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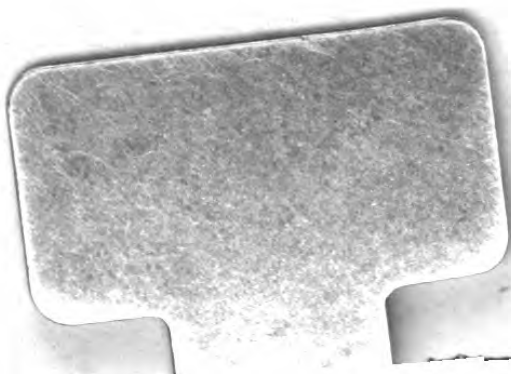


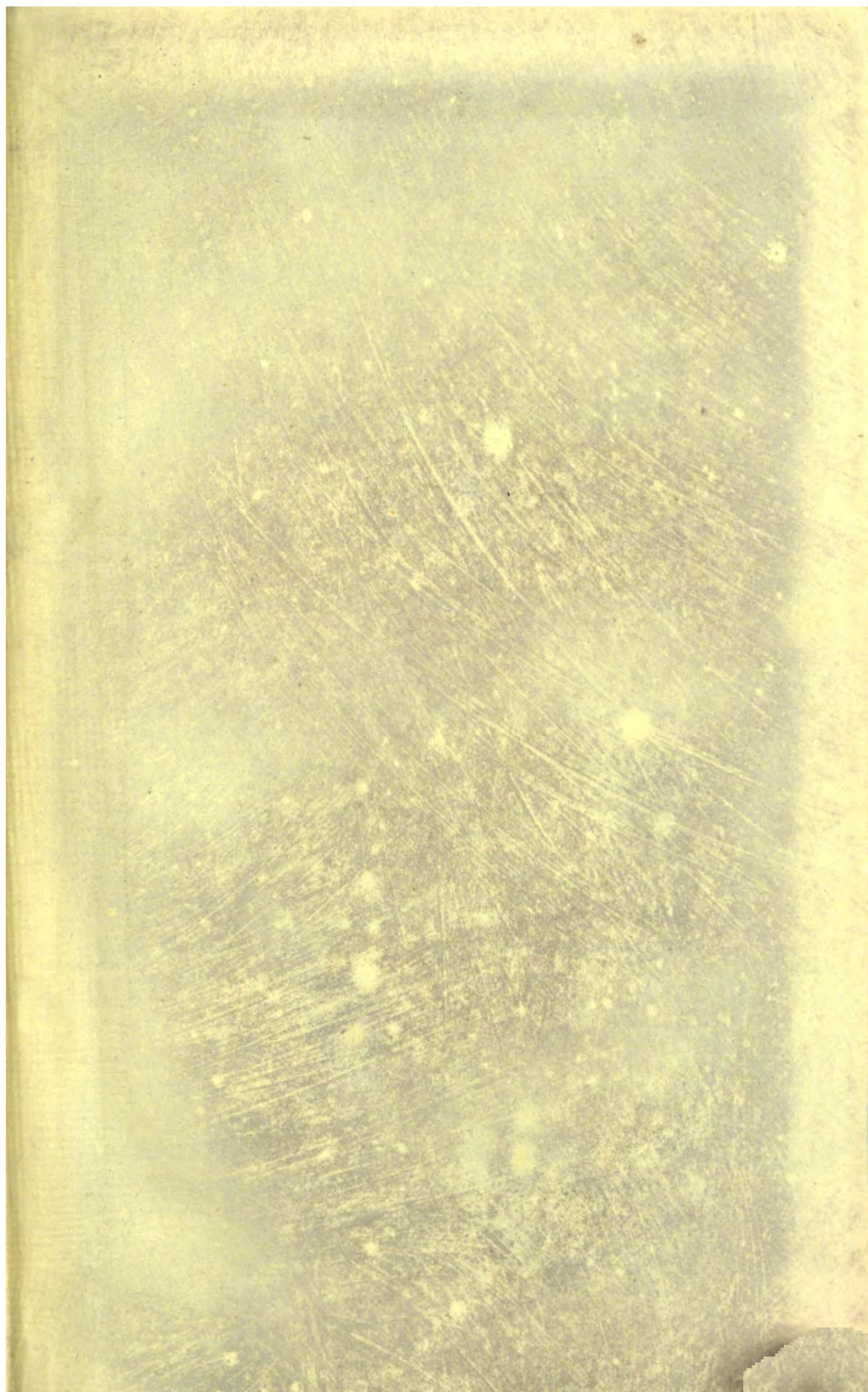
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THE IMPENDING DANGERS
OF OUR
COUNTRY, &c.

48.902.





THE IMPENDING
DANGERS OF OUR COUNTRY;

OR,

HIDDEN THINGS BROUGHT TO LIGHT.

BY W. FERGUSON,

BICESTER, OXON,

AUTHOR OF THE "COTTAGER'S COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE," ETC.

"What mean ye that ye beat my people to pieces, and grind the faces of the poor?"—ISAIAH.

"Alarming as the present aspect of affairs unquestionably is, the most appalling feature of the times is the prevailing discontent of the lower orders; discontent arising not so much from the infusion of speculative principles, as from the impression of actual distress. . . . We have the highest authority for asserting that 'a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand.' . . . We have listened to every breeze that moves along the surface of Europe, and descried danger from afar; while, deaf to the complaints of the poor, we have beheld ignorance, wretchedness, and barbarity, multiply at home, without the smallest regard."—ROBERT HALL.

"The cause which I knew not I searched out."—JOB.

LONDON :

WARD AND CO., PATERNOSTER-ROW; GILPIN AND CO.,
BISHOPSGATE-STREET WITHOUT; B. L. GREEN,
PATERNOSTER-ROW.

1848.



LONDON :
MIALI AND COCKSHAW, PRINTERS, HORSE-SHOE COURT, LUDGATE HILL.

TO LORD JOHN RUSSELL,

FIRST LORD OF THE TREASURY.

MY LORD,

THIS small volume, on the dangerous state of the country, is dedicated to you, without your permission—without even asking for it. I am fully aware that the liberty which I have taken, in dedicating my Treatise to your Lordship, is not in strict accordance with the formalities usually observed by those who dedicate their productions to their friends and patrons ; but still, as you are the leader of our political rulers, I look upon you as the one exalted and responsible personage to whom I feel myself in duty bound to inscribe my book. It must be well known to you, my Lord, that the constitution of society in

this country is radically, and to an alarming extent, unsound and deranged. Thousands have recently been ruined by commercial embarrassment, paucity of money, and diminution of demand. The industrious classes have been converted into a myriad of degraded helots. The consequence of this state of things is a divided, distracted, and embroiled empire, where one, and that an armed, portion of the nation is employed to coerce or punish the other portion!! Placemen, sycophants, and hangers-on, who are nothing better than a noxious spawn engendered by the corruptions of successive governments, are enriched at the expense of the middle and down-trodden classes.

My Lord, it is not of the sum of money drawn from us to support Royalty that we so much complain, as of the immense revenue daily collected and expended to support the aristocracy, promote war and bloodshed to the ends of the earth, and to erect useless fortifications at home, and to sustain and

pamper a swarm of governmental dependents, who, as Dr. Paley says, spend and spoil that which the industry of others produces. As the true end of law is the prevention of crime, even so the true end of government is the happiness of the people. But the theory of our constitution is a continued satire on the practice of our rulers.

My Lord, I have had the very best opportunities of ascertaining the truth of every statement contained in this volume, relating either to the failure of the State Church as a religious institution among the peasantry, or to the ruined and discontented state of the people. The necessity for a remedy to remove evils and sufferings which cannot be endured much longer, is both great and urgent. The ELECTIVE FRANCHISE stands in great need of revision and extension; the prodigality of our legislators must be checked; and the burden of taxation must be regulated and adjusted with a strict regard to economy and justice to all parties. Remember,

my Lord, that the present state of the country is full of terror and of danger, which neither the policeman's truncheon, nor the Government's determination to resist reform, can allay or repel. The middle and working classes are resolved to save both the throne and the country from anarchy and revolution, by insisting on such a measure of real reform as justice demands and equity must yield.

I have the honour to be,

My Lord,

Your Lordship's obedient and humble Servant,

W. FERGUSON

Minister of the Congregational Church.

RED-HOUSE, KING'S-END, BICESTER, OXON.

June 14th, 1848.

PREFACE.

THE Author of the following Treatise has had the very best opportunity of becoming acquainted with the real condition of the working classes. He has frequently mingled in their society in all the principal cities and towns in England and Scotland. He has also preached the glorious gospel of the blessed God to tens of thousands of them, in twenty-four different counties. How far the present attempt to plead their cause, and to induce others to plead it, may prove successful, time alone can reveal. The continuity and interest of thought, which are always essential to successful efforts made through the medium of the head, the heart, and the press, have been, in the Author's case, broken and frequently interrupted by other duties and many cares. He therefore asks—simply asks—that the mantle of charity may be thrown over those errors in style or composition, which are incident to a

divided attention of the mind. Great things have not been aimed at, but the truth has been honestly and faithfully spoken. Firm words and true statements have been the only graces of composition studied. Other and more cogent arguments might have been advanced to demonstrate the truth of the many startling facts brought to light in the following chapters; but it has been thought a much better plan to let the contents of the work make their own appeal to the reason and conscience of those who may choose to read them.

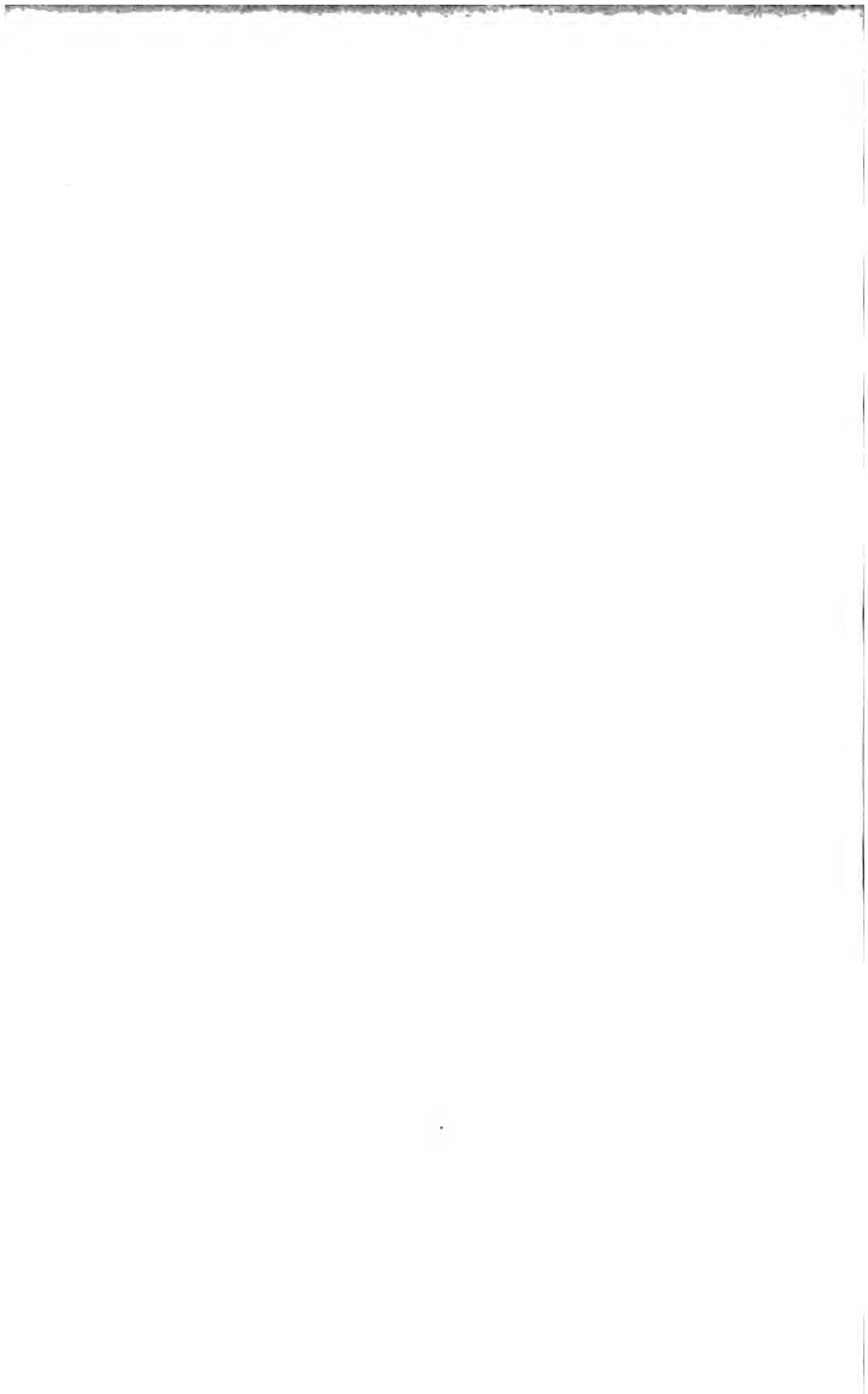
That it may please God to incline the upper and middle classes to do justice to those who husband the soil, feed the cattle, and keep the sheep; and that this humble, but heartfelt and earnest, attempt to place the peasantry and their privations in their true character before the public, may lead others to plead the cause of the oppressed, the widow, and the fatherless, is the unceasing wish and fervent prayer of the Author.

RED-HOUSE, KING'S-END, BICESTER, OXON.

June, 1848.

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THE IMPENDING DANGERS OF OUR COUNTRY, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

“IT is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” “All have sinned,” and consequently all need a Saviour. The Redeemer of mankind came into the world to magnify and honour the Law—to satisfy the claims of God’s moral government—to illustrate the meaning of types and shadows—to explain and confirm the language of prophecy—to atone for the sins of universal man, and thus to bring the means of salvation within the reach of all. He assumed our nature, and in that

nature he presented a perfect and vicarious sacrifice to Him whose holy and equitable law had been transgressed by the race—he laid the foundation of a kingdom of holiness and virtue, as extensive as the human family—as lasting as the earth—as enduring as eternity. This aim he most diligently pursued in all his discourses, during his whole life, to the last painful breath on the cross. He sought to accomplish the same object by his meritorious death, by his triumphant resurrection, and by the last blessing which he pronounced, while yet with his disciples at Bethany. He never turned his eye off the great work of reconciling men to God. He came to seek and to save lost and condemned sinners. This is the key of his life and death—that he died to save his people from their sins; not from the consequences merely, but from sin itself! The afflicted—the poor and needy, were not lost sight of or overlooked by him; it was among them he found that state of mind which called forth the language of benediction, at a time when the rich and proud Pharisees were expecting the honour which comes from men. His impartial love and disinterested labours for the poor as well as the rich, for the slave, the beggar, the outcast leper, as well as for the powerful and refined, demonstrate that the Spirit of the Lord God was upon him, and that his

mission was to preach the gospel to the poor, to bind up the broken hearted, to make atonement for sin, and to bring in everlasting righteousness. He conquered sin and death, brought life and immortality to light, and thus introduced the new era, when all men, without distinction, may become rich in faith and heirs of heaven.

The gospel which Christ and his disciples preached to the poor as well as to the rich, is a scheme of mercy, in which all the Divine attributes are blended in majesty, harmony, and splendour. It is the source of light, spiritual animation, and advancing life to all Bible, Tract, and Missionary Societies, and to all other sanctified institutions. These societies, directed by the wisdom which is from above, are destined to heal the nations, and to bring the world into the fold of Christ. The great Head of the Church employs the word of life to unseal the inward and immortal springs of our being, to call forth the right exercise of good affections, pure emotions, and spiritual desires, and to transform even the most uneducated of the poor peasantry into fruitful, intelligent, and active beings, who, in the strength of faith, scatter around them the seeds of goodness, real kindness, and permanent usefulness. The religion of Jesus crosses the bounds of country and colour, and scatters the best

gifts of time and eternity over dark and oppressed lands. What happiness and glory then may we not expect from the faithful preaching of that gospel, and from the influences of that Spirit, by means of which the great Head of the Church has purposed to quicken, sanctify, and save the heirs of salvation. Dear Reader, is it not most desirable that the truth which is the power of God unto salvation, should be preached to every creature? A scheme so full of mercy, a truth so glorious, a word so full of life, light, and peace, and all so well adapted to supply the spiritual wants and remove the woes of man, should not be treated with heartless indifference by those who are commanded to disciple all nations, and to run to and fro, that knowledge may be increased, that sinners may be saved, and the world restored to the fellowship of heaven. It is, however, a heart-rending and soul-agonizing fact, that the gospel is not preached to the great bulk of the working classes in this, our land of boasted Protestantism. There are tens of thousands of moral agents in England alone, who seldom or never hear the heart-searching, spirit-quickening, and life-sanctifying word of reconciliation proclaimed in its moral grandeur and evangelical purity.

