased. By

modern improvement the production has in many parts been doubled since the Revolution. An augmented production requires of course an increase of manual labour. This village, which contains only 20 cottages, produces, I suppose, 4000 quarters of corn, and the two villages of Great and Little Massingham not less than 10,000 quarters.

The quantity of employment has also been greatly increased by the extended growth of wheat in this county. It is generally stated that the expence in manual labour of cultivating and bringing to market an acre of wheat is nearly double that of an acre of other corn. This change in husbandry affects in a remarkable degree the means of employment. The general consumption of wheaten bread was unknown among the working classes till the middle of the last century. In the history of Norwich it is recorded among the remarkable events, that "in 1745 fine flour, from Hertfordshire, was retailed in Norwich, before which time a coarse household bread, inferior to meal, was the general bread used in the city and county." Barley bread was till that time as common as it is now in some parts of Wales. Till that period, scarcely any wheat was grown in this part of the country. Within the last thirty years not more than 30 or 40 acres of wheat were grown in this parish, and now there are between 300 and 400 acres. The growth of this corn favourably affects the condition of the

peasantry, by supplying a large quantity of gleaning as well as work. The thirty families belonging to this parish have the gleaning of three or four hundred acres of wheat, and many of the families collect from 8 to 12 and even 16 bushels. The earnings of the women and children by this means have often amounted to more than the earnings of the labourer himself in harvest, when his wages are the highest. Since the commencement of the present century, the increased production of wheat has been enormous. The number of quarters returned to the Inspector of Corn Returns for Norwich, for the first 21 years of this century, will demonstrate this. In 1801 there were returned 17,159 quarters; in 1814, 34,007, or double that quantity; and in 1821, 78,219, or more than four-fold the number of quarters.

From this brief sketch of the changes which have taken place in agriculture, in the quantity of cultivated land, in the mode of tillage, and in the increased production of the soil, it is manifest that the means of employment and the demand for the labour of the peasantry must have greatly increased. When the agricultural population is compared with the means of employment, the difficulty is to reconcile the *ratio* of the numbers with the *ratio* of the demand for their labour. The difficulty is increased if we take into the account the immense increase of demand for the peasantry, arising from the increase of our towns and cities, fleets and

armies, highways and turnpikes, manufactures and commerce, colonies and dependencies. It must also be recollected that in the gross amount of the agricultural population at the Revolution a much greater proportion would be labourers than at the present moment, in consequence of the increase of the number of country gentlemen, resident clergy, annuitants, substantial yeomen, domestic servants, small tradesmen and mechanics, who always increase in proportion to the wealth and stock of the community.

It may be said that the application of machinery to agriculture has had great effect on the market of labour. In manufactures, where the operation of machinery is constant and the division of labour more perfect, the first effect of machinery may be to throw out of employment a certain description of workmen, but the ultimate effect has always been to create an increased demand for labour. The effect of machinery in agriculture is inconsiderable and very much over-rated. It can be only applied occasionally and partially, and is never in constant operation. Perhaps the *direct* effect of the application of machinery to husbandry is to increase the means of employment. The two principal machines employed in agriculture are the drilling and the thrashing machines. The first has not only increased the demand for labour by encouraging the use of the hoe, but the actual operation of depositing the seed by this machine requires

more manual labour, than the ancient practice of scattering the seed by hand, and depositing it by the subsequent application of the rude harrow.— The thrashing machine has changed the employment of some of the stoutest of the peasantry, but it has directly brought into employment the labour of women and children, and thus has increased the earnings of larger families. If this machine, the power of horses, and the labour of women and children had not been introduced in this and many parts of the country, it would have been very difficult to bring to market the crop of one year before the succeeding harvest. The employment of the female population, and of boys and girls from a very early age, is one of the chief circumstances which serves to reconcile the number of agricultural labourers with the manifest increase of demand for their labour. In this village at this time there are probably as many women and girls as men and boys employed. This change in the employment of the female population is of great moment in ascertaining the earnings of labourers' families. The actual expenditure of the farmers for manual labour is altogether at variance with the popular accounts which are given of the wages of agricultural labourers. These statements are the main basis on which the justification of our rural pauperism, and of the means which have been adopted to enforce it, is reared. There have been injustices, grievous and innumerable, but the op-

pressors have derived their powers, not from the overflowing supply of labourers or the dearth of employment, but from the disturbing force of our Poor Laws, which have banished the labourers from some villages and accumulated them in others; and especially from the intervention of authority to equalize wages, and to grind them down to the standard of a bare maintenance. Had there been that surplus population and dearth of employment which have been reported, the interference of such authority combined with interest must have completely succeeded in the reduction of wages to the scale of allowance. But where nature is left to its own operations, and even where the market of labour has been disturbed by interference, task-work, industry, the earnings of individuals, and especially the earnings of families, have risen above the level of the system.—And why? Simply because the supply of labour has not exceeded the demand. If indeed we were to judge of this case from the representations of Overseers, the zeal of Magistrates, and the reports of Parliament, we must conclude that it was altogether a matter of grace and favour on the part of the farmer to employ the labourers. We must suppose that it was only from the benevolence of their hearts or the compulsion of law that they employed their workmen, and doled out to them a bare maintenance for their laborious toil. The combination of land owners and land occupiers is certainly strong, but there

appear to be good reasons to suspect the kindness of this system to the labourer, and its advantages to the farmer. This species of benevolence has sprung from cupidity and the lust of power, and not from charity. If it be charity, it has proved itself to be of a most malignant kind, and a curse to the receiver and the bestower. If farmers were left to feel their obligation to the labourers for their services, and above all if labourers were not cajoled, but taught to know their own value and importance, it seems to be no visionary expectation that justice would be done, that mutual good-will (founded on mutual interest) would be restored, and that the vicious tide of pauperism, raised not by the harmonious law of nature, but by the eccentric influence of injustice, would speedily ebb and retire from our villages.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE WAGES OF AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS.

THE wages of labour, where labour is freely bought and sold, must be high or low, as the demand is great or small. The facts which have been produced respecting the number of productive labourers employed in agriculture, and the fund destined for their employment, would lead us to conclude that, under such a state of the market of labour, wages or the price of labour must have risen, and that the labourers must have become more active, diligent, and expeditious, than in former times. We hear, however, continual reports of the low rate of wages, and of the idleness and worthlessness of agricultural labourers. Strange as it may appear, these reports are louder and more frequent, when any discussion is proposed respecting the trade in corn. It is of consequence, therefore, to inquire how far these reports are well founded, and whether the low price of labour (where the price is depressed) arises from the state of the supply and demand, or from the interference and violence of authority. To the latter cause experience has led me to ascribe the perverted state of

the peasantry and of their wages, in particular districts and places. Poor laws, workhouses, select vestries, and justices of the peace, have had considerable influence in this important matter. On coming to reside in this part of the country, it was impossible not to observe the universal prevalence of pauperism and its mischievous influence on the morals and habits of the people. The first thing which led me to suspect the nature of the disease was not the burden of the poor rate, but the small price at which the labourers sold or rather at which other parties sold their independence, interest, and happiness. The corruption of manners, the number of paupers, and the *small amount* of poor rate, convinced me that the labourers could be no gainers by this system. *For five-and-twenty pounds* a year they were all reduced to the condition of beggars and paupers. That was the proportion of rate received by the able-bodied labourers. Most persons who investigate this subject begin their inquiry with the gross amount of poor rate. They are naturally most inquisitive when the burden is unusually heavy, and their attention is most likely to be absorbed in the results and difficulties of the system, or in the application of expedients for redress. My attention was attracted to the small amount of the receipts of the labourers by poor rate in comparison of their receipts by wages. The poison was administered in small doses, but the effects of it, upon the constitution of

the patients, were lamentable, and even shocking. On inquiring what necessity existed for placing the *whole population* under this system, the reply was in one quarter, we have so many people and so little work ; and in another, the wages are so low, that unless we enforce the payment of rate, the people must starve. I was induced, therefore, to inquire into the state of the population, the means of employment, and the wages. Such was the state of supply and demand, that the population was insufficient, by one-third, to do the work required by the regular business of agriculture. Such was the state of wages, that the actual earnings of the labourers were double the amount computed by the magistracy as necessary for their maintenance, over and above their actual earnings, there remained a third part of the whole expenditure in the business of agriculture, in demand for the labour of persons not attached to the parish by law. The whole body of labourers had been for a series of years paupers. They are so by birth, education, and habits. They are doomed by the magistracy of the country to pauperism as their privilege ; it is represented to them that nothing stands between them and destruction but the office of justice of the peace, or a select vestry, and an allowance of half instead of the whole of their wages. It is true they might obtain the half in idleness, and they could only obtain the whole by industry. Many no doubt preferred the half, with poaching, smug-

gling, pilfering, and plunder. In the list of paupers it appeared, that many had been seduced to part with their independence and happiness for a shilling or a half crown in some particular week of the year. That trifling sum was in many cases obtained by fraud and perjury, by summons and orders, by the utmost stretch of power, by the reciprocal alienation of master and servant, and even of parent and child. This system has received a check so far as this village is concerned, which has proved advantageous to the labourer. In all the surrounding country, however, it is still flourishing. A gentleman, and principal landed proprietor of an adjoining parish (but who has too much honourable feeling to take any part in these iniquitous transactions), told me the other day that the system was more rife than ever in his village, *though the people were all employed*. An overseer of another parish informed me, that they did not now allow the labourers to appear at the vestry, but that each farmer paid to his labourer the amount of allowance; and that when they met in vestry they apportioned a certain part to their private accounts, and the remainder was refunded to the farmer out of the parish stock. Such must be the consequences of attempting to conduct the business of agriculture under the regulations of law and police.

Persuaded as I am, that the case of this village is the case of the country, that the *removal* of the system *every where* would produce corresponding

effects to those which have followed from its check *here*, and that its *removal* here would produce more lasting good effects than can possibly follow from its *check*, I am induced to go further into detail respecting the wages of labour in order to shew the consistency of this argument when generally applied. The population, and the quantity of employment, would lead us to expect certain effects on the expenditure of the farmers and the receipts of the labourers. These consequences have followed to a degree which could scarcely be expected under the present system, and which can only be ascribed to the powerful impulse of demand. Wages have risen in all cases where the market has been undisturbed ; they have even risen in spite of the regulations which have been adopted to depress them. In the Northern counties, where 50 years ago wages were lowest, and where the regulations of police have not interfered, wages are now the highest. In the Southern counties, where wages were formerly the highest, they have become, since the introduction of these regulations, nominally the lowest. But even in these districts, where nominal wages are so depressed, such has been the real force of demand, that the increase of earnings and of task work have kept pace more equally than could have been conceived with the increase of demand.

There has been indeed great oppression. Extensive injustice has been done. Moral evils,

which every reflecting man must deplore, have followed. Our consolation however is, that it is medicine only that has made the patient sick ; that there is no organic disease, and that when nature shall be left to her own operations, health and soundness will be immediately restored. It is sometimes an act of benevolence to expose the empirics, to analyse their nostrums, and advertize the poisonous nature of their drugs. For this purpose it will not be necessary to enter into any laboured discussions of the principles of political science now so generally admitted on this subject. An examination of the popular opinions respecting the wages of agricultural labourers, and of the evidence on which they are founded, may have some practical effect. A statement of facts, illustrating the rate of wages and the actual amount of earnings, may still further elucidate this important topic.

