

**An essay on the principle of population ; or, a view of its past and present effects on human happiness; with an inquiry into our prospects respecting the future removal or mitigation of the evils which it occasions / By T.R. Malthus ... In two volumes.**

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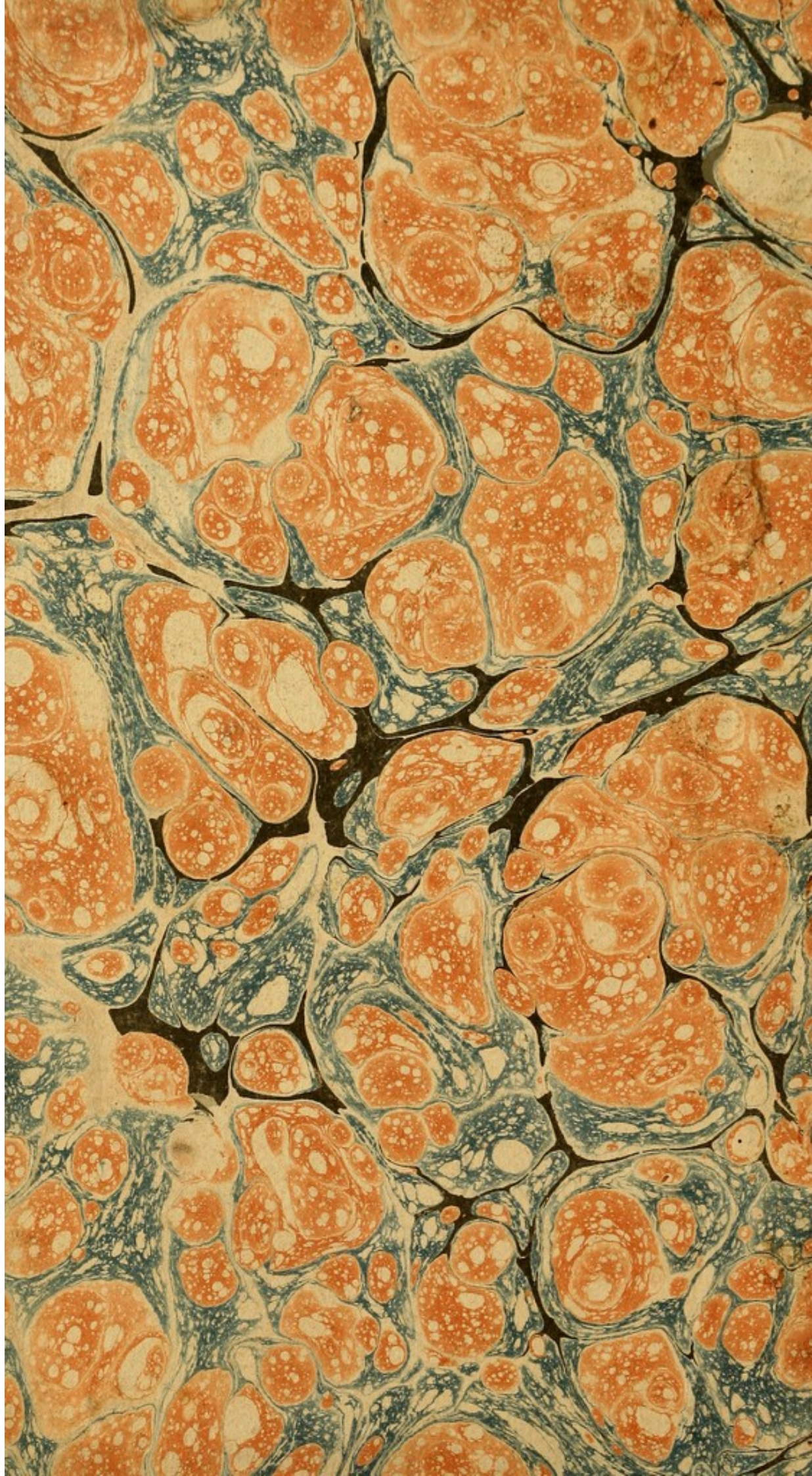
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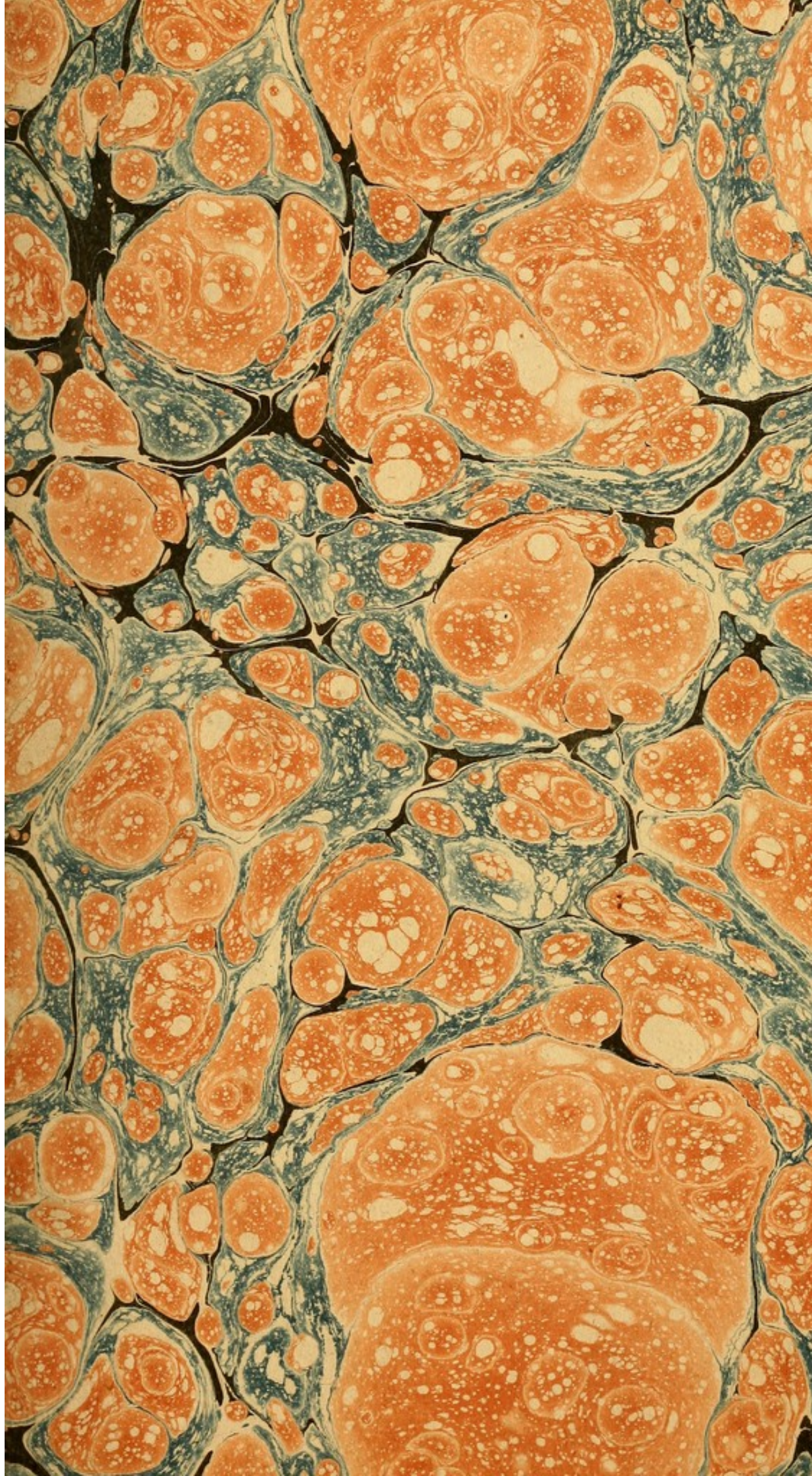














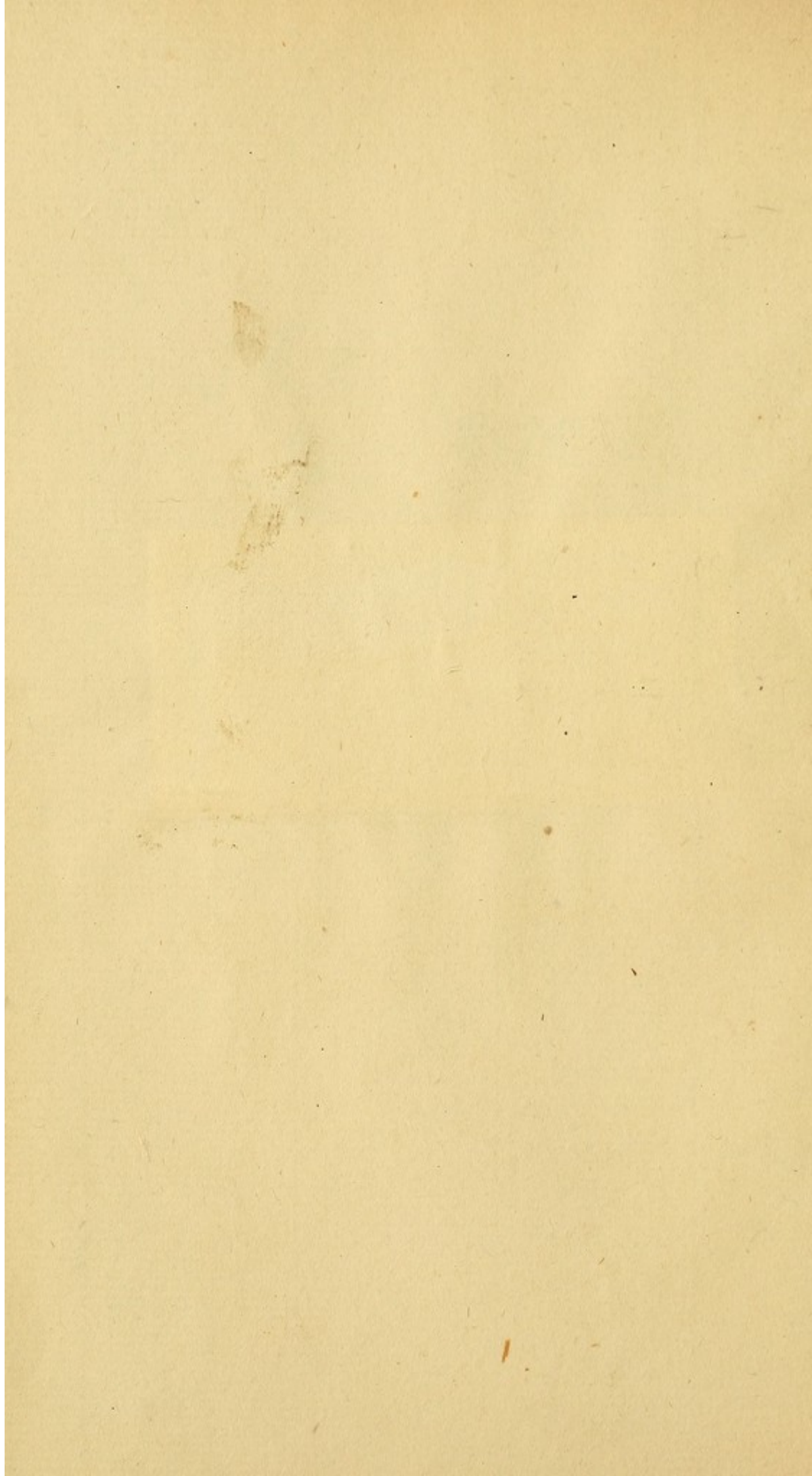
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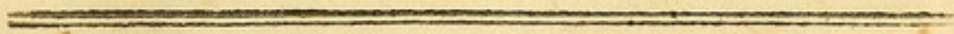
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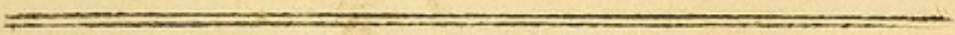


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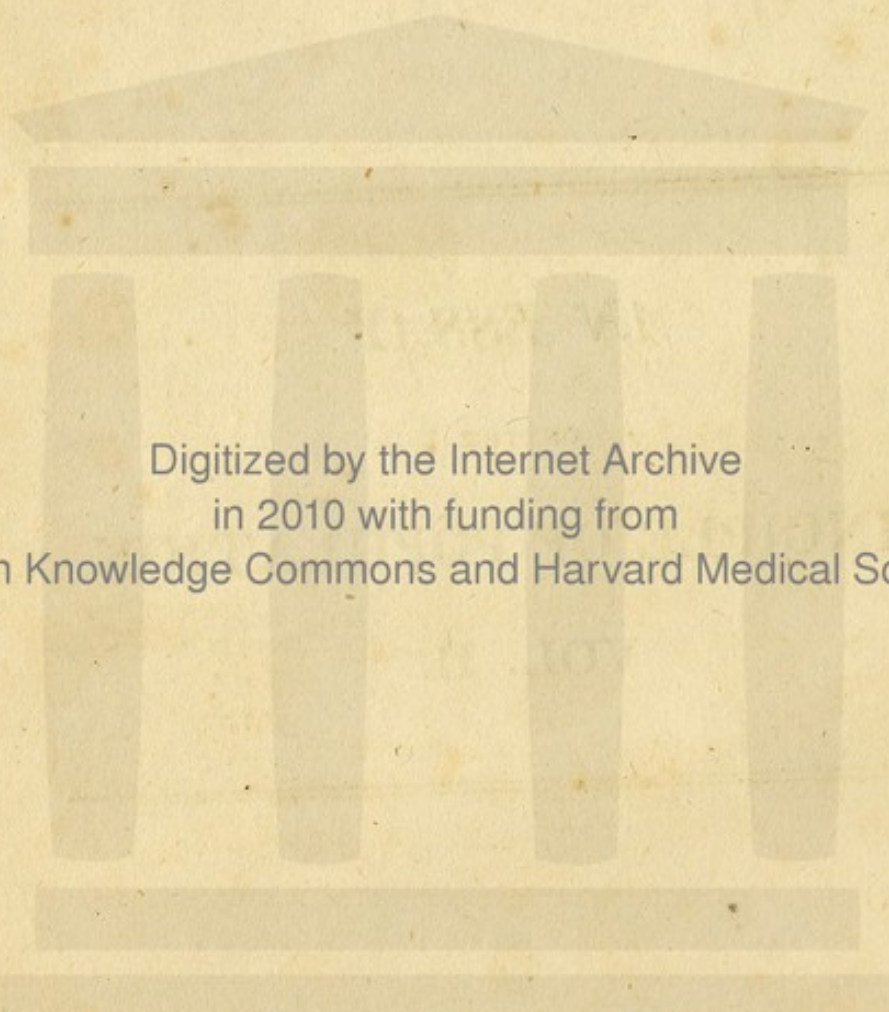
ON THE

PRINCIPLE OF POPULATION.