But we must confine our remarks to the state of things as we found it in the rural districts in the

year 1839, and to the various steps which have, since that time, been taken by us to reach the masses with the gospel of Christ, and to educate, elevate, employ, cheer, and save them. Having made an open-air preaching tour through the north part of Buckinghamshire, and another through the county of Oxford, I found that neither preaching out of doors, nor the distribution of tracts, had been sufficiently tried by the people of God in these counties; I was therefore led to fear that the full extent of the moral wants, social wretchedness, and physical ruin of the peasantry, had not been brought before the public. I resolved at the throne of grace, in the strength of God, and of faith in that truth which is able to make men wise unto salvation, to follow in the footsteps of Him who went about doing good, and thus to go out quickly into the streets and lanes, hamlets and villages, to preach the gospel to the maimed, the halt, and the blind. I went at first accompanied by a few of my friends to a number of the surrounding villages. I found the peasantry always anxious to hear me, but constables, churchwardens, and one magistrate, did what they could to hinder me. My life was once or twice in danger, but the great Head of the Church was with me and protected me. These ITINERANT labours brought me into direct contact with so much misery, poverty, ignorance, and im-

morality, among the people, as at once to overwhelm me. The thought of calling public attention to the real—not fancied—state of society, and of publishing the statistics which I had collected, made me tremble. I had already been spoken of as one who ought to be driven from the sphere of my ministerial labours. The opinion and wishes of some of my neighbours in relation to my movements may be expressed thus :—
“This man being a stranger, does exceedingly trouble our neighbourhood; magistrates, help! this is the man who teaches all men everywhere that there is no salvation in baptism, or in any other of our holy sacraments. Away with such a fellow from the earth, for it is not fit that he should live; he teaches things which are not lawful for us to receive; he teaches that we must repent and believe in Christ; and we have been informed that he does not believe that we were made Christians at our baptism.” I knew that if I should speak out and publish the whole truth, the wrath of man, the frowns of neighbours, and the unkind insinuations of mistaken professors, would be freely employed to bring me into contempt. But, on the other hand, I felt for the honour of Christianity—for my suffering fellow-men; but, above all, I felt for the tens of thousands who were perishing around me for lack of knowledge. I felt my own responsibility as a moral agent—as a

minister of Christ, occupying a pulpit which had been erected in the age of England's religious revolutions, by men who were burning and shining lights in their day, and who protested against the intolerance, immoralities, and bigotry of an age which was not worthy of such learned, disinterested, and laborious ministers of Christ. I prayed, wept, thought, formed my plans, counted the cost, asked counsel of God—surveyed the “field already white unto harvest,” and resolved to use means to evangelize the population.

If total ignorance of the plan of salvation, Sabbath profanation, drunkenness, and uncleanness, are a sufficient reason why the gospel should be preached to the perishing multitudes, I have had that reason for the various steps which I have taken to regenerate and educate the peasantry, and to excite an interest in their favour. I appeared before a committee of the House of Commons in the year 1842, to be examined on the state of things in my own neighbourhood, and to implore the Legislature to use means to induce masters to pay their labourers on Saturday evening, instead of Sunday morning; and though I had to endure no ordinary share of persecution and abuse from mistaken neighbours, and *interested shopkeepers*, who did not understand my motives, I have now the cheering satisfaction

to know that my labours on that occasion were not in vain. The very mild attack which I then made upon the profaners of the Sabbath, has often since been made upon them in more distinct terms from the pulpit of their own parish church. It occurred to me about three years ago, that in order to meet the necessities, wants, and woes, of the surrounding peasantry, we, as a Church, ought to have a system of lay agency—a theological class under the direct superintendence of the pastor, with a view to promote and prosecute the evangelization of the whole district.

But here, again, my difficulties were neither few nor small. I found the men, but I had no books sufficiently simple and to the point for their use. But I persevered, obtained a suitable library, through the disinterested kindness of the Rev. I. Cobbin, M.A., and Messrs. Ward and Co., London. The time which I have been able to bestow upon my zealous, devoted, and active helpers in Christ, has been much less than I could have wished; still we have made some progress, and the result is, three very useful lay preachers, and if they have not had a learned education, they have a knowledge of Christ, they know their Bibles; their conduct is exemplary, their habits are devotional, and their knowledge keeps pace with their zeal. They are much re-

spected by the poor people among whom they labour in word and doctrine. Their labours have been made a blessing to many, who will be their "joy and crown of rejoicing in the presence of the Lord at his coming." We have endeavoured to carry out the spirit of His conduct who, in the days of his humiliation, went through the towns and villages, preaching to the poor as well as the rich, and healing all manner of sickness.

The plans which have been adopted, and the efforts which have been made, by us to benefit our neighbours, without distinction of sect or party, will demonstrate how far Congregational dissent and voluntary Christianity have checked the physical wretchedness and improved the moral and social condition of field-labourers in the rural districts. But, alas for them! their privations are still many and painful; their real friends are comparatively few; their regular comforts are but an occasional dream. Let us visit their cottages, look into their circumstances, ascertain the causes of their ruin, and speak of things just as we may happen to find them.

CHAPTER II.

THE COTTAGES AND HOVELS OCCUPIED BY THE PEASANTRY.

POETS, historians, novelists, and travellers, have spoken and written of our rural peasantry as a finished picture of social order and domestic happiness. The cottage and its garden—the peasant and his family—the village church and its clergyman—have all been portrayed as the quintessence of loveliness, and the perfection of earthly bliss! Retired parishes and their clergy in rural districts have been held up to the view of mankind as a centre of civilization, from which gleams of refinement of manners, of neatness as well as of science and general literature, have shone forth in streams of light to illuminate the surrounding neighbourhood. But the voice of adorned fiction and the blunt and bold utterance of facts do not always

agree in their respective statements. Fiction deceives us ; truth convinces and guides us. Let us, therefore, follow her, as she leads us to the homes of the oppressed, starved, and dying.

Thousands of the cottages and hovels occupied by English labourers are a lasting disgrace to the proprietors of the soil, and a curse to those who are, by unjust and unreasonable circumstances, compelled to inhabit them. We have entered, *measured*, and *searched*, *hundreds* of these mud abodes, in which there is only one small room below and another above stairs. Some of these rooms are not more than eight feet square. They are in general void of furniture, with the exception of a broken chair or two, and a broken table ; and the things which the wretched inmates call beds and bedding are nothing better than a bundle of rags, pieces of old sacking, and dirty straw. The height of some of these mud mansions is about four feet ten inches from the floor to the ceiling. They are close, damp, badly ventilated, and not fit for human beings to dwell in. Numbers of them are built of what the poor people call "wattle and daub ;" consequently they are too weak to support a roof, and the trembling poor are thus in constant danger of being buried in their own mud graves. To save life, they are under the necessity of using

props to support the place on which they sleep. We have seen as many as nine or ten props in one small hovel in Buckinghamshire.

Part of the county of Oxford is very *flat*, so that during very wet weather whole villages present the appearance of a sheet of water. As the cottages are not under-drained, the water reaches the poor both through the roof and through the floor. The cottagers who are thus exposed, keep an open hole in the back part of the so-called room, into which the rain finds its way, and from which it is taken and carried out. We have not been told these things by our neighbours. No. We have seen them with our eyes—not once, or twice, but frequently. The sleeping apartment in these graves of the living is so low that a girl or boy of twelve or fourteen years of age can not stand upright in any part of the attic, except just in the place where the so-called bed stands. As there is no room for a staircase, the degraded cottagers climb up a small ladder, but only one at a time can retire to bed; if two or three were to go up at the same time, they would be in each other's way. We have visited a number of these mud hovels in Buckinghamshire, which have been built, from time to time, by the people themselves, and in each of which we found one or two large open holes in the walls, but not a

single pane of glass. The poor men left the holes for windows, but they have never been able to have them put in. These holes may be useful in summer, but they are the death of the people in winter.

We found one poor and much afflicted woman stretched on a miserable bed, and just under one of these holes, in the depth of winter. We asked her if the evangelical clergyman, who is a man of wealth and property, and in the rich enjoyment of a living worth *seven hundred a year* and a *splendid mansion*, had ever called to see her. "Yes, sir," was her reply; "he has been here, and told me that I ought to be very thankful, and that there are many in Ireland worse off than I am." The poor sufferer has since joined the number of the unseen living, and her parish minister must soon give an account of his stewardship.

There is a village in the county of Oxford in which we have seen a hovel without a roof of any kind; but still it is inhabited by a family who have lived, sinned, and starved, for years in a state of danger, to which the village farmers would not be very willing to expose either their hens or their pigs. A grown-up son has slept in his every-day and Sunday clothes on the mud floor so long, that, when we called, we could distinctly trace his mould,

from head to foot, in the wet clay on which he had slept for twelve months.

We need not be surprised that the peasantry are the constant victims of periodical fever, ague, and rheumatism. Numbers of men, women, and children, in the agricultural districts of the south, suffer much from these tormentors of the human frame. It is a sober fact, that in almost every village and town in parts of Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, and other places, a number of persons, of all ages, are laid up as permanent paupers from diseased joints and limbs, the cause of which must be traced to their damp mud hovels, their want of proper shelter, and also to the *bad quality* and deficient quantity of their food. Strangers have frequently remarked to us that they had never seen so many lame persons in any other part of the kingdom. As the cause of the poor creatures' sufferings is a permanent reality, it is not in the power of medical men to destroy the effect; but as the hard-working poor are not in circumstances to pay for pills and mixtures, they are not in any danger of being visited much by the great majority of country surgeons. Many of the aged and decayed poor suffer much from the dilapidated state of their dwellings. We have been visited before now by an aged man (one of the 2s.-a-week

and a brown-loaf paupers), who walked, by means of his sticks, a distance of eleven miles to beg a few shillings, to enable him to have his hovel, which, like himself, was bending, breaking, and threatening to become a heap of ruins, repaired and rendered a safe place for him to live in.

But the most extraordinary place we have ever seen inhabited by a human being, is a hole which a hard-working man dug out of a hill-side as a dwelling-place for himself and family. We entered the hole, measured it, and found it eight feet by five. We examined the bed and bedding—they were in a good condition; but the straw which was under all, was destroyed by the water which ran under the bedding and through the gravel from the hill-side. We have not seen any place inhabited by human beings, in any other part of the United Kingdom, which could be compared, in point of real wretchedness, to this modern sepulchre hewn out of the clay. But miserable as these mud hovels are, the poor peasantry are glad of them, and would rather die at them than leave them. They have their reasons for their determination to hold fast their possessions. We shall now state what these reasons are. It is well known that the *preventive checkists* have not succeeded with their *execrable* theory in their unnatural efforts to check

the rapid increase of the population ; but while the population is multiplying, the number of cottages and hovels is on the decrease. Our *preventive checkists* have resolved that, if the poor should continue to get married and become parents, their offspring shall lodge in the hedges and live upon hawthorn-berries, and drink with horses and cows at the village mud-ponds. The ruralists know their fate, and therefore they are glad to live under any shelter rather than perish under a hedge. Who can blame them ? They hate the union-house, and the workhouse hates them. Indeed, the able-bodied labourer could not, if he would, leave his present place of abode. He is too poor, too starved, and too naked, to leave the land of his birth ; and were he to leave his own parish he would not be at all likely to get employed in any other parish. The poor are thus compelled to remain weltering in their physical and moral ruin. If they leave their wretched abodes, they run the risk of having to wander up and down, like a certain spirit, seeking rest, but finding it not.

There are, however, not a few in every county in the south of England, who are compelled, for want of cottages, to seek shelter in the nearest small market-town in the neighbourhood, in which they

live and toil. We are well acquainted with numbers of hard-working men, who, because they made free to get married, or because they have sheltered a son or a daughter who is married, or because their cottages have been pulled down or suffered to tumble into ruins, have had to seek homes and shelter where they could find them. These men, with their large families, crowd into our little rural towns, and pay a high rent (from 1*s.* 3*d.* to 2*s.* a week) for a miserable abode. Of course, the persons who let these town cottages to the poor cannot be supposed to feel an interest in the comfort, prosperity, or moral elevation, of their tenants. All they look after is the rent. We are acquainted with one small town in the vicinity of Oxford, in which there are about eleven hundred, young and old, of the peasantry huddled together in a part of the town which is inhabited by themselves exclusively, or nearly so. We need not add, that the effect of such a crowded state of poor society is in the country just what it is in the city.

Another great hardship which these expelled labourers are compelled to endure is, the distance they have to walk to and from their work. Some of them walk a distance of seven miles every day,

including Sunday. They live in the town, but work in their own parishes. From half-past four in the morning until seven or eight o'clock in the evening, these *physical* and *moral machines* are kept in motion to produce food for man and beast. We do not believe that there are two sleeping apartments in one cottage or hovel out of ten in the county of Oxford; and it is highly probable that the same state of things which we have portrayed in this chapter exists very generally throughout the rural districts of the south. Let it not be said that we have selected a few extreme cases. We are fully prepared to demonstrate, so far as cottages are concerned, that there are tens of thousands of men, women, and children, in the more southern counties of England, living and suffering in the degraded state which we have now reviewed. It is of no use to deny it. It is a notorious fact—a proclaimed truth—a terrible reality.

It cannot be expected that the people who are thus degraded can have attained a high state of civilization; neither can we look for much piety or morality among persons who are compelled to live and sleep in one small room, huddled together more like pigs than human beings, and who are *baked* in summer and frozen in winter. Men have

stopped their ears at the cry of the poor; and therefore we *are* justified in saying that they themselves "shall cry, but shall not be heard." Prov. xxi. 13.

CHAPTER III.

THE POVERTY AND SUFFERINGS OF THE PEASANTRY.

THE miserable hovels occupied by the peasantry may be taken as an index to the real nature and full extent of their personal sufferings. We have already stated that they suffer much from fever, ague, and rheumatism; and these sore evils are greatly strengthened by the nakedness of the sons and daughters of toil. It cannot be expected that a family of from six to nine persons, young and old, can spare anything out of eight or nine shillings a week, to be laid out on the purchase of clothes and other necessaries. The fact is, the whole of the peasant's wages is nearly expended every week on bread. Firing is so very expensive that the poor cannot afford to buy a sufficient quantity of coals to cook their own food; and, consequently, the baker

is, to a certain extent, their cook—he receives the principal part of their earnings.

If field-labourers had constant employment at the present rate of wages, they would not be in a condition to clothe themselves and their families. But numbers of them are frequently out of work for weeks together, and some even for months, in the winter season. Others, who have large families to provide for, are employed, during a part of the winter half-year, by the parish, at the stone-pits, or on the highways, at six or seven shillings a week wages. Single women are in the habit of going round to the farmers in search of work. When any of them are fortunate enough to meet with a master for a few days, they receive *sixpence* a day in winter, but neither food nor drink. Both married and single females are paid at the rate of *eightpence a day* in *mowing* and *harvest* time; lads of from thirteen to sixteen years of age receive from *2s. to 2s. 6d. a week*, without food. But neither lads nor females are in demand during six months out of the twelve. So that the bulk of the peasantry are only half-fed in summer, and left to starve in winter. Poor creatures! Poverty has tamed them; despair has made them wild! They are looked upon by too many of their employers as an isolated, doomed, and inferior race. The great

majority of the aristocracy have ceased to respect them. They pay a great deal more attention to their horses and hounds, than they do to those by whose labour and toil they live in pleasure and roll in wealth. There are masters who despise their labourers, and there are labourers who know it; and, consequently, there is anything but a good feeling existing between the two parties.