The general opinion which prevails respecting the wages of agricultural labourers is, that in all cases they are extremely low, and that in many extensive districts of the kingdom (of which this county is one), they fall (where the law does not interfere to raise them) below the standard of a bare maintenance. This opinion is manifestly at variance with the foregoing evidence. It is however very generally entertained. It has been sanctioned by the reports and authority of Parliament, by most modern writers on the poor laws, and by the periodical publications which exercise

the most extensive influence in the kingdom. In considering the law of employment we shall have occasion to refer to the authority of Parliament in this matter, but it may be sufficient here to notice the opinions of eminent individuals and of the public press.

In July, 1817, the Quarterly Review gave some details respecting the earnings and expences of labourers' families. In 1822 Robert A. Slaney, Esq. published an "Essay on the Employment of the Poor," accompanied with "A Letter, by James Scarlett, Esq. M. P." and published with the permission of that learned gentleman. In this essay the author assumes the calculations of the Quarterly Reviewer as the basis of his argument, and as proof of the condition of the peasantry, of a surplus population, and of a dearth of employment. The calculations are to shew the expences and earnings of a labourer with three children. A half-peck loaf is allowed for each individual per week, and the price of bread is taken at ninepence per quarter, which is the present price.

| | £. | s. | d. |
|---|-------|----|----|
| Bread for five persons, at 7s. 6d. per week | 18 | 10 | 0 |
| Soap and candles, at 8d. say | 1 | 14 | 0 |
| Rent | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| Clothing and furniture | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| Fuel—2s. in winter and 1s. in summer ... | 3 | 18 | 0 |
| | <hr/> | | |
| Expences per annum | 30 | 2 | 0 |
| | <hr/> | | |

"The above account," it is observed, "does not allow any thing for meat, beer, tea, sugar,

tobacco, &c. It does not include any contingent payments for illness, benefit clubs, &c. And we must bear in mind, that every child under a working age brings an additional expence of £5."

The calculation of the earnings is thus stated :

| | £. | s. | d. |
|---|-------|-------|-------|
| Earnings of the man, 9s. per week | 23 | 8 | 0 |
| <hr/> woman, at 2s. | 5 | 4 | 0 |
| | <hr/> | <hr/> | <hr/> |
| | 28 | 12 | 0 |
| | <hr/> | <hr/> | <hr/> |

"It appears, therefore," Mr. Slaney observes, "that the payments of a labourer for the barest necessaries will, at the present rate of wages, exceed his gains; and instead of getting 9s. per week, it is well known that in many places, *husbandry workmen do not earn more than 8s. through the year.* No minute mistake will at all impair the deduction to be drawn from this calculation, because there are so many necessary expences left out, and no allowance is made for accidents, which must occasionally occasion the loss of a day's labour."

The omissions in this calculation of expences are very considerable. It is well known that the peasantry do consume tea, sugar, tobacco, and they sometimes eat meat, and occasionally, as our village public-houses and the prosperity of brewers testify, drink beer. They do not indeed obtain these two comforts so freely as every poor man's friend must desire, but they do consume no inconsiderable quantity of these articles. This calcula-

tion leaves out many other "necessary expences." Now these omissions in the expences would lead us to suspect some omissions in the earnings, and here the fallacy is much greater than in the expences.

The deduction drawn from these calculations is, that the deficiency must be made up out of another fund, viz. the poor rate. But the truth is, that this statement of the expences and earnings of agricultural labourers must be erroneous. On principle and in fact it may be shewn to be so. If this were really the case, of course the political maxim which is always admitted, must be altogether false, "that a man must live by his work, and his wages must at least be sufficient to maintain him; that they must even upon most occasions be somewhat more, otherwise it would be impossible for him to bring up a family, and the race of such workmen could not last beyond the first generation."* It is true the poor laws have put this maxim in check, but it is impossible that it should be inapplicable to that particular business which employs the greatest number of workmen. *On principle*, therefore, this statement must be erroneous. *In fact*, it is untrue. For if a family of five persons can earn no more than £28. 12s. per ann. then the expenditure for manual labour in the cultivation of the soil could not amount to

* Wealth of Nations, book i. c. 8.

one half the sum which is known to be expended. This calculation is however the basis of general propositions applied to agriculture in England. There are in England about 2 millions of persons, or at 5 persons to a family (a proportion too high, but that which is here assumed,) there are 400,000 families employed in the *labour* of agriculture. At £28. 12s. a family, the cost of cultivating England would be about 13 millions. That is, the cultivation of 37 millions of acres would be at the rate of 7s. an acre for manual labour, which, it is well known, is not above *one-third* of the actual cost. There is therefore not a minute mistake, but a palpable absurdity in this calculation.

The next statement which I shall take is one which appeared at the opening of the present year in a leading and most extensively circulated journal of the metropolis. It appeared in the form of a letter, signed "A Day Labourer." I quote the whole, because whatever may be the merit of the reasoning the sentiment and feeling are admirable, and the maxims of our benevolent religion can never be too strongly applied to this subject.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES.

Essex, January 23.

SIR,—As I hear that you always put into your paper any thing that may be likely to do good to poor people, I make bold to write to you. I am told that the great people talk of nothing but the riches, the happiness, and the flourishing state of the country; and as I see and feel nothing but misery, and famine, and distress, I think that if our Parliament-men knew the real

situation of myself and hundreds of thousands of my fellow country-men, they might be able to do something for our relief. I will therefore just tell you my own condition:—I am a strong, healthy, and (though I say it) an industrious labourer, about 30 years of age, with an active wife, and three fine young children; I have regular farming work, which is more than half my poor neighbours can say. How, then, it may be asked, come you to be in distress? Why, Sir, because my wages are not enough to put bread into the mouths of myself and family. The wages in our part of the country have been for a long time 7s. a week; and as it is impossible for us to exist upon this, I am obliged to go and beg every week at the vestry, (a hard case this for an industrious strong man with a moderate-sized family.) The gentlemen there have, since the last rise of flour, given those with three children 1s. 9d. a week. My wife can do but little work, as the children are small, but she manages to make about a score of straw plait in the week, for which she gets 6d. so that altogether, with my own and my wife's earnings, and what we beg, we receive 9s. 3d. a week; with this we buy two pecks and a half of flour: my rent is 3*l.* a year; by extra work and extra wages, during the four weeks of harvest, I save 1*l.* 12s. towards it; to make up the other 28s. I am obliged to save 7d. a week for the other 48 weeks.

| | S. | D. |
|--|----|----|
| 2½ pecks of flour, (seconds) - - - - - | 8 | 1½ |
| Salt - - - - - | 0 | 0½ |
| Rent - - - - - | 0 | 7 |

Thus, Sir, after having provided myself and family with a cottage to live in, and about 1*lb.* 2oz. of bread per day each, for us to eat, I have 6d. a week left to supply us with clothes, cheese, potatoes, candles, &c. and firing, in a place where coals are at least 1s. 6d. a bushel, and wood is still dearer. Think, Sir, on the miserable, hopeless, half-starved condition of myself and family; and then, Sir, think of the far worse situation of nine-tenths of my neighbours, who have not such good health and such regular work, or who have much larger families than myself. Surely this misery and beggary in the midst of plenty, can't be right! If our cries do not reach the ears of our rulers on earth, they will at least reach the ears of our King in heaven; at least I could not help thinking so when I heard our parson, a few Sundays ago, read out of St. James—"Behold the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped, are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth."

Don't you think that for the farmers to pay their labourers half their just wages, and to send them to the parish officers to beg a wretched pittance, is very like defrauding them of their hire,

and is just what is called in another place in the Bible "grinding the faces of the poor?" I am sure, Sir, that if this plan last much longer, it will be even worse for the farmers than it is for us: they often complain that a labourer does not do half so much work now as he did 20 years ago; and I dare say it is true enough, for we have neither strength nor spirits to do more than half a good day's work. And I heard one of our gentlemen say the other day, that the poor-rates here came last year to very near 1,600*l.* and that all the wages paid to labourers in the parish, for 11 months, leaving out the harvest month, came to very little more than 1,700*l.* So you see, Sir, that very nearly half of us are supported in beggary. Now, though I don't understand much about making laws, yet I think that it would be a good thing if there were a law made to oblige the farmers to pay every able-bodied man for his week's work the value of three pecks of flour. The more he sold his wheat for, the better he could afford to pay us; and the less he sold it for, the less money we should want. And as I hear that there is a law to keep up the price of corn for the good of the farmers, I do not see why it would not be fair to make them pay us our wages accordingly. Hoping that when the miserable condition of us poor labourers is made known to our fellow-countrymen, they will do something for our relief,

I remain, Sir, your humble servant,

A DAY-LABOURER.

The editor introduces this letter with the following remark:—"A letter in this day's paper, signed 'a Labourer,' deserves very general attention. We know that the statements which it contains are true, and that they apply to a very large district, in a quarter from which the letter comes, and to some thousands of parishes in England."

Under the present regime adopted in agricultural districts, there is no degree of oppression which may not occur in particular cases, where interest and authority are combined against the labourer. But such cases do not arise spontaneously in the business of agriculture, or from the natural relation of farmer and labourer. They can

only occur where authority has enforced the present system. That they are not more common, is owing, not to the benevolence of the law or the skill of the controlling powers, but to the demand which actually exists for the labour of the peasantry. I shall shew that the earnings of agricultural labourers, even in spite of interference, are more *variable* through the different seasons and much *higher* than is here represented. It may be sufficient to remark, however, that this statement cannot be true of the county of Essex, or of thousands of parishes in England. The county of Essex is maritime, the soil is rich and heavy, the the growth of wheat is large, from its proximity to the metropolis, there must be a great demand for labour in gardens, nurseries, highways, and turnpikes, and especially in carting provisions, hay, straw, &c. to London. Assuming, however, that the county of Essex requires no more labour in proportion to its extent than other counties, we shall see that this statement cannot be true to any extent, perhaps not absolutely in any particular case. There are not five persons to each family in the whole of this opulent county, of course not so many in the families of labourers. But there are in Essex 33,206 families employed in agriculture; of these, not more than 20,000 are the families of labourers. There are in Essex a million of acres, nearly. When all the circumstances of that county are considered, its soil, productions, and locality,

it seems impossible that a less sum than £1. per acre can be expended for manual labour. It is no doubt much greater. But at this rate there would be one million expended among 20,000 families, or £50. to each family. The letter assumes, that in a case in which the labourer enjoys some advantages above his fellows, the earnings are not much above half that sum, and that nearly a fourth of this amount is received, not as the wages of labour, but as alms from the poor rate. According to this proportion, the expenditure for poor rate and labour in the county of Essex would be sufficient to maintain, not only the families of labourers, but all the families and inhabitants of the county. There are, therefore, in these calculations some capital errors. The nature of these errors we shall more clearly ascertain, by a more comprehensive inquiry into the rate of wages, and the actual amounts paid by the farmers and received by the labourers.

To elucidate this part of the subject I shall inquire into the rate of wages at the close of the seventeenth century, at the close of the eighteenth, and during the first quarter of the nineteenth century.