VOL. II.







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AN ESSAY  
ON THE  
*PRINCIPLE OF POPULATION;*  
OR, A  
VIEW OF ITS PAST AND PRESENT EFFECTS  
ON  
**HUMAN HAPPINESS;**

WITH  
AN INQUIRY INTO OUR PROSPECTS RESPECTING THE  
FUTURE REMOVAL OR MITIGATION OF THE  
EVILS WHICH IT OCCASIONS.

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By *T. R. MALTHUS*, A. M.

LATE FELLOW OF JESUS COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

FIRST AMERICAN, FROM THE THIRD LONDON  
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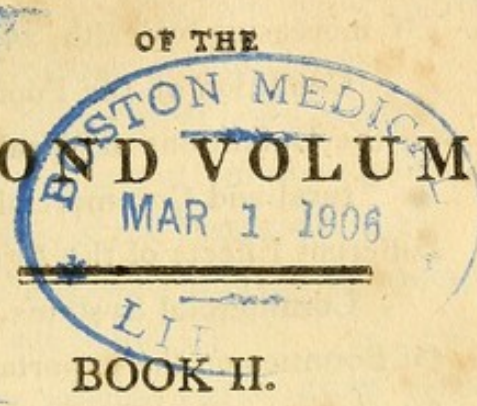
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# CONTENTS

OF THE  
**SECOND VOLUME.**



## BOOK II.

	Page.
CHAP. IX. On the Fruitfulness of Marriages, . . . . .	1
X. Effects of Epidemics on Registers of Births, Deaths, and Marriages, . . . . .	32
XI. General deductions from the preceding view of Society, . . . . .	50

## BOOK III.

OF THE DIFFERENT SYSTEMS OR EXPEDIENTS WHICH HAVE BEEN PROPOSED OR HAVE PREVAILED IN SOCIETY, AS THEY AFFECT THE EVILS ARISING FROM THE PRINCIPLE OF POPULATION.

	Page.
CHAP. I. Of Systems of Equality. Wallace. Condorcet, . . . . .	77
II. Of Systems of Equality. Godwin, . . . . .	97
III. Observations on the Reply of Mr. Godwin, . . . . .	121



	Page.
CHAP. IV. Of Emigration, . . . . .	133
V. Of Poor Laws, . . . . .	148
VI. Subject of Poor Laws, continued,	170
VII. Of increasing Wealth, as it affects the Condition of the Poor, . . . . .	188
VIII. Of the Definitions of Wealth. Agricul- tural and Commercial Systems, . . . . .	206
IX. Different Effects of the Agricultural and Commercial Systems, . . . . .	220
X. Of Bounties on the exportation of Corn,	235
XI. On the prevailing Errors respecting Po- pulation and Plenty, . . . . .	275

## BOOK IV.

### OF OUR FUTURE PROSPECTS RESPECTING THE REMOVAL OR MITIGATION OF THE EVILS ARISING FROM THE PRINCIPLE OF POPULATION.

	Page.
CHAP. I. Of moral Restraint, and our Obligation to practice this Virtue, . . . . .	297
II. Of the Effects which would result to So- ciety from the Prevalence of this Virtue, . . . . .	315
III. Of the only effectual Mode of improving the Condition of the Poor, . . . . .	331
IV. Objections to this mode considered,	343
V. Of the Consequences of pursuing the op- posite Mode, . . . . .	353
VI. Effects of the Knowledge of the Principle Cause of Poverty on Civil Liberty,	367

	Page.
CHAP. VII. Plan of the gradual Abolition of the Poor	
Laws proposed, . . . . .	388
VIII. Of the Modes of correcting the prevailing	
Opinions on Population, . . . . .	408
IX. Of the Direction of our Charity, . . . . .	420
X. Different Plans of improving the Condi-	
tion of the Poor considered, . . . . .	435
XI. Of the Necessity of general Principles on	
this Subject, . . . . .	461
XII. Of our rational Expectations respecting	
the future Improvement of Society, . . . . .	487
Appendix, . . . . .	503









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On the fruitfulness of marriages.

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which lately took place in this country, while it is supposed with reason, that the registry of marriages is nearly correct, it is known with certainty, that there are very great omissions in the births and deaths; and it is probable that similar omissions, though not perhaps to the same extent, prevail in other countries.

To form a judgment of the prolificness of marriages, taken as they occur, including second and third marriages, let us cut off a certain period of the registers of any country, 30 years for instance, and inquire what is the number of births which have been produced by all the marriages included in the period cut off. It is evident, that with the marriages at the beginning of the period will be arranged a number of births proceeding from marriages not included in the period; and at the end, a number of births produced by the marriages included in the period, will be found arranged with the marriages of a succeeding period. Now if we could subtract the former number, and add the latter, we should obtain exactly all the births produced by the marriages of the period, and of course the real prolificness of those marriages. If the population be stationary, the number of births to be added would exactly equal the num-



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On the fruitfulness of marriages.

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ber to be subtracted, and the proportion of births to marriages, as found in the registers, would exactly represent the real prolificness of marriages. But if the population be either increasing or decreasing, the number to be added would never be equal to the number to be subtracted, and the proportion of births to marriages in the registers would never truly represent the prolificness of marriages. In an increasing population the number to be added would evidently be greater than the number to be subtracted, and of course the proportion of births to marriages, as found in the registers, would always be too small to represent the true prolificness of marriages. And the contrary effect would take place in a decreasing population. The question therefore is, what we are to add and what to subtract, when the births and deaths are not equal.

The average proportion of births to marriages in Europe is about 4 to 1. Let us suppose for the sake of illustration, that each marriage yields four children, one every other year.<sup>1</sup> In this

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<sup>1</sup> In the statistical account of Scotland it is said, that the average distance between the children of the same family has been calculated to be about two years.



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On the fruitfulness of marriages.

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case it is evident, that wherever you begin your period in the registers, the marriages of the preceding eight years will only have produced half of their births, and the other half will be arranged with the marriages included in the period, and ought to be subtracted from them. In the same manner, the marriages of the last eight years of the period will only have produced half of their births, and the other half ought to be added. But half of the births of any eight years may be considered as nearly equal to all the births of the succeeding  $3\frac{3}{4}$  years. In instances of the most rapid increase it will rather exceed the births of the next  $3\frac{1}{2}$  years, and in cases of slow increase approach towards the births of the next 4 years. The mean therefore may be taken at 3 years.<sup>1</sup> Consequently if we subtract the births of the first  $3\frac{3}{4}$  years of the period, and add the births of the  $3\frac{3}{4}$  years subsequent to the period, we shall have a number of births nearly equal to the births produced by all the marriages included in the period, and of course the prolificness of these marriages.

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<sup>1</sup>According to the rate of increase which is now taking place in England, the period by calculation would be about  $3\frac{3}{4}$  years.



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On the fruitfulness of marriages.

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But if the population of a country be increasing regularly, and the births, deaths, and marriages continue always to bear the same proportion to each other, and to the whole population, it is evident that all the births of any period will bear the same proportion to all the births of any other period of the same extent, taken a certain number of years later, as the births of any single year to the births of a single year taken the same number of years later; and the same will be true with regard to the marriages. And consequently to estimate the prolificness of marriages we have only to compare the marriages of the present or any other year with the births of a subsequent year taken  $3\frac{3}{4}$  years later.

We have supposed in the present instance, that each marriage yields four births; but the average proportion of births to marriages in Europe is 4 to 1, and as the population of Europe is known to be increasing at present, the prolificness of marriages must be greater than 4. If allowing for this circumstance we take the distance of 4 years instead of  $3\frac{3}{4}$  years, we shall probably be not far from the truth. And though undoubtedly the period will differ in different countries, yet it will not differ so much as we might at first imagine;



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On the fruitfulness of marriages.

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because in countries where the marriages are more prolific, the births generally follow at shorter intervals, and where they are less prolific at longer intervals; and with different degrees of prolificness, the length of the period might still remain the same.<sup>1</sup>

It will follow from these observations, that the more rapid is the increase of population, the more will the real prolificness of marriages exceed the proportion of births to marriages in the registers.

The rule which has been here laid down, attempts to estimate the prolificness of marriages taken as they occur, but this prolificness should be carefully distinguished from the prolificness of first marriages and of married women, and still more from the natural prolificness of women in general, taken at the most favorable age. It is probable that the natural prolificness of women is nearly the same in most parts of the world; but

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<sup>1</sup> In places where there are many exports and imports of people, the calculations will of course be disturbed. In towns, particularly, where there is a frequent change of inhabitants, and where it so often happens that the marriages of the people in the neighboring country are celebrated, the inferences from the proportion of births to marriages are not to be depended on.



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On the fruitfulness of marriages.

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the prolificness of marriages is liable to be affected by a variety of circumstances peculiar to each country; and particularly by the number of late marriages. In all countries the second and third marriages alone form a most important consideration, and materially influence the average proportions. According to Sussmilch, in all Pomerania, from 1748 to 1756 both included, the number of persons who married were 56,956, and of these 10,586 were widows and widowers. According to Busching in Prussia and Silesia for the year 1781, out of 29,808 persons who married, 4,841 were widows and widowers,<sup>2</sup> and consequently the proportion of marriages will be given full one sixth too much. In estimating the prolificness of married women the number of illegitimate births<sup>3</sup> would tend, though in a very slight degree, to counterbalance the overplus of marriages; and as it is found that the number of widowers who marry again is greater than the number of widows, the whole of the correction should not on this ac-

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<sup>1</sup> Gottliche Ordnung, vol. i. tables, p. 98.

<sup>2</sup> Sussmilch, vol. iii. tables, p. 95.

<sup>3</sup> In France before the revolution the proportion of illegitimate births was  $\frac{1}{47}$  of the whole number. Probably it is less in this country.



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On the fruitfulness of marriages.

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count be applied; but in estimating the proportion of the born which lives to marry from a comparison of the marriages and deaths, which is what we are now about to proceed to, the whole of this correction is always necessary.

To find the proportion of the born which lives to marry, we must first subtract one sixth from the marriages, and then compare the marriages of any year so corrected, with the deaths in the registers at such a distance from them, as is equal to the difference between the average age of marriage and the average age of death.

Thus, for example, if the proportion of marriages to deaths were as 1 to 3, then subtracting one sixth from the marriages this proportion would be as 5 to 18, and the number of persons marrying annually the first time would be to the number of annual deaths as 10 to 18. Supposing in this case the mean age of death to be ten years later than the mean age of marriage, in which ten years the deaths would increase  $\frac{1}{3}$ , then the number of persons marrying annually the first time, compared with the number of annual deaths, at the distance of the difference between the age of marriage and the age of death, would be as 10 to 20; from which it would follow that exactly half of the born lived to marry.



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On the fruitfulness of marriages.

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The grounds of this rule will appear from the following observations on registers in general.

In a country in which the population is stationary, the contemporary deaths compared with the births will be equal, and will of course represent the deaths of all the born; and the marriages, or more properly the number of married persons compared with both the births and deaths, will, when a proper allowance has been made for second and third marriages, represent the true proportion of the born which lives to marry. But if the population be either increasing or decreasing, and the births, deaths, and marriages increasing or decreasing in the same ratio, then the deaths compared with the births, and the marriages compared with the births and deaths, will cease to express what they did before, unless the events which are contemporary in the registers are also contemporary in the order of nature.

In the first place it is evident that death can not be contemporary with birth, but must on an average be always at such a distance from it, as is equal to the expectation of life, or the mean age of death. Consequently though the deaths of all the born are, or will be, in the registers, where there are no emigrations, yet, except

*vol. ii.*



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On the fruitfulness of marriages.

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when the population is stationary, the contemporary periods of births and deaths never show this, and we can only expect to find the deaths equal to the births, if the deaths be taken at such a distance from the births in the registers as is equal to the expectation of life. And in fact, thus taken the births and deaths will always be found equal.

Secondly, the marriages of any year can never be contemporary with the births from which they have resulted, but must always be at such a distance from them as is equal to the average age of marriage. If the population be increasing, the marriages of the present year have resulted from a smaller number of births than the births of the present year, and of course the marriages, compared with the contemporary births, will always be too few to represent the proportion of the born which lives to marry, and the contrary will take place if the population be decreasing; and to find this proportion, we must compare the marriages of any year with the births of a previous year at the distance of the average age of marriage.

Thirdly, the average age of marriage will almost always be much nearer to the average age of death than marriage is to birth; and consequently the annual marriages compared with the contemporary



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On the fruitfulness of marriages.

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annual deaths will much more nearly represent the true proportion of the born living to marry, than the marriages compared with the births.<sup>1</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Price very justly says (Observ. on Reserv. Pay. vol. i. p. 269, 4th edit.) “that the general effect of an  
“ increase while it is going on in a country is to render  
“ the proportion of persons marrying annually, to the an-  
“ nual deaths *greater* and to the annual births *less* than  
“ the true proportion marrying out of any given number  
“ born. This proportion generally lies between the other  
“ two proportions, but always nearest the first.” In these observations I entirely agree with him, but in a note to this passage he appears to me to fall into an error. He says, that if the prolificness of marriages be increased (the *probabilities of life* and the *encouragement to marriage* remaining the same) both the annual births and burials would increase in proportion to the annual weddings. That the proportion of annual births would increase is certainly true, and I here acknowledge my error in differing from Dr. Price on this point in my last edition; but I still think that the proportion of burials to weddings would not necessarily increase under the circumstances here supposed.