The present Poor-law has given farmers, who are, in general, overseers or guardians, great power over the enslaved peasantry, who, when they are out of work, are told that there is the *House* (workhouse) for them. At the same time, it is very well known by those who direct them to the Board of Guardians, that the crushed and down-trodden labourer would rather starve than enter the union-house. Though these skeletons and shadows of former men and women are poor, they continue to be human beings, and therefore they love their children, and cannot endure the thought of being parted from them. "We want employment, and as much wages as will keep life in motion," say they, "and not an order for the House." It is but seldom that a labouring man can buy himself a new coat or a pair of trousers. Many of them do not purchase a new garment of any kind once in two years; and when they do buy

one, it is a smock-frock—a most inconvenient robe, but it answers the peasant's purpose better than any other article of clothing which he could purchase, because it hides a multitude of rags. The reader may be anxious to know how the ruralists can live out of eight or nine shillings a week. It is done as follows:—

S. J. is an honest and hard-working man. His wages are nine shillings a week, and he has a constant place; he has also a wife and six children to support, the eldest of whom is eleven years of age. The poor man is not able to rent a chain of potatoe land; he pays rent for his cottage. Rent, 1s. 3*d.* a week; $\frac{1}{2}$ cwt. of coals, 9*d.*; nine loaves of bread, 4 lbs each, 4s. 6*d.*; candles, 4*d.*; salt, $\frac{1}{2}$ *d.*; lard, 2*d.*; soap, 3*d.*; flour, 6*d.*; potatoes, 8*d.* Total, 8s. 6*d.* Thus we see that this sober and industrious labourer and his family are doomed to live, if they can, at the rate of about 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ *d.* per head per day. But as there is 6*d.* over, we shall add it to the above sum of 8s. 6*d.*; and still the hard-working man's earnings, when divided into eight equal parts, do not amount to 2*d.* per day for each of the family of eight persons. Yet this labourer, having constant work, is much better off than scores of families who are well known to us.

Second case.—B. has a wife and five children, and rents a chain of land. Wages, 9s. a week, but not in constant work. Wages laid out as follows :—Rent, 1s. a week ; ten loaves of bread, 4 lbs. each, 5s. ; 1 cwt. of coals, 1s. 6d. ; soap, 4d. ; candles, 4d. ; lard, 3d. ; bacon, 3d. ; tea, 1½d. ; salt, ½d. ; butter, 2d. Total, 9s. This sum, when divided into seven equal parts, does not amount to quite 2¼d. per head per day.

Are not these sufferers in a land of plenty real objects of pity ? If there are some families better off than those whose circumstances we have here analyzed, there are many others who are sunk in a more deplorable state of wretchedness, poverty, and helplessness, than any whose degraded condition we have yet described.

It will be seen that we have not included butcher's meat, cheese, milk, coffee, and sugar, in the poor man's "bill of fare." These necessaries of life and useful things are out of the peasant's reach. He milks the cows, but others drink the milk. He feeds the oxen, but others eat the beef. He attends to the swine, but others consume the pork. If the field-labourer earns a few more shillings in hay-time and harvest than he does at other seasons of the year, he has to work from three o'clock in the morning until between eight

and nine o'clock at night for what he gets ; and the few shillings which he saves in this way go to pay his back rent, and what remains, if anything, is laid out in the purchase of a few articles of clothing.

We have known a case in which a hard-working and honest man was told at the end of harvest that his employer had nothing more for him to do. This labourer has a wife and three children to support. A few weeks after he had been at home, doing nothing, he was sent for by his former master, who gave him two days' work, and then paid him with one shilling a day ! Yes ; and he added, " I thought that would be better for you than being at home doing nothing ! "

Another field-labourer, who is a pious Wesleyan Methodist, and well known to us, had to leave his parish hovel some time back, to make room for another person who was coming to the *place* to live with his own aged mother ; and, as it is not an uncommon thing in a rural village to find two families stowed in one and the same small cottage or hovel, the poor man, with a large family, being thus stowed up in a miserable cottage, was compelled by the parochial authorities to give place to another person. He took shelter at the union-house ; but he had no sooner done so than one of the village

farmers said that he would employ him. The poor man returned to his parish, went to work, but when night came he could not find a single room in the village in which his family could take shelter. They sat down under a hedge, and there spent the night, in the depth of winter, and during a snow-storm! Next day he returned to the workhouse. The Guardians wrote to the Commissioners to know how they should act. The Commissioners decided that, as the peasant had work to go to, he must be sent back to his parish. He went back, but still he could not get a cottage. We stated his case to the clergyman of the parish, who is also a poor-law guardian and county magistrate. The reverend gentleman felt for the ill-fated man and his family, spoke well of them, but he could not find them a cottage. What became of this poor and badly-used family at last, we know not; but believe that they got into a shed, coal-house, or hovel, there to spend their days of earthly sorrow and spiritual joy in the midst of trouble.

It was only the other day that we went into a labourer's cottage in which we found a still-born child, which the poor man could not get buried, because he was not in circumstances to pay one shilling to the gravedigger. The shilling was paid, and the dead was buried out of their sight.

At another hovel, we found the corpse of a fine child stretched on a mud floor, with a piece of old sacking, or something like it, thrown over it. The small sleeping attic was occupied by the other children, all of whom were suffering from fever.

In the same village a poor woman died, about three years ago, without a sheet or a blanket to cover her skeleton frame. The poor family had but one sheet—not a blanket—in the house; and the suffering woman died while a neighbour was washing that sheet.

There are hamlets in Oxfordshire, at which the poor people have no other water to drink than what they draw from the stagnant ponds at which horses and cows drink, and in which ducks and geese swim. we have been informed by a highly respectable medical gentleman that numbers of the inhabitants of these hamlets die annually of a fever which is the effect of the water they are forced to drink, and of the bad quality and short quantity of their food.

Young men in the rural districts of our country are objects of pity. In winter numbers of them remain idle for months together, and not a few of them enter the army—not, however, from choice, but for a morsel of bread. Poverty and the want of employment are the means by which a constant supply of poachers and thieves are kept on hand,

that magistrates may have regular employment, and policemen, constables, and jail-keepers, may have something to do for their bread.

There is another class of great sufferers in the rural districts—we mean the poor lace-makers, who sit at the pillow for ten, twelve, or even fourteen hours a day, and yet cannot earn more than from *1s. 3d.* to *2d. 3d.* a week. She is a good lace-maker indeed who can clear *2s. 6d.* a week. When the piece is finished, the poor woman has to go from house to house, and from shop to shop, in search of a customer. Lace-buyers will hardly take the lace at any price. This once flourishing trade has gone to ruin, but not until it has ruined the bulk of the female population in those districts in which it is made.

The lace-buyer is generally a shopkeeper, and consequently those whose lace he takes are compelled to take goods for it, instead of money. But as the goods which they are thus forced to take—such as tea—are luxuries which they cannot afford to keep for their own use, they are under the necessity of wandering from house to house to sell the tea! The lace-buyer, of whom the lace-makers must buy the thread, charges them *2s. 6d.* for as much thread as they could buy at any of the regular shops for *3d.* Alas! for the wretched and degraded

women who are dependent on the lace-pillow for their bread. Their trade is their utter ruin. They are not fit for service. They are ignorant of the duties of their station. Many of them have no knowledge of household occupations, and, consequently, they are strangers to the art of housekeeping. Numbers of these famished lace-makers die of consumption, brought on by hunger, and also by their constantly leaning over the pillow.

Whatever may be said against the pawnbrokers' shop, we are fully convinced that, in the rural districts, whole families *are frequently* saved by it. It is a business which we do not admire; but the peasantry are so reduced, that many of them could not get on without it. We have had the very best opportunities of watching the effects of a pawnshop upon the poor, and from all that we have seen of its direct and indirect effects, we believe it to be both a blessing and a curse to them. The goods, such as they are, of from ten hundred to thirteen hundred persons, are at this moment pledged with the pawnbroker in Bicester, Oxfordshire. Many of the poor have to pledge before they can pay for their chain or two chains of potatoe land, the rent of which is generally paid in advance. From four to *ten* shillings a chain is the rent usually paid by the poor for their land!!

A clergyman in our neighbourhood, whose living is worth about £800 per annum, charges the poor people at the rate of *eight shillings* a chain for land, for which the late occupier could not pay more than *two* shillings a chain. And even at this unjust and unreasonable price they cannot have it, unless they consent to withdraw their children from the British School and send them to the National School, and keep them from the chapel on the Lord's-day!! True, the reverend gentleman pays the rates and taxes to which his land is liable—but he charges the peasantry more than double the rent which a farmer could pay.

We have heard *much* of late of Ragged Schools, but we have not heard of *ragged parishes*; and yet there are many ragged villages and hamlets in the rural districts. Decent clothing is the exception, not the rule, in large families. The poor creatures have much cause to bless the memory of the first maker of a smock-frock.

Constant employment, both summer and winter, has now become a luxury of which the care-worn sons of toil have ceased to dream. Women are glad to have the tea-leaves and coffee-grounds which their more fortunate neighbours have got to give away. Trade is ruined; and, consequently, many tradesmen who used to save money now find

it a hard matter to make good their payments. Shops, at which the peasantry used to lay out pounds at the end of the week, do not now take ten shillings of the working classes during a whole week. This state of things will soon work its own cure. The people are not content—tradesmen are not satisfied. We are all suffering. Our rulers have ruined us. We warn them; and earnestly hope that the following statistics and arithmetical facts will check their immoderate laughter, and supply them with some useful information.

We shall not be very wide of the mark if we take the average annual income, including lost time, of the peasantry of Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, &c., at £21 for every family of five persons. Though many of the hovels occupied by the poor are rent-free, the average weekly rent paid by field-labourers must be rather above than under 9*d.* per family. We shall state it at 9*d.*; and thus we have the sum of £1 19*s.* as the rent paid per year, which leaves the sum of £19 1*s.* to be equally divided into five parts, which gives each member of a family of five the sum of £3 16*s.* 2½*d.* per annum. This gives 1*s.* 5½*d.* per week, or 2½*d.* per day. Now, if we deduct a trifle for shoes and clothing (education being out of the question), we shall have something less than 2*d.* per head per day; out of which the

sweating classes are expected to live, labour, be happy, pay their debts, obey the Game-laws, and sing cheerily.

Who is prepared to deny the substantial correctness of these our assertions? Let them state their facts, and produce their witnesses. Bad as the Poor-law is, and unreasonable as are many of its pinching and degrading clauses, it provides a more equitable provision for the inmates of the work-house than the labour of the field provides for those who are the physical strength and wealth of our country. The average sum paid for paupers throughout England for food alone is about 2s. 8d. per head per week. No wonder that industrious field-labourers are half naked, dispirited, and immoral.

The following letter, written by a pawnbroker and dealer in furniture, &c., and one who was himself born and brought up in our town, will serve to demonstrate the truth of all that we have stated in this section of our treatise :—

“ TO THE REV. W. FERGUSON.

“ *Bicester, February 24th, 1845.*

“ Dear Sir,—You have requested me to state my opinion as to the state of the field-labourers and poor in this neighbourhood at the present time.

“ I beg very respectfully to inform you that I know that numbers of them are ruined in their morals, and in a very deplorable state of wretchedness and poverty. The wages of those who are in constant work are not *more* than *half sufficient* to support their families” [the wages then were just what they are now]. “ What, then, must be the condition of those—and there are many of them—who go many weeks, and some of them even for months together, without any work, and that in the depth of winter? What must be the condition of those who, finding their homes so miserable and wretched, go and spend a part of their evenings at a public-house, to escape for a little while the miseries of their own fireless and wretched habitations ?

“ Numbers of young girls, many of whom have been taught at our Sunday-schools, and, consequently, know better, are driven to prostitution for a morsel of bread ; and many have pledged all they have got, so that they have nothing left [*that they could pledge*]. Some come many miles to pledge for a trifle. The trade, too, of those who deal in goods such as they usually buy, is very much decreased.

“ I sincerely hope that your praiseworthy efforts will be crowned with success ; and that you will go on in your endeavours to do good, and

to save them, and those who live by them, from impending ruin.

“ I am, yours respectfully,

“ SAMUEL ROLLS.”

The poor are worse off now than they were in 1845. The failure of the potatoe crop has greatly added to their sufferings since my friend addressed his letter to me.

On the 15th of January, 1845, the day on which our beloved Queen arrived at Buckingham, I visited, in company with Mr. Rolls, the cottages of a number of labourers in our own town; and the facts which I then collected I stated in a long letter, addressed to one of the most amiable members of the House of Commons, G. G. Harcourt, Esq. That letter brought Mr. Harcourt from the House of Commons to Bicester, and also to some of the villages in the neighbourhood. The honourable gentleman, after having seen the deplorable state of some few families, gave me £5 for the use of the poor, and informed me that he had seen many poor persons in a still greater state of wretchedness in other parts of the world. I have not a single doubt upon my mind that this witness is true. But what then? If the working classes are starving in other countries, it does not follow that we should let our

peasantry starve; and I am happy to say that Mr. Harcourt does not think or say that we should. He feels for the poor; and I have had more than one proof of his real kindness to them. But charity alone will never meet the evil, nor remove the curse which now afflicts the sons and daughters of toil.

The following note, added to my letter addressed to Mr. Harcourt, through the medium of the *Patriot*, in the month of February, 1845, and written by Mr. Rolls, speaks for itself:—

“ I do hereby certify, that I visited the cottages described in Mr. Ferguson’s letter, in company with him, and that his statements are perfectly correct. And, as a dealer in furniture, &c., I further declare that I would not give more than £2 10s. for all the goods found in twelve cottages occupied by able-bodied men.

“ SAMUEL ROLLS.”

“ *Bicester, February 24th, 1845.*”

Mr. Rolls being a tradesman, and having so much to do with the poor, is well acquainted with their sufferings, privations, and domestic wretchedness. Policemen and constables are in the habit of scouring the surrounding neighbourhood for miles for stolen goods. They enter the dwellings of the

poor without a WARRANT, and search where and how they please ; and if (as was the case recently) any of the poor creatures were to attempt to defend their humble castle, they would be knocked down by the constable, handcuffed, and dragged into the village *lane*, with their wives and children following in anguish of heart.

Such is the systematic poverty of the working classes in the more southern counties, that if a poor woman were to be seen going to the baker's with a few pounds of mutton, she would at once be suspected of theft, and might expect a visit from the official searchers. Very few of the peasantry are able to feed a small pig ; and those who do feed one are in general compelled to part with it, in order that they may have the means of purchasing a few articles of clothing and shoes for their feet.

CHAPTER IV.

THE IMMORALITY, BONDAGE, IGNORANCE, AND SUPERSTITION OF THE PEASANTRY.

It cannot reasonably be expected that a people so completely degraded and crushed as the rural peasantry are, should be either very moral or intelligent. We have visited many a cottage in which from eight to eleven persons, and including grown up sons and daughters, all sleep in one small room ; and upon nothing better than a bundle of rags. Our attention was called a few months ago to a case where fifteen persons, including **THREE MARRIED FAMILIES**, live in one small cottage, and fourteen of *whom sleep in the same room!* We have come in contact with cases where a grown up sister and brother, (the younger of whom was turned sixteen,) slept together—not, however, from any choice of theirs, but because their poor parents had not the

means of making up separate beds for them. No wonder that there are so many illegitimate children ever starting into being in our towns and villages.

The want of chastity among the working classes, as well as among those who are above them in rank and station, is most flagrant. This is true of every part of the country, but we confine our strictures to those places of the real state of which we have some accurate knowledge. The promiscuous intercourse of the sexes, both married and single, is carried on among the labouring classes to a degree, which if the whole truth, so far as it is known to us, were to be stated, would rend the hearts of the modest and virtuous, and astonish the friends of morality and common decency. It is a great mistake to suppose that certain sins to which we need not more particularly allude here, are more extensively encouraged and practised in our large towns and cities than they are in the obscure villages and small towns of our rural districts.

If the population of an agricultural province were collected into one large mass of people, and examined in the light of truth and virtue, it would be seen that both the quality and number of unclean and immoral practices by which the bulk of the peasantry are degraded and ruined, are greater and more debasing in our provinces than they are,

numbers being equal, in our large towns and cities. This assertion may startle those who have not examined this very unpleasant subject. But truth is often startling and very pointed in her statements. The fact is, there is always a number of intelligent, virtuous, pious, and highly respectable persons and families, in every large town and city, who exert themselves to improve the morals of those by whom they are surrounded ; to educate and raise them in society ; and to promote their comfort and happiness. These god-like efforts are at once both a blessing and a check. But, alas for the peasantry of our obscure villages ! there are but few comparatively who take any active and continued interest in their welfare and permanent improvement.