At the close of the seventeenth century we have the calculations of Sir M. Hale and Mr. Gregory King. Sir M. Hale computes that a family, consisting of six persons, (the husband and wife, two children *able to earn* something, and two unable,)

could not be maintained for less than £26 per ann. Mr. King computes that a family, consisting of $3\frac{1}{2}$ persons, was maintained at the rate of £15 per ann. This calculation is nearly the same as that of Sir M. Hale, if the number of persons in the two families is taken into the account. It must be observed, however, that these calculations are for labourers of the first class. Sir M. Hale computed, for a family employed in one of the first manufactures of the kingdom, and living in one of the towns of Gloucestershire. Mr. King computes £15 as the expenditure of labourers and out-servants, but he calculates the expence of the families of "cottagers and paupers," consisting of $3\frac{1}{4}$ persons, at £6.15s. It must also be observed, that provisions were higher in the latter half of the seventeenth than in the first half of the eighteenth century.

If we pass on to the close of the eighteenth century we shall observe a gradual increase in the earnings of agricultural labourers. Sir F. Eden has given us a variety of tables respecting the price of labour and provisions to the scarcity in 1794 and 5. I will select four cases which he has given from the county of Norfolk.

Expences and Earnings of Four Families of Agricultural Labourers by the Day & by the Year.

CASE FIRST.—FOUR PERSONS.

Man 33—woman 30—eldest child 3—youngest 1. Man industrious, woman frugal; they use nei-

ther meat, sugar, nor beer. It now (1795) costs this family 1s. 2d. per week more for barley than it did in 1792 for wheat meal.

| | £. | s. | d. |
|---|-------|----|----|
| 1792.—Total expences per ann. at 4s. 6 $\frac{1}{4}$ d. per week, | 11 | 17 | 3 |
| Rent | 2 | 10 | 0 |
| Fuel | 1 | 10 | 0 |
| Clothes | 2 | 7 | 6 |
| Births, Burials, and Sickness | 0 | 8 | 6 |
| | <hr/> | | |
| Total earnings (per week) at 9s. 8d. | 23 | 16 | 8 |
| | <hr/> | | |
| Excess of earnings | 4 | 3 | 5 |
| | <hr/> | | |
| 1794.—Total expences | 20 | 2 | 6 |
| Total earnings | 23 | 16 | 8 |
| | <hr/> | | |
| Excess | 3 | 14 | 2 |
| | <hr/> | | |

CASE SECOND.—SIX PERSONS.

Man 38—woman 34—children 10, 7, 5, and 2 years. Man works often by the piece; gets a good deal of firing in the course of his employment; keeps a breeding sow, the profits of which help a little towards family expences. The parish allow this family 2s. a week.

| | £. | s. | d. |
|--|-------|----|----|
| 1793.—Expences per ann. at 7s. 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. per week .. | 20 | 9 | 6 |
| Rent, fuel, clothes, sickness | 7 | 0 | 0 |
| | <hr/> | | |
| Total earnings, at 11s. 6d. per week | 27 | 9 | 6 |
| | <hr/> | | |
| Excess | 29 | 18 | 0 |
| | <hr/> | | |
| 1795.—Total expences | 36 | 11 | 4 |
| Total earnings | 29 | 18 | 0 |
| | <hr/> | | |
| Deficiency | 6 | 13 | 4 |
| | <hr/> | | |

CASE THIRD.—SEVEN PERSONS.

Man 40—woman 28 ; he is a moderate workman : the woman, though healthy, not very diligent or attentive to her children. The ages of the children are 9, 7, 5, 3, 1. This family is allowed 2s. a week from the parish.

| | £. | s. | d. |
|---------------------------------------|-------|----|----|
| 1795.—Total expences per ann. | 42 | 7 | 1 |
| Total earnings—9s. 8d. per week | 24 | 1 | 0 |
| | <hr/> | | |
| Deficiency | 18 | 6 | 1 |
| | <hr/> | | |

CASE FOURTH—EIGHT PERSONS.

Man 42—woman 33—children 11, 9, 7, 5, 3, 2, 1. He is a good workman. The parish allows this family 3s. a week.

| | £. | s. | d. |
|------------------------------------|-------|----|----|
| 1795.—Total expences per ann. | 49 | 10 | 8 |
| Total earnings—13s. per week | 33 | 16 | 0 |
| | <hr/> | | |
| Deficiency | 15 | 14 | 8 |
| | <hr/> | | |

It is manifest that these accounts are very defective and incomplete. They shew, that the average rate of wages had greatly increased during the century. The earnings are, however, computed by a weekly rate ; there is no allowance for piece work or harvest, and scarcely any for the earnings of women and children. They were made at a time when there was an alarm of scarcity and even famine. They were made at that particular moment when the change in the price of provisions had been greatest and most sudden, for from 1790—1793 wheat was very cheap, and in 1794—5 it

had become exceedingly dear. They were made partly to induce the poor to substitute barley and other provisions for wheaten bread, and partly to encourage parishes to afford some *temporary* relief to the labourer. Sir F. Eden felt the force of these reasons as a benevolent man, but at the same time he could not believe the accuracy and correctness of these statements. His remarks upon them are worthy of record. "It is," he observes, "chiefly on the score of earnings that the labourer confounds all enquiries, either by taciturnity or misrepresentation. He calculates himself, or endeavours to persuade those who examine him, to calculate his *yearly income from the average price of day labour in his parish*. But as work is now very generally done by the *piece*, it is obvious that statements, formed upon such *data*, must be extremely fallacious; they, however, are not without their use, and I have therefore inserted them; but the reader will, I trust, often be inclined to draw the same conclusion which I have drawn from them, *that if the expenditure is not exaggerated, the income is, in most instances, considerably under-rated.*" *

* Mr. Kent, in his Survey of Norfolk, has given the following as the wages of agricultural labour at that time, 1794-5.

| | Yearly Wages. | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|---------------|----|----|----|----|----|---|
| | £. | s. | d. | £. | s. | d. | |
| A head carter, from | 9 | 9 | 0 | to | 10 | 10 | 0 |
| An under carter | 5 | 5 | 0 | .. | 7 | 7 | 0 |
| A shepherd | 10 | 0 | 0 | | | | |
| A dairy maid ? | 4 | 4 | 0 | | | | |

It may now be necessary to shew that wages have risen during the present century—that earnings have increased still faster, (by the increase of piece-work,) and that this increase of industry and income on the part of the labourers corresponds with the state of the population, and the increase of employment produced by the changes which have taken place in agriculture. In a former publication* I exhibited the earnings of all the labourers of this village during the year 1822–23, when all kinds of agricultural produce were at the lowest point. Those accounts did not, however, exhibit the expenditure during the *different seasons of the year*. It is of considerable consequence to ascertain, if possible, the distribution of employment and earnings in different months, because this will at once shew the entire fallacy of computing the *yearly* earnings of agricultural labourers by their *weekly* wages in one or two weeks of the year.—Dr. Smith concludes, that the wages of labour in

| | Daily Wages. | | | | | | |
|---|--------------|----|----|---------------------|----|----|---|
| | £. | s. | d. | £. | s. | d. | |
| A common labourer, without diet, } in summer } | 0 | 1 | 6 | in winter | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| A carpenter, thatcher, or bricklayer | 0 | 1 | 8 | | | | |
| Men hay makers | 0 | 1 | 6 | | | | |
| Women ditto | 0 | 0 | 6 | | | | |
| Threshing wheat, the quarter | 0 | 2 | 0 | and 2 pints of beer | | | |
| Reaping wheat, the acre, from | 0 | 5 | 0 | . to . | 0 | 7 | 0 |
| New banking and ditching, from .. | 0 | 1 | 0 | ..... | 0 | 1 | 6 |
| Washing & clipping sheep the score | 0 | 1 | 4 | | | | |

Wheat was at that time dearer than it is now, and yet all these prices have been very greatly advanced.

* Observations on the Administration of the Poor Laws.

England are more than sufficient to maintain the labourer, because his earnings are much higher in summer, when his expences are least, than in winter, when his expences are greatest. It will also more clearly point out the error of computing the earnings of agricultural labourers by day wages, if we can ascertain, with precision, the proportion of earnings *by day* and *piece-work*.

The following schedule exhibits the monthly expenditure on a large farm in this county for the last twenty years. It will clearly shew that it is utterly vain to calculate the earnings of the labourers by any weekly payment, and that it is absurd in the extreme to attempt, by law, to *compel a uniform and constant rate of wages*. It will also shew that the earnings of agricultural labourers are, *from the nature of the case*, extremely *variable* at different seasons; and that any endeavour to adjust them to a fixed scale, or a scale that is to vary with the price of provisions, can only tend to disturb the business of agriculture, and destroy all prudence and fore-thought in that class of labourers who most require these virtues. This is the mischief of the weekly and even daily examination of particular cases by parish vestries and justices of the peace.

| | Jan. | Feb. | Mar | Ap. | May | Jun | Jul. | Aug | Sept | Oct. | Nov | Dec. |
|------|------|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|-----|------|------|-----|------|
| 1805 | £45 | 45 | 63 | 55 | 51 | 59 | 60 | 100 | 111 | 222 | 68 | 47 |
| 1806 | 50 | 49 | 59 | 52 | 62 | 52 | 62 | 141 | 218 | 93 | 65 | 40 |
| 1807 | 50 | 37 | 41 | 50 | 61 | 55 | 59 | 146 | 182 | 102 | 42 | 41 |
| 1808 | 56 | 39 | 42 | 57 | 41 | 55 | 75 | 124 | 158 | 148 | 50 | 54 |
| 1809 | 41 | 43 | 47 | 60 | 52 | 48 | 79 | 77 | 209 | 176 | 48 | 61 |
| 1810 | 48 | 43 | 52 | 55 | 58 | 66 | 55 | 86 | 256 | 106 | 68 | 43 |
| 1811 | 35 | 30 | 45 | 43 | 56 | 54 | 41 | 192 | 54 | 77 | 68 | 65 |
| 1812 | 67 | 84 | 68 | 76 | 82 | 75 | 87 | 132 | 262 | 155 | 66 | 63 |
| 1813 | 78 | 55 | 68 | 63 | 82 | 72 | 114 | 172 | 237 | 154 | 62 | 59 |
| 1814 | 61 | 51 | 57 | 79 | 71 | 67 | 97 | 114 | 239 | 124 | 75 | 72 |
| 1815 | 49 | 48 | 49 | 77 | 79 | 92 | 94 | 136 | 206 | 133 | 54 | 61 |
| 1816 | 44 | 38 | 54 | 49 | 47 | 57 | 55 | 111 | 141 | 217 | 84 | 55 |
| 1817 | 65 | 54 | 64 | 63 | 71 | 67 | 83 | 175 | 139 | 136 | 82 | 55 |
| 1818 | 70 | 60 | 61 | 59 | 73 | 70 | 81 | 293 | 61 | 144 | 52 | 51 |
| 1819 | 63 | 53 | 56 | 72 | 80 | 60 | 131 | 295 | 68 | 136 | 57 | 58 |
| 1820 | 74 | 60 | 60 | 68 | 47 | 60 | 97 | 164 | 242 | 120 | 64 | 67 |
| 1821 | 52 | 56 | 69 | 57 | 56 | 68 | 73 | 145 | 199 | 130 | 45 | 56 |
| 1822 | 45 | 44 | 54 | 45 | 50 | 73 | 103 | 177 | 55 | 100 | 54 | 42 |
| 1823 | 44 | 41 | 55 | 44 | 61 | 53 | 70 | 169 | 159 | 83 | 61 | 45 |
| 1824 | 56 | 49 | 48 | 49 | 66 | 49 | 102 | 147 | 169 | 79 | 54 | 47 |

It will more clearly appear that the earnings of agricultural labourers are and must be variable, and that they are greatly augmented in harvest, in the summer months, and in many months of winter, if we examine their weekly receipts through the year. The four following cases exhibit the earnings of four labourers, in the year 1822-23, when flour and provisions were remarkably cheap. I shall give the weekly earnings through the year, and also distinguish the amount received by day wages, from that received by task work. They are common cases, and will, I think, shew that the business of agriculture cannot be subjected to such regulations as have been enforced and recommended without occasioning great inconvenience to

the farmer, checking the industry and earnings of the labourers, and dissolving the best ties of social life.