The reason why the proportion of births to weddings increases is, that the births occurring in the order of nature considerably prior to the marriages which result from them, their increase will affect the register of births much more than the contemporary register of marriages. But the same reason by no means holds with regard to the deaths, the average age of which is generally later than the age of marriage. And in this case, after the first interval between birth and marriage, the permanent effect would be, that the register of marriages would be more



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On the fruitfulness of marriages.

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marriages compared with the births, after a proper allowance has been made for second and third marriages, can never represent the true proportion of the born living to marry, unless when the population is absolutely stationary; but although the population be increasing or decreasing according to any ratio, yet the average age of marriage may still be equal to the average of death; and in this case the marriages in the registers compared with the contemporary deaths, after the correction for second and third marriages, will represent the true proportion of the born living to marry.<sup>1</sup>

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affected by the increase of births, than the contemporary register of deaths; and consequently the proportion of the burials to the weddings would be rather decreased than increased. From not attending to the circumstance that the average age of marriage may often be considerably earlier than the mean age of death, the general conclusion also which Dr. Price draws in this note does not appear to be strictly correct.

<sup>1</sup> The reader will be aware, that as all the born must die, deaths may in some cases be taken as synonymous with births. If we had the deaths registered of all the births which had taken place in a country during a certain period, distinguishing the married from the unmarried, it is evident, that the number of those who died married, compared with the whole number of deaths, would accurately express the proportion of the *births* which had lived to marry.



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On the fruitfulness of marriages.

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Generally however, when an increase of population is going forwards, the average age of marriage is less than the average of death, and then the proportion of marriages compared with the contemporary deaths, will be too great to represent the true proportion of the born living to marry, and to find this proportion, we must compare the marriages of any particular year with the deaths of a subsequent year at such a distance from it in the registers, as is equal to the difference between the average age of marriage and the average age of death.

There is no absolutely necessary connection between the average age of marriage and the average age of death. In a country the resources of which will allow of a rapid increase of population, the expectation of life, or the average age of death may be extremely high, and yet the age of marriage be very early, and the marriages then, compared with the contemporary deaths in the registers, would, even after the correction for second and third marriages, be very much too great to represent the true proportion of the born living to marry. In such a country we might suppose the average age of death to be 40, and the age of marriage only 20; and in this case, which however



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On the fruitfulness of marriages.

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would be a rare one, the distance between marriage and death would be the same as between birth and marriage.

If we apply these observations to registers in general, though we shall seldom be able to obtain accurately the true proportion of the born living to marry, on account of our not knowing the average age of marriage, yet we may draw many useful inferences from the information which they contain, and reconcile many of the difficulties with which they are accompanied; and it will generally be found, that in those countries where the marriages bear a very large proportion to the deaths, we shall see reason to believe that the age of marriage is much earlier than the average age of death.

In the Russian table for the year 1799, produced by Mr. Tooke, and referred to p. 372, the proportion of marriages to deaths appeared to be as 100 to 200. When corrected for second and third marriages, by subtracting one sixth from the marriages it will be as 100 to 252. From which it would seem to follow that out of 252 births 200 of them had lived to marry; but we can scarcely conceive any country to be so healthy, as that 200 out of 252 should live to marry. If however we suppose what seems to be probable,



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On the fruitfulness of marriages.

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that the age of marriage in Russia is 15 years earlier than the expectation of life or the average age of death, then, in order to find the proportion which lives to marry, we must compare the marriages of the present year, with the deaths 15 years later. Supposing the births to deaths to be (as stated p. 372) 183 to 100, and the mortality 1 in 50, the yearly increase will be about  $\frac{1}{50}$  of the population; and consequently in 15 years the deaths will have increased a little above .28; and the result will be, that the marriages compared with the deaths 15 years later, will be as 100 to 322. Out of 322 births it will appear that 200 live to marry, which from the known healthiness of children in Russia, and the early age of marriage, is not an improbable proportion. The proportion of marriages to births, being as 100 to 385, the prolificness of marriages, according to the rule laid down, will be as 100 to 411, or each marriage will on an average, including second and third marriages, produce 4.11 births.

The lists given in the earlier part of the chapter on Russia are probably not correct. It is suspected with reason, that there are considerable omissions both in the births and deaths, but particularly in the deaths, and consequently the proportion



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On the fruitfulness of marriages.

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of marriages is given too great. There may also be a further reason for this large proportion of marriages in Russia. The empress Catherine, in her instructions for a new code of laws, notices a custom prevalent among the peasants, of parents obliging their sons, while actually children, to marry full grown women in order to save the expense of buying female slaves. These women, it is said, generally become the mistresses of the father, and the custom is particularly reprobated by the empress as prejudicial to population. This practice would naturally occasion a more than usual number of second and third marriages, and of course more than usually increase the proportion of marriages to births in the registers.

In the transactions of the society at Philadelphia, (vol. iii. No. vii. p. 25) there is a paper by Mr. Barton, entitled *Observations on the probability of life in the United States*, in which it appears that the proportion of marriages to births is as 1 to  $4\frac{1}{2}$ . He mentions indeed  $6\frac{1}{2}$ , but his numbers give only  $4\frac{1}{2}$ . As however this proportion was taken principally from towns it is probable, that the births are given too low, and I think we may very safely take as many as five for the average of towns and country. According to the same au-



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On the fruitfulness of marriages.

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thority, the mortality is about 1 in 45, and if the population doubles every 25 years, the births would be about 1 in 20. The proportion of marriages to deaths would on these suppositions be as 1 to  $2\frac{2}{5}$ ; and corrected for second and third marriages as 1 to 2.7 nearly. But we cannot suppose that out of 27 births 20 should live to marry. If however the age of marriage be ten years earlier than the mean age of death, which is highly probable, we must compare the marriages of the present year with the deaths ten years later, in order to obtain the true proportion of the born which lives to marry. According to the progress of population here stated, the increase of the deaths in ten years would be a little above .3, and the result will be that 200 out of 351, or about 20 out of 35, instead of 20 out of 27 will live to marry.<sup>1</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> If the proportions mentioned by Mr. Barton be just, the expectation of life in America is considerably less than in Russia, which is the reason that I have taken only 10 years for the difference between the age of marriage and the age of death, instead of 15 years, as in Russia. According to the mode adopted by Dr. Price, (vol. i. p. 272.) of estimating the expectation of life in countries the population of which is increasing, this expectation in Russia would be about 38, (births  $\frac{1}{25}$ , deaths  $\frac{1}{30}$ , mean  $\frac{1}{38}$ .) and supposing the age of marriage to be 23, the difference would be 15.



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 On the fruitfulness of marriages.
 

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marriages compared with the births 4 years later, according to the rule laid down, will in this case give 5.58 for the prolificness of marriages. The calculations of Mr. Barton respecting the age to which half of the born live cannot possibly be applicable to America in general. The registers on which they are founded are taken from Philadelphia, and one or two small towns and villages, which do not appear to be so healthy as the moderate towns of Europe, and therefore can form no criterion for the country in general.

In England the average proportion of marriages to births appears of late years to have been about 100 to 350. If we add  $\frac{1}{7}$  to the births, instead of  $\frac{1}{8}$ , which in the chapter on *the Checks to Population in England* I conjectured might be nearly the amount of the omissions in the births and deaths, this will allow for the circumstance of illegitimate births; and the marriages will then be to the births as 1 to 4, to the deaths as 1 to 3. Corrected for second and third marriages, the

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In America the expectation of life would, upon the same principles, be only  $32\frac{1}{2}$ , (births  $\frac{1}{20}$ , deaths  $\frac{1}{4}$ , mean  $3\frac{1}{22}$ ;) and supposing the age of marriage  $22\frac{1}{2}$  the difference would be 10.



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On the fruitfulness of marriages.

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proportion of marriages to deaths will be as 1 to 3.6. Supposing the age of marriage in England about 7 years earlier than the mean age of death, the increase in these 7 years according to the present progress of population of  $\frac{1}{120}$  yearly would be .06, and the proportion living to marry would be 200 out of 381, or rather more than half.<sup>1</sup> The marriages compared with the births 4 years later will give 4.136 for the prolificness of marriages.

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<sup>1</sup> Births  $\frac{1}{30}$ , deaths  $\frac{1}{40}$ , mean  $\frac{1}{35}$ , and on the supposition that the age of marriage is 28, the difference would be 7. With regard to the allowance which I have made here and in a former chapter for the omissions in the births and deaths, I wish to observe, that as I had no very certain and satisfactory grounds on which to proceed, it may be incorrect, and perhaps too great, though assuming this allowance the mortality appears to be extraordinarily small considering the circumstances of the country. It should be remarked however, that in countries which are different in their rates of increase, the annual mortality is a very incorrect criterion of their comparative healthiness. When an increase is going forward the portion of the population which becomes extinct every year is very different from the expectation of life, as has appeared very clearly in the cases of Russia and America just noticed. And as the increase of population in England has of late years been more rapid than in France, this circumstance will undoubtedly contribute in part to the great difference in the annual mortality.



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On the fruitfulness of marriages.

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These instances will be sufficient to show the mode of applying the rules which have been given in order to form a judgment, from registers, of the prolificness of marriages, and the proportion of the born which lives to marry.

It will be observed how very important the correction for second and third marriages is. Supposing each marriage to yield 4 births, and the births and deaths to be equal, it would at first appear necessary that in order to produce this effect, exactly half of the born should live to marry; but if on account of the second and third marriages we subtract  $\frac{1}{2}$  from the marriages, and then compare them with the deaths, the proportion will be as 1 to  $4\frac{1}{2}$ , and it will appear that instead of one half it will only be necessary that 2 children out of  $4\frac{1}{2}$  should live to marry. Upon the same principle if the births were to the marriages as 4 to 1, and exactly half of the born live to marry, it might be supposed at first that the population would be stationary, but if we subtract 1 from the marriages, and then take the proportion of deaths to marriages as 4 to 1, we shall find that the deaths in the registers compared with the marriages would only be as  $3\frac{1}{2}$  to 1; and the births would be to the deaths



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On the fruitfulness of marriages.

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as 4 to  $3\frac{1}{3}$ , or 12 to 10, which is a tolerably fast rate of increase.

Three causes appear to operate in producing an excess of the births above the deaths, 1. the prolificness of marriages; 2. the proportion of the born which lives to marry, and 3. the earliness of these marriages compared with the expectation of life, or the shortness of a generation by marriage and birth, compared with the passing away of a generation by death. This latter cause Dr. Price seems to have omitted to consider. For though he very justly says, that the rate of increase, supposing the prolific powers the same, depends upon the encouragement to marriage and the expectation of a child just born; yet in explaining himself, he seems to consider an increase in the expectation of life, merely as it affects the increase of the number of persons who reach maturity and marry, and not as it affects, besides, the distance between the age of marriage and the age of death. But it is evident that if there be any principle of increase, that is, if one marriage in the present generation yields more than one in the next, including second and third marriages, the quicker these generations are repeated, compared with the passing



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On the fruitfulness of marriages.

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away of a generation by death, the more rapid will be the increase.

A favorable change in either of these three causes the other two remaining the same, will clearly produce an effect upon population, and occasion a greater excess of the births above the deaths in the registers. With regard to the two first causes, though an increase in either of them will produce the same kind of effect on the proportion of births to deaths, yet their effects on the proportion of marriages to births will be in opposite directions. The greater is the prolificness of marriages the greater will be the proportion of births to marriages, and the greater is the number of the born which lives to be married, the less will be the proportion of births to marriages.<sup>1</sup> Con-

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Price himself has insisted strongly upon this, (vol. i. p. 270, 4th edit.) and yet he says, (p. 275.) that healthfulness and prolificness are probably causes of increase seldom separated, and refers to registers of births and weddings as a proof of it. But though these causes may undoubtedly exist together, yet if Dr. Price's reasoning be just, such coexistence cannot possibly be inferred from the lists of births and weddings. Indeed the two countries, Sweden and France, to the registers of which he refers as showing the prolificness of their marriages, are known to be by no means remarkably healthy; and the registers of towns to which he alludes, though they



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On the fruitfulness of marriages.

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sequently if within certain limits, the prolificness of marriages and the number of the born living to marry increase at the same time, the proportion of births to marriages in the registers may still remain unaltered. And this is the reason why the registers of different countries with respect to births and marriages are often found the same under very different rates of increase.

The proportion of births to marriages, indeed, forms no criterion whatever, by which to judge of the rate of increase. The population of a country may be stationary or declining with a proportion as 5 to 1, and may be increasing with some rapidity with a proportion as 4 to 1. But given the

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may show as he intends, a want of prolificness, yet according to his previous reasoning show at the same time great healthiness, and therefore ought not to be produced as a proof of the absence of both. The general fact that Dr. Price wishes to establish may still remain true, that country situations are both more healthy and more prolific than towns; but this fact certainly cannot be inferred merely from lists of births and marriages. With regard to the different countries of Europe, it will generally be found, that those are the most healthy which are the least prolific, and those the most prolific which are the least healthy. The earlier age of marriage in unhealthy countries is the obvious reason of this fact.



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On the fruitfulness of marriages.

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rate of increase which may be obtained from other sources, it is clearly desirable to find in the registers a small, rather than a large proportion of births to marriages; because the smaller this proportion is, the greater must be the proportion of the born which lives to marry, and of course the more healthy must be the country.

Crome<sup>1</sup> observes that when the marriages of a country yield less than 4 births, the population is in a very precarious state, and he estimates the prolificness of marriages by the proportion of yearly births to marriages. If this observation were just, the population of many countries of Europe would be in a precarious state, as in many countries the proportion of births to marriages in the registers is rather below than above 4 to 1. It has been shown in what manner this proportion in the registers should be corrected in order to make it a just representation of the prolificness of marriages, and if a large part of the born live to marry, and the age of marriage be considerably earlier than the expectation of life, such a proportion in the registers is by no means inconsistent with a rapid increase. In Russia it has appeared

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<sup>1</sup> Ueber die Bevolkerung der Europais. Staat. p. 91.



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On the fruitfulness of marriages.