Their unclean and most debasing practices, like their real and established sufferings, are not only overlooked, but in too many instances encouraged by those who ought to labour to promote their regeneration and elevation in society. The immodesty of the young, the licentiousness of the married, the number of women of ill-fame in our towns and villages, are such as to threaten the utter ruin of that section of the community to which we have to look for female servants, and to which the hard-working man has to look for a

partner for life. The poverty and ignorance of the industrious classes are the grand source of their immorality ; and though they are proper objects of blame, they are still greater objects of pity. Numbers of married men leave their large families chargeable to the parish, and go off, some with single, others with married women ; and there are some who leave their own wives, and live with girls or widows in the *same* neighbourhood. Every village has its quota of loose characters, and these are more in number than people are in general aware of. In many of the villages within twenty miles of the two Universities, there are certain places called " THE COLLEGE."

But while we do not hesitate to assert that our great Universities exert a very bad and demoralizing influence upon surrounding neighbourhoods, it would be very unfair to insinuate that the *gentlemen* of the University are the only bold transgressors in the provinces. The truth is, the extreme poverty of the poor renders them an easy prey to all who may be disposed to take advantage of them. The scions of the aristocracy are not always the aggressors, nor yet the greatest transgressors, in those districts, of the social, physical, and moral condition of which we are treating in this chapter. The working classes contaminate

each other ; and there are other parties in every small town and village throughout the country who glory in their shame, and act as a moral plague among those who are under them in station and circumstances.

Drunkenness is another means by which the labourer is willing to ruin himself. Some years ago a teetotaler attempted to deliver a lecture on the evils of intemperance and the benefits of temperance at an Independent chapel in a certain town in Oxfordshire. While he was engaged delivering his lecture, a number of the inhabitants had a quantity of ale taken to the chapel, which they drank in the house of prayer!!!

The ale-house is the poor man's chapel of ease, especially on Saturday evenings and on the Lord's-day. There are those who, if they want a man to empty a waggon-load of coals, corn, or flour, will pay the labourer in *beer*. Parties have much more time on hand in the rural provinces than they have in the manufacturing districts ; and as idleness is the parent of vice and sin, much evil is the consequence of time spent in skittle-alleys. The practice of paying labourers at the ale-house is very prejudicial to a healthy state of society. We have known instances before now in which a poor man has gone to a public-house and asked for one

halfpenny worth of small beer ; he did not, however, go for the sake of the beer, but—to use his own words—that he might “ get a warm.” Many are, we are persuaded, induced in the first instance to visit the ale-house because they have neither firing nor comfort at home.

Various are the contrivances made use of by some small innkeepers to induce the idle and the thoughtless to spend their money, or rather their halfpence, at their inns. The practice of getting poor men to pay so much a-week for a supper, which some landlords are in the habit of giving to the poor at their respective inns, is a great curse to the peasantry. We have heard of one small public-house, in a certain part of the country, to which boys have been drawn together to pitch for pennypies ; the object of the landlord being, of course, to induce them to spend the few halfpence they had in beer. We have always found that the peasantry are best off in those villages (and there are some in every county) in which the proprietor will not allow any of his houses or cottages to be licensed as public-houses.

These facts may not be very agreeable to some of our readers, but we are bound to write both impartially and honestly. Our object is not to wound the feelings of any one, but to throw some light upon

the real state of society in our agricultural provinces, in order that we may assist our rulers and the public press in their efforts to bring about a better state of things for all parties. Indeed, we are fully satisfied that there is not a respectable innkeeper throughout the rural districts who would not cheerfully admit that the present state of society is not a desirable one.

We know of one small town from which seven men have just been sent to jail for various transgressions; and there were thirty-four persons tried for stealing, &c., at Oxford Easter Sessions. If the numbers sent from time to time to Oxford jail from the County Petty Sessions were to be added to the above thirty-four, the total for the year 1848 would surprise, alarm, and stagger, the dreamers of the better and present improved state of society.

We shall now proceed to look at the ill-fated labourer from another point of view. In Scotland, the giants of the Free Church have loudly and justly complained of the conduct of those who will not sell building-sites upon which to erect new churches. But it is just the same in England as in Scotland. There are many villages in almost every county in the south, in which neither the Methodists nor the Independents could procure a building-site at any price. There are scores of such locked-up

parishes in Oxfordshire ; and what is still worse, the poor people are not allowed to hear what preacher they please. They are not suffered to enter a Dissenting place of worship. They are even forbidden to read the Religious Tract Society's tracts. This state of things is not the exception, but the rule, in a number of parishes in the county of Oxford. Members of Christian churches, who serve under certain masters in our province, dare not let it be known that they are Christian Dissenters. Were it to become known that they are, they would be driven out from their employer's presence, and thus deprived of the means of earning their bread in the sweat of their brow. We ourselves have been, before now, menaced with the power of the constable and his handcuffs for preaching on the village green. Ministers of another bold and active denomination have been taken up and imprisoned for the night, for attempting to preach on a village green in the county of Oxford.

We visited a certain parish in our own district in the year 1843, for the purpose of preaching on the green, and there we met a few pious persons, who informed us that, as they were not allowed the privilege of meeting together in the character of Wesleyan Methodists for praise and

prayer, they adopted the plan of meeting at midnight. "True," said they, "we meet, but it is at an hour when our enemies can neither see nor hear us—we meet at midnight."

This being the state of things, our reader will be prepared to hear that the great bulk of the peasantry are very ignorant. Their ideas of men and things are, like themselves, confined to the hovel or cottage, the barn and the field. Those of the field-labourers who have not had an opportunity of becoming acquainted with the saving truths of the gospel, as we understand and preach them, are ignorant indeed. The words redemption, regeneration, justification, adoption, sanctification, atonement, moral government of God, vicarious sacrifice, decrees of God, physical ability, moral inability, election, reprobation, salvation, predestination, and many other words of the same class, are all Greek to the bulk of the peasantry. We have conversed with many a poor person who could not form any correct idea of the meaning of these words. They understand that confirmation means something done by the bishop, and that baptism means something done by the clergyman; but they do not, in general, know that regeneration means a change of heart, effected by the Spirit of God through the medium of divine truth.

Nor is this state of things to be wondered at. The people have not been educated; neither have they been thoroughly instructed in the doctrines and precepts of our holy religion. Church of England schools in rural districts are comparatively few. There are many parishes in every county in the south without a day-school of any kind, with the exception of those taught by poor and very ignorant old men and old women, who teach a few little children to read, that they may procure a few pence to save themselves from starvation.

In those parishes in which there are regular Sunday and daily schools sustained in connexion with the Established Church, the teachers are, in nine cases out of ten, very incompetent, and every way unfit for their office. It is only where and when the Dissenters establish a day-school, conducted by a well-trained and efficient teacher, that the parochial clergyman attempts to procure a good schoolmaster for the National School.

We need not stay here to point out the motive by which the clergy are swayed in their zeal to teach the rising generation in those places in which Dissenters are already teaching them. It is, however, a fact that the masses are too poor to afford anything in the shape of pay for having their children educated, and too ignorant to appreciate

the benefits of a sound and useful education. We have a British School of our own, conducted by an efficient teacher, and we charge only 1*d.* per week for each child; still we cannot keep up our number. We clothe many of the poor and ragged creatures; but all will not do. In winter several of them are kept at home for weeks together, in consequence of the various and annual complaints to which they are heirs, and which are the effect of nakedness, damp, and hunger; and in summer their poor parents are glad to turn the elder ones into the field to feed swine and frighten birds.

Whatever good the great majority of the young peasantry get at the best Sabbath-schools, they lose it, at least in part, as soon as they return home, where, in nine cases out of ten, they hear nothing but oaths and obscene language. The little knowledge they acquire at the daily school, they soon forget when they, if boys, begin their field-work of bird-keeping and plough-driving; or if girls, when they take up their permanent abode at the lace-pillow. I have heard a Sunday-school superintendent of twenty years' standing state, that nothing short of separating the children for ever from their parents could afford the least prospect of being able successfully to train them up in the way they should go. We adopt this opinion as our own; still we do

not approve of the idea of separating children from their own parents. The bulk of these poor children have no knowledge whatever of the real morality of the gospel. They know nothing of history, geography, or grammar. Those who ought to promote their education care just as much about it as they do about the salvation of their souls.

“Hard swearing,” as the more respectable inhabitants of the provinces call it, is to our certain knowledge a sin of frequent occurrence among both the working classes and those who ought to set a good example before them. Yes ; *perjury* is not an unknown thing among many who dread the thought of a ghost more than they fear the consequence of a false oath.

Witches and ghosts are, in the firm opinion of the sweating classes, a terrible reality—a reality with which it is most dangerous to trifle. Those who make free to call in question the witch’s power and the ghost’s visible appearance, run the risk of being visited by these wandering phantoms. There are farmers as well as labourers who think that witches are rather a useful class of diviners, seeing the lords of the plough, as well as the more gentle and softer sex, are never very backward in consulting these daughters of craft and deception, to learn what is in store for them. Field-labourers

are very unwilling to believe that witches and ghosts are not a reality. We are acquainted with pious members of Dissenting churches and Methodist societies, who would as soon give up their religion as their faith in ghosts and witches! Horse-shoes are still nailed on barn and stable doors, to break the charm of the witch as she approaches the farmer's premises. The timid ghost has never been, that we have heard of, consulted upon any question. Why he has not been consulted we know not; but we happen to know that he is not regarded in the agricultural districts of our country as a blessing to the terror-stricken inhabitants. We have been gravely informed by some of our neighbours, that the best way to compel him to remain out of sight is to cause him to enter into a barrel of ale! None, except the clergy of the Established Church, can, however, perform the ceremony of "laying the ghost;" and they—even they—cannot perform it without the Prayer-book.

Our thoughtful reader will, therefore, be prepared to admit that the clergy have a power, and the Book of Common Prayer a charm, to which Dissenters and their literature are utter strangers in this world of strange inequalities, apostolical succession, and sacramental efficacy. We do not, of

course, say or insinuate that the clergy of our neighbourhood pretend to do these miracles. No. They are not the men who would stoop to such things ; but the uninstructed, both of the Established Church and of the Dissenting family, have told us that these things have been done by the clergy, and that none but the clergy can do them.

We have been informed before now, by a respectable farmer's son, that in the vicinity of Oxford *fits* of some years' standing had been cured by means of a silver ring. "The silver is begged," said Mr. Simpleton, jun., "of nine young men, each of whom gives a sixpence—not more, not less. The money must not be borrowed, but given. The silver is put into the hands of a jeweller, who makes the ring out of the middle pieces, and keeps the remainder for his trouble !! The ring, when finished, is put on a particular finger, and the fits vanish at once !" It is really painful to witness, as we have done, the extent to which the poor peasantry have been left to become the victims of their own ignorance, and the prey of the crafty, selfish, and tyrannical.

CHAPTER V.

THE FAILURE OF THE STATE CHURCH AS A RELIGIOUS INSTITUTION AMONG THE PEASANTRY.

“ WE must not wonder to find the public forget the reverence due to the sacred profession, when its members forget the spirit, and neglect the duties, on which that reverence was founded.

“ If the people are expected to reverence an order, it must be from the consciousness of benefits received. If the clergy claim authority, it must be accompanied with a solicitude for the spiritual interest of their flocks, and that pastoral labour be well sustained. To enjoy at once both honour and ease, never fell to the share of any profession. If the clergy neglect their charge—if they conform to the spirit of the world, and engage with eagerness in the pursuits of ambition, or of pleasure—it will be impossible for any human policy to preserve them from sinking in the public esteem.

“As far as the attachment of the people to their established ministers is diminished in consequence of misconduct on their part, it will not be remedied by excluding other instructors.

“To deprive them of every other means of information may make them heathens, but will not make them Churchmen.” — ROBERT HALL, *on Village Preaching*.

Dear reader, it is our most earnest wish that you should understand and keep in mind that we have no personal quarrel with the clergy of the Establishment, the majority of whom are learned, highly respectable, and much respected by all who have the honour of being acquainted with them. Many of them are, to our certain knowledge, very kind, humane, and anxious to see the poor people placed in better circumstances; but they are not the men, and they never can become the men, for the times in which we live. They are too high in rank and station—too aristocratic in blood and education—to meet the spiritual wants, and to remove the woes, by which the peasantry are afflicted. They are not adapted to their work; neither is the Church of which they are ministers an institution which can benefit the rural peasantry to any telling extent. The clergy are the servants of the State, but they

are not, in general, the pastors of the people. A mode of action to which they are entire strangers, and an agency into which they can never be converted, are now demanded in this country to supply the masses with the means of salvation and education.

But truth and justice to all parties require that we state here that neither Dissenting ministers nor Methodist preachers have paid that attention to the poor which their physical wretchedness and moral ruin have solicited. It is not, however, in the power of the Dissenters to benefit a people to any great extent to whom they have no access, except it be by means of open-air preaching. We must, therefore, throw the principal part of the blame for the ruined state of the peasantry upon those who are the legally-appointed parochial clergy. They have had the full, the entire, the almost exclusive and unopposed charge of the working classes in many parts of the country for nearly three hundred years; and it is notorious that they have not been at all troubled with Dissent in the districts, the real state of which we have laid bare in the preceding chapters of our treatise.

Here, then, we have the Church of England, in England, and in possession of an extensive field of ministerial labour—the people, rich and poor, in her

grasp—the University at her back—the Queen at her head—and learning, wealth, great influence, splendid endowments, with a large legal provision made to sustain her—and her people divided into parochial and small sections, which might be managed with comparative ease: what is the result? A people in ruin—uneducated, unsaved, unacquainted with the religion of Christ, degraded, superstitious, immoral, too many of them dishonest, and more like the hordes of Tartary than the bold, virtuous, and intelligent peasantry of a PROTESTANT and FREE country.

Nor can it be pleaded in extenuation that more churches are needed in agricultural counties to accommodate the population. In each parish or village there is a church large enough to seat all who may attend at these parochial sanctuaries. We have a plantation of churches and a forest of clergymen in our province, but still the masses of the people are a ruined wreck. There are about twenty parish-churches, with a population of about ten thousand souls, including Bicester, within five and a-half miles of our house; and a religious service is held twice every day at several of these churches; and on Passion-week, some of the evangelical as well as the Puseyite clergy hold about twenty services in seven days. Still their hearers

remain, with scarcely one exception, as they were, and what they were. But this sober and heart-rending fact does not trouble men who believe that their parishioners have been made heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, through the medium of baptism.

How far our description of the real—not fancied—state of things in the surrounding counties may meet the approbation of the Bishop of Oxford, we do not presume to guess; but his lordship must be a very clever man indeed, if he can demonstrate either that the Deanery of Bicester does not present a very fair, full, and clear, picture of the state of the Church-going population throughout his own diocese, or that the Church of England is God's best instrument for teaching the gospel! Persons who are strangers to the art of detecting a fallacy concealed under a veil of unreasonable reasoning, may believe anything which may have a bishop for its author; but there is not a class of men in the kingdom who deal more freely in incorrect reasoning and conjectural conclusions than the majority of those who sit on the episcopal bench. Bishop Wilberforce must have known, or ought to have known, when he was delivering a speech, about eighteen months ago, in the presence of the Earl of Abingdon, who was in the chair, that the State

Church has failed in Oxfordshire to instruct and elevate the population.

The extent to which the poor people have been neglected, overlooked, and even despised, by some of those who have been legally paid for looking after them, is a sin against God, a violation of the sacred laws of virtue, humanity, and equity. Such a state of society as that by which Oxford is surrounded is a sad, but unerring illustration, of the positive and soul-destroying injury inflicted upon an ignorant and helpless people by a chained Church, which, if the whole of her clergy were strictly pious and laborious ministers of Christ, could not, owing to her earthly constitution and legal shackles, adapt herself to the spiritual and educational wants of the population.

The Bishop of Oxford spoke, at the meeting to which we have already alluded, of the labours and teaching of the Dissenters as "SOMETHING INFERIOR," and of the teaching of the Church as the "BEST *article!*" What effect has this "*best article*" produced in Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Wiltshire, and Buckinghamshire? Yes; the bishop's "*best article*" has left the peasantry to cure fits, or rather to charm them away, through the medium of a silver ring—to drown a ghost in a barrel of ale—and to glory in their shame. But the truth is, the thing which

Dr. Wilberforce treats as a very "inferior" thing—that is to say, the teaching of Dissenters—is the exclusive instrumentality by which the living Word of God has been preached to thousands on the village green, and in his lordship's diocese, who never dream of hearing it preached in its evangelical purity by their Puseyite clergy.