CASE FIRST.—(*See Table First.*)

Weekly and annual earnings by day-work and piece-work of a labourer and his family, consisting of his wife and five children, two able to work, from Oct. 11, 1822, to Oct. 11, 1823. It will be seen that the earnings of agricultural labourers are more variable than those of most other workmen, and therefore cannot be computed by the earnings of any particular week. For instance: in one week, at the conclusion of harvest, he receives £4. 17s. 9d. From the 7th of June to 15th September he received £1. 4s. 1d. on an average, weekly. In the three following weeks he received only 11s. and in one week only 7s. His day-work was in proportion to his piece-work as 11 : 38. His winter work in proportion to his summer as 20 : 29. The differences are greater we shall see in both these particulars where the earnings of the man only (exclusive of the family) are considered.—These earnings were, it must be observed, when the quartern loaf was under six-pence, and day-wages 8s. per week. This man was a pauper, occasionally under the care of the magistracy; and this is one of the innumerable cases in which it would be represented that the expences exceed the earnings, because day wages were only 8s. per week.

CASE SECOND.

This is the case of the earnings of the man only, *exclusive* of the earnings of the family. Besides the earnings here stated there were others obtained (from the 15th of Nov. to the 18th of Jan.) with other employers. This is very often the case with workmen who may be conversant with some particular kind of work. The substance of his receipts is however given: He has a wife and five children; the wife and two children are capable of work, and earn considerable sums, which are not stated. In this case the day-work is to the piece-work as 6 : 26, and the winter earnings to the summer as 12 : 20.

CASE THIRD AND FOURTH.

These cases are nearly the same, as the men worked in company for half the year; their families are however of different sizes, but their earnings are not included. No. 3 has only one child, No. 4 has three children. In the third case the day-work is to the piece-work as 4 : 30, and the winter earnings to the summer as 13 : 20. In the fourth case, the day-work to the piece-work, as 3 : 32; and the winter earnings to the summer, as 14 : 20.

These bold peasants, once their country's pride, are now by law, by habit, by authority, paupers; but who can view without pain and regret, a whole race of hardy labourers, their wives, their children, and their virtues, sacrificed by a degrading superstition upon the altars of pauperism, which are now erected in almost every district and

village of the country. Real and substantial good is not to be expected from the moderation of the magistracy, but from a change of system. Those gentlemen who have been most sincere, as I am persuaded they have been, may however consider whether they have not, through an ignorance of facts, overshot the boundaries of reason and law.

CASE FIRST.
WEEKLY EARNINGS.

| WINTER. | | | | | | SUMMER. | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------|----|----|-------------|----|----|-----------|----|---------------|-------------|----|----|----|---------------|---------------|----|----|----|---------------|
| Day Work. | | | Piece Work. | | | Day Work. | | | Piece Work. | | | | | | | | | |
| | £. | s. | d. | £. | s. | d. | £. | s. | d. | £. | s. | d. | | | | | | |
| Oct. | 18 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 0 | 13 | 9 | $\frac{1}{2}$ | April | 18 | 0 | 6 | 11 | $\frac{1}{2}$ | 0 | 9 | 11 | |
| | 25 | | | | 1 | 0 | 8 | | | 25 | 0 | 3 | 3 | | 0 | 14 | 0 | $\frac{1}{2}$ |
| Nov. | 2 | | | | 0 | 10 | 6 | $\frac{1}{2}$ | May | 20 | 4 | 1 | $\frac{1}{2}$ | | 0 | 12 | 9 | |
| | 9 | | | | 1 | 1 | 10 | $\frac{1}{2}$ | | 9 | 0 | 8 | 9 | | 0 | 11 | 9 | |
| | 15 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 15 | 4 | | | 16 | 0 | 2 | 8 | $\frac{1}{2}$ | 0 | 17 | 6 | |
| | 22 | 0 | 1 | 8 | 0 | 13 | 10 | | | 23 | 0 | 4 | 2 | $\frac{1}{2}$ | 0 | 10 | 11 | |
| | 29 | 0 | 6 | 8 | 0 | 7 | 0 | | | 30 | 0 | 7 | 1 | | | | | |
| Dec. | 5 | 0 | 4 | 7 | 0 | 10 | 1 | | June | 7 | 0 | 11 | 2 | $\frac{1}{2}$ | 0 | 10 | 8 | $\frac{1}{2}$ |
| | 12 | 0 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 10 | | | 14 | 0 | 11 | 6 | | 0 | 8 | 10 | |
| | 19 | 0 | 6 | 8 | 0 | 11 | 0 | | | 21 | 0 | 13 | 3 | | 0 | 9 | 10 | |
| | 28 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 0 | 14 | 5 | | | 27 | 0 | 9 | 2 | $\frac{1}{2}$ | 0 | 14 | 5 | |
| Jan. | 3 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 0 | 10 | 8 | $\frac{1}{2}$ | July | 5 | 0 | 10 | 9 | $\frac{1}{2}$ | 1 | 3 | 5 | $\frac{1}{2}$ |
| | 10 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 6 | | | 12 | 0 | 16 | 7 | $\frac{1}{2}$ | 0 | 9 | 4 | $\frac{1}{2}$ |
| | 17 | | | | 0 | 18 | 2 | | | 18 | 0 | 17 | 6 | | 0 | 1 | 4 | |
| | 24 | | | | 0 | 11 | 3 | | | 25 | 0 | 2 | 3 | $\frac{1}{2}$ | 0 | 10 | 8 | $\frac{1}{2}$ |
| | 31 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 0 | 13 | 6 | | Aug. | 2 | | | | | 0 | 14 | 10 | |
| Feb. | 8 | | | | 0 | 14 | 2 | $\frac{1}{2}$ | | 8 | 0 | 7 | 6 | | 1 | 0 | 0 | |
| | 15 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 13 | 1 | $\frac{1}{2}$ | | 15 | 0 | 5 | 3 | | 0 | 14 | 0 | |
| | 22 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 12 | 2 | | | 22 | 0 | 9 | 1 | | 0 | 14 | 0 | |
| | 28 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 11 | 3 | | | 29 | | | | | 1 | 11 | 0 | |
| March | 7 | 0 | 5 | 4 | 0 | 10 | 10 | | Sept. | 6 | | | | | 1 | 0 | 0 | |
| | 14 | 0 | 2 | 8 | 0 | 12 | 4 | | | 13 | | | | | 1 | 0 | 0 | |
| | 21 | 0 | 4 | 4 | 0 | 11 | 4 | | | 15 | | | | | 4 | 17 | 9 | |
| | 28 | 0 | 5 | 4 | 0 | 9 | 4 | $\frac{1}{2}$ | | 26 | | | | | 0 | 10 | 0 | |
| April | 4 | | | | 0 | 15 | 9 | | Oct. | 3 | | | | | 0 | 11 | 0 | |
| | 11 | 0 | 7 | 3 | 0 | 12 | 4 | $\frac{1}{2}$ | | 10 | 0 | 0 | 9 | | 0 | 11 | 6 | |
| | 3 | 16 | 4 | | 16 | 16 | 3 | | | 7 | 11 | 2 | $\frac{1}{2}$ | | 21 | 9 | 7 | $\frac{1}{2}$ |

Total earnings £49 13 5
Weekly earnings 0 19 1

CASE SECOND.

WEEKLY EARNINGS.

| WINTER. | | | | SUMMER. | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------|----|-----------|------------|---------|-------|-----------|-----------------|-------|----|----|----|----|----|----|---|
| | | Day Work. | Piece Work | | | Day Work. | Piece Work. | | | | | | | | |
| | | £. | s. | D. | | | £. | s. | D. | | | | | | |
| Oct. | 18 | | 0 | 12 | 0 | April | 18 | | 0 | 12 | 0 | | | | |
| | 25 | | 0 | 12 | 0 | | 25 | 0 | 7 | 8 | | | | | |
| Nov. | 2 | | 0 | 12 | 6 | May | 20 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 12 | 6 | | | |
| | 9 | | 0 | 12 | 0 | | 9 | 0 | 6 | 0 | | | | | |
| | 15 | | Not known | | | | 16 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 10 | 9 | | |
| | 22 | 0 | 1 | 0 | | | 23 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 9 | | |
| | 29 | 0 | 5 | 4 | Ditto | | 30 | | | | 0 | 18 | 5 | | |
| Dec. | 5 | 0 | 8 | 0 | Ditto | June | 7 | | | | 0 | 15 | 0 | | |
| | 12 | 0 | 8 | 0 | Ditto | | 14 | | | | 0 | 13 | 0 | | |
| | 19 | 0 | 8 | 0 | Ditto | | 21 | 0 | 0 | 9 | 0 | 14 | 0 | | |
| | 26 | 0 | 8 | 0 | Ditto | | 27 | | | | 0 | 16 | 6 | | |
| Jan. | 3 | 0 | 4 | 2 | Ditto | July | 5 | | | | 0 | 15 | 0 | | |
| | 10 | 0 | 8 | 0 | Ditto | | 12 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 15 | 0 | | |
| | 18 | 0 | 7 | 0 | Ditto | | 18 | 0 | 3 | 9 | 0 | 7 | 3 | | |
| | 25 | 0 | 0 | 7 | 0 | 7 | 0 | 25 | 0 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 3 | |
| | 31 | | 0 | 10 | 0 | Aug. | 2 | | | | 0 | 15 | 0 | | |
| Feb. | 8 | | 0 | 9 | 10 | | 8 | | | | 1 | 0 | 0 | | |
| | 15 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 7 | 0 | 15 | | | 0 | 14 | 0 | | |
| | 22 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 0 | 9 | 8 $\frac{1}{4}$ | 22 | | | 0 | 14 | 0 | | |
| | 28 | | 0 | 11 | 0 | | | 29 | | | 0 | 15 | 0 | | |
| Mar. | 7 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 9 | 0 | Sept. | 6 | | 1 | 0 | 0 | | |
| | 14 | | 0 | 12 | 0 | | | | 13 | | 1 | 0 | 0 | | |
| | 21 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 6 | | 15 | | 2 | 17 | 9 | | |
| | 28 | 0 | 2 | 4 | 0 | 9 | 6 | | 26 | 0 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 6 |
| April | 4 | | 0 | 12 | 0 | | | Oct. | 3 | 0 | 5 | 3 | 0 | 4 | 6 |
| | 11 | | 0 | 12 | 0 | | | | 10 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 3 |
| | | 3 | 12 | 9 | 8 | 4 | 0 $\frac{1}{4}$ | | | 2 | 13 | 11 | 17 | 10 | 5 |

Total earnings £32 1 1 $\frac{1}{4}$

Weekly earnings 0 12 4

CASE FOURTH.