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that the proportion of births to marriages is less than 4 to 1, and yet its population increases faster than that of any other nation in Europe. In England the population increases more rapidly than in France, and yet in England the proportion of births to marriages, when allowance has been made for omissions, is about 4 to 1, in France  $4\frac{4}{7}$  to 1. To occasion so rapid a progress as that which has taken place in America, it will indeed be necessary that all the causes of increase should be called into action; and if the prolificness of marriages be very great, the proportion of births to marriages will certainly be above 4 to 1; but in all ordinary cases, where the whole power of procreation has not room to expand itself, it is surely better that the actual increase should arise from that degree of healthiness in the early stages of life, which causes a great proportion of the born to live to maturity and to marry, than from a great degree of prolificness accompanied by a great mortality. And consequently in all ordinary cases, a proportion of births to marriages as 4 or less than 4 to 1 cannot be considered as an unfavorable sign.

It should be observed that it does not follow that the marriages of a country are early, or that



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On the fruitfulness of marriages.

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the preventive check to population does not prevail, because the greater part of the born lives to marry. In such countries as Norway and Switzerland, where half of the born live to above 40, it is evident that though rather more than half live to marry, a large portion of the people between the ages of 20 and 40 would be living in an unmarried state, and the preventive check would appear to prevail to a great degree. In England it is probable that half of the born live to above 35, and though rather more than half live to marry, the preventive check might prevail considerably (as we know it does,) though not to the same extent as in Norway and Switzerland.

The preventive check is perhaps best measured by the smallness of the proportion of yearly births to the whole population. The proportion of yearly marriages to the population is only a just criterion in countries similarly circumstanced, but is incorrect, where there is a difference in the prolificness of marriages, or in the proportion of the population under the age of puberty, and in the rate of increase. If all the marriages of a country, be they few or many, take place young, and be consequently prolific, it is evident that to produce the same proportion of births, a smaller proportion of



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On the fruitfulness of marriages.

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marriages will be necessary; or with the same proportion of marriages a greater proportion of births will be produced. This latter case seems to be applicable to France, where both the births and deaths are greater than in Sweden, though the proportion of marriages is nearly the same or rather less. And when in two countries compared, one of them has a much greater part of its population under the age of puberty than the other, it is evident, that any general proportion of the yearly marriages to the whole population will not imply the same operation of the preventive check among those of a marriageable age.

It is in part the small proportion of the population under the age of puberty, as well as the influx of strangers, that occasions in towns a greater proportion of marriages than in the country, although there can be little doubt that the preventive check prevails most in towns. The converse of this will also be true, and consequently in such a country as America where half of the population is under sixteen, the proportion of yearly marriages will not accurately express how little the preventive check really operates.

But on the supposition of nearly the same natural prolificness in the women of most coun-



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On the fruitfulness of marriages.

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tries, the smallness of the proportion of births will generally indicate, with tolerable exactness, the degree in which the preventive check prevails, whether arising principally from late, and consequently unprolific marriages, or from a large proportion of the population above the age of puberty dying unmarried.

That the reader may see at once the rate of increase, and the period of doubling, which would result from any observed proportion of births to deaths, and of these to the whole population, I subjoin two tables from Sussmilch, calculated by Euler, which I believe are very correct. The first is confined to the supposition of a mortality of 1 in 36, and therefore can only be applied to countries where such a mortality is known to take place. The other is general, depending solely upon the proportion which the excess of the births above the burials bears to the whole population, and therefore may be applied universally to all countries, whatever may be the degree of their mortality.

It will be observed, that when the proportion between the births and burials is given, the period of doubling will be shorter, the greater the mortality; because the births as well as deaths are in-



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On the fruitfulness of marriages.

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creased by this supposition, and they both bear a greater proportion to the whole population than if the mortality were smaller, and there were a greater number of people in advanced life.

The mortality of Russia, according to Mr. Tooke, is 1 in 58, and the proportion of births 1 in 26. Allowing for the omissions in the burials, if we assume the mortality to be 1 in 52, then the births will be to the deaths as 2 to 1, and the proportion which the excess of births bears to the whole population will be  $\frac{1}{52}$ .<sup>1</sup> According to Table II. the period of doubling will, in this case, be about 36 years. But if we were to keep the proportion of births to deaths as 2 to 1, and suppose a mortality of 1 in 36, as in Table I. the excess of births above the burials would be  $\frac{1}{36}$  of the whole population, and the period of doubling would be only 25 years.

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<sup>1</sup> The proportions here mentioned are different from those which have been taken from the additional table in Mr. Tooke's second edition; but they are assumed here as more easily and clearly illustrating the subject.



## TABLE I.

*When in any country there are 100,000 persons living, and the mortality is 1 in 36.*

<i>If the proportion of deaths to births be as</i>	<i>Then the excess of the births will be</i>	<i>The proportion of the excess of the births, to the whole population, will be</i>	<i>And therefore the period of doubling will be</i>
11	277	$\frac{1}{360}$	250 years.
12	555	$\frac{1}{180}$	125
13	833	$\frac{1}{120}$	$83\frac{1}{2}$
14	1110	$\frac{1}{90}$	$62\frac{3}{4}$
15	1388	$\frac{1}{72}$	$50\frac{1}{4}$
16	1666	$\frac{1}{60}$	42
17	1943	$\frac{1}{51}$	$35\frac{3}{4}$
18	2221	$\frac{1}{45}$	$31\frac{2}{3}$
19	2499	$\frac{1}{40}$	28
20	2777	$\frac{1}{36}$	$25\frac{3}{10}$
22	3332	$\frac{1}{30}$	$21\frac{1}{8}$
25	4165	$\frac{1}{24}$	17
30	5554	$\frac{1}{18}$	$12\frac{4}{5}$

## TABLE II.

<i>The proportion of the excess of births above the deaths, to the whole of the living.</i>	<i>Periods of doubling in years, and ten thousandth parts.</i>	<i>The proportion of the excess of births above the deaths, to the whole of the living.</i>	<i>Periods of doubling in years, and ten thousandth parts.</i>
10	7.2722	21	14.9000
11	7.9659	22	15.5932
12	8.6595	23	16.2864
13	9.3530	24	16.9797
14	10.0465	25	17.6729
15	10.7400	26	18.3662
16	11.4333	27	19.0594
17	12.1266	28	19.7527
18	12.8200	29	20.4458
19	13.5133	30	21.1391
20	14.2066		



## TABLE II, (continued.)

<i>The proportion of the excess of births above the deaths, to the whole of the living.</i>	<i>Periods of doubling in years, and ten thousandth parts.</i>	<i>The proportion of the excess of births above the deaths, to the whole of the living.</i>	<i>Periods of doubling in years, and ten thousandth parts.</i>		
1 : {	32 34 36 38 40 42 44 46 48 50	22.5255 23.9119 25.2983 26.6847 28.0711 29.4574 30.8438 32.2302 33.6165 35.0029	1 : {	210 220 230 240 250 260 270 280 290 300	145.9072 152.8387 159.7702 166.7017 173.6332 180.5647 187.4961 194.4275 201.3590 208.2905
1 : {	55 60 65 70 75 80 85 90 95 100	38.4687 41.9345 45.4003 48.8661 52.3318 55.7977 59.2634 62.7292 66.1950 69.6607	1 : {	310 320 330 340 350 360 370 380 390 400	215.2220 222.1535 229.0850 236.0164 242.9479 249.8794 256.8109 263.7425 270.6740 277.6055
1 : {	110 120 130 140 150 160 170 180 190 200	76.5923 83.5230 90.4554 97.3868 104.3183 111.2598 118.1813 125.1128 132.0443 138.9757	1 : {	410 420 430 440 450 460 470 480 490 500	284.5370 291.4685 298.4000 305.3314 312.2629 319.1943 326.1258 333.0573 339.9888 346.9202
			1 : 1000	693.49	



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## CHAPTER X.

### *Effects of Epidemics on Registers of Births, Deaths, and Marriages.*

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IT appears clearly, from the very valuable tables of mortality which Sussmilch has collected, and which include periods of 50 or 60 years, that all the countries of Europe are subject to periodical sickly seasons, which check their increase; and very few are exempt from those great and wasting plagues, which, once or twice, perhaps, in a century, sweep off the third or fourth part of their inhabitants. The way in which these periods of mortality affect all the general proportions of births, deaths, and marriages, is strikingly illustrated in the tables for Prussia and Lithuania, from the year 1692 to the year 1757.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sussmilch, *Gottliche Ordnung*, vol. i. table xxi. p. 83. of the tables.



### TABLE III.

Annual Average.	Marriages.	BIRTHS.	DEATHS.	Proportion of marriages to births.	Proportion of deaths to births.
5 yrs. to 1697	5747	19715	14862	10 : 34	100 : 132
5 yrs. 1702	6070	24112	14474	10 : 39	100 : 165
6 yrs. 1708	6082	26896	16430	10 : 44	100 : 163
In 1709 & 1710	a plague	Number destroyed in 2 years.	247733		
In 1711	12028	32522	10131	10 : 27	100 : 320
In 1712	6267	22970	10445	10 : 36	100 : 220
5 yrs. to 1716	4968	21603	11984	10 : 43	100 : 180
5 yrs. 1721	4324	21396	12039	10 : 49	100 : 177
5 yrs. 1726	4719	21452	12863	10 : 45	100 : 166
5 yrs. 1731	4808	29554	12825	10 : 42	100 : 160
4 yrs. 1735	5424	22692	15475	10 : 41	100 : 146
In 1736	5280	21859	26371	Epidemic years.	
In 1737	5765	18930	24480		
5 yrs. to 1742	5582	22099	15255	10 : 39	100 : 144
4 yrs. 1746	5469	25275	15117	10 : 46	100 : 167
5 yrs. 1751	6423	28235	17272	10 : 43	100 : 163
5 yrs. 1756	5599	28392	19154	10 : 50	100 : 148
In the 16 yrs. before the plague,	95585	380516	245763	10 : 39	10 : 154
In 46 yrs. after the plague,	248777	1083872	690324	10 : 43	100 : 157
In 62 good yrs.	344361	1464388 936087	936087	10 : 43	100 : 156
More born than died,		528301			
In the 2 plague years,	5477	23977	247733		
In all the 64 yrs. including the plague,	340838	1488365 1183820	1183820	10 : 43	100 : 125
More born than died,		304745			



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Effects of epidemics on registers

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The table, from which this is copied, contains the marriages, births, and deaths, for every particular year during the whole period; but to bring it into a smaller compass, I have retained only the general average drawn from the shorter periods of five and four years, except where the numbers for the individual years presented any fact worthy of particular observation. The year 1711, immediately succeeding the great plague, is not included by Sussmilch in any general average; but he has given the particular numbers, and if they be accurate they show the very sudden and prodigious effect of a great mortality on the number of marriages.

Sussmilch calculates that above one third of the people was destroyed by the plague; and yet, notwithstanding this great diminution of the population, it will appear by a reference to the table, that the number of marriages in the year 1711 was very nearly double the average of the six years preceding the plague.<sup>1</sup> To produce this ef-

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<sup>1</sup> The number of people before the plague, according to Sussmilch's calculation, (vol. i. ch. ix. sect. 173.) was 570,000 from which if we subtract 247,733, the number dying in the plague, the remainder 322,267 will be the population after the plague; which, divided by the



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of births, deaths, and marriages.

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fect we must suppose that almost all who were at the age of puberty were induced, from the demand for labor, and the number of vacant employments, immediately to marry. This immense number of marriages in the year could not possibly be accompanied by a great proportional number of births, because we cannot suppose that the new marriages could each yield more than one birth in the year, and the rest must come from the marriages which had continued unbroken through the plague. We cannot therefore be surprised that the proportion of births to marriages in this year should be only 2.7 to 1, or 27 to 10. But though the proportion of births to marriages could not be great, yet on account of the extraordinary number of marriages, the absolute number of births must be great; and as the number of deaths would naturally be small, the proportion of births to deaths is prodigious, being 320 to 100; an excess of

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number of marriages and the number of births for the year 1711, makes the marriages about one twenty-sixth part of the population, and the births about one tenth part. Such extraordinary proportions could only occur in any country, in an individual year. If they were to continue, they would double the population in less than ten years.



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Effects of epidemics on registers

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births as great, perhaps, as has ever been known in America.

In the next year, 1712, the number of marriages must of course diminish exceedingly, because, nearly all who were at the age of puberty having married the year before, the marriages of this year would be supplied principally by those who had arrived at this age, subsequent to the plague. Still however, as all who were marriageable had not probably married the year before, the number of marriages in the year 1712 is great in proportion to the population; and though not much more than half of the number which took place during the preceding year, is greater than the average number in the last period before the plague. The proportion of births to marriages in 1712, though greater than in the preceding year on account of the smaller comparative number of marriages, is, with reference to other countries, not great, being, as 3.6 to 1, or 36 to 10. But the proportion of births to deaths, though less than in the preceding year, when so very large a proportion of the people married, is, with reference to other countries, still unusually great, being as 220 to 100; an excess of births which, calculated on a mortality of 1 in 36, would double the



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of births, deaths, and marriages.

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population of a country (according to Table I. page 30) in  $21\frac{1}{8}$  years.

From this period the number of annual marriages begins to be regulated by the diminished population, and of course to sink considerably below the average number of marriages before the plague, depending principally on the number of persons rising annually to a marriageable state. In the year 1720, about nine or ten years after the plague, the number of annual marriages, either from accident, or the beginning operation of the preventive check, is the smallest; and it is at this time that the proportion of births to marriages rises very high. In the period from 1717 to 1721 the proportion, as appears by the Table, is 49 to 10; and in the particular years 1719 and 1720, it is 50 to 10 and 55 to 10.

Sussmilch draws the attention of his readers to the fruitfulness of marriages in Prussia after the plague, and mentions the proportion of 50 annual births to 10 annual marriages as a proof of it. There are the best reasons, from the general average, for supposing that the marriages in Prussia at this time were very fruitful; but certainly the proportion of this individual year, or even period, is not a sufficient proof of it, being evidently caused by a smaller number of marriages taking



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Effects of epidemics on registers

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place in the year, and not by a greater number of births.<sup>1</sup> In the two years immediately succeeding the plague, when the excess of births above the deaths was so astonishing, the births bore a small proportion to the marriages, and according to the usual mode of calculating, it would have followed that each marriage yielded only 2.7 or 3.6 children. In the last period of the table, from 1752 to 1756, the births are to the marriages as 5 to 1, and in the individual year 1756, as 6.1 to 1; and yet during this period, the births are to the deaths, only as 148 to 100, which could not have been the case, if the high proportion of births to marriages had indicated a much greater number of births than usual, instead of a smaller number of marriages.