The first Sunday and evening-schools in Oxfordshire were established by the Dissenters of Bicester; and they were established at a time when every parish had then, as now, its church and its clergyman, and when the population was sitting in darkness and under the shadow of death, without scarce a ray of light to break through the surrounding gloom. Is the state of things any better now? Will Dr. Wilberforce answer our simple question? But we have answered it for him, and therefore proceed to remark that the Church of England has utterly failed in her mission to the peasantry. Her failure is gazetted in the social and moral ruin of the people among whom her ministers have laboured for three hundred years. She has had a long, full, and fair trial of her fitness to do the work of evangelization, and to promote the education of those who have been under her fostering care, and she has failed; and her failure, so far as our province is concerned, is henceforth a demon-

strated fact. The weaker portion of her own family are looked upon and treated by the great majority of the more wealthy and favoured portion as an isolated, alienated, degraded, and uneducated race. Neither a large and constant supply of learned clerks, nor a redundancy of parish-churches, nor yet the daily reading of prayers, both morning and evening, appear to produce any permanent change for the better among a people who are true to their Church, and never enter a Dissenting place of worship.

This is just the result, and the only result, which an enlightened philosophy and Bible Christianity would teach us to look for or expect from the working of a system, so unwieldy, so ponderous, and so prodigious, as that of a State Church. A system which has no adaptation to the end in view, and where so little pastoral superintendence is made to bear upon the masses, cannot answer the end which New Testament Christianity is destined to accomplish. What has the Established Church done successfully to regenerate, educate, and elevate, the poor and care-worn labourer and his family, in those districts in which she has been neither checked, nor excited and stimulated to action, by the Dissenters? And these are the places in which we must, in justice to all parties, try the real merits of an Establishment.

Every seventh day, an army of gentlemen, well provided for, classically educated, and legally appointed, stand up in clerical uniform to denounce the sin of schism and Popery, as they call it, and to exhort the people — each clergyman in his own order. One exhorts them to hope that, if they are of the number of the elect, they shall be saved some time or other. Another tells his flock that the Church—the Church of England as by law established—is the only way to heaven. A third preaches that sacramental efficacy is the only certain and sure ground of hope, and safe way to glory. A fourth gentleman reads the prayers and delivers his *little task in forty-five minutes*, and then walks into the vestry, leaving his handful of hearers to *guess* what he has been talking about. But notwithstanding the nine or ten millions of British money annually expended to sustain this vast apparatus, the great bulk of the people remain strangers to the way of salvation through faith on Christ. Let any candid and unbiassed observer of the state of things in our large towns as well as in our agricultural provinces say whether the Nonconformists or the State Church, or both, are keeping pace with the population.

The Church of England is looked upon as a great blessing to the *poor man*! In what does that

blessing consist ? We are not surprised that the Government is anxious to take the Irish priesthood into its pay ; for in Ireland the Roman Catholic clergy are now the poor man's clergy, because they are dependent upon him for their support. But in England, the clergy are independent of the population, and consequently more anxious to support the aristocracy than to bring the people's sufferings and degradation before the public. In Ireland, the priests are with and for the people. In England, the clergy are with and for the men who enact and defend the laws which support them. No wonder that the Christian religion should have so feebly operated on the masses of the working classes of our highly favoured land. We know the cause, and therefore we are prepared to maintain that the existence of a State Church is incompatible with the progress of New Testament and spiritual Christianity in this country. The clergy are, in general, just as much opposed to Dissent and its efforts to evangelize the population, as the Catholic priesthood can possibly be opposed to any efforts which may be made by Protestant clergymen to convert the Irish people.

But if the great and still growing majority of the ministers of the Established Church have resolved to act the part of the "*priest*," it is un-

reasonable that they should endeavour, as they certainly do, to crush the "good Samaritan," for no other reason than because he attempts to bind up the wounds which their own incapacity and errors have inflicted under the sanction of law, and in the name of religion.

In a certain church-yard in the county of Oxford stands a grave, which was dug at the clergyman's request, and at a considerable distance from all the other graves. The rector had this grave dug for the reception of the corpse of a Wesleyan Methodist. The priest, as he calls himself, resolved that the remains of Methodists and Dissenters should not be buried in that part of the yard occupied by the *dead* of the Church. The precious ashes of the members of the Established Church were to be kept separate from the vile ashes of all schismatics. But the friends of the deceased refused to act as a *jury* for the earthly judge, and therefore buried the corpse close by the other graves. The clergyman, however, nothing daunted, read the funeral service over the empty grave !!!

CHAPTER VI.

HINTS AND REMEDIAL SUGGESTIONS.

THE clergy of the Church of England are not the only parties whose ministerial labours are not adapted to benefit the degraded masses. There are not a few Dissenting ministers and Methodist preachers who choose to remain comparative strangers to the terrible miseries, privations, and afflictions, endured by the inhabitants of the mud hovel. Poor members of the Methodist Society, in the rural districts, are in many instances shamefully neglected by their own ministers. We have had much to do with and for these suffering sons and daughters of want and sorrow, and consequently we are fully prepared to assert that the shepherds feed themselves, but they do not feed the flock. It cannot, however, be expected that Christian gentlemen

should visit mud hovels, and talk to poor people about their nakedness and poverty.

If these remarks should be considered somewhat severe, we cannot help it. We have our reasons for what we say. Those who enter the ministry to watch for souls, should endeavour to keep in mind that the hungry, the naked, the oppressed, and the tried, are among their flocks. The fact is, the peasantry are too poor for the Wesleyans; and, consequently, the travelling preachers are not over anxious to visit, instruct, and defend them. Both the Methodists and Independents might, perhaps, *trace* their want of success to their neglect of the very poor among the working classes. A hint to the wise is enough. To hear the servants of the Most High God, as we have heard them, state, with no small degree of complacency, that their sphere of labour, or circuit, was a snug and easy one, and that they had plenty of time for reading and study, while tens of thousands are perishing in their sins, within a few miles of their dwellings, is to us a matter of astonishment, and a fact to be wondered at.

Ministers, we know, must have time for reading and study; they cannot prosper in their work of faith and labour of love without studying hard, careful reading, much prayer, and hard thinking;

but still, while thousands are sinking to hell around us and at our doors, a portion of each day should utter speech in the hearing of those who are perishing for lack of knowledge ; and that speech should be the earnest language of love and mercy, employed to warn every man, and to teach every man, " in all wisdom," that every man might be saved, and God glorified. No man who is a Christian minister, and in the enjoyment of health, can be excused or justified in devoting that time to reading and study which he ought to spend in prayerful and earnest endeavours to draw the world to Christ. The man who talks about his easy sphere of ministerial labour, and remains at ease, surrounded by uneducated, unsaved, and immoral thousands, is defective in his faith, and a stranger to the full force and power of the motives by which Christ and his apostles, Luther and Melancthon, Wesley and Whitefield, were swayed in their heaven-born zeal to save a ruined world from dominant sin and impending woe.

The inspired apostle, who exhorted Timothy to give attention to reading, added, " Make full proof of thy ministry"—" Be instant in season, out of season"—" Do the work of an evangelist"—" Preach the word." Christ did not confine his labours to the more respectable classes. He went

about doing good among the *poor* — *instructing, healing, defending, and blessing* them. Earnestness of manner, kindness to all, sympathy with the afflicted, fidelity to God and to the souls of men, were some of the great characteristics of his ministry. When he met an *outcast leper*, he *listened* to his *tale of woe, felt* for him, *healed, and blessed* him. The labouring poor are remembered in heaven, and given in charge to the ministers of Him who has said, “Ye have the poor always with you.”

They have a strong claim upon the ministers of God’s word, whose duty it is to visit them in their afflictions, and to sympathize with those whose sins and sufferings summon us to penetrate the depth of their woe. They are our brethren; and consequently it is our duty to enter their wretched abodes frequently, and to identify ourselves with them, in order that their knowledge may be increased, their moral character improved, and that the wrongs inflicted upon them by wicked and unreasonable men may be fully ascertained and permanently removed.

But there are great and formidable difficulties in the way. The peasantry have been so long neglected, oppressed, and used as men use their ploughs and harrows, saddles and harness, that

they have become like an iron post, upon which an impression cannot be made until it has been sufficiently heated in the forge and made malleable in the furnace. Nothing short of the full exercise of the patience of hope, the meltings of love, the most untiring perseverance, and the influence of that gospel and grace by means of which men become willing to be all things to all men, will ever reach and alleviate the sufferings and woes of the tillers of the soil. They appear as if, like Cain, they had been driven out from the presence of the Lord, and from the society of civilized men, to live, like Nebuchadnezzar, with the beasts of the field.

The sober, honest, and industrious among them never have one shilling to spare, and the immoral starve themselves that they may get drunk. Their degraded condition is a disgrace to the mortgaged landlords of the soil—still they are moral agents, and consequently they are capable of being restored to the path of virtue, honesty, and sobriety, and raised to the noble dignity of the sons of God and heirs of bliss. But not through the medium of the cold and unfruitful preaching of the clergy, nor yet by the metaphysical preaching and dry essays of too many Dissenting ministers, whose present method of preaching the gospel to the working classes

is too tame, artificial, formal, and apathetic. The parlour is more frequented than the humble cottage, and our ministrations are partial and circumscribed ; the love of ease and pleasure has withered the zeal and piety of too many of the people of God.

What then is to be done ? The peasantry cannot be left as they are—the bulk of them have not the gospel preached unto them. These are not the times to pass by the physically, morally, and socially wounded. The life-giving word must be brought to bear upon them. But by whom ? We confess that we do not look for much from some of our old county associations in agricultural districts, nor yet from the Wesleyan Methodists ; and from the Church of England, constituted as she is, we have no scriptural right to expect much. There are, however, three great and growing institutions in active work, to which we look with strong hope and firm faith for much fruit. We mean the Independent and Baptist Home Missionary Societies—and our devoted, active, and zealous friends, the Primitive Methodists. These three societies are doing a great work among the peasantry in some parts of the country. The agents of the Independent Home Missionary Society are, in general, well trained, pious, humble, and laborious preachers of the gospel

of Christ; and their attention to the poor and needy is untiring. "But what are they among so many?" Other churches must awake and put on strength. Lay agency, tract distributors, and Scripture readers, should be multiplied by thousands. Each Dissenting church should have its own college for training lay agents. The peasantry must be taught by the peasantry—that is to say, by young men trained from among themselves as village preachers. The plan of forming distinct churches in small villages, within a distance of three or four miles of small towns, is neither wise nor economical. Poor churches are made still poorer, and rendered almost useless, by the very injudicious practice of encouraging a few poor men and women, who are neither able to support a pastor, nor yet fit to choose one, to form branch churches into *distinct churches*. There are many such broken fragments of disorder and skeleton churches to be met with in many parts of the kingdom; and the sooner the Congregational Union pronounces against this withering practice the better. Christian societies in small towns, as well as in large cities, should form the centre of a number of preaching stations, daily and Sunday-schools, each of which should be superintended by the minister of the parent church in the town, and supplied by agents trained from among the members

of the church. Village stations might always be kept by this plan in a healthy state, and the evangelizing church would thus stand upon many sound pillars.

The thinking, intelligent, active, and influential classes are to be found in large towns and cities, but if the Dissenters wish to go-a-head in the country, they must be willing to work upon the poor, in order that they may be moved, and moulded into thinking beings, and raised to the rank of influential men and women. Ministers of nonconformist denominations have themselves been raised from among the middle and working classes by the preaching of the Cross. The peasantry have, therefore, a scriptural and most reasonable claim upon the men who have been chosen from among themselves, by the Great Head of the Church, to preach the gospel to the poor, and to bind up the broken hearted. But as things are at present in the rural districts, neither the Dissenters nor the Methodists can do much permanent good among the people.

Neither could the Government, were it to attempt it, educate them in their present, unemployed, immured, and degraded state. We are fully satisfied that the British Government is not aware of the extent to which the peasantry are ruined. A people who are huddled together, from eight to fourteen in

one small hovel, without regular employment, and, consequently, without proper food, firing, or clothing, and without even a single whole chair or stool to sit on, as is the case in many of the cottages visited by us, are not the most likely to become good, cheerful, thankful, and improving Government scholars. To talk of educating the rising race at the expense of the country, is just like telling their parents, that if they will agree to continue to starve, to work for half pay, and to sleep fourteen in one small attic, and will not say a word about it, their children shall have a Government schoolmaster to teach them how to write their names.

The proprietors of the soil and others may treat the ruin of the peasantry with perfect indifference, but it may end in consequences and results which will prove disastrous to all parties. It is, however, a state of things for which neither the clergy nor the farmers are alone responsible. The farmers cannot build cottages for the poor. The clergy cannot employ them. The successive Governments of England are responsible for much of the evil, immorality, and poverty by which the producing classes are afflicted. Before the bulk of the field-labourers can be either educated or restored to the path of virtue, decency, and honesty, the present system, if system it may be called, of managing them must

give place to a better. Cottages containing four rooms, two above stairs and two below, with suitable back premises, including a coal-house, pig-house, washhouse, and a place for the ashes, should be built on all farms for the accommodation of the labourers. Each cottage ought to have from one to four chains of land attached to it for the use of the peasant and his family. These cottages should be well ventilated and under-drained to keep them dry. The rent should be low, and the labourer should have constant employment at fair wages,—and he should be made to feel and understand that so long as he conducts himself as an honest and industrious man, he has a home and is safe. His children should also be employed, after a certain age, on the same farm with their parent, that they might thus be trained up in the school of industry and honest labour. The wages of field-labourers might be regulated by the price of grain and other native provisions. The size of the cottager's allotment and the amount of his wages should be such as to enable him, as a free man, to pay for the schooling of his own children, and to feed and clothe them decently. To create in the labourer a spirit of independence and self-respect, should be the earnest endeavour of his employer.

These things might be done—they ought to be

done at once—the time is at hand when they must be done. The men who labour in the field are righteously entitled to a sufficient support for their toils. There are nine millions of idle acres in England which might be reclaimed by the poor and for their benefit; and there are four times as many ditches and hedges which have not been cut, cleaned, or dressed for many years. These are sober facts, and yet the millions are starving from want of food and clothing, and ruined for want of employment. The bulk of the farmers are kept in check and in chains by an absurd system of yearly tenancy; so that they have no chance of making any extensive and permanent improvement in their antiquated mode of managing their farms. The truth is, farmers in many parts of the rural districts are oppressed by the system on which they hold their farms, and they are thus forced in some measure to oppress their labourers. Still, our thoughtful rulers will not do justly—our landed proprietors do not love mercy half as much as they love hares, pheasants, and foxes. The middle and working classes must therefore awake and contrive for themselves. “Household suffrage” at least, “vote by ballot, triennial elections, equal electoral districts, no property qualification, and paid members,” are among the things which must be granted to a down-trodden people.

If we had these, our just rights, we should be in a condition to right ourselves by reducing our national expenses. The intolerable system of taxation under which the masses groan must be equalized, and the burden placed on the right shoulders. Honest, intelligent, and devoted men must be sent to represent the real interests of all classes in Parliament. Practical agriculturists, enterprising manufacturers, and disinterested patriots, are the persons who should be called upon by the United Kingdom to stand and act in the hall of legislation. Without such men the STATE VESSEL WILL SINK—PERHAPS SUDDENLY and IN A STORM; but with such men on board, Richard Cobden at the helm, and Joseph Hume standing by his side, *descrying the approaching tempest*, through the medium of his *mental and well-tried telescope*, she may yet be *conducted in safety into a secure haven*.

CHAPTER VII.

EFFORTS MADE TO PROMOTE THE REGENERATION AND ELEVATION OF THE PEASANTRY.

IN the preceding chapters, we have reviewed the real and degraded condition of the rural peasantry ; it is now my duty and privilege to inform the reader that something has been done by us to promote the physical, moral, and mental improvement of the thousands by whom we are surrounded.

On the 17th of January, 1848, a Home Missionary Meeting was held in connexion with the Independent church, Bicester, Oxfordshire, at the Congregational Chapel in that town, when it was moved by the Rev. Charles Gilbert, of London, and seconded by Mr. Samuel Rolls, of Bicester, " That the Report now read be adopted, printed, and circulated." At the earnest and kind request of many friends, I have consented to insert a short abstract of my

Report in this treatise. Should it be said that I have given publicity to my own labours, I am prepared to reply, that these things have not been done in a corner. If the facts which I state had not been created by God's blessing upon my labours, they could not have been published. I am the humble individual who has been employed by the Great Head of the Church to attempt the things of which I speak ; and, consequently, I have found it an impossible thing to publish my Report without introducing myself as the acting agent in the work to which I now call the reader's candid attention.