WEEKLY EARNINGS.

| WINTER. | | | | | | SUMMER. | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------|----|----|-------------|----|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|-------|-------------|-----------------|-----------------|----|----|-----------------|----|---|-----------------|
| Day Work. | | | Piece Work. | | | Day Work. | | | Piece Work. | | | | | | | | |
| £. | s. | D. | £. | s. | D. | £. | s. | D. | £. | s. | D. | | | | | | |
| Oct. | 18 | | 0 | 7 | 0 | April | 18 | | 0 | 11 | 9 | | | | | | |
| | 25 | | 0 | 13 | 9 | | 25 | | 0 | 12 | 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ | | | | | | |
| Nov. | 2 | | 0 | 10 | 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ | May | 2 | | 0 | 16 | 0 | | | | | | |
| | 9 | | 0 | 14 | 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ | | 9 | | 0 | 10 | 0 | | | | | | |
| | 15 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 11 | 0 | | 16 | 0 | 12 | 0 | | | | | | |
| | 22 | 0 | 8 | 0 | | | 23 | | 0 | 12 | 0 | | | | | | |
| | 29 | 0 | 8 | 0 | | | 30 | 0 | 4 | 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ | 0 | | | | | | |
| Dec. | 5 | | 0 | 10 | 0 $\frac{1}{2}$ | June | 7 | | 0 | 13 | 2 | | | | | | |
| | 12 | | 0 | 10 | 7 $\frac{1}{4}$ | | 14 | | 0 | 13 | 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ | | | | | | |
| | 19 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 9 | 21 | 0 | 6 | 0 | | | | | | |
| | 28 | | 0 | 10 | 0 | | 27 | | 0 | 13 | 0 | | | | | | |
| Jan. | 3 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 11 | 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ | July | 5 | | 0 | 16 | 0 | | | | | |
| | 10 | | 0 | 10 | 0 | | 12 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 0 | | | | | | |
| | 18 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 18 | | 0 | 14 | 1 | | | | | |
| | 25 | 0 | 0 | 9 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 25 | | 0 | 13 | 4 | | | | | |
| | 31 | 0 | 1 | 5 | 0 | 9 | 0 | Aug. | 2 | | 0 | 13 | 4 | | | | |
| Feb. | 8 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 10 | 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ | | 8 | | 0 | 15 | 0 | | | | | |
| | 15 | 0 | 2 | 8 | 0 | 7 | 7 | 15 | | 0 | 13 | 10 | | | | | |
| | 22 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 10 | 6 | 22 | | 1 | 1 | 8 | | | | | |
| | 28 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 11 | 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ | 29 | | 0 | 15 | 0 | | | | | |
| Mar. | 7 | 0 | 2 | 6 | 0 | 9 | 0 | Sept. | 6 | | 1 | 0 | 0 | | | | |
| | 14 | | | | 0 | 11 | 6 | 13 | | 1 | 0 | 0 | | | | | |
| | 21 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 0 | 10 | 6 | 15 | | 2 | 17 | 9 | | | | | |
| | 28 | 0 | 5 | 8 | 0 | 4 | 6 | 26 | | 0 | 18 | 0 | | | | | |
| April | 4 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 12 | 0 | Oct. | 3 | | 0 | 10 | 8 | | | | |
| | 11 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 10 | | 0 | 9 | 0 | | | | | |
| | | | 2 | 3 | 4 | 12 | 4 | 1 | | | | 0 | 12 | 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ | 20 | 0 | 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ |

Total earnings £35 0 2 $\frac{1}{4}$

Weekly earnings 0 14 0

These cases have been selected, not from any peculiarity which appears in them. They exhibit the course of agricultural business, disturbed indeed to a certain degree by extraneous influences, but still preserving its natural current. They are consistent with the whole tenor of agricultural occupation during

the different seasons of the year, and with the representations, oral and written, of practical men. They shew a great increase of task work and consequent industry, which is necessary to reconcile the manifest changes in the supply and demand of labour. They are, however, below the average of cases, for if they are compared with the sums which are known to be expended, and consequently distributed among the families of the labourers, they certainly do not reach the average. They were taken at a time that was most unfavourable to this statement, and when every thing connected with agriculture was at the lowest point of depression—when labour was 1s. 4d. per day, and the quartern loaf sixpence. I have examined the earnings of labourers in several districts, and they accord in a considerable degree with what might be expected from their number, and the sum expended in wages. I have also drawn out tables of their earnings for a series of years, during the present century, in which it appears that the annual earnings of labourers, exclusive of the earnings of their families, exceed on an average £40. per annum. This is especially the case when they are constantly employed by the same masters, as they would generally be, if master and servant were not set at variance by the present inquisitorial and official interference. When the number of the labourers, the demand and expenditure for manual labour, and the actual receipts of the labourers are examined, it is manifest that

this is the lowest average that can be taken for regular workmen during the last five and twenty years. But let us take the calculations which have been put forth by the magistrates, the parliament, and the public press, and let us apply these calculations to the number of the labourers, the supply of employment, and the expenditure, and what are the results? The county of Norfolk, it must be confessed, is a fair example. The cultivation of the land, by manual labour, was computed from practical accounts to cost from 14s. to 15s. per acre in 1790. It is now known in many cases to amount to 30 and 40 shillings per acre. The lowest computations that are given by practical men, and in courts of law, do not fall below 20s. Now the calculations which have been made the basis of all apologies and vindications of our poor laws and their present administration, assign 10s. per week as the earnings of a labourer's family, consisting of five persons. At this rate the known expenditure would maintain not only the families of labourers, *but all the families of all the inhabitants of the county of Norfolk, in towns and villages*, excepting only the four borough towns of Norwich, Yarmouth, Lynn, and Thetford. I will state the numbers. There are in Norfolk 74,498 families of all descriptions—of these 20,390 inhabit the four capital towns. There remain, therefore, in the other market towns, seaports, and villages, 54,108 families of all sorts. In these fa-

milies there are not much above $4\frac{1}{2}$ to a family; we here assume 5. At ten shillings a week for each family, the cost would be £1,406,808. There are in Norfolk 1,338,880 acres of land, which according to this computation would not only maintain the twenty or five and twenty thousand families of agricultural labourers, or the 36,000 families employed in agriculture altogether, but nearly the whole of the families of gentlemen and clergymen, and annuitants—all families employed in agriculture, farmers, freeholders, and labourers—all the families employed in commerce, manufacture, handicraft, or any trade whatever.—These calculations therefore are utterly fallacious, and so far from forming any justification of our poor laws and their administration, they afford when examined the strongest possible condemnation of them.

Besides there has been expended in the towns and villages of this county, exclusive of the four boroughs, a quarter of a million, in many years, in poor rate. This sum, at the rate of 10s. a week, would maintain nearly 10,000 families without any labour or wages. This poor rate also would assign to each family employed in the labour of agriculture, more than twice the sum which Mr. Gregory King computed to be the earnings of "cottagers and paupers," at the period of the Revolution. It would also, within a fraction, maintain the whole of the labourers, allowing to each family the allowance which he considered to

be the earnings of "labourers and out-servants," that is, workmen of the first class, without any labour or wages.

It is manifest therefore that the modern popular computations, which are founded upon conjecture and report, and not on practical investigation, must be erroneous. It is equally clear that our rural pauperism has not arisen from a surplus population, or retarded employment, or inadequate wages. The demoralization of our peasantry is the natural result of injustice and a system of mis-rule, which has forced an iniquitous *distribution* of wages, interrupted the business of agriculture, disunited master and servant, and perverted the common principles of reason and humanity.

The fallacious computations respecting the number of the peasantry and their wages, which have been generally spread through the country, have contributed, as might be expected, to suggest schemes and remedies which have tended only to accumulate or perpetuate the evils. It may not be unimportant to observe the effect of those which have been sanctioned or recommended by parliament. These will shew how dangerous it is in legislation to acknowledge erroneous principles, though it should be with the view of regulating the consequences of the error. The Select Vestry Act is one of the most important measures which has received the sanction of the legislature. The advantage of that act is, that it admits, to a certain

extent, right principles, but it still retains such an admixture of evil, and permits it to such a degree, that the good influence of this act will speedily be lost, and it may only contribute to give fresh force to the evils which it was intended to check and controul. This act supposes that the poor are chiefly to be restrained, and so far as *imposition* is concerned, this is undoubtedly wise, but there is *oppression*, as well as imposition; and where the vestry shall choose or find it convenient to sanction the proceedings of the magistracy, or the magistracy the proceedings of the vestry, the oppression may be perpetuated. This has been the case in numberless instances. The Select Vestry Act, where it has been fairly tried, has produced good effects. Care and attention, without an act, would have done the same. But the fact is, respectable men are often driven from those select vestries which are supposed to interfere with the *privileges* of the magistracy. All that select vestries now do in this part of the country is to carry into effect the scale of the magistracy; and the consequence is, that pauperism is the most triumphant, and the poor rate the heaviest, where there is a select vestry. But the Select Vestry Act has had another most pernicious effect. It has condemned all vestries that are not *select*. The old open free parish court is thrown into contempt, and the magistrates now assume that no vestry that is not constituted according to that act, can exercise any functions in

the management of the poor. The number of persons required to constitute a quorum is such, that exclusive of the parish officers, perhaps not a quarter of the villages of this county can find a sufficient number of inhabitants to form a legal court. This act therefore has had a direct effect to cramp the influence of the parish court, and to multiply the customs that prevail in different parts of the country.

That act was followed by *parliamentary recommendations* respecting the keeping of parish accounts, and the publishing a weekly list of the names of the paupers.* The design of the former recommendation was to make the overseers more careful of their own affairs, and also to afford information respecting the nature and extent of the illegal disbursements. But surely this information might have been obtained by more simple means, and was indeed already in the possession of parliament. But the classification of items which was recommended, furnished an admission on the part of the legislature of the existence of such practices, and gave an indirect but powerful sanction to them. The printing, publishing, and distributing lists of those who receive relief and on what accounts, may detect a few instances of imposition, but it manifestly gives a direct sanction to the illegal modes of expenditure which are practised in different districts. With such recommendation, on

* See Report H. C. April 2, 1819.

The poor rate increased slowly till the time that the workhouse system was adopted; after which it progressively and rapidly increased. In 1817 the Select Vestry Act passed. In 1819 the committee of the House of Commons proposed the printing and publishing of names, and both the law and the recommendation have been adopted by this parish. The fluctuations of the parish accounts will shew the temporary and permanent effects of the measures, which exactly correspond with the temporary and permanent effects of the workhouse system, and all other expedients that admit the same principles.

| | | | | | |
|------|------------|-------|-------|---|---|
| 1810 | rate | ..... | £1000 | 0 | 0 |
| 1817 | ..... | ..... | 2117 | 0 | 0 |
| 1818 | ..... | ..... | 2222 | 0 | 0 |
| 1819 | ..... | ..... | 1720 | 0 | 0 |
| 1821 | ..... | ..... | 1904 | 0 | 0 |
| 1824 | ..... | ..... | 2400 | 0 | 0 |

For a time select vestries, salaried overseers, and stigmas, may produce an effect; but if the vicious principles remain the evil will recur with accumulated force. Regulations are in fact sanctions. When asked what effect was produced by the publication of names—the overseer replied, a very bad one. When asked for what purpose his select vestry assembled—his reply was, to pay to each individual applicant the allowance ordered by the magistrates. The following is the weekly list published in this town by the select vestry, acting under the sanction of the magistracy. It will clearly shew the futility of all legislation in the High Court

of Parliament, so long as *local legislation* is permitted in every district of the country.