The variations in the proportion of births to deaths, in the different periods of the 64 years included in the table, deserve particular attention. If we were to take an average of the four years immediately succeeding the plague, the births would be to the deaths in the proportion of above 22 to 10, which supposing the mortality to be 1 in

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<sup>1</sup> *Susmilch, Gottliche Ordnung*, vol. i. c. v. s. lxxxvi. p. 175.



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of births, deaths, and marriages.

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36 would double the population in less than 21 years. If we take the 20 years from 1711 to 1731, the average proportion of the births to deaths will appear to be about 17 to 10, a proportion which (according to Table I. page 30) would double the population in about 35 years. But if instead of 20 years we were to take the whole period of 64 years, the average proportion of births to deaths turns out to be but a little more than 12 to 10, a proportion which would not double the population in less than 125 years. If we were to include the mortality of the plague, or even of the epidemic years 1736 and 1737, in too short a period, the deaths might exceed the births, and the population would appear to be decreasing.

Sussmilch thinks that instead of 1 in 36, the mortality in Prussia after the plague might be 1 in 38; and it may appear perhaps to some of my readers, that the plenty occasioned by such an event ought to make a still greater difference. Dr. Short has particularly remarked that an extraordinary healthiness generally succeeds any very great mortality;<sup>1</sup> and I have no doubt that the observation is just comparing similar ages together. But

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<sup>1</sup> History of air, seasons, &c. vol. ii. p. 344.



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Effects of epidemics on registers

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under the most favorable circumstances, infants under three years are more subject to death than at other ages; and the extraordinary proportion of children which usually follows a very great mortality counterbalances at first the natural healthiness of the period, and prevents it from making much difference in the general mortality.

If we divide the population of Prussia after the plague by the number of deaths in the year 1711, it will appear that the mortality was nearly 1 in 31, and was therefore increased rather than diminished, owing to the prodigious number of children born in that year. But this greater mortality would certainly cease as soon as these children began to rise into the firmer stages of life; and then probably Sussmilch's observations would be just. In general however, we shall observe, that a great previous mortality produces a more sensible effect on the births than on the deaths. By referring to the table it will appear, that the number of annual deaths regularly increases with the increasing population, and nearly keeps up the same relative proportion all the way through. But the number of annual births is not very different during the whole period, though, in this time, the population had more than doubled itself; and therefore the



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of births, deaths, and marriages.

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*proportion* of births to the whole population, at first, and at last, must have changed in an extraordinary degree.

It will appear therefore how liable we should be to err in assuming a given proportion of births for the purpose of estimating the past population of any country. In the present instance it would have led to the conclusion, that the population was scarcely diminished by the plague, although from the number of deaths it was known to be diminished one third.

Variations of the same kind, though not in the same degree, appear in the proportions of births, deaths, and marriages, in all the tables which Sussmilch has collected ; and as writers on these subjects have been too apt to form calculations for past and future times from the proportions of a few years, it may be useful to draw the attention of the reader to a few more instances of such variations.

In the churmark of Brandenburgh,<sup>1</sup> during 15 years ending with 1712, the proportion of births to deaths was nearly 17 to 10. For 6 years ending with 1718, the proportion sunk to

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<sup>1</sup> Sussmilch's *Gottliche Ordnung*, vol. i. Tables, p. 88.  
vol. ii.



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Effects of epidemics on registers

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13 to 10; for four years ending with 1752, it was only 11 to 10; and for 4 years ending with 1756, 12 to 10. For 3 years ending with 1759, the deaths very greatly exceeded the births. The proportion of the births to the whole population is not given; but it is not probable that the great variations observable in the proportion of births to deaths should have arisen solely from the variations in the deaths. The proportion of births to marriages is tolerably uniform, the extremes being only 38 to 10, and 35 to 10, and the mean about 37 to 10. In this table no very great epidemics occur till the 3 years beginning with 1757, and beyond this period the lists are not continued.

In the dukedom of Pomerania,<sup>1</sup> the average proportion of births to deaths for 60 years from 1694 to 1756 both included, was 138 to 100; but in some of the periods of six years it was as high as 177 to 100, and 155 to 100. In others it sunk as low as 124 to 100, and 130 to 100. The extremes of the proportions of births to marriages in the different periods of 5 and 6 years were 36 to 10, and 43 to 10, and the mean of the 60 years about 38 to 10. Epidemic years appear to have

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<sup>1</sup> Sussmilch, vol. i. Tables, p. 91.



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of births, deaths, and marriages.

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occurred occasionally, in three of which the deaths exceeded the births; but this temporary diminution of population produced no corresponding diminution of births; and the two individual years which contain the greatest proportion of marriages in the whole table occur, one the year after, and the other two years after epidemics. The excess of deaths however was not great till the 3 years ending with 1759, with which the table concludes.

In the neumark of Brandenburg,<sup>1</sup> for 60 years from 1695 to 1756 both included, the average proportion of births to deaths in the first 30 years was 148 to 100, in the last 30 years 127 to 100, in the whole 60 years 136 to 100. In some periods of 5 years it was as high as 171 and 167 to 100. In others as low as 118 and 128 to 100. For 5 years ending with 1726, the yearly average of births was 7012; for 5 years ending with 1746, it was 6927; from which, judging by the births, we might infer that the population had decreased in this interval of 20 years; but it appears from the average proportion of births and deaths during this period, that it must have considerably increased notwithstanding the intervention of some epi-

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<sup>1</sup> Sussmilch's *Gottliche Ordnung*, vol. i. Tables, p. 99.



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Effects of epidemics on registers

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demic years. The proportion of births to the whole population must therefore have decidedly changed. Another interval of 20 years in the same table gives a similar result, both with regard to the births and the marriages. The extremes of the proportions of births to marriages are 34 to 10, and 42 to 10, and the mean about 38 to 10. The 3 years beginning with 1757 were, as in the other tables, very fatal years.

In the dukedom of Magdeburg<sup>1</sup> during 64 years ending with 1756, the average proportion of births to deaths was 123 to 100; in the first 28 years of the period 142 to 100, and in the last 34 years only 112 to 100; during one period of 5 years it was as high as 170 to 100, and in two periods the deaths exceeded the births. Slight epidemics appear to be interspersed rather thickly throughout the table. In the two instances where three or four occur in successive years, and diminish the population, they are followed by an increase of marriages and births. The extremes of the proportions of births to marriages are 42 to 10, and 34 to 10, and the mean of the 64 years 39 to 10. On this table Sussmilch remarks, that

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<sup>1</sup> Sussmilch, vol. i. Tables, p. 103.



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of births, deaths, and marriages.

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though the average number of deaths shows an increased population of one third from 1715 or 1720, yet that the births and marriages would prove it to be stationary or even declining. In drawing this conclusion however, he adds the three epidemic years ending with 1759, during which both the marriages and births seem to have diminished.

In the principality of Halberstadt,<sup>1</sup> the average proportion of births to deaths for 68 years, ending with 1756, was 124 to 100; but in some periods of 5 years it was as high as 160 to 100, and in others as low as 110 to 100. The increase in the whole 68 years was considerable, and yet for 5 years ending with 1723, the average number of births was 2818, and for 4 years ending with 1750, 2628, from which it would appear that the population in 27 years had considerably diminished. A similar appearance occurs with regard to the marriages, during a period of 32 years. In the 5 years ending with 1718, they were 727; in the 5 years ending with 1750, 689. During both these periods the proportion of deaths would have shown a considerable increase. Epidemics seem

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<sup>1</sup> Sussmilch, vol. i. Tables, p. 108.



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Effects of epidemics on registers

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to have occurred frequently, and in almost all the instances in which they were such as for the deaths to exceed the births, they were immediately succeeded by a more than usual proportion of marriages, and in a few years by an increased proportion of births. The greatest number of marriages in the whole table occurs in the year 1751, after an epidemic in the year 1750, in which the deaths had exceeded the births above one third, and the four or five following years contain the largest proportion of births. The extremes of the proportions of births to marriages are 42 to 10, and 34 to 10, the mean of the 68 years 38 to 10.

The remaining tables contain similar results, but these will be sufficient to show the variations which are continually occurring in the proportions of the births and marriages as well as of the deaths, to the whole population.

It will be observed that the least variable of the proportions is that which the births and marriages bear to each other, and the obvious reason is, that this proportion nearly expresses the prolificness of marriages, which will not of course be subject to great changes. We can hardly indeed suppose that the prolificness of marriages should vary so much as the extremes which have been mentioned.



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of births, deaths, and marriages.

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Nor is it necessary that it should, as another cause will contribute to produce the same effect. The births which are contemporary with the marriages of any particular year belong principally to marriages which had taken place some years before, and therefore if for four or five years a large proportion of marriages were to take place, and then accidentally for one or two years a small proportion, the effect would be a large proportion of births to marriages in the registers during these one or two years; and on the contrary, if for four or five years few marriages comparatively were to take place, and then for one or two years a great number, the effect would be a small proportion of births to marriages in the registers. This was strikingly illustrated in the table for Prussia and Lithuania, and would be confirmed by an inspection of all the other tables collected by Susmilch, in which it appears that the extreme proportions of births to marriages are generally more affected by the number of marriages than the number of births, and consequently arise more from the variations in the disposition or encouragement to matrimony, than from the variations in the prolificness of marriages.

The common epidemical years that are inter-



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Effects of epidemics on registers

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dispersed throughout these tables will not of course have the same effects on the marriages and births, as the great plague in the table for Prussia ; but in proportion to their magnitude, their operation will in general be found to be similar. From the registers of many other countries, and particularly of towns, it appears that the visitations of the plague were frequent at the latter end of the 17th and the beginning of the 18th centuries.

In contemplating the plagues and sickly seasons which occur in these tables, after a period of rapid increase, it is impossible not to be impressed with the idea that the number of inhabitants had, in these instances, exceeded the food and the accommodations necessary to preserve them in health.—The mass of the people would, upon this supposition, be obliged to live worse, and a greater number of them would be crowded together in one house ; and these natural causes would evidently contribute to produce sickness, even though the country, absolutely considered, might not be crowded and populous. In a country, even thinly inhabited, if an increase of population take place before more food is raised, and more houses are built, the inhabitants must be distressed for room and subsistence. If in the Highlands of Scotland,



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of births, deaths, and marriages.

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for the next ten or twelve years, the marriages were to be either more frequent or more prolific, and no emigration were to take place, instead of five to a cottage, there might be seven, and this, added to the necessity of worse living, would evidently have a most unfavorable effect on the health of the common people.

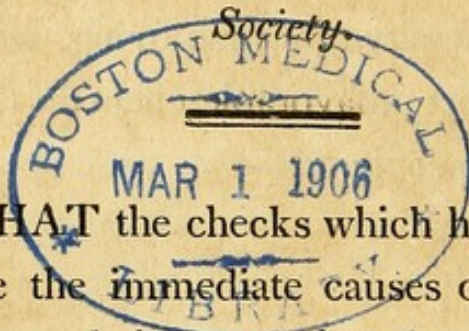


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## CHAPTER XI.

*General deductions from the preceding view of  
Society.*



THAT the checks which have been mentioned are the immediate causes of the slow increase of population, and that these checks result principally from an insufficiency of subsistence, will be evident from the comparatively rapid increase, which has invariably taken place whenever, by some sudden enlargement in the means of subsistence, these checks have been in any considerable degree removed.

It has been universally remarked that all new colonies settled in healthy countries, where room and food were abundant, have constantly made a rapid progress in population. Many of the colonies from ancient Greece, in the course of one or two centuries, appear to have rivalled, and even surpassed, their mother cities. Syracuse and Agrigentum in Sicily ; Tarentum and Locri in Italy ; Ephesus and Miletus in Lesser Asia ; were, by all accounts, at least equal to any of the cities of



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General deductions from the, &c.

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ancient Greece. All these colonies had established themselves in countries inhabited by savage and barbarous nations, which easily gave place to the new settlers, who had of course plenty of good land. It is calculated that the Israelites, though they increased very slowly, while they were wandering in the land of Canaan, on settling in a fertile district of Egypt doubled their numbers every fifteen years during the whole period of their stay.<sup>1</sup> But not to dwell on remote instances, the European settlements in America bear ample testimony to the truth of a remark, that has never, I believe, been doubted. Plenty of rich land to be had for little or nothing is so powerful a cause of population as generally to overcome all obstacles.

No settlements could easily have been worse managed than those of Spain in Mexico, Peru, and Quito. The tyranny, superstition, and vices of the mother country were introduced in ample quantities among her children. Exorbitant taxes were exacted by the crown; the most arbitrary restrictions were imposed on their trade; and the governors were not behind hand in rapacity and

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<sup>1</sup>Short's New Observ. on Bills of Mortality, p. 259, 8vo. 1750.



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General deductions from the

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extortion for themselves as well as their master. Yet under all these difficulties, the colonies made a quick progress in population. The city of Quito, which was but a hamlet of Indians, is represented by Ulloa as containing fifty or sixty thousand inhabitants above fifty years ago.<sup>1</sup> Lima, which was founded since the conquest, is mentioned by the same author as equally or more populous, before the fatal earthquake in 1746. Mexico is said to contain a hundred thousand inhabitants, which, notwithstanding the exaggerations of the Spanish writers, is supposed to be five times greater than what it contained in the time of Montezuma.<sup>2</sup>

In the Portuguese colony of Brazil, governed with almost equal tyranny, there were supposed to be above thirty years ago six hundred thousand inhabitants of European extraction.<sup>3</sup>

The Dutch and French colonies, though under the government of exclusive companies of merchants, which, as Dr. Smith justly observes, is the

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<sup>1</sup> Voy. d'Ulloa, tom. i. liv. v. ch. v. p. 229. 4to. 1752.

<sup>2</sup> Smith's Wealth of Nations, vol. ii. b. iv. ch. vii. p. 363.

<sup>3</sup> Id. p. 536



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preceding view of Society.