It is well known that I have made some noise, and have written much, within the last nine years, to call attention to the sufferings and woes of the degraded peasant and his family. Yes ; I can honestly say that I have been the cheerful, willing, and *unpaid, servant* of all parties, including thousands who are members of the Church of England. Had I been labouring for the hireling's pay, I should consider the *sum of one thousand pounds* a poor remuneration for the *extra exertions* made by myself and those of my *own house*, who have been my noon-day and midnight helpers in the cause of the poor, to feed, instruct, clothe, and employ them. But we have our reward in the smile of God, in

joyful recollections, in permanent remembrance, in sustaining hope, in the blessing of the poor, in growing sympathies with bleeding humanity, and in the felt consciousness of having done what we could to serve our generation according to the will of God.

I have preached four hundred and fifty times out of doors within the last nine years, in the counties of Oxford and Buckingham, to thousands of the uneducated masses; many of whom I hope to meet in that world where the inhabitants "shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto fountains of living waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." Rev. vii. 16, 17.

Though these degraded ruralists *dare not open a cottage as a preaching-room*, they are always anxious to hear the word of life on the village-green, and to receive and read our tracts with pleasure and thankfulness. *About twenty-five thousand tracts, of various kinds; small books for Sunday-school children; magazines, in great numbers, and of different sorts and sizes; Bentley's "Health made Easy for the people;" Bibles; Commentaries, by Cobbin, Barnes, Henry, Brown; Dictionaries; Conquest's Bible; Spelling-books; Geography, His*

tory, Grammar ; the “ Protestant Dissenter’s Catechism ;” the “ Patriot ” newspaper, the “ Nonconformist,” the “ British Banner,” the “ Universe,” and “ Christian News ;” and many other useful books and periodicals, have been *introduced* and *circulated in the neighbourhood by us*. This fact proves that I have not been an enemy either to the bookseller, the book-buyer, or the bookbinder. A considerable number of lectures have been delivered by me from time to time, on various subjects, to instruct those who have been willing to learn somewhat of the signs of the times. I am thankful to say that these labours have not been “in vain in the Lord.”

It is well known to those who make man their study, that a rural population is not easily moved to think and act freely for itself. A people who have spent their days and years in obscure villages are not soon moved. Their ideas are few and confused ; their knowledge, like themselves, is confined to the hovel, the barn, and the field. It has been with a large class of these long-neglected and despised field-labourers that I have had to do. The best years of my life have been spent in their service—laborious, but soul-elevating service. I have walked about eight hundred miles, from village to village, from hamlet to hamlet, and from cottage to hovel—

in eighteen different villages and one market-town—to search into, and to search out, the real condition of the rural peasantry. What a condition!!! My manner of life has not been to call at their doors to ask if they were well. No. My plan has been to enter their humble dwellings, and to examine their furniture, beds and bedding, food, and clothing. The partner of my joys and sorrows and myself have walked before now for days, from village to hamlet, to instruct the ignorant, and to relieve their wants; and we have always been compelled to change our clothes on our return home, in order to save ourselves and children from the black vermin which were sure to fasten upon us while turning over the ragged bedding in the mud hovel. Many a day have I walked from nine in the morning till ten at night, drenched in rain, and ankle-deep in water, in the counties of Oxford and Buckingham, to lift up the hands which hung down, and the feeble knees, to strengthen the diseased, to heal the sick, and to direct all to the Lamb of God who “taketh away the sin of the world.”

I have written more than eleven hundred letters, including about three hundred which have been published by me, to plead the cause of the oppressed, and to direct public attention to their wretched condition in this land of wealth and of

poverty. I can honestly say—and why should I not say it?—that I have been “in journeyings often, in perils, in weariness and painfulness; in watchings often;” in cold and wet, late and early; to search out the cause which I knew not—to bring hidden evils to light—to preach Jesus as the only Saviour of men—and to promote the physical, moral, and mental improvement of my poor and enslaved fellow-sufferers.

From four hundred to five hundred families, living in twenty-two different villages and one market-town, or a total of more than four thousand persons (and many of them frequently), have been relieved—substantially relieved—by us. Seventy-two beds, with bedding; eighty-five smock-frocks, shoes, clothes of every description; more than one hundred and seventy sheets and blankets; eight tons of coal; eight pounds' worth of butcher's meat; eighty bushels of potatoes; hundreds of loaves of bread; rice, tea, coffee, sugar, butter, candles, medicine, *medical advice*, and peas for seed; have been provided by us for our afflicted brethren: and some who had not a chair or a whole stool to sit on, have been supplied with these and other pieces of household furniture. Implements of husbandry, their rags of clothes, and other things, have been taken out of pledge for them. We have paid the rent of

the allotment, and supplied them with the seed which planted it. The widow's hovel has been repaired; the living have been kept from starving; and the expense of burying the dead has been paid by us. Good situations at high wages have been procured for several families and single young men in Lancashire, Cheshire, Derbyshire, and Staffordshire; and the sum of twenty-nine pounds has been obtained and paid for their travelling expenses.

Those who could not afford to pay for them have been furnished with Bibles, Hymn-books, Sunday and day-school books, and maps. Hundreds of the persons who have been thus relieved through our medium live at a distance of from four to *ten* miles from the sphere of my ministerial labour. Not a few of them are members of the Methodist Society; but the great bulk are members of the Church of England.

We have kept a regular and proper account of every penny placed in our hands, with a list of the names of those by whom we have been encouraged, also of the names, numbers, circumstances, wages, moral character, denomination, and places of abode, of those relieved, and of the kind of relief given, and of the years and days when relieved.

The efforts which we have made to improve the

condition of our poor brethren, have provoked very many to try to do likewise. Other Dissenting churches, other pastors, other denominations, some parish clergymen, and other parties in other counties, have been influenced by our example, and thus led to pay more attention to their suffering neighbours than they had been in the habit of doing. Our own townspeople admit that I furnished the facts which led the inhabitants of Bicester and others to subscribe the sum of £108 4s., in the month of January, 1847, for the relief of the starving hundreds in our own parish.

But my labours in the rural districts have not been confined to the physical and mental necessities of the peasantry. Some steps have been taken, and some efforts have been made, to promote their moral and spiritual elevation in society. We had our chapel enlarged a few years back, that a greater number of them might be accommodated in the house of prayer; and I have walked about *nine hundred miles*, in town and country, to beg the greater part of the money which paid for the alterations which we had then made. Sixty-eight members have been added to the church under my pastoral care since I settled in Bicester; a small number in itself, but respectable considering the dormant state of society in those agricultural dis-

tricts in which the Church of England has had it all her own way; and seeing the many, *various*, and *very telling influences* which have been CONSTANTLY at work to *check me*, and to draw all to the parish church.

Three Sabbath-schools, one evening-school and Bible-class, kept up during the winter half-year; a good British day-school, one theological class for the education of lay preachers, one Dorcas Society, a Missionary Society and Bible Society, a scientific and literary class, a town and district Tract and Home Missionary Society, cottage lectures, prayer-meetings, and some good and useful libraries, have been established, and some thousands of the hard-working classes are thus reached and instructed by us. One good and flourishing village congregation and branch-church have been raised, by the blessing of God upon our labours. I have been enabled, through mercy, to *preach three thousand three hundred and seventy times, including four times almost every Lord's-day* during the *summer season*. I have also *walked* upwards of *nine thousand miles* in the cause of charity, religion, and mercy, to promote the present and everlasting improvement and elevation of my fellow-men. We are about to build a handsome new chapel, and to wall in a new and large burying-ground, in

one of the neighbouring villages. We are truly thankful to the great Head of the Church for the good measure of success which has crowned our humble labours in the cause of righteousness and truth.

The opposition we have had, and which we still have, to encounter has been powerful, and, in some instances, even *fierce* as well as *cowardly*; but He who has been on our side is the God of salvation. Like the Hebrews in Egypt, the more we have been oppressed, the more our influence and power have been felt in the midst of our enemies. Notwithstanding that some of our best subscribers have been compelled to leave the neighbourhood in consequence of the bad state of trade, the people of my charge raise considerably more money now than they did when I first settled among them—but it is for educational, chapel, and school-building, and missionary purposes, they raise it. It cannot, therefore, be said that their pastor and his family have pocketed the fruits of their own exertions in a cause, to promote the prosperity of which they have devoted years of their best days, and some *thousands* of their *midnight* and *early hours*. We have laboured—God has given the increase—and other parties are reaping the benefit.

May the smile of God rest upon the good and

great who have strengthened our hands and cheered the hearts of thousands through our medium. Indeed, I am prepared to demonstrate, by incontrovertible facts—facts which the surrounding peasantry have felt—that more real, substantial, and permanent good has been done through our medium among the poor field-labourers, since I settled in Bicester, than has been done by any six parish churches in the district, with all their wealth, interest, and influence. The people know it, though at present they dare not—or they think that they dare not—give utterance to their opinion on the subject. Why should I hesitate to state these things, and thus vindicate the character of Nonconformity and voluntary Christianity in a county in which dissent from the Church of England has long been treated as a thing which ought not to be either respected or tolerated? The means which have been used by us have told upon the surrounding population, many of whom are now fully convinced that, while the Church of England remains in State chains, *congregational dissent from that church will continue to be a noble and dignified act of obedience to the law of Christ.*

In several parts of this treatise, there will be found the language of emphatic censure on the conduct of those by whom the people have been consigned to such a deplorable condition of intel-

lectual, physical, and moral degradation, while the most enormous resources have been lavished on objects of vanity and ambition—war and slaughter, aristocratic mansions, and national defences.

Young men, who are both able and willing to work, are forced from time to time to enlist in the army for a piece of bread ; and there are many married men in our agricultural districts who have families to support, but who have only from one to three days' work *a-week* in winter, at from 1s. 4*d.* to 1s. 6*d.* a-day. Cases—not a few—have frequently come under my notice, in which a family of from four to nine persons have not had more than *one penny* per head per day, one week with another, for weeks together, for their support. Hunger compels them to join the cattle in the fields to eat *swedes* ; and the law of the land compels them to dance upon the treadmill for eating the swedes.

Many of them, when led by hunger to err, come to me from a distance of seven or eight miles to accompany them to the Magistrates' Chamber. When they quarrel, they come to me to settle their petty disputes ; and when hunger and cold pinch and pierce them, they come with their tale of woe.

A poor man died, a few months back, in the county of Oxford, in whose house there was nothing, with the exception of cold water, that his

large family of eight persons could either eat or drink. The sufferer begged hard for a cup of tea to *quench* his dying thirst, but though the water was there, the tea was not.

The dying man talked much about his little motherless girl, who is two years of age, and exclaimed, "O Agnes! O Agnes! I would not care if I knew of any person who would take you for your parish allowance, so that you would not have to go to the house," meaning the union work-house.

Surely the Irish peasantry are not, in general, in a more helpless and pitiable condition than that in which many of the English field-labourers are fixed. Oh, how nicely the present poor-law adjusts its scales, and weighs out their food to the subdued, starving, and crushed peasantry! It weighs out the last ounce to them just the night before they die, and leaves them on the day of their death without so much as a cup of tea to quench their dying thirst!

To know the real character and the full extent of the sufferings, ignorance, depravity, and wretchedness, of the field-labourers, we must not only live among them, but with them.

The various schemes which have been either suggested or devised, from time to time, by land-

owners and others, to better the physical, social, and moral condition of the peasantry, remind me of the many cures prescribed by some of our village dames to heal the sick, and to charm fits away from those who are afflicted by them. When a child is suffering from a fever, one says, "Put the child into hot water, as hot as he can bear it, and that will cure him!" Another advises that the child should be carried to a gipsy, who will put an end to the fever by a charm!! A third person urges, that the child should be taken out and held to the nostrils of a piebald horse, adding, that the animal's breath is a certain cure for all fevers!!

It is by some such means and devices as these that the English landowners would like to restore the once brave, but now ruined, peasantry to a healthy, happy, intelligent, and thriving condition!! That field-labourers are treated with undue severity, is a fact which few will dare to contradict. Their deep poverty, squalidness, misery, degradation, haggard countenances, and ignorance, demonstrate that they have been too long treated as an inferior class of beings, and shunned by those who ought to have taken them by the hand; and if they cannot live well out of their present rate of wages, they must starve. Their chain reaches from their cottages or hovels to the inside of the union workhouse.

Beyond the workhouse they cannot travel, for they are penniless ! Another great hardship to which the peasantry are compelled to submit is, the want of proper and prompt medical aid in the hour of their need.

The leading Dissenters and Methodists have, of late years, taken great and praiseworthy pains to raise the standard of ministerial education ; but while the middle classes have been ascending in the scale of mental and moral improvement, the great bulk of the people have been overlooked, and left to sink into a pit of ignorance, immorality, uncleanness, degradation, and ruin ! I fearlessly assert that, with the noble exception of our home missionaries, Sunday-school teachers, lay preachers, and a comparatively small number of settled pastors and travelling preachers, the ministry of the present day is not the ministry which will ever reach and successfully teach and evangelize the rural peasantry. There are tens of thousands of English serfs who have not the gospel preached unto them. They know nothing about it ; they never hear it as the life-giving truth which is the power of God unto salvation. They never enter our places of worship ; and how few ministers there are who will condescend to go out into the highways and bye-lanes to preach the " glorious gospel " to the mentally blind

and morally diseased masses of their spiritually-famishing countrymen!

If we would draw the untaught millions to Christ, we must go from house to house, and from the village-green to the bye-lane, in the spirit of Christ,—we must sympathize with the poor, enter feelingly into their troubles, learn their real condition, and teach them how to respect themselves. As the servants of the Most High God, who profess to show unto others the way of salvation, we are in duty bound to pray with and for the poor, and to direct them to the “Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world.” Earnestness of manner, kindness, fidelity to God and to the souls of the people, wisdom, prudence, self-denying and incessant efforts to do good, should distinguish us as the ministers of Christ. It is our imperative duty to seek the profit of many that they may be saved. Society is endangered by the poverty, ignorance, sins, and vices of the multitude.

The Government of this country may very soon have to face, in the heart of England, the very evil which at present threatens to convert Ireland into a heap of graves. Those dreadful convulsions which have deluged other countries with blood, those frantic ebullitions of barbarity and crime which are at once the terror and disgrace of our nature, are

mainly to be attributed to those who hate political and civil freedom, and religious equality, and operate upon the ignorance of the many, that they may have an opportunity of crushing them, that they may grind their faces, and keep back their hire. The leading cause of the people's ruin in our own country, lies at the door of our aristocracy, including the clergy, landowners, and other influential parties, who hold the people in chains, that they may beat them to pieces at their pleasure, and give them vinegar and gall to drink. Oh, that the better educated and more affluent classes would remember—daily remember—that by the side of their well-furnished and well-stored dwellings stand the abodes of squalid poverty, immorality, ignorance, sin and woe!!

Before the millions can be elevated and made to feel fully conscious of their relation to God and of their immortality, liberal and good Voluntary schools must be established in connexion with our village congregations and Wesleyan chapels in the rural districts,—I mean, cheap day-schools established, not in every village, but here and there in the centre of a group of villages. Above all, the man of God must be sent forth throughout the length and breadth of the kingdom, and, in the strength of faith, hope, and charity, to preach the gospel of free grace to the poor, and to lead them,

by the Word and Spirit of God, to Him who became poor that they might be made rich in faith, and heirs of everlasting life. We, as Dissenting ministers and churches, should pay special attention to such of the youth of our churches as are likely to become useful Sunday-school teachers and lay-preachers.

In addition to these means of evangelizing and elevating the poor labourers, their cottages must be improved, their wages must be raised, and Temperance Societies must be established among them, before they can be fully restored to the dignity and morality of civilised society.

Though I have never admired the provisions of the present poor-law, I believe that those who are in the different union workhouses fare better than those who are suffering in the fields, but will not submit to enter these mysterious and artificial places of human abode. That the miseries of the field-labourers are daily increasing is a fact that very few will venture to deny; but when I speak of their wretchedness and nakedness, I am told that "*they are bad ones;*" and that "*if they had any money they would spend it at the ale-house.*" These charges against the poor are, to a certain extent, true, and, therefore, I should like to know why they have been left, in the vicinity of Oxford, to grow up in such a state of ignorance and immorality. What have their

spiritual guides been about? For they not only admit, but even assert, that too many of their poor parishioners are very immoral and far behind. Should the present state of things be continued much longer, disease and premature death will release too many of the starving classes; but the end may be bitter.