*RELIEF GRANTED TO THE POOR,**

February 14th, 1825.

| <i>Aged and Widows.</i> | | | £. | s. | d. | | |
|---|---|---|----|--------------------------------|----|----|---|
| Archer Wm. sen. | 0 | 9 | 0 | Harper's Widow | 0 | 3 | 0 |
| Allen Thos. Burnham | — | — | — | Hubbard Thomas | 0 | 4 | 0 |
| Ashley William | 0 | 6 | 0 | Hall Ann and Child | 0 | 3 | 0 |
| Balcombe C. Blakeney | — | — | — | Howlett David | 0 | 2 | 6 |
| Baldwin and Wife, Bunwell | — | — | — | Hart William | 0 | 10 | 6 |
| Bougin John | 0 | 4 | 0 | Johnson's Children | 0 | 3 | 6 |
| Bunting Widow | 0 | 7 | 9 | Jarrett's Family, Wells | — | — | — |
| Bensley William | 0 | 4 | 0 | Kingdom Margaret | 0 | 2 | 6 |
| Brown Widow | 0 | 3 | 0 | Kirby Widow, Wis- | — | — | — |
| Bately ditto | 0 | 3 | 0 | beach | — | — | — |
| Bennell Nicholas | 0 | 4 | 0 | Lynn's Wm. Family | 1 | 1 | 7 |
| Bacey Frances | 0 | 2 | 6 | Mann Elizabeth | 0 | 2 | 6 |
| Blanchflower Widow | 0 | 2 | 6 | Mann's Family, Nor- | — | — | — |
| Bell's Children, Tittleshall | — | — | — | wich | 0 | 6 | 0 |
| Brunton's Child, Tofts | 0 | 2 | 3 | Mitchell John | 0 | 8 | 0 |
| Clarke Jane | 0 | 2 | 6 | Neal John | 0 | 3 | 9 |
| Cooper Robert | 0 | 5 | 6 | Nicholson Widow | 0 | 13 | 0 |
| Cooper Widow | 0 | 2 | 6 | Nichols Barbara | 0 | 4 | 6 |
| Clarke Ann | 0 | 3 | 6 | Nelson Widow | 0 | 3 | 0 |
| Cates's Family | 0 | 1 | 6 | Newton ditto | 0 | 2 | 6 |
| Crockley John | 0 | 5 | 6 | Olley Sarah | 0 | 3 | 6 |
| Cranmer Henry | 0 | 6 | 6 | Parker Robert | 0 | 5 | 6 |
| Dix & Wife, Morston | — | — | — | Russel's Jas. Family | 0 | 9 | 6 |
| Dowson R. Norwich | 0 | 4 | 0 | Ramm William | 0 | 4 | 0 |
| Eagle Wid. Rudham | — | — | — | Rowling William | 0 | 4 | 0 |
| Eagle Widow | 0 | 3 | 6 | Smith Margaret | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Everett Thomas | 0 | 3 | 6 | Skippon Widow | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Fakenbridge John | 0 | 5 | 6 | Seppings, Wymond- | — | — | — |
| Fidgett Peter | 0 | 4 | 0 | ham | — | — | — |
| Farrow Widow | — | — | — | Simmons Thomas | 0 | 9 | 0 |
| Goldsmith ditto, Wisbeach | — | — | — | Seppings Robert | 0 | 5 | 6 |
| Green Widow | 0 | 3 | 0 | Salmon Widow | 0 | 2 | 6 |
| Guttridge Edmund | 0 | 4 | 0 | Southcote Widow | — | — | — |
| Green Sarah | 0 | 2 | 6 | Strangleman Widow | 0 | 3 | 0 |
| | | | | Stolworthy Widow | 0 | 2 | 6 |
| | | | | Stamp ditto | 0 | 1 | 6 |
| | | | | Smith Susan | 0 | 3 | 0 |
| | | | | Sheltram Elizabeth | 0 | 2 | 6 |

* This town contains 1600 inhabitants.

| | £. | s. | d. |
|----------------------------------|----|----|----|
| Simmons Widow ... | 0 | 3 | 0 |
| Shorten William ... | 0 | 5 | 6 |
| Thompson Juby ... | 0 | 10 | 0 |
| Todd Richard | 0 | 5 | 6 |
| Thompson Robert .. | 0 | 4 | 0 |
| Thompson's James Family | 0 | 11 | 6 |
| White Mary | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Wacey Widow | 0 | 5 | 0 |
| West Ann | 0 | 2 | 6 |
| Wells Frances | 0 | 2 | 6 |
| Willis Widow | — | — | — |
| Woodhouse's Family | 0 | 6 | 0 |
| Wright John | 0 | 5 | 0 |

Wages made up, &c.

| | | | |
|------------------------------------|---|----|---|
| Adcock Edmund .. | 0 | 2 | 9 |
| Barnes Jonathan ... | 0 | 6 | 6 |
| Beck Robert | 0 | 6 | 6 |
| Brunton James | 0 | 7 | 0 |
| Butters William ... | 0 | 4 | 0 |
| Colls Beldon | 0 | 7 | 0 |
| Clarke Richard | 0 | 7 | 6 |
| Cook James | 0 | 4 | 0 |
| Crockley Henry ... | 0 | 9 | 6 |
| Crockley William .. | 0 | 7 | 0 |
| Claxton James | — | — | — |
| Creak Thomas | — | — | — |
| Elyard John | — | — | — |
| Eagle Thomas | — | — | — |
| Flegg Thomas | 0 | 5 | 6 |
| Frost Thomas, jun. | 0 | 2 | 6 |
| Farrow Paul | — | — | — |
| Graver John | 0 | 2 | 6 |
| Green Robert | — | — | — |
| Hewitt Matthew ... | — | — | — |
| Long Henry, sen. ... | — | — | — |
| Long Henry, jun. ... | 0 | 2 | 6 |
| Marshall William ... | — | — | — |
| Nichols Isaac | 0 | 8 | 3 |
| Patrick William ... | 0 | 5 | 6 |
| Russels Richard ... | 0 | 12 | 6 |
| Rawling W. Gres- singhall | — | — | — |
| Rice Henry | — | — | — |

| | £. | s. | d. |
|-----------------------|----|----|----|
| Roberts James | — | — | — |
| Shorten Samuel | 0 | 2 | 9 |
| Smith Samuel | — | — | — |
| Savage John, sen. ... | 0 | 10 | 6 |
| Thaxter James | — | — | — |
| Warner Charles ... | 0 | 4 | 0 |
| Williamson William | — | — | — |

Men on Roads, &c.

| | | | |
|-----------------------|---|----|---|
| Applegate Robert .. | 0 | 8 | 0 |
| Ashley Thomas | 0 | 4 | 0 |
| Ashley John | — | — | — |
| Antingham Jas. jun. | 0 | 9 | 6 |
| Buckingham John .. | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Boulter Thomas, jun. | — | — | — |
| Bensley Thomas ... | — | — | — |
| Barnes Robert | 0 | 7 | 0 |
| Boulter Miller | — | — | — |
| Blanchflower Matt. | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Bird John | — | — | — |
| Bately John | — | — | — |
| Clarke Robert | 0 | 2 | 6 |
| Dennis's Family ... | 0 | 14 | 6 |
| Drew Barney | 0 | 5 | 6 |
| Drew John | — | — | — |
| Fuller Stephen | 0 | 13 | 0 |
| Fakenbridge Thomas | — | — | — |
| Fiddaman Thos. jun. | 0 | 6 | 0 |
| Fiddaman Thos. sen. | — | — | — |
| Howard James | — | — | — |
| Harper William ... | — | — | — |
| Jarret Thomas | — | — | — |
| Lowder W. | — | — | — |
| Mason Mark | — | — | — |
| Mitchell George ... | 0 | 9 | 6 |
| Newton George ... | — | — | — |
| Oughton James | 0 | 5 | 6 |
| Patrick William, jun. | — | — | — |
| Raspberry John ... | — | — | — |
| Reeder William ... | 0 | 8 | 3 |
| Reeder George | — | — | — |
| Reeder Charles | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Reeder James | 0 | 3 | 8 |
| Rawling Henry | 0 | 9 | 0 |
| Savory George | 0 | 11 | 0 |

| £. s. d. | | £. s. d. | |
|--------------------------|-------|-----------------------------------|------------|
| Smith John, jun. | 0 7 3 | Rice Mary | 0 1 6 |
| Salmon William | ————— | Spooner J. for Ry- | |
| Salmon James | ————— | bnrgh | 0 3 0 |
| Savage F. | ————— | Vagrants | 0 1 0 |
| Skerry John | 0 2 6 | BASTARD CHILDREN | 1 14 6 |
| Simmons F. | 0 7 0 | <i>Tradesmen's Bills, &c.</i> | |
| Skedje Edmund | 0 1 8 | Postage | 0 0 10 |
| Thompson G. | ————— | | 31 9 3 |
| Watts Robert | 0 4 0 | Disbursed | 1714 4 6 |
| <i>Girls, &c.</i> | | | £1745 13 9 |
| Curson's Eliz. child | 0 2 0 | | |
| Fiddamon Amy | 0 2 0 | | |

☞ The more effectually to detect fraud or imposition, it is requested that every person employing any of the above named Paupers, or any part of their family, will place the sum paid to them opposite their respective names, and the paper to be taken care of for the Parish Beadle, who will call for the same next week, and deliver it to the Select Vestry, which will meet on the 23d of February next, at Four o'clock in the evening.

In the last session of parliament another effort was made to effect some change in the administration of the poor laws. A noble Lord, to whom the country is highly indebted for his patriotic intentions, instituted an inquiry "into the practice which prevails in some parts of the country of paying the wages of labour out of the poor rates." The report of the committee developed the nature and scandalous effects of that practice; but that same report proposes a scheme which sanctions the very principle which it professed to investigate and to condemn. The report acknowledges that it is impossible to frame an act on this subject, but by a "general sanction," which we are told would "be extremely beneficial," and a form which "appears as unexceptionable as any," a plan is

recommended, which, if it could be carried into execution in the parishes of England, would be a more dreadful curse than any with which we have yet been visited. The scheme is said to be similar to one contained in a bill brought into the house in an early part of the session, and is as follows :

“ The parishioners in vestry shall, if they think fit, draw up rules and regulations for the maintenance of the old and impotent, and other poor unable to work, as *also for the employment of the able poor*, and the same signed or agreed to by a *majority in value*, shall be presented to the justices to be by them amended, approved, or rejected, or sent back for alterations, and when adjusted to the *satisfaction of the justices and parishioners*, to be *parochial law for one year.*”

This is the “general sanction,” which is to alter the general practice of paying the wages of labour out of the rates, and the practice is to be altered by *making a rate to pay the wages*. This practice is now pursued in one of the three following cases:—1st. Where the justices and parishioners agree upon a scale of maintenance for the employed and unemployed. 2dly. Where that scale of maintenance is enforced by the magistracy contrary to the will of the parishioners; and 3dly. Where it is adopted by the parishioners contrary to the will of the magistrates. The two former are the most common cases. In the first case, all that this parochial law could do, would be to bind a

heavy and galling yoke on the neck of the labourer more firmly than before, for in addition to the consent of parishioners and magistrates, who are generally interested parties, and which is a combination sufficiently strong against the poor man, there would be the "general sanction" of the wisdom of parliament. In the two latter cases, where the parishioners and the magistrates differ, such a *parochial law* could not take place—no, not *for a year*.