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worst of all possible governments, still persisted in thriving under every disadvantage.<sup>1</sup>

But the English North American colonies, now the powerful people of the United States of America, far outstripped all the others, in the progress of their population. To the quantity of rich land which they possessed in common with the Spanish and Portuguese colonies, they added a greater degree of liberty and equality. Though not without some restrictions on their foreign commerce, they were allowed the liberty of managing their own internal affairs. The political institutions which prevailed were favorable to the alienation and division of property. Lands which were not cultivated by the proprietor within a limited time were declared grantable to any other person. In Pennsylvania, there was no right of primogeniture; and in the provinces of New England, the eldest son had only a double share. There were no tithes in any of the States, and scarcely any taxes. And on account of the extreme cheapness of good land, a capital could not be more advantageously employed than in agriculture, which at the same

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<sup>1</sup> Id. p. 368, 369.



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General deductions from the

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time that it affords the greatest quantity of healthy work supplies the most valuable produce to the society.

The consequence of these favorable circumstances united was a rapidity of increase almost without parallel in history. Throughout all the northern provinces the population was found to double itself in 25 years. The original number of persons which had settled in the four provinces of New England in 1643 was 21,200. Afterwards it was calculated that more left them than went to them. In the year 1760 they were increased to half a million. They had therefore, all along, doubled their number in 25 years. In New Jersey, the period of doubling appeared to be 22 years; and in Rhode Island still less. In the back settlements, where the inhabitants applied themselves solely to agriculture, and luxury was not known, they were supposed to double their number in fifteen years. Along the sea coast, which would naturally be first inhabited, the period of doubling was about 35 years, and in some of the maritime towns the population was absolutely at a stand.<sup>1</sup> From the late census made in

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<sup>1</sup> Price's *Observ. on Revers. Paym.* vol. i. p. 282, 283,



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preceding view of Society.

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America it appears, that taking all the States together, they have still continued to double their numbers every 25 years; and as the whole popu-

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and vol. ii. p. 260. I have lately had an opportunity of seeing some extracts from the sermon of Dr. Styles, from which Dr. Price has taken these facts. Speaking of Rhode Island, Dr. Styles says, that though the period of doubling for the whole colony is 25 years, yet that it is different in different parts, and within land is 20 and 15 years. The population of the five towns of Gloucester, Situate, Coventry, Westgreenwich, and Exeter, was 5033, A. D. 1748, and 6986, A. D. 1755; which implies a period of doubling of 15 years only. He mentions afterwards that the county of Kent doubles in 20 years; and the county of Providence in 18 years.

I have also lately seen a paper of *Facts and calculations respecting the population of the United States*, which makes the period of doubling for the whole of the States, since their first settlement, only 20 years. I know not of what authority this paper is; but far as it goes upon public facts and enumerations I should think that it must be to be depended on. One period is very striking. From a return to Congress in 1782, the population appeared to be 2,389,300, and in the census of 1790, 4,000,000: increase in 9 years, 1,610,700; from which deduct ten thousand per annum for European settlers, which will be 90,000; and allow for their increase at 5 per cent. for  $4\frac{1}{2}$  years, which will be 20,250: the remaining increase during those 9 years, from procreation only, will be 1,500,450, which is very nearly 7 per cent; and consequently the period of doubling at this rate would be less than 16 years.

If this calculation for the whole population of the States



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General deductions from the

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lation is now so great as not be materially affected by the emigrations from Europe, and as it is known, that in some of the towns and districts near the sea coast, the progress of population has been comparatively slow; it is evident that, in the interior of the country in general, the period of doubling from procreation only must have been considerably less than 25 years.

The population of the United States of America, according to the late census, is 5,172,312.<sup>1</sup> We have no reason to believe that Great Britain is less populous at present, for the emigration of the small parent stock which produced these numbers. On the contrary, a certain degree of emigration is known to be favorable to the population of the mother country. It has been particularly remarked that the two Spanish provinces, from which the

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be in any degree near the truth, it cannot be doubted, that in particular districts the period of doubling from procreation only has often been less than 15 years. The period immediately succeeding the war was likely to be a period of very rapid increase.

<sup>1</sup> One small State is mentioned as being omitted in the census; and I understand that the population is generally considered at above this number. It is said to approach towards 6,000,000. But such vague opinions cannot of course be much relied on.



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preceding view of Society.

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greatest number of people emigrated to America, became in consequence more populous.

Whatever was the original number of British emigrants which increased so fast in North America; let us ask, Why does not an equal number produce an equal increase in the same time in Great Britain? The obvious reason to be assigned is the want of food; and that this want is the most efficient cause of the three immediate checks to population, which have been observed to prevail in all societies, is evident, from the rapidity with which even old states recover the desolations of war, pestilence, famine, and the convulsions of nature. They are then for a short time placed a little in the situation of new colonies, and the effect is always answerable to what might be expected. If the industry of the inhabitants be not destroyed, subsistence will soon increase beyond the wants of the reduced numbers; and the invariable consequence will be, that population, which before perhaps was nearly stationary, will begin immediately to increase, and will continue its progress till the former population is recovered.

The fertile province of Flanders, which has been so often the seat of the most destructive wars, after a respite of a few years, has always appeared as



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General deductions from the

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rich and as populous as ever. The undiminished population of France, which has before been noticed, is an instance very strongly in point. The tables of Sussmilch afford continual proofs of a very rapid increase after great mortalities, and the table of Prussia and Lithuania, which I have inserted,<sup>1</sup> is particularly striking in this respect. The effects of the dreadful plague in London, in 1666, were not perceptible 15 or 20 years afterwards.— It may even be doubted whether Turkey and Egypt are upon an average much less populous for the plagues which periodically lay them waste. If the number of people which they contain be considerably less now than formerly, it is rather to be attributed to the tyranny and oppression of the governments under which they groan, and the consequent discouragements to agriculture, than to the losses which they sustain by the plague. The traces of the most destructive famines in China, Indostan, Egypt, and other countries, are by all accounts very soon obliterated; and the most tremendous convulsions of nature, such as volcanic eruptions and earthquakes, if they do not happen so frequently as to drive away the inhabitants, or

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<sup>1</sup> See page 33 of this vol.



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preceding view of Society.

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destroy their spirit of industry, have been found to produce but a trifling effect on the average population of any state.

It has appeared from the registers of different countries which have already been produced, that the progress of their population is checked by the periodical, though irregular, returns of plagues and sickly seasons. Dr. Short, in his curious researches into bills of mortality, often uses the expression of "terrible correctives of the redundancy of mankind;"<sup>1</sup> and in a table of all the plagues, pestilences, and famines, of which he could collect accounts, shows the constancy and universality of their operation.

The epidemical years in his table, or the years in which the plague or some great and wasting epidemic prevailed, for smaller sickly seasons seem not to be included, are 431,<sup>2</sup> of which 32 were before the Christian æra.<sup>3</sup> If we divide therefore the years of the present æra by 399, it will appear that the periodical returns of such epidemics, to some country that we are acquainted with, have

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<sup>1</sup> New Observ. on Bills of Mortality, p. 96.

<sup>2</sup> Hist. of Air, Seasons, &c. vol. ii. p. 366.

Id. vol. ii. p. 202.



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General deductions from the

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been on an average only at the interval of about  $4\frac{1}{2}$  years.

Of the 254 great famines and dearths enumerated in the table, 15 were before the Christian æra,<sup>1</sup> beginning with that which occurred in Palestine, in the time of Abraham. If subtracting these 15 we divide the years of the present æra by the remainder, it will appear that the average interval between the visits of this dreadful scourge has been only about  $7\frac{1}{2}$  years.

How far these “terrible correctives to the redundancy of mankind” have been occasioned by the too rapid increase of population, is a point which it would be very difficult to determine with any degree of precision. The causes of most of our diseases appear to us to be so mysterious, and probably are really so various, that it would be rashness to lay too much stress on any single one ; but it will not perhaps be too much to say, that *among* these causes we ought certainly to rank crowded houses, and insufficient or unwholesome food, which are the natural consequences of an increase of population faster than the accommodations of a country with respect to habitations and food will allow.

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<sup>1</sup> Hist. of Air, Seasons, &c. vol. ii. p. 206.



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preceding view of Society.

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Almost all the histories of epidemics which we have, tend to confirm this supposition, by describing them in general as making their principal ravages among the lower classes of people. In Dr. Short's tables this circumstance is frequently mentioned ;<sup>1</sup> and it further appears that a very considerable proportion of the epidemic years either followed or were accompanied by seasons of dearth and bad food.<sup>2</sup> In other places he also mentions great plagues as diminishing particularly the numbers of the lower or servile sort of people ;<sup>3</sup> and in speaking of different diseases he observes, that those which are occasioned by bad and unwholesome food generally last the longest.<sup>4</sup>

We know from constant experience, that fevers are generated in our jails, our manufactories, our crowded workhouses, and in the narrow and close streets of our large towns ; all which situations appear to be similar in their effects to squalid poverty : and we cannot doubt that causes of this kind, aggravated in degree, contributed to the produc-

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<sup>1</sup> Hist. of Air, Seasons, &c. vol. ii. p. 206. et seq.

<sup>2</sup> Id. p. 206, et seq. and 336.

<sup>3</sup> New Observ. p. 125.

<sup>4</sup> Id. p. 108.



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General deductions from the

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tion and prevalence of those great and wasting plagues formerly so common in Europe, but which now, from the mitigation of these causes, are every where considerably abated, and in many places appear to be completely extirpated.

Of the other great scourge of mankind, famine, it may be observed, that it is not in the nature of things that the increase of population should absolutely produce one. This increase, though rapid, is necessarily gradual; and as the human frame cannot be supported, even for a very short time without food, it is evident that no more human beings can grow up than there is provision to maintain. But though the principle of population cannot absolutely produce a famine, it prepares the way for one in the most complete manner; and by obliging all the lower classes of people to subsist nearly on the smallest quantity of food that will support life, turns even a slight deficiency from the failure of the seasons into a severe dearth; and may be fairly said therefore, to be one of the principal causes of famine. Among the signs of an approaching dearth, Dr. Short mentions one or more years of luxuriant crops together: <sup>1</sup> and this

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<sup>1</sup> Hist. of Air, Seasons, &c. vol. ii. p. 367.



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preceding view of Society.

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observation is probably just, as we know that the general effect of years of cheapness and abundance is to dispose a greater number of persons to marry, and under such circumstances the return to a year merely of an average crop might produce a scarcity.

The small-pox which at present may be considered as the most prevalent and fatal epidemic in Europe, is of all others, perhaps, the most difficult to account for, though the periods of its return are in many places regular.<sup>1</sup> Dr. Short observes, that from the histories of this disorder it seems to have very little dependence upon the past or present constitution of the weather or seasons, and that it appears epidemically at all times, and in all states of the air, though not so frequently in a hard frost. We know of no instances, I believe, of its being clearly generated under any circumstances of situation. I do not mean therefore to insinuate that poverty and crowded houses ever absolutely produced it; but I may be allowed to remark, that in those places where its returns are regular, and its ravages among children, particularly among those of the lower class, are considerable, it necessarily follows that these circumstances, in a greater degree

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<sup>1</sup> Hist. of Air, Seasons, &c. vol. ii. p. 411.



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General deductions from the

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than usual, must always precede and accompany its appearance; that is, from the time of its last visit, the average number of children will be increasing, the people will, in consequence, be growing poorer, and the houses will be more crowded till another visit removes this superabundant population.

In all these cases, how little soever force we may be disposed to attribute to the effects of the principle of population in the actual production of disorders, we cannot avoid allowing their force as predisposing causes to the reception of contagion, and as giving very great additional force to the extensiveness and fatality of its ravages.

It is observed by Dr. Short that a severe mortal epidemic is generally succeeded by an uncommon healthiness, from the late distemper having carried off most of the declining wornout constitutions.<sup>1</sup> It is probable, also, that another cause of it may be the greater plenty of room and food, and the consequently meliorated condition of the lower classes of the people. Sometimes, according to Dr. Short, a very fruitful year is followed by a very mortal and sickly one, and mortal ones often

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<sup>1</sup> Hist. of Air, Seasons, &c. vol. ii. p. 344.



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preceding view of Society.

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succeeded by very fruitful, as though nature sought either to prevent or quickly repair the loss by death. In general the next year, after sickly and mortal ones, is prolific in proportion to the breeders left.<sup>1</sup>

This last effect we have seen most strikingly exemplified in the table for Prussia and Lithuania.<sup>2</sup> And from this and other tables of Susmilch it also appears, that when the increasing produce of a country, and the increasing demand for labor, so far meliorate the condition of the laborer, as greatly to encourage marriage, the custom of early marriages is generally continued till the population has gone beyond the increased produce, and sickly seasons appear to be the natural and necessary consequence. The continental registers exhibit many instances of rapid increase, interrupted in this manner by mortal diseases, and the inference seems to be, that those countries where subsistence is increasing sufficiently to encourage population, but not to answer all its demands, will be more subject to periodical epidemics than those where the increase of population is more nearly accommodated to the average produce.

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<sup>1</sup> New Observ. p. 191.

<sup>2</sup> Page 33 of this vol.



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General deductions from the

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The converse of this will of course be true. In those countries which are subject to periodical sicknesses, the increase of population, or the excess of births above the deaths, will be greater in the intervals of these periods than is usual in countries not so much subject to these diseases. If Turkey and Egypt have been nearly stationary in their average population for the last century, in the intervals of their periodical plagues, the births must have exceeded the deaths in a much greater proportion than in such countries as France and England.

It is for these reasons that no estimates of future population or depopulation, formed from any existing rate of increase or decrease, can be depended upon. Sir William Petty calculated that in the year 1800 the city of London would contain five millions three hundred and fifty nine thousand<sup>1</sup> inhabitants, instead of which it does not now contain a fifth part of that number. And Mr. Eton has lately prophesied the extinction of the population of the Turkish empire in another century;<sup>2</sup> an event which will, as certainly, fail of taking place. If

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<sup>1</sup> Political Arithmetic, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Survey of the Turkish Empire, c. vii. p. 281.



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preceding view of Society.

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America were to continue increasing at the same rate as at present, for the next 150 years, her population would exceed the population of China; but though prophecies are dangerous I will venture to say, that such an increase will not take place in that time, though it may perhaps in five or six hundred years.