“The prophet wept for Israel; wish’d his eyes
 Were fountains fed with infinite supplies:
 For Israel dealt in robbery and wrong;
 There were the scorner’s and the slanderer’s tongue;
 Oaths, used as playthings, or convenient tools,
 As interest biass’d knaves, or fashion fools;
 Adultery, neighing at his neighbour’s door;
 Oppression, labouring hard to grind the poor;
 The partial balance, and deceitful weight;
 The treacherous smile, a mask for secret hate;
 Hypocrisy, formality in prayer,
 And the dull service of the lip were there.
 But sounds prophetic are too rough to suit
 Ears long accusom’d to the pleasing lute:
 They scorn’d his inspiration and his theme,
 Pronounced him frantic, and his fears a dream;
 With self-indulgence wing’d the fleeting hours,
 Till the foe found them, and down fell the towers.”

CHAPTER VIII.

FACTS AND STATISTICS ILLUSTRATIVE AND CONFIRMATORY OF THE STATEMENTS CONTAINED IN THE PRECEDING CHAPTERS, COLLECTED IN THE COUNTIES OF OXON AND BUCKS, IN THE YEARS 1845, 1846, AND 1847.

1. G. HAS a wife and three children ; wages, 6s. a-week, on the road ; pays poor's-rates and highway rates!!!

2. W. has a very sickly wife and two children. They live in a small hovel, in the wall of which there is a large hole, but not an inch of glass!! The starving and wretched family live, sleep, and perish on the same damp floor!! The poor man pays poor's-rates and highway-rates out of his 6s. or 7s. a-week. He works on the roads ; but as I had to write in the dark at the door, and was compelled to use my hat for a writing-table, I cannot tell whether

my figure is 6*s.* or 7*s.*, but I believe the poor man's wages are only 6*s.* a-week.

3. S. has a wife and three children, works on the roads, wages 7*s.* a-week, out of which he pays 1*s.* 6*d.* a-week rent! There remains, therefore, only 5*s.* 6*d.* a-week, out of which the poor man has to support himself, his wife, and three children, this winter.

I understand that some of the duke's faithful servants are greatly disturbed by the seasonable gift of beds, smock-frocks, sheets, and blankets, which have been distributed by me to the poor of — and its neighbourhood. I have many touching applications for beds, &c., from places in Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire every day.

I find that cheap as the Bible now is, many of the poor peasantry in the villages are not able to pay for a small copy of the word of life, and, consequently, I have resolved to give a pocket Bible to such of the poor creatures as I may meet with and find unable to pay for, but able and willing to read that best of books. Thanks to those "free-traders" who have put it into my power to add this delightful work of faith to my many and various other refreshing, though arduous, labours in the cause of the poor peasantry.

4. J. has a wife and a number of children

dependent upon him, and upon begging together, for support. His wages are 6*s.* per week; house rent, 1*s.* 6*d.* There was not a single bed in the house when I examined it. The wretched family, eight in number, including his daughter's child, all slept in one room, upon some old sacking filled with straw. They have no potatoes; and when they buy any coals, they pay, this season of the year, at the rate of 1*s.* 8*d.* per cwt. for them. There is not a single pane of glass in any of the windows. This is the man (and this is his cottage) who was engaged to act, and who did act, the fool for the Duke of Buckingham, when the Marquis of Chandos became of age. Why did not the Duke present this wretched family with a bed?

5. J. has a wife and six children. Wages: father, 8*s.* per week; son, 2*s.* 6*d.* House-rent, 1*s.* 2*d.*; coals, 1*s.* 8*d.* per cwt.; no potatoes. Eight sleep in one room, in two wretched beds.

6. J. has a wife and four children. Father has no work; son earns 3*s.* per week; rent, 1*s.* per week. Two poor beds, made up of many rags and patches. All sleep in one room.³

7. G. has a wife and nine children. No employment. Two boys in work; one earns 5*s.*, the other 2*s.* 6*d.* per week; one girl makes a little lace. Rent, 1*s.* 3*d.* per week. Three ragged

and torn beds in one small room, in which eleven sleep.

8. J. has a wife and four children. Wages, 9s. per week, when in work; rent, 1s. 3d. Two wretched beds, one straw and one chaff, in one small room.

9. T. has a wife and four children. No employment. Two boys at work; one earns 2s. 6d., the other 3s. per week. Rent, 1s. 6d. Three wretched beds.

10. J. has a wife and five children. No employment. Rent, 1s. 6d.; son earns 2s. per week. Only one wretched bed for seven!!!

11. G. has a wife and five children; being ill, is kept by the parish: allowed 6s. per week and seven loaves. Rent, 1s. 3d. No potatoes.

12. T. has a wife and four children; one straw bed. The children sleep on two old sacks in the same room. Wages, 8s. per week. House-rent, 1s. 3d.

13. J. has a wife and six children. Wages, 9s. per week. Rent, 1s. 9d. per week. Coals, 1s. 8d. per cwt. No potatoes. Eight sleep in one room on two beds of straw.

14. J. has a wife and six children. Wages, 9s. a-week. Boy earns 1s. 6d. Rent, 1s. Wife very near her confinement. They have one chaff bed,

and another made up of rags and flocks. I have never seen such beds before in either England or Scotland. No potatoes. Coals, 1s. 8*d.* per cwt.

15. W., widower, has three sons, who bring him in 8*s.* per week, but has no employment for himself. Rent, 1*s.* per week. One straw bed, on which the father and three grown-up sons sleep, two at the head and two at the foot of the bed.

16. J., a poor shoemaker, who, in consequence of the poverty of the working classes, has next to no employment at his trade. He has a wife and two children at home. They have but one straw bed for the family. No potatoes, and are in great distress.

17. T.—Wages, 8*s.* per week ; scarcely any beds or bedding. Several children at home, and all dependent.

18. J. has a wife and six children, all at home. Works on the roads. Wages, 8*s.* per week. Rent, 9*d.* per week for a miserable hovel ; coals, 2*s.* per cwt. The woman is a clever and contriving person, but her husband is a victim of the game-laws.

19. J. has a wife and six children, all dependent upon him for support. He has to go five miles to his work. Wages, 8*s.* per week. Rent, 1*s.* 2*d.* per week. Eldest boy, aged fourteen years, is ill, and is allowed five loaves per week : very badly off for bedding, and no potatoes. Though he wishes to

attend a place of worship, he cannot for want of clothes.

20. C. has a wife and eight children all dependent upon him for support ; one girl makes a little lace. Total income, 11s. per week. Very badly off for clothes ; their stock of potatoes, between thirty and forty bushels, all spoiled. Having so large a family, he can hardly contrive to find anything for some of them in the shape of beds or bedding.

21. W., day-labourer, has a wife and six young children, who suffered much in the summer while he was away seeking work. He earns 10s. per week at the stone pit ; pays 1s. per week rent, and 1s. 10d. per cwt. for coals. Very badly off for beds and bedding. His wife is an industrious woman, and has to deprive herself of necessaries to keep her club paid up for a few clothes.

22. J., a shoemaker, has a wife and three children ; cannot get any work at his trade, the number in it in the neighbourhood being so great, and the people too poor to employ them. As he follows a trade, no one will employ him ; no, not the road-surveyors. His eldest son earns 2s. per week, one of which goes to pay house-rent for a miserable hovel, having only two rooms, one above and one below, ABOUT SEVEN FEET SQUARE. They have two wretchedly poor beds, one of which is made of

straw, and nearly all to pieces. They all sleep in the same room. They have no potatoes. How they live I cannot say ; but with all, they prefer home to the union.

23. J. has a wife and five children dependent upon him for support. Earns 7s. per week at the stone-pits ; rent, 1s. per week ; coals, 1s. 6d. per cwt. One girl earns about 1s. 3d. per week at the lace-pillow. One very poor flock bed, and some straw in old sacking ; seven sleep in one small room.

24. J. has a wife and four children dependent upon him for support. Rent, 1s. per week ; earns 7s. per week at the stone-pit. Beds and bedding very bad ; seven sleep in one small room.

25. J. has a wife and seven children. Wages, 9s. per week. Boy earns 2s. per week. Rent, 1s. per week ; coals, 1s. 6d. per cwt. Three wretched beds in one small room, in which nine persons slept.

26. T. has a wife and six children. Wages, 8s. Boy, 2s. per week. Two bedsteads (but I cannot say anything about the beds) on the *same damp floor on which the family live and starve.*

27. T. has a wife and seven children. Wages, 8s. per week. Two very poor beds. Potatoes destroyed.

28. A. has a son *eighteen years of age*. *Wages, 4s. per week*. She is allowed 2s. and a loaf weekly by the parish, out of which she has to support a grandchild. Neither her hovel nor her beds can be described.

29. R. has a wife and five children. No work. About five acres of land. Two miserable beds: seven sleep in one room. One boy at work for 2s. per week. Coals, 1s. 6d. per cwt.

30. W. has a wife and three children. No employment at present. No potatoes, except a few saved for seed. Two wretched beds in one room.

31. R. has a wife and two children. One poor bed. *Wages, 9s. per week*.

32. W. has a wife and five children at home. *Wages, 9s. per week*. Two poor beds in one room.

33. W. has a wife and five children. *Wages, 8s. per week*. No potatoes; coals, 1s. 6d. per cwt. Two poor beds, one flock and one chaff, in one room.

34. J. has a wife and five children. *Wages, 8s. per week*; boy, 2s. 6d. The beds are made up of chaff and rags. All sleep in one room. No potatoes.

35. T. has a wife and seven children; is out of health; and has 4s. and nine loaves per week allowed him by the parish. Has a few potatoes.

Has one flock bed and one chaff. All nine sleep in one small room.

36. W. has a wife and five children. No potatoes. Is out of health; has seven loaves and 5s. per week from the parish; has two miserably poor beds.

37. W. has a wife and four children. No potatoes. Has two chaff beds; only one room in the hovel. Wages, 9s. per week; rent, £2 per annum.

38. J. has a wife and four children. Total income, 10s. per week. Rent, £2 per annum. Two beds, one of which is a chaff bed. All sleep in one room.

39. G. has a wife and five children; they are poor and wretched.

40. J. has a wife and four children, one flock-bed and some chaff. They sleep in a small loft, which is reached by a ladder. The loft might do for a hen-roost; but woe to the wretched and degraded creatures who are compelled to sleep in it. May God help them; their comforts are few indeed, but their privations are many and constant. They pay a shilling a week rent for their miserable hovel.

41. T. has a wife and three children; wages, eight shillings per week, but was out of work for a long time during the winter; rent a shilling per week. The children sleep on some straw on the floor.

42. J. has a wife and three children ; the children sleep on some straw on the floor ; rent, three pounds per year. Out of work last winter, and compelled to leave the neighbourhood in search of employment ; his poor wife has been under the necessity of begging from door to door. No doubt she might have taken shelter in the union workhouse, but she would not.

43. J. has a wife and one child. They had *neither bed nor bedding of their own* when we called ; *they slept upon a borrowed bed.* This sober and pious man, though young, and naturally of a strong constitution, is suffering severely from *rheumatic pains, brought on by cold and hunger.*

44. R. has a wife and two children. The poor woman was confined to her bed when we saw her, and she had *neither sheet nor blanket to change the bed* on which she had been *confined a few days before we called.* Their bedding was such as I cannot describe.

45. M. This poor widow has no relief from the parish, and consequently want and woe compel her to beg from door to door. We found her in great distress ; a grown up son and one daughter, who are each between twenty and thirty years of age, sleep in the same room in which their mother sleeps ; one wretchedly poor bed and some straw on the floor.

46. J. has a wife and three children ; all sleep in one room. One of the children is very frequently subject to fits. It was in this village we were told by a respectable farmer's son, in the most serious and solemn manner, that this poor family were *collecting nine sixpences from nine single young men, out of which a ring was to be made to be worn by the afflicted girl.*

According to the young gentleman's account of the way in which the wonderful ring is manufactured, the sixpences must neither be borrowed by the young men, nor yet received as a gift, but they must be their own personal property. The silver is placed in the hands of a jeweller, who cuts a piece out of each sixpence to make the ring, and keeps the middle pieces for his trouble.

Verily, whether the fits be charmed away or not, the jeweller is well paid ; and this superstition, practised in England, in the nineteenth century, demonstrates that our rural peasantry are still living in a somewhat barbarous state. What say you to this, ye who *talk about the necessity of "keeping pace with the times ?"*

47. H. has a wife and four children ; they had nothing that could be called a bed when we called, but thanks to the liberality of Free-traders, they have a good one now.

48. W. has a wife and two children. This poor man is frequently afflicted with fits, and consequently he is paid 1s. a day for his work. Rent £1 7s. 6d. per year. A grown-up son and daughter had but one bed between them when we visited the cottage, but now they have the means of occupying separate beds in the same room.

49. G. has a wife and five children, all dependent upon him for support. House rent £2 a year; wages 8s. a week. Nine sleep in one room; beds most wretched.

50. T. has a wife and two children, all dependent upon him for support; they have three chaff beds. This poor family had the small-pox some years ago; in consequence of which the parish authorities had all their beds destroyed, and the wretched family were supplied with chaff beds. House rent £1 4s. per annum; wages 8s. a week.

An extraordinary meeting of the peasantry of Oxfordshire was held at the Independent Chapel, Bicester, on Tuesday evening, the 26th of January, 1847. The principal speakers were poor men and women, between twenty and thirty of whom delivered their artless tales of woe in the spirit of patience and meekness. The following are a few of the facts which were stated by the speakers:—

1. T. has a wife and one child; he has been out

of work about nine weeks, only a day's work now and then.

2. J. has a wife and two children. Wages 6*s.* a week.

3. H. has a wife and six children. 6*s.* a week.

4. B. has a wife and eight children; only one boy at work at 3*s.* 6*d.* a week. Rent 1*s.* 3*d.* He has had five days' work in nine weeks.

5. J. has a wife and four children; one boy at work at 3*s.* a week. J. has had only one week's work during the last eighteen weeks; some weeks he earns a shilling. Rent, 1*s.* a week.

6. J. has a wife and seven children. Rent, 2*s.* a week. Parish allowance, 5*s.* and eight loaves. A girl dying; family in great distress.

7. J. has a wife and four children. Rent, 1*s.* a week; sixteen weeks out of work; has not earned more than 3*s.* a week during winter; pawned everything they had; in great distress. This man has had the same shirt on his back for five weeks, and never washed, because he has no other shirt to put on.

8. W. has a wife and five children. A son earns 4*s.* a week. The father has no regular work. The mother is very ill; the surgeon ordered the woman 2*lbs.* of mutton, but the Board of Guardians would not allow it. Rent, 1*s.* 6*d.* a week.

9. R. has a wife and five children. Out of work about five months ; a day's work now and then. His wife earns about 4s. a week by washing. Rent, 1s. 6d. a week.

10. T. has a wife ; has been out of work ever since October. Rent, 1s. 4d. a week. They have a day's work now and then, and are in great distress.

11. J. has a wife and two children. Rent, 1s. 4d. a week. They are allowed 2s., and a loaf a week by the Board of Guardians. The poor man is nearly blind, and not able to earn his bread.

12. J. has a wife and five children. He has no regular work. Rent, 1s. 6d. A boy and a girl earn about 3s. 6d. a week. J. has had only four and a half days' work for nine weeks.

13. H. has a wife ; he has had fourteen days' work since October last, and is out of work.

14. W. has a wife and one child ; out of work for a long time.

It is, I believe, the practice to starve animals before they are led to *the slaughter-house*, and it does appear to me that parties in power have resolved to subject the field-labourer and his family to a similar fate. To any who might say that these remarks are too severe, I would reply, "Is there not a cause?"

APPENDIX.

“ Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in Heaven.”—Matt. v. 16.

“ Let all things be done decently and in order.”—1 Cor. xiv. 40.

THE following extracts, made from the journals of our lay preachers and Scripture readers, will, I am sure, be perused with deep interest by the thoughtful reader.