But the recommendation of this Oundle, or labour rate, or parochial law scheme, is extremely mischievous, for it diverts the public attention from salutary reform, and sanctions the very principles and powers which have checked the free circulation of labour, and have enabled interested parties to buy and sell the labour of others *without their consent, and at the valuation of a bare existence*. Law is a serious thing, and to give to any scheme which is to affect the interest of the largest and most valuable class of workmen the force of law, is a very important matter. "Legislation is the greatest act that can be exercised by one being over another," and ought not to be intrusted to ignorant or half-informed, and least of all, to interested men. People are apt to think, that there can be nothing interested or oppressive in poor laws, but they have introduced a great deal of spurious legislation, which has sapped the harmony of our villages and the best interests of the pea-

santry. Not only have acts of parliament had the force of law, but reports, bills, propositions for bills, recommendations which it is impossible to convert into laws, have had the force of law—edicts, decrees of local magistrates in petty sessions, and now to consummate the matter, the rules and regulations of a *majority in value* in vestry are to be parochial law. And for what purpose? for making roads, or paving streets, or some such trifling matters? No parochial law for the most important of all purposes, affecting the interests of the largest class of workmen in the country, and the most serious of all contracts in civil society—the hiring and service of labourers, and subjecting that contract to the entire contrivance and superintendance of the most interested parties—the landowners and land occupiers. A model of this law is given, which is, that a majority in value are to fix the price of the labour of every man, woman, and child in the parish, *without their consent*, and this when once fixed is to be parochial law for one year.*

* One of the witnesses before the select committee on labourers' wages, gives a full account of the operation of this law in a parish in Bedfordshire. There appears to be 39 labourers, 18 youths and 10 boys. A parish meeting was held. The labourers were valued by the squire and the farmers, the majority in value. The labourers do not appear to have had any voice in the sale of their labour, and the following was the price at which any farmer might employ them for six weeks:—14 at 6s. per week—4 at 7s. per week—12 at 8s. per week—9 at 9s. per week, or 7s. 6d. on an average per week. The youths were all valued at 3s. per week; and the boys from 1s. 6d. to 2s. 6d. This is the statute of labourers which is recommended.

This seems to be trifling with law and with justice. Till this enlightened age, it was considered that there should be as few changes and variations in law as possible. But in this department nothing so contradictory, unintelligible, and mutable as law, varying through the improvements of the last century with every county and district, and now through the projected improvement of the last session of parliament, to vary with every parish, and to change with every changing year—parochial law for one year is the proposed legislative remedy for the evils of pauperism and the various customs of the provinces. District law, under the sanction of the magistracy, introduced the evil, has continued the evil, which could not have been begun or continued without it, and now this parochial law is to remedy it. The evil has arisen from local legislation, and the cause of the mischief is suggested as the cure—the bane is prescribed as the antidote.*

* The mischievous effects of local legislation may perhaps have been aggravated in this county from the peculiarity of the people. The learned antiquary, Camden, makes the following observation on the character of the Northfolk:—"The goodness of the soil," he observes, "may be gathered from hence, that the inhabitants are of a bright clear complexion, not to mention their sharpness of wit, and admirable quickness in the study of the common law. So that it is at present, and always has been, reputed the most fruitful nursery of lawyers; and even *among the common people* you shall meet with a great many who (as one expresses it), if they have no just quarrel, are able to raise it out of the very quirks and niceties of the law." The quirks and niceties of our hundred law have been fruitful sources of contention; what strife the quirks and niceties of parochial law might kindle it is impossible to predict.

The foregoing inquiry into rural pauperism was instituted with a view to ascertain how far it is at present upheld, by a superfluity of workmen, a dearth of employment, or inadequate wages. If it shall appear that none of these are the real causes of this protracted malady, but that its force and continuance are to be ascribed to the nature or interpretation of the laws, to provincial and local legislation, to the enlarged jurisdiction of some courts, and the degradation, desecration or prostitution of others, then the remedies to be applied to this case, however obvious are not those which have been yet applied to any extent. *The regulation of the inferior courts, a uniformity of law and practice, and the release of the business of agriculture from the thralldom of legal or official regulations, are manifestly the proper remedies.* It far exceeds my abilities to detail the mode in which they should be applied, for this is the business of statesmen ; but the necessity for them may be briefly stated. Private individuals can do no more than protest against an evil, and bring evidence to shew the enormity of the grievance and the *practicability of its redress.*

During the present and preceding century, the jurisdiction of the hundred court has been extensively enlarged. It has not only administered the laws, heard appeals, and made legal decisions, but

it has *legislated* in the most important of all concerns—the employment and wages of labourers. It is impossible to read the acts which have passed during this period, and not observe how the legislature has referred almost every matter of importance in rural economy to the cognizance and controul of this court. The practice of this court, especially in the business of agriculture and the administration of the poor laws, has exceeded even these limits. It is not necessary to enquire how far the members of this court were likely to be qualified for the business which has been transacted in it; how far they have been disinterested, or whether lawyers, by birth and fortune, are more suited to the office than those who are so by profession and education; or whether, as in the courts of corporate towns, the presidency of a professional lawyer would not both facilitate and regulate the proceedings of such a court. The chief point which is here to be observed, is the destruction of the parochial by the enlarged and assumed jurisdiction of the hundred court, as well as by the incorporation of parishes and districts. There are but few parish courts, and, where they exist, their efficiency is altogether neutralized. Parochial laws and senates are not to be desired, for they would prove parochial tyrannies; but the restoration of the parish court, invested with its original functions, for the preservation of order according to law, and for the prevention of nuisances to society

from beggary, vagrancy, idleness, or abject distress, might tend perhaps more than any other reformation to suppress vice and diminish crime. The parish court affords to the Presbyterian clergy of Scotland a most salutary influence over society. Through its instrumentality the peasants have preserved their character for independence and moral conduct, and have received all needful relief in distress. The middle ranks have also preserved their reputation for good sense and sound discretion, for they have had the full power of exercising those qualifications. This corporation has, however, nothing to do with the private affairs of its members. The business of agriculture, the wages of labour, the employment of the labourers, are not within their province. This corporation in Scotland has been, therefore, harmonious and most useful. The Church of England would acquire from the restoration of a corresponding system, a moral and unsuspected influence in the little communities in which she is appointed to minister, and which would be of the utmost importance to herself and to the community. It is a vestry act for all the parishes of England, and not a select vestry act, which must be partial and invidious—that will restore the ancient parish court of England with its original functions and respectability.

In order to render this court universally and practically useful, there must be one uniform law. The most extraordinary feature in rural pauperism,

is the variety of customs which prevail in different counties. Some counties are entirely, and others partially exempt from the grievance. In different parts of the same county wages vary from seven to eighteen shillings, and in other cases from three to twelve. It is manifest that parochial or district law has been the occasion of these varieties, and affording fresh sanction to such law can only tend to multiply and confirm the cases. Alfred the Founder and Edward the Restorer of our laws, perceiving different customs in the provinces, composed one common law to be observed through the whole kingdom, and that law was carried into execution by a gradation of independent courts. This process we have reversed, and by local legislation the spread of capricious and arbitrary customs has been authorized.

In order to preserve the harmony of this court, the integrity of its members, and the efficiency of the law, it will appear that the law and practice must be restricted to that point which will release the hiring and wages of labourers, and the private business of the members of this court from all restriction. Rural pauperism is a mixed case of oppression and fraudulent imposition, and the law must proceed to remove both together. If imposition were restrained the oppression might continue from a combination of interest and authority. If, on the other hand, oppression were removed, the imposition might still be practised. If the influence of the third party

were removed, the labourers, under the present state of the market of labour, would emancipate themselves; but if the law remained unchanged they would have the power of imposition. For instance, in many parts of the country, labour would rise from 3 or 5 to 10 or 12 shillings a week. The labourers would receive the full reward of their labour. Mr. Morgan and the most scientific calculators compute that a young man, under 20 years of age, might, by the payment of £18. 11s. 3d. assure to himself 10s. a week in sickness—5s. weekly after the age of 65, and £10 on death. The annual difference, therefore, between these rates of wages would enable such labourers in health, youth, and celibacy to provide for sickness, age, and married life. But if the law or practice should continue to apportion pensions in age, sickness, and married life, equal, or nearly equal to the wages of labour, they would squander their earnings, become more profligate, and remain as much a burden upon society as ever.

It is in vain, therefore, to expect reformation from magistrates, farmers, or the clergy, and much more vain to expect it from artificial regulation. The government and the labourers themselves are far more powerful agents. In the ensuing year the laws affecting the agriculture of the country will undergo a revision. A cheaper and more steady price of provisions will be sought, and in order to secure that desirable object the agricul-

turist must, like every other party in the country, be released from the compulsory employment of labourers. The removal of all restriction upon labour, the regulation of the inferior courts, and a uniform law will confer greater benefits upon society than can ever be expected from schemes and expedients. The pecuniary *burden of pauperism* is the smallest part of the grievance. The few millions are not worthy of consideration, but as they are the index of the evil. The pecuniary burden of the poor rate, in the village in which I reside, is unusually light, but the immoral effects of the poison have been extensive. Those maxims of our religion, which are most valuable to us as social beings, are taught, if at all, to an immense disadvantage, for religion and law, virtue and authority, are at issue. Our public charity, in its present form, is as inconsistent with true benevolence as it is with common justice and sound policy.

APPENDIX.

Extracts from the Minutes of Evidence before a Select Committee on Labourers' Wages, 1824.

Rev. William Carmault examined.

Have you found the morals of the people injured by giving them relief indiscriminately?—Yes; an immoral man obtained much greater relief from the parish than a moral man, because, by his immoral habits, his family were in a worse condition than the family of the other.

You believe that the effect of that practice was to encourage immoral habits?—Yes, certainly.

Mr. John Danns Examined.

Supposing a labourer is unwilling to work, what kind of assistance does the parish afford him?—They allow him so much a head; if he is unwilling to work, then we apply to the magistrates to punish him for his neglect of work.

Have you frequently had occasion to make this application? We frequently have had occasion, but we do not so often inflict the punishment as we ought to do. I have done it, when I have been in office, two or three times.

By withholding the parish relief?—That we cannot do, because the magistrates say, you are starving the family—the family must have maintenance, and you must punish the man for neglect of work.

How has he been punished?—By putting him in Bridewell.

Could not that evil be remedied by giving him task work? Yes.

Supposing that man is not punished, does he receive for himself and his family as much as an industrious labourer?—Just as much; so much a head is what the magistrates allow the poor now, and it ruins them; they can have just as much for lying still as for working.

Have you had many men leave their families?—No; they need not leave their families when they can be supported without work; we have had some, but not many.

Do you find that the magistrates give an order for relief, when men apply to them and say they have not sufficient to support their families?—Always.

Does not that tend to make the labourers indifferent to their character for industry and sobriety?—Certainly.