Europe was, without doubt, formerly more subject to plagues and wasting epidemics than at present, and this will account, in great measure, for the greater proportion of births to deaths in former times, mentioned by many authors, as it has always been a common practice to estimate these proportions from too short periods, and generally to reject the years of plague as accidental.

The highest average proportion of births to deaths in England may be considered as about 12 to 10, or 120 to 100. The proportion in France for ten years, ending in 1780, was about 115 to 100.<sup>1</sup> Though these proportions have undoubtedly varied at different periods during the last century, yet we have reason to think that they have not varied in any very considerable degree;

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<sup>1</sup> Necker de l'Administration des Finances, tom. i. c. ix. p. 225.



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General deductions from the

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and it will appear therefore, that the population of France and England has accommodated itself more nearly to the average produce of each country than many other states. The operation of the preventive check, wars, the silent though certain destruction of life in large towns and manufactories, and the close habitations and insufficient food of many of the poor, prevent population from outrunning the means of subsistence; and if I may use an expression, which certainly at first appears strange, supersede the necessity of great and ravaging epidemics to destroy what is redundant. If a wasting plague were to sweep off two millions in England, and six millions in France, it cannot be doubted that after the inhabitants had recovered from the dreadful shock, the proportion of births to deaths would rise much above the usual average in either country during the last century.<sup>1</sup>

In New Jersey the proportion of births to deaths on an average of 7 years, ending 1743, was 300 to 100. In France and England the highest average proportion cannot be reckoned at more than

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<sup>1</sup> This remark has been, to a certain degree, verified of late in France, by the increase of births which has taken place since the revolution.



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preceding view of Society.

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120 to 100. Great and astonishing as this difference is, we ought not to be so wonder-struck at it, as to attribute it to the miraculous interposition of heaven. The causes of it are not remote, latent, and mysterious, but near us, round about us, and open to the investigation of every inquiring mind. It accords with the most liberal spirit of philosophy to believe, that not a stone can fall or plant rise without the immediate agency of divine power. But we know from experience, that these operations of what we call nature have been conducted almost invariably according to fixed laws. And since the world began the causes of population and depopulation have been probably as constant as any of the laws of nature with which we are acquainted.

The passion between the sexes has appeared in every age to be so nearly the same, that it may always be considered, in algebraic language, as a given quantity. The great law of necessity which prevents population from increasing in any country beyond the food which it can either produce or acquire, is a law so open to our view, so obvious and evident to our understandings that we cannot for a moment doubt it. The different modes which nature takes to repress a redundant population, do not appear indeed to us so certain and re-



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General deductions from the

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gular; but though we cannot always predict the mode we may with certainty predict the fact. If the proportion of the births to the deaths for a few years indicates an increase of numbers much beyond the proportional increased, or acquired food of the country, we may be perfectly certain, that unless an emigration take place the deaths will shortly exceed the births, and that the increase that had been observed for a few years cannot be the real average increase of the population of the country. If there were no other depopulating causes, and if the preventive check did not operate, very strongly, every country would, without doubt, be subject to periodical plagues and famines.

The only true criterion of a real and permanent increase in the population of any country is the increase of the means of subsistence. But even this criterion is subject to some slight variations, which however are completely open to our observation. In some countries population seems to have been forced; that is, the people have been habituated by degrees to live almost upon the smallest possible quantity of food. There must have been periods in such countries when population increased permanently without an increase in the means of subsistence. China, India, and the countries possessed by the Bedoween Arabs, as we have



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preceding view of Society.

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seen in the former part of this work, appear to answer to this description. The average produce of these countries seems to be but barely sufficient to support the lives of the inhabitants, and of course any deficiency from the badness of the seasons must be fatal. Nations in this state must necessarily be subject to famines.

In America, where the reward of labor is at present so liberal, the lower classes might retrench very considerably in a year of scarcity, without materially distressing themselves. A famine therefore, seems to be almost impossible. It may be expected that in the progress of the population of America the laborers will in time be much less liberally rewarded. The numbers will in this case permanently increase without a proportional increase in the means of subsistence.

In the different countries of Europe there must be some variations in the proportion of the number of inhabitants and the quantity of food consumed, arising from the different habits of living which prevail in each state. The laborers of the south of England are so accustomed to eat fine wheaten bread, that they will suffer themselves to be half-starved before they will submit to live like the Scotch peasants.



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General deductions from the

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They might perhaps, in time, by the constant operation of the hard law of necessity, be reduced to live even like the lower classes of the Chinese, and the country would then with the same quantity of food support a greater population. But to effect this must always be a difficult, and every friend to humanity will hope, an abortive attempt.

I have mentioned some cases where population may permanently increase, without a proportional increase in the means of subsistence. But it is evident, that the variation in different states between the food and the numbers supported by it is restricted to a limit, beyond which it cannot pass. In every country the population of which is not absolutely decreasing, the food must be necessarily sufficient to support and to continue the race of laborers.

Other circumstances being the same it may be affirmed, that countries are populous according to the quantity of human food which they produce, or can acquire; and happy, according to the liberality with which this food is divided, or the quantity which a day's labor will purchase. Corn countries are more populous than pasture countries; and rice countries more populous than corn countries. But their happiness does not depend either upon their being thinly or fully inhabited, upon



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preceding view of Society.

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their poverty or their riches, their youth or their age; but on the proportion which the population and the food bear to each other. This proportion is generally the most favorable in new colonies, where the knowledge and industry of an old state operate on the fertile unappropriated land of a new one. In other cases the youth or the age of a state is not, in this respect, of great importance. It is probable that the food of Great Britain is divided in more liberal shares to her inhabitants at the present period, than it was two thousand, three thousand, or four thousand years ago. And it has appeared that the poor and thinly-inhabited tracts of the Scotch Highlands are more distressed by a redundant population than the most populous parts of Europe.

If a country were never to be overrun by a people more advanced in arts, but left to its own natural progress in civilization; from the time that its produce might be considered as a unit, to the time that it might be considered as a million, during the lapse of many thousand years, there would not be a single period when the mass of the people could be said to be free from distress, either directly or indirectly, for want of food. In every state in Europe, since we have first had accounts

*vol. ii.* 1



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General deductions from the

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of it, millions and millions of human existences have been repressed from this simple cause, though perhaps in some of these states an absolute famine may never have been known.

Famine seems to be the last, the most dreadful resource of nature. The power of population is so superior to the power in the earth to produce subsistence for man, that unless arrested by the preventive check, premature death must in some shape or other visit the human race. The vices of mankind are active and able ministers of depopulation. They are the precursors in the great army of destruction, and often finish the dreadful work themselves. But should they fail in this war of extirmination, sickly seasons, epidemics, pestilence, and plague, advance in terrific array, and sweep off their thousands and ten thousands. Should success be still incomplete, gigantic inevitable famine stalks in the rear, and at one mighty blow levels the population with the food of the world.

Must it not then be acknowledged, by an attentive examiner of the histories of mankind, that in every age and in every state in which man has existed or does now exist,



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preceding view of Society.

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The increase of population is necessarily limited by the means of subsistence :

Population invariably increases when the means of subsistence increase, unless prevented by powerful and obvious checks :

These checks, and the checks which keep the population down to the level of the means of subsistence, are moral restraint, vice, and misery.

In comparing the state of society which has been considered in this second book with that which formed the subject of the first, I think it appears that in modern Europe the positive checks to population prevail less, and the preventive checks more than in past times, and in the more uncivilized parts of the world.

War, the predominant check to the population of savage nations, has certainly abated, even including the late unhappy revolutionary contests ; and since the prevalence of a greater degree of personal cleanliness, of better modes of clearing and building towns, and of a more equable distribution of the products of the soil from improving knowledge in political economy, plagues, violent diseases, and famines, have been certainly mitigated, and have become less frequent.

With regard to the preventive check to popula-



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General deductions from the, &c.

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tion, though it must be acknowledged, that that branch of it which comes under the head of moral restraint<sup>1</sup> does not at present prevail much among the male part of society; yet I am strongly disposed to believe, that it prevails more than in those states which were first considered; and it can scarcely be doubted, that in modern Europe a much larger proportion of women pass a considerable part of their lives in the exercise of this virtue, than in past times and among uncivilized nations. But however this may be, if we consider only the general term which implies principally an infrequency of the marriage union from the fear of a family, without reference to consequences, it may be considered in this light as the most powerful of the checks, which in modern Europe keep down the population to the level of the means of subsistence.

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<sup>1</sup> The reader will recollect the confined sense in which I take this term.



# ESSAY, &c.

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## BOOK III.

OF THE DIFFERENT SYSTEMS OR EXPEDIENTS WHICH  
HAVE BEEN PROPOSED OR HAVE PREVAILED IN SO-  
CIETY, AS THEY AFFECT THE EVILS ARISING  
FROM THE PRINCIPLE OF POPULATION.

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### CHAPTER I.

*Of Systems of Equality. Wallace. Condorcet.*

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TO a person who views the past and present states of mankind in the light in which they have appeared in the two preceding books, it cannot but be a matter of astonishment that all the writers on the perfectability of man and of society, who have noticed the argument of the principle of population, treat it always very slightly, and invariably represent the difficulties arising from it as at a great and almost immeasurable distance. Even Mr. Wallace, who thought the argument itself of



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Of systems of equality. Wallace. Condorcet.

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so much weight as to destroy his whole system of equality, did not seem to be aware that any difficulty would arise from this cause till the whole earth had been cultivated like a garden, and was incapable of any further increase of produce. Were this really the case, and were a beautiful system of equality in other respects practicable, I cannot think that our ardour in the pursuit of such a scheme ought to be damped by the contemplation of so remote a difficulty. An event at such a distance might fairly be left to providence. But the truth is, that if the view of the argument given in this essay be just, the difficulty, so far from being remote, would be imminent and immediate. At every period during the progress of cultivation, from the present moment to the time when the whole earth was become like a garden, the distress for want of food would be constantly pressing on all mankind if they were equal. Though the produce of the earth would be increasing every year, population would be tending to increase much faster, and the redundancy must necessarily be checked by the periodical or constant action of moral restraint, vice, or misery.

M. Condorcet's *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain* was written, it



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Of systems of equality. Wallace. Condorcet.

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is said, under the pressure of that cruel proscription which terminated in his death. If he had no hopes of its being seen during his life, and of its interesting France in his favor, it is a singular instance of the attachment of a man to principles, which every day's experience was so fatally for himself contradicting. To see the human mind, in one of the most enlightened nations of the world, debased by such a fermentation of disgusting passions, of fear, cruelty, malice, revenge, ambition, madness, and folly, as would have disgraced the most savage nations in the most barbarous age, must have been such a tremendous shock to his ideas of the necessary and inevitable progress of the human mind, as nothing but the firmest conviction of the truth of his principles, in spite of all appearances, could have withstood.

This posthumous publication is only a sketch of a much larger work which he proposed should be executed. It necessarily wants therefore that detail and application, which can alone prove the truth of any theory. A few observations will be sufficient to show how completely this theory is contradicted, when it is applied to the real and not to an imaginary state of things.



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Of systems of equality. Wallace. Condorcet.

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In the last division of the work, which treats of the future progress of man towards perfection, M. Condorcet says, that comparing in the different civilized nations of Europe the actual population with the extent of territory ; and observing their cultivation, their industry, their divisions of labor, and their means of subsistence, we shall see that it would be impossible to preserve the same means of subsistence, and consequently the same population, without a number of individuals who have no other means of supplying their wants than their industry.

Having allowed the necessity of such a class of men, and adverting afterwards to the precarious revenue of those families that would depend so entirely on the life and health of their chief,<sup>1</sup> he says very justly, “ There exists then a necessary cause  
“ of inequality, of dependence, and even of misery,  
“ which menaces without ceasing, the most nu-  
“ merous and active class of our societies.” The difficulty is just and well stated ; but his mode of

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<sup>1</sup> To save time and long quotations, I shall here give the substance of some of M. Condorcet's sentiments, and I hope that I shall not misrepresent them ; but I refer the reader to the work itself, which will amuse if it do not convince him.



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Of systems of equality. Wallace. Condorcet.

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removing it will, I fear, be found totally inefficacious.

By the application of calculations to the probabilities of life, and the interest of money, he proposes that a fund should be established, which should assure to the old an assistance produced in part by their own former savings, and in part by the savings of individuals, who in making the same sacrifice die before they reap the benefit of it. The same or a similar fund should give assistance to women and children who lose their husbands or fathers; and afford a capital to those who were of an age to found a new family, sufficient for the development of their industry. These establishments, he observes, might be made in the name and under the protection of the society. Going still further, he says, that by the just application of calculations, means might be found of more completely preserving a state of equality, by preventing credit from being the exclusive privilege of great fortunes, and yet giving it a basis equally solid, and by rendering the progress of industry and the activity of commerce less dependent on great capitalists.

Such establishments and calculations may appear very promising upon paper; but when applied



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Of systems of equality. Wallace. Condorcet.

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to real life they will be found to be absolutely nugatory. M. Condorcet allows that a class of people which maintains itself entirely by industry is necessary to every state. Why does he allow this? No other reason can well be assigned, than because he conceives that the labor necessary to procure subsistence for an extended population will not be performed without the goad of necessity. If by establishments upon the plans that have been mentioned, this spur to industry be removed; if the idle and negligent be placed upon the same footing with regard to their credit, and the future support of their wives and families, as the active and industrious, can we expect to see men exert that animated activity in bettering their condition, which now forms the master-spring of public prosperity? If an inquisition were to be established to examine the claims of each individual, and to determine whether he had or had not exerted himself to the utmost, and to grant or refuse assistance accordingly, this would be little else than a repetition upon a larger scale of the English poor laws, and would be completely destructive of the true principles of liberty and equality.

But independently of this great objection to these establishments, and supposing for a moment



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Of systems of equality. Wallace. Condorcet.

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that they would give no check to production, the greatest difficulty remains yet behind.