Mr. ——— reports that the clergyman of the village in which he labours has said from the pulpit, “ that all who go to any other place of worship than the Church of England, will be eternally damned.” The same reverend gentleman has said, “ that all who read our tracts will go to hell!” Another of our agents states that, when he asked an aged

person if he knew anything of Jesus Christ, as the Saviour of men, the answer was, "No; *where does the gentleman live?*" He asked another aged woman if she had a Bible. Her reply was, "No,—neither do I want one!" One of these ignorant persons asked our agent, "How often does God pay you for coming with these books?" He answered, "As often as I receive the blessings of this life, and of that which is to come." An old woman told him "that it was wrong of him to come to disturb the village with tracts on the Sabbath day!" It is reported that another woman went to the magistrate for a summons, to have our friend taken up for breaking the Sabbath by distributing tracts, but her request was not complied with. A third agent reports, "that he has met with some old persons so bound down by moral stupor, ignorance, and poverty, as to be, to all human appearance, totally incapable of forming any correct idea of the plan of salvation." Mr. ——— complains that the people on his station are much addicted to Sabbath profanation; some of them asked him "if he was well paid for his trouble." "Yes," was his reply, "a crown of glory which fadeth not away will be my reward." A respectable female informed one of these devoted and disinterested men, "that she felt a deep concern about her soul, and had often

thought of putting a note inside the tract, to request him to pray for her, but she was afraid that he might not see it."

The doctrines inculcated by some of the clergy in the county of Oxford, are truly alarming. The following will serve as a specimen:—

"When you receive your clergyman, you receive your Saviour. Whatever he does, as your minister, such as visiting, blessing, absolving, &c., it is not he who does it,—it is God Almighty. Almighty God chose your minister, and through the bishop gave his Holy Spirit to him. The clergyman, and no one else, can read the prayers, or go about among your neighbours, praying with them and teaching them. The clergyman is sent by the bishop to do all these things for you. When your clergyman comes to you, he does not come alone, the Lord Jesus comes with him." A certain clergyman struck one of our people with his hands and feet about three months back, while the good man was engaged in prayer with a dying penitent.

But, notwithstanding the difficulties we have had to encounter, and the extraordinary trials we have had to endure, we look back with no ordinary degree of heartfelt pleasure, and thank God, we look forward, take courage, and lay hold on eternal life through faith in Christ.

Religious and educational services, conducted by the pastor and members of the Independent Church, assembling at Water-lane Chapel, Bicester, Oxon :—

1. Preaching morning and evening every Lord's-day, and a prayer-meeting at seven o'clock in the morning, and at eight o'clock in the evening.

2. Sabbath-school morning and afternoon.

3. Cottage lecture every Monday evening, at seven o'clock.

4. Preaching every Tuesday evening, at seven o'clock.

5. Bible and writing class every Wednesday evening during the winter half year, from six till eight o'clock.

6. Prayer-meeting on Wednesday and Thursday evenings, at seven o'clock.

7. Cottage lecture on Friday evening.

8. Mrs. Ferguson's Girls' Free Evening School, from six till eight o'clock on Friday evening.

9. Missionary prayer-meeting first Monday in the month.

10. A meeting of the Dorcas Society and a Bible Committee meeting, once a month.

11. Our devoted tract distributors in Bicester change their tracts once a fortnight.

12. Preaching at the village of Launton every Sabbath afternoon and evening.

13. Sabbath-school at Launton every Sabbath morning.

14. Preaching at Launton every Wednesday evening, and prayer-meetings every Sabbath morning, and also on Tuesday and Friday evenings.

15. Preaching at the village of Ambrosden every Sabbath evening, and Sunday-school at five o'clock on Sunday afternoon.

16. Sunday-school in Crockwell every Sabbath morning and afternoon.

17. Occasional services held at Stratten-Audley, and Arcott, in the winter season, and preaching in the open air at seven of the surrounding villages during the summer half year.

18. A District Home Missionary Society has been established, by means of which between four thousand and five thousand of the poor peasantry are reached with the word of life. Our agents visit their respective stations regularly, change their tracts, read and pray with the afflicted and dying, and exhort the people to repent, and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

19. There is a good British and Congregational day-school in connexion with the branch church in the village of Launton, which is attended by about sixty children. It is open to the children of

all denominations at the small charge of one penny a week for each child.

20. There are three libraries connected with the church and congregation. Two of these are at Launton, and one in Bicester.

21. Mrs. Ferguson keeps two boxes of linen, and a Bible to each, which she lends out for a month to poor women during their confinement. She also keeps about one hundred sheets and blankets, which she lends to the poor of all denominations during the winter half year.

22. A stock of Bibles and Testaments, shoes, and articles of clothing, are placed in her care, that cases of urgent necessity may be relieved by her. Six hundred persons, young and old, were relieved by Mr. and Mrs. Ferguson in the year 1847, through the medium of bread, firing, butcher's meat, Bibles, and clothes.

23. The number of Bibles and Testaments sold in the villages during the year 1847 by our zealous agents, and exclusive of those sold by our Bible Society, 122.

24. Number of magazines sold by them during the same year, and exclusive of those sold in Bicester and Launton, 312.

25. Number of visits made by us to the cottages of the poor, 18,000.

26. Number of miles walked to visit and instruct them, 3,000.

Much good is doing to the souls of the people through the labours of our agents in the neighbouring villages. Sinners have been converted—the ignorant have been instructed—readers have been created—the starving have been relieved—and the anxious penitent has been saved through their unpaid exertions in the cause of their own poor neighbours. Useful books, in addition to the Holy Scriptures, have been introduced in the villages by them. The poor people are always glad to see them, and express themselves in terms of gratitude to God for his messengers of mercy.

27. The number of children in our Sunday, day, and evening schools is about 300.

28. The “Evangelical Magazine,” “Christian Witness,” “Friend of the People,” “Day Star,” “Dew Drop,” “Juvenile Missionary Magazine,” “Tait’s Magazine,” “Howitt’s Journal,” “Chambers’s Information for the People,” “Hogg’s Weekly Instructor,” volumes of “Murray’s Home and Colonial Library,” the “Patriot,” “Nonconformist,” the “Universe,” “Christian News,” and “British Banner,” are read and circulated among us. We need not now inform our reader that ours is not one of the “*snug and easy spheres of labour.*” But we

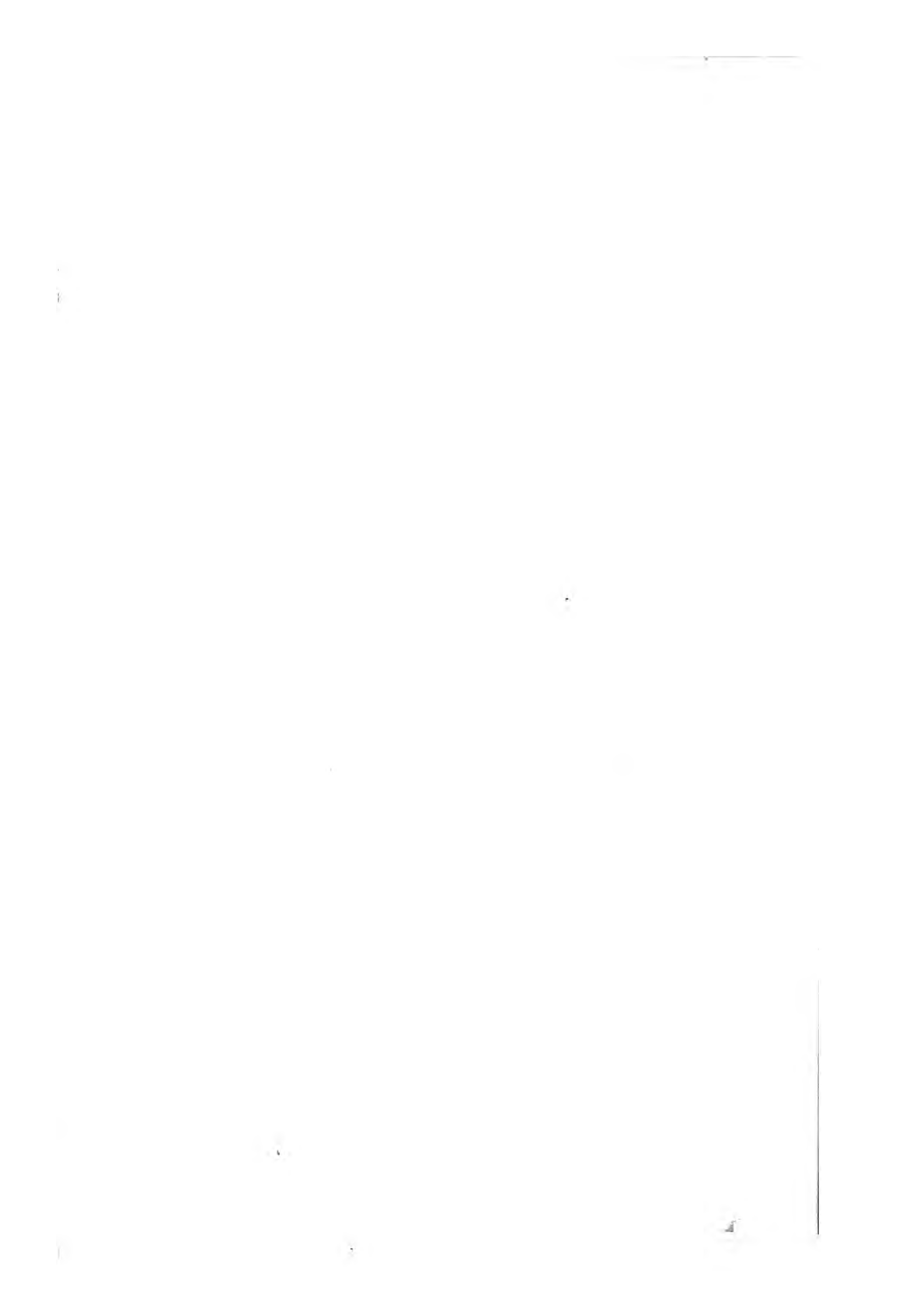
do not complain—perish the thought. No,—for our sphere of ministerial labour is just what we have, under God, made it,—and of the people, there have been but few willing to help us. But now, thank God, there is a band of men whose hearts the Lord has touched, able and willing to act as our helpers in Christ. May they be enabled to hold on their way, and to remain “steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as” they “know that” their “labour is not in vain in the Lord.”

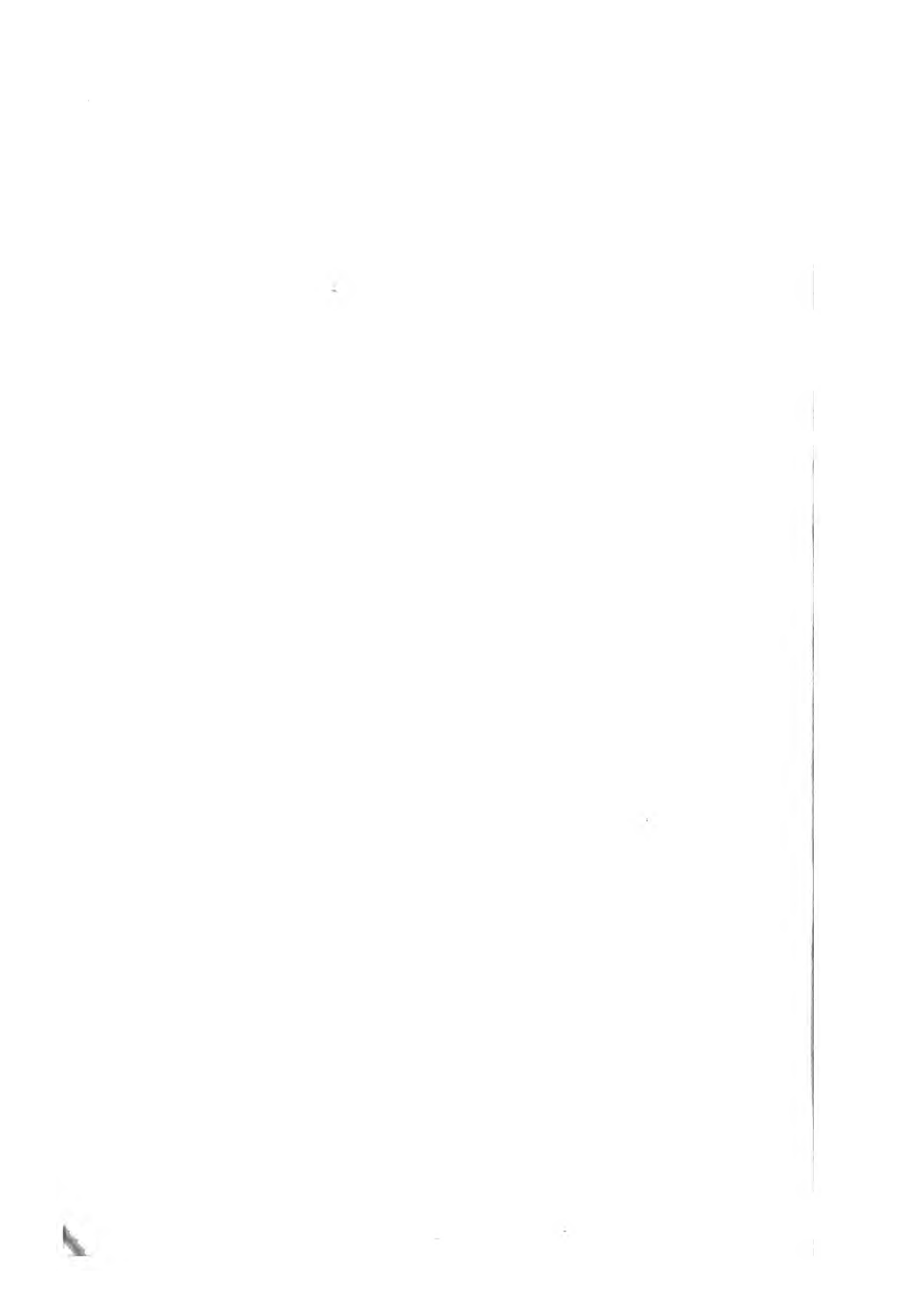
It is very generally said of those Dissenting ministers who labour successfully, and suffer incessantly, in the provinces, that they are *just fit* for such *stations* and *rough work*. But if they should not happen to succeed where clerical intolerance, withered dissent, an enslaved population, Church of England wealth and influence, and an unfelt religion, are as an Alpine mountain of brass in their way, it would be boldly asserted, that they had missed their way and were unfit for the Christian ministry. It is a very easy thing for those who are utter strangers to what is passing in the ruined and wretched villages and hamlets of our agricultural districts to show their opinion, but great men are not always wise, neither do the most knowing know everything. Small as our own success has been, it would have

been much smaller, had it not been that we have had the continued, earnest, intelligent, influential, and devoted co-operation of an educated helpmate, who has been always at our side. We do not for a moment believe, and therefore we do not admit, that justice is done by our denomination to those ministers in the rural districts, whose partners might spend that time in scholastic pursuits at a handsome salary, which they so cheerfully spend in promoting the cause of Congregational and New Testament Christianity. It is thought, and even said by some, who profess to *understand more than the ancients*, that men and women of inferior talents will do very well for the country, but they would never do for the city or manufacturing town. What a discovery! But the Dissenters have acted too fully and too freely on this unsanctified notion, and consequently their hold is feeble and their interests weak, where they ought to present a strong front, by means of which Puseyism might be kept in its own place, and the Gospel of Christ sustained in its onward career of unfading glory. Our leading men must excuse us if we tell them, that while there is not a whit less useful learning, real piety, or sanctified talent, needed in the large city or manufacturing town, than is demanded for smaller spheres of ministerial labour in country places, there is much more *tact*, self-

denial, perseverance, and knowledge of human nature, required in the country pastor, than his more fortunate brethren appear to be aware of. We labour under one great and unavoidable disadvantage in the country—a disadvantage of which many of our leading brethren have no painful knowledge—that is to say, the very best of our people are daily compelled to leave us, in order that they may better their physical condition in our large towns and cities. Poverty robs us of our kindest, most active, and intelligent members, who are thus led to swell the ranks of the thinking and moving masses in the emporiums of commercial enterprise. But we do not repine at these wise arrangements of the Holy One. It was through the medium of the scattered ones that the Gospel was first preached, and religious societies organized; and we are assured that it will be through the medium of many who shall yet run to and fro, that knowledge shall be increased, the whole earth filled with the glory of the Lord, and the world saved.

“Strengthen, O God, that which thou hast wrought for us,” and to thy name shall be all the praise.





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