Do you think that men marry without any certain means of support, relying upon the parish relief?—We have a very great proof in our parish at this time: a man that has always been relieved by the parish; he is a cripple, having one leg, and he has been marrying a young wife, which will bring an incumbrance upon the parish of young children, perhaps.

When a man marries, does he call upon you to find him a house?—Immediately, not always, but very often, and to furnish it too.

Do the magistrates enforce that demand?—They do, because they say they cannot be in the street, and you must find them a home.

Then, in fact, your opinion is, that the poor laws are a premium upon matrimony?—Yes; and for this reason: I have known young men, perhaps because you would not give them more than three shillings a week, they will say, we will marry, and you must maintain us.

Is the only punishment inflicted upon determined idleness sending them to Bridewell?—Yes.

How long do you keep them there?—Perhaps a week, a fortnight, or a month.

Do you ever find any good effect from it?—What we may do now I do not know; we have a tread-mill now, but before they used to laugh at the idea of being sent to Bridewell.

The Rev. Philip Hunt, LL. D. Examined.

What is the course which a labourer takes to increase his income or wages, when he marries and has a family?—He applies to the overseer of the parish for assistance, and that assistance, in general, is doled out in so limited a way, that *very few labourers marry voluntarily.*

Do you suppose that the greater proportion of labourers, with a family, receive assistance from the poor rate in Bedfordshire?—I believe that *almost every labourer's family*, that consists of more than himself and wife and one child, has either perpetual or occasional relief from the overseers, either in weekly allowance or by occasional aid afforded to him, either in shoes, clothes, or money, and all extraordinary occurrences in such a man's family are paid by the parish, such as attending his wife in labour, or the visitation of sickness: on such occurrences he must apply to the salaried

parish apothecary, and, when a death occurs in the family, the expence of a family is paid out of the poor rates; the principal calculation of the overseer is, the *amount of what will merely support existence*, without any of the extraordinary occurrences that happen in a labourer's family.

When a labourer marries then, do you suppose he has no money to pay for any expences which immediately occur, or are likely soon to occur to him?—He has scarcely more than sufficient to pay the marriage fee, and not always that; both the fee and the ring, I suspect, are sometimes furnished by the parish.

Have you ever known the marriage fee paid by the parish?—I have known very frequently that the expence of a licence has been paid for the paupers by the parish—that was when the marriage *must* take place sooner than the publication of banns would allow it.

Is parish relief always afforded to labourers with a family in all cases, whether employed by farmers or not?—I believe generally.

Does the relief afforded by the parish for a labourer's family generally make the amount to him as much as an industrious labourer can at any time earn?—I should think that an industrious married labourer, receiving the highest wages that are given for day labour, aided by the supplementary allowance which the overseers give to him to enable him to support his family, does thus obtain a larger weekly sum than an industrious labourer, working at task-work or by the piece, can obtain; I think the amount of wages that he receives at day labour, at the highest rate, together with the increase of what the parish allows him to support his family with, is generally more than that man could obtain by the greatest bodily exertions at piece or task-work; therefore there are comparatively few of them who are of sufficient independent feeling, to work laboriously and perseveringly at task-work, because they cannot thus obtain more than by common labour and parish supplementary aid.

Does not that certainty of support act as a discouragement to industry and sobriety?—I believe so.

Do the labourers generally enter upon marriage in an improvident or imprudent manner?—I think often in an improvident manner; and so unfit are they often for entering upon the expences of a domestic establishment, that many of them do not marry voluntarily, but the marriage is contracted to avoid the prospect of imprisonment under the bastardy laws; in some instances, I believe, they are perhaps tempted by the increased pay they get as soon as they

become married; as soon as such a labourer becomes a married man, he is thus as it were identified altogether with the rates for the relief of the poor, and reduced in some degree to a state of pauperism, though able-bodied and willing to work.

Is that increase of wages given independently of the considerations affecting the character of the labourer?

It does not in my opinion depend upon the moral character of the person who receives it—it is a matter of course; because before he married he was a lodger—but, as a married man, he must have a somewhat more expensive establishment, and rent to pay, instead of being an inmate or lodger.

If a parish refuses relief to a person of this kind, what is the course he takes?—He applies to a magistrate.

What is his statement to a magistrate? His statement to the magistrate is, that his wages will not enable him *to support life, with lodging, washing, and other necessary incidental expences connected with his situation in life*; the magistrate in that case recommends the parish officers to grant a small weekly sum, in addition to the earnings of the labourer, (as the magistrate has not the power to order the master to pay greater wages,) such a sum of money as, in addition to his wages, will enable him to live; the parish officer then, perhaps, tells the magistrate that he has the option to afford the relief to the applicant, either in money, or by placing the dissatisfied labourer in the workhouse; and that he can keep him in the workhouse for three shillings, or three shillings and sixpence a week, and the parish be entitled to his labour, and that he is to lodge in the workhouse; and therefore *it seems to be very much the case, that the scale, according to which the parish maintains labourers who apply for legal support, is according to what such applicants could be maintained for in the workhouse*; for the overseer has always the option of refusing to comply with the magistrate's order for a weekly relief in money, if there be a workhouse established in the parish to which he can send the applicant.

The question refers to a labourer with a family, whose wages are in his own opinion not sufficient to support himself and his family?—The magistrate in general, if there appears to be any extraordinary cause that requires immediate assistance, orders it to be given to the applicant for a very short period, till the next petty sessions of the district may decide upon the case, by examining it more in detail, than can be done before the magistrate out of sessions in the first instance.

In what manner does the magistrate estimate the relief that he orders?—In many districts of the county, the magistrates have formed a scale, calculating how much per week is required by a single man for his support; how much for a single woman; how much for a married couple; for a married couple with one child, or two children, and so on, taking as a criterion the actual price of the quartern loaf at the nearest market town; and if the labourer's wages and the earnings of his family do not amount to such a sum as is pointed out in this graduated scale, they generally recommend the overseer to allow out of the poor rate as much as will make up that sum. Do you conceive that practice to be legal? I do not think it is sanctioned by any provision of the poor laws; but in order that magistrates may act upon something like a consistent or uniform plan, this scale, to which I have alluded, *has been adopted at various petty sessions, and acquiesced in by overseers.*

Is the character of the labourer taken into consideration when that relief is ordered?—No; for the scale is calculated merely as to what is absolutely necessary for support or maintenance.

It is entirely intended then for the mere subsistence of the labourer and his family?—For the mere subsistence of the labourer and his family, without any reference to the moral character of the individuals that compose that family.

Does the assurance of that relief make the labourer indifferent to his character, both as an industrious labourer and a good moral man?—That appears to me to be the necessary consequence from such a practice.

Have not those effects been found in practice to follow?—I have no doubt of it; much of the crimes of the labouring classes appears to me to arise from their finding that they cannot, by their utmost exertion and industry, maintain their families without some kind of parochial assistance.

Does it not follow that they have no feeling of shame when they apply to the parish for relief?—I think that the feeling of shame, on applying for parish relief, has long ceased to exist in the neighbourhood in which I live.

Do you not consider that the character of the agricultural population generally, in that part of the country, is thereby greatly degraded?—I think it is very much so; and I conceive the evil to flow originally from the very low rate at which the labour of an able-bodied single man has of late been estimated; he cannot lay by any money against the time he may wish to marry; he can scarcely indulge any temporary gratification without having recourse to other

means than labour; and in counties where game-preserves are very numerous, the resource of poaching immediately presented itself to him. If detected, he cannot pay the penalty, and is consequently sent to prison, where he remains three months, and where he sees other persons not suffering a greater penalty for petty larceny; when he is at length liberated, perhaps he goes a step further in delinquency, and he commits an offence that he knows will not be visited more severely than poaching; he breaks open a dove-house, or he steals poultry, and other half-protected property, and probably he is sent to prison again, and in the end becomes a confirmed depredator or felon; whereas if he could have gratified an occasional wish for any extra little enjoyment by what he could have saved out of his wages, the first temptation to crime would not have presented itself so strongly to his mind.

Has there been, in fact, a great increase of crime in the county in which you reside?—I am afraid that I must say, that crime has very much increased in Bedfordshire within the last fourteen years.

Henry Drummond, Esq. Examined.

What is the practice you allude to of forcing marriages? I believe nothing is more erroneous than the assertion, that the poor laws tend to improvident marriages; I never knew an instance of a girl being married till she was with child, nor ever knew of a marriage taking place through a calculation for future support.

What is the motive of the parish officers for forcing a marriage in those cases where they have not work in the parish to provide for the family?—It usually happens that the father is of one parish and the mother of another, and they think if the man is threatened with imprisonment for want of sureties to indemnify the parish, the parish offer to let him off, upon condition that he will marry the girl, by which they think they will be freed from the expence of keeping the child.

But if both belong to the same parish, they will have probably not only one child to keep, but a large family?—That is the case, but still they always do force a marriage.

Rev. Anthony Collett Examined.

Have you observed, within your memory, that the quantity of crime has increased?

Undoubtedly very much; within the last five years parti-

cularly so. The present system of relieving in money, without providing labour, has produced a lamentable series of evil consequences. It has broken the bond of union which formerly existed between the labourer and his employer, who both within a period to which my memory extends, considered their interests as one and the same. The husbandman then worked for years, perhaps for life, on the same farm; he was considered as part of the establishment, rejoiced in his master's prosperity, and sympathized with him in his misfortune. This mutual feeling no longer exists. The labourer is now, in general, the mere servant of the day, or of the season, and is cast off when the task is done, to seek a precarious subsistence from other work if he can find it, if not, from the parish rates. It has most rapidly effected the demoralization of the lower orders; and while the pittance allowed to sustain life has driven those to despair who still cherish the feelings of honesty, it has made those who are more void of principle poachers, thieves, and robbers. Were I to detail the melancholy, degrading, and ruinous system which have been pursued, with few exceptions, throughout the country, with regard to the unemployed poor, and in the payment of the wages of idleness, I should scarcely be credited beyond its confines. In the generality of parishes from five to forty labourers have been without employment, loitering about during the day, engaged in idle games, insulting passengers on their road, or else consuming their time in sleep, that they might be more ready and active in the hours of darkness. The weekly allowances cannot supply more than food; how then are clothing, firing, and rent to be provided? by robbery and plunder; and those so artfully contrived and effected, that discovery has been almost impossible. Picklock keys have readily opened our barns and granaries. The lower orders of artificers, and even, in one or two instances, small farmers have joined the gangs, consisting of from ten to twenty men; and corn has been sold by sample in the market, of such mixed qualities by these small farmers, that competent judges have assured me it must have been stolen from different barns, and could not have been produced from their occupations. Disgraceful as these facts are to a civilized country, I could enumerate many more; but the recital would create disgust. I will mention, however, one circumstance, to prove the degree of misery to which the labouring population has been reduced, by receiving relief in money instead of being provided with work; that when a poor unemployed fellow was convicted before me of stealing wood, the penalty for which was miti-

gated to the lowest sum, and he was allowed a month to pay it, he entreated me with tears to send him, as an act of mercy, at once to the house of correction, where he should find employment and food. This disgraceful system, ruinous as it is to the moral character of the lower classes, must, if persisted in, ultimately be so to the landed proprietor in general; and without the speedy application of some remedy, he will soon discover that he holds his estate not for his own benefit, but merely as a trustee for the poor.

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