Were every man sure of a comfortable provision for a family, almost every man would have one ; and were the rising generation free from the "killing frost" of misery, population must increase with unusual rapidity. Of this M. Condorcet seems to be fully aware himself ; and after having described further improvements he says,

" But in this progress of industry and happiness, each generation will be called to more extended enjoyments, and in consequence, by the physical constitution of the human frame, to an increase in the number of individuals. Must not there arrive a period then when these laws equally necessary shall counteract each other ; when the increase of the number of men surpassing their means of subsistence, the necessary result must be, either a continual diminution of happiness and population—a movement truly retrograde ; or at least a kind of oscillation between good and evil? In societies arrived at this term will not this oscillation be a constantly subsisting cause of periodical misery? Will it not mark the limit when all further melioration will become impossible, and point out that term to the perfectibility of the human race, which



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Of systems of equality. Wallace. Condorcet.

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“ it may reach in the course of ages, but can never  
“ pass ?” He then adds,

“ There is no person who does not see how  
“ very distant such a period is from us. But shall  
“ we ever arrive at it? It is equally impossible  
“ to pronounce for or against the future realization  
“ of an event, which cannot take place but at an  
“ æra when the human race will have attained im-  
“ provements of which we can at present scarcely  
“ form a conception.”

M. Condorcet's picture of what may be expected to happen when the number of men shall surpass their means of subsistence is justly drawn. The oscillation which he describes will certainly take place, and will without doubt be a constantly subsisting cause of periodical misery. The only point in which I differ from M. Condorcet in this description is, with regard to the period when it may be applied to the human race. M. Condorcet thinks that it cannot possibly be applicable, but at an æra extremely distant. If the proportion between the natural increase of population and food, which was stated in the beginning of this essay, and which has received considerable confirmation from the poverty that has been found to prevail in every stage and department of human society, be in any degree near the truth, it will



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Of systems of equality. Wallace. Condorcet.

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appear on the contrary that the period when the number of men surpasses their means of subsistence has long since arrived; and that this necessary oscillation, this constantly subsisting cause of periodical misery, has existed ever since we have had any histories of mankind, and continues to exist at the present moment.

M. Condorcet however goes on to say, that should the period which he conceives to be so distant ever arrive, the human race, and the advocates of the perfectibility of man, need not be alarmed at it. He then proceeds to remove the difficulty in a manner which I profess not to understand. Having observed that the ridiculous prejudices of superstition would by that time have ceased to throw over morals a corrupt and degrading austerity, he alludes either to a promiscuous concubinage which would prevent breeding, or to something else as unnatural. To remove the difficulty in this way will surely, in the opinion of most men, be to destroy that virtue and purity of manners which the advocates of equality, and of the perfectibility of man, profess to be the end and object of their views.

The last question which M. Condorcet proposes for examination is, the organic perfectibility of



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Of systems of equality. Wallace. Condorcet.

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man. He observes, that if the proofs which have been already given, and which, in their development, will receive greater force in the work itself, are sufficient to establish the indefinite perfectibility of man, upon the supposition of the same natural faculties and the same organization which he has at present; what will be the certainty, what the extent of our hopes, if this organization, these natural faculties themselves, be susceptible of melioration?

From the improvement of medicine; from the use of more wholesome food and habitations; from a manner of living, which will improve the strength of the body by exercise without impairing it by excess; from the destruction of the two great causes of the degradation of man, misery, and too great riches; from the gradual removal of transmissible and contagious disorders by the improvement of physical knowledge, rendered more efficacious by the progress of reason and of social order; he infers, that though man will not absolutely become immortal, yet that the duration between his birth and natural death will increase without ceasing, will have no assignable term, and may properly be expressed by the word indefinite. He then defines this word to mean either a constant approach to an unlimited extent without ever



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Of systems of equality. Wallace. Condorcet.

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reaching it; or an increase in the immensity of ages to an extent greater than any assignable quantity.

But surely the application of this term in either of these senses to the duration of human life is in the highest degree unphilosophical, and totally unwarranted by any appearances in the laws of nature. Variations from different causes are essentially distinct from a regular and unretrograde increase. The average duration of human life will to a certain degree vary from healthy or unhealthy climates, from wholesome or unwholesome food, from virtuous or vicious manners, and other causes; but it may be fairly doubted whether there has been really the smallest perceptible advance in the natural duration of human life since first we had any authentic history of man. The prejudices of all ages have indeed been directly contrary to this supposition; and though I would not lay much stress upon these prejudices, they will in some measure tend to prove, that there has been no marked advance in an opposite direction.

It may perhaps be said that the world is yet so young, so completely in its infancy, that it ought not to be expected that any difference should appear so soon.

If this be the case, there is at once an end of all



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Of systems of equality. Wallace. Condorcet.

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human science. The whole train of reasonings from effects to causes will be destroyed. We may shut our eyes to the book of nature, as it will no longer be of any use to read it. The wildest and most improbable conjectures may be advanced with as much certainty as the most just and sublime theories, founded on careful and reiterated experiments. We may return again to the old mode of philosophising, and make facts bend to systems, instead of establishing systems upon facts. The grand and consistent theory of Newton will be placed upon the same footing as the wild and eccentric hypothesis of Descartes. In short, if the laws of nature be thus fickle and inconstant; if it can be affirmed and be believed that they will change, when for ages and ages they have appeared immutable, the human mind will no longer have any incitements to inquiry, but must remain fixed in inactive torpor, or amuse itself only in bewildering dreams and extravagant fancies.

The constancy of the laws of nature and of effects and causes is the foundation of all human knowledge; and if without any previous observable symptoms or indications of a change we can infer that a change will take place, we may as well







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Of systems of equality. Wallace. Condorcet.

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breed to any degree of nicety you please; and they found this maxim upon another, which is, that some of the offspring will possess the desirable qualities of the parents in a greater degree. In the famous Leicestershire breed of sheep, the object is to procure them with small heads and small legs. Proceeding upon these breeding maxims it is evident, that we might go on till the heads and legs were evanescent quantities; but this is so palpable an absurdity, that we may be quite sure that the premises are not just, and that there really is a limit, though we cannot see it or say exactly where it is. In this case the point of the greatest degree of improvement, or the smallest size of the head and legs may be said to be undefined; but this is very different from unlimited, or from indefinite, in M. Condorcet's acceptation of the term. Though I may not be able in the present instance to mark the limit at which further improvement will stop, I can very easily mention a point at which it will not arrive. I should not scruple to assert, that were the breeding to continue for ever, the heads and legs of these sheep would never be so small as the head and legs of a rat.

It cannot be true therefore, that among animals



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Of systems of equality. Wallace. Condorcet.

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some of the offspring will possess the desirable qualities of the parents in a greater degree; or that animals are indefinitely perfectible.

The progress of a wild plant to a beautiful garden flower is perhaps more marked and striking than any thing that takes place among animals; yet even here it would be the height of absurdity to assert, that the progress was unlimited or indefinite. One of the most obvious features of the improvement is the increase of size. The flower has grown gradually larger by cultivation. If the progress were really unlimited it might be increased ad infinitum; but this is so gross an absurdity that we may be quite sure, that among plants as well as among animals there is a limit to improvement, though we do not exactly know where it is. It is probable that the gardeners who contend for flower prizes have often applied stronger dressing without success. At the same time it would be highly presumptuous in any man to say, that he had seen the finest carnation or anemone that could ever be made to grow. He might however assert without the smallest chance of being contradicted by a future fact, that no carnation or anemone could ever by cultivation be increased to the size of a large cabbage; and yet there are assignable quantities greater than a cabbage. No man can



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OF systems of equality. Wallace. Condorcet.

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say that he has seen the largest ear of wheat, or the largest oak that could ever grow ; but he might easily, and with perfect certainty, name a point of magnitude at which they would not arrive. In all these cases therefore, a careful distinction should be made between an unlimited progress and a progress where the limit is merely undefined.

It will be said perhaps, that the reason why plants and animals cannot increase indefinitely in size is, that they would fall by their own weight. I answer, how do we know this but from experience ? From experience of the degree of strength with which these bodies are formed. I know that a carnation long before it reached the size of a cabbage would not be supported by its stalk ; but I only know this from my experience of the weakness and want of tenacity in the materials of a carnation stalk. There might be substances of the same size that would support as large a head as a cabbage.

The reasons of the mortality of plants are at present perfectly unknown to us. No man can say why such a plant is annual, another biennial, and another endures for ages. The whole affair in all these cases, in plants, animals, and in the human race, is an affair of experience ; and I only conclude that a man is mortal, because the invari-



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Of systems of equality. Wallace. Condorcet.

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able experience of all ages has proved the mortality of those materials of which this visible body is made.

“What can we reason but from what we know?”

Sound philosophy will not authorise me to alter this opinion of the mortality of man on earth till it can be clearly proved, that the human race has made, and is making, a decided progress towards an illimitable extent of life. And the chief reason why I adduced the two particular instances from animals and plants was to expose and illustrate, if I could, the fallacy of that argument which infers an unlimited progress, merely because some partial improvement has taken place, and that the limit of this improvement cannot be precisely ascertained.

The capacity of improvement in plants and animals, to a certain degree, no person can possibly doubt. A clear and decided progress has already been made; and yet I think it appears that it would be highly absurd to say that this progress has no limits. In human life, though there are great variations from different causes, it may be doubted whether since the world began any organic improvement whatever of the human frame can be clearly ascertained. The foundations therefore, on which the arguments for the organic perfectibility of man rest, are unusually weak, and can



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Of systems of equality. Wallace. Condorcet.

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only be considered as mere conjectures. It does not however by any means seem impossible, that by an attention to breed, a certain degree of improvement similar to that among animals might take place among men. Whether intellect could be communicated may be a matter of doubt; but size, strength, beauty, complexion, and perhaps even longevity, are in a degree transmissible. The error does not seem to lie in supposing a small degree of improvement possible, but in not discriminating between a small improvement, the limit of which is undefined, and an improvement really unlimited. As the human race however could not be improved in this way, without condemning all the bad specimens to celibacy, it is not probable that an attention to breed should ever become general; indeed I know of no well-directed attempts of this kind except in the ancient family of the Bickerstaffs, who are said to have been very successful in whitening the skins and increasing the height of their race by prudent marriages, particularly by that very judicious cross with Maud the milk-maid, by which some capital defects in the constitutions of the family were corrected.

It will not be necessary, I think, in order more completely to show the improbability of any approach in man towards immortality on earth, to



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Of systems of equality. Wallace. Condorcet.

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urge the very great additional weight that an increase in the duration of life would give to the argument of population.

M. Condorcet's book may be considered not only as a sketch of the opinions of a celebrated individual, but of many of the literary men in France at the beginning of the revolution. As such, though merely a sketch, it seems worthy of attention.

Many, I doubt not, will think that the attempting gravely to controvert so absurd a paradox as the immortality of man on earth, or indeed even the perfectibility of man and society, is a waste of time and words; and that such unfounded conjectures are best answered by neglect. I profess, however, to be of a different opinion. When paradoxes of this kind are advanced by ingenious and able men, neglect has no tendency to convince them of their mistakes. Priding themselves on what they conceive to be a mark of the reach and size of their own understandings, of the extent and comprehensiveness of their views; they will look upon this neglect merely as an indication of poverty and narrowness in the mental exertions of their contemporaries; and only think, that the world is not yet prepared to receive their sublime truths.

On the contrary, a candid investigation of these



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Of systems of equality. Wallace. Condorcet.

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subjects, accompanied with a perfect readiness to adopt any theory warranted by sound philosophy, may have a tendency to convince them, that in forming improbable and unfounded hypotheses, so far from enlarging the bounds of human science, they are contracting it; so far from promoting the improvement of the human mind, they are obstructing it: they are throwing us back again almost into the infancy of knowledge; and weakening the foundations of that mode of philosophising under the auspices of which science has of late made such rapid advances. The late rage for wide and unrestrained speculation seems to have been a kind of mental intoxication, arising perhaps from the great and unexpected discoveries which had been made in various branches of science. To men elate and giddy with such successes, every thing appeared to be within the grasp of human powers; and under this illusion they confounded subjects where no real progress could be proved, with those where the progress had been marked, certain, and acknowledged. Could they be persuaded to sober themselves with a little severe and chastised thinking they would see, that the cause of truth and of sound philosophy cannot but suffer by substituting wild flights and unsupported assertions, for patient investigation and well authenticated proofs.







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Of systems of equality. Godwin.

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melioration of society to be produced merely by reason and conviction gives more promise of permanence than any change effected and maintained by force. The unlimited exercise of private judgment is a doctrine grand and captivating, and has a vast superiority over those systems, where every individual is in a manner the slave of the public. The substitution of benevolence, as the master-spring and moving principle of society, instead of self-love, appears at first sight to be a consummation devoutly to be wished. In short, it is impossible to contemplate the whole of this fair picture without emotions of delight and admiration, accompanied with an ardent longing for the period of its accomplishment. But alas! that moment can never arrive. The whole is little better than a dream—a phantom of the imagination. These “gorgeous palaces” of happiness and immortality, these “solemn temples” of truth and virtue, will dissolve, “like the baseless fabric of a vision,” when we awaken to real life, and contemplate the genuine situation of man on earth.

Mr. Godwin, at the conclusion of the third chapter of his eighth book, speaking of population, says, “There is a principle in human society  
“by which population is perpetually kept down



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Of systems of equality. Godwin.

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“ to the level of the means of subsistence. Thus,  
“ among the wandering tribes of America and  
“ Asia we never find, through the lapse of ages,  
“ that population has so increased as to render ne-  
“ cessary the cultivation of the earth.”<sup>1</sup> This  
principle which Mr. Godwin thus mentions as  
some mysterious and occult cause, and which he  
does not attempt to investigate, has appeared to be  
the grinding law of necessity—misery, and the  
fear of misery.

The great error under which Mr. Godwin labors throughout his whole work is, the attributing of almost all the vices and misery that prevail in civil society to human institutions. Political regulations, and the established administration of property, are, with him, the fruitful sources of all evil, the hotbeds of all the crimes that degrade mankind. Were this really a true state of the case, it would not seem an absolutely hopeless task to remove evil completely from the world; and reason seems to be the proper and adequate instrument for effecting so great a purpose. But the truth is, that though human institutions appear to be the obvious and obtrusive causes of much

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<sup>1</sup> Page 460, 8vo. 2d edit.



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Of systems of equality. Godwin.

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mischief to mankind, they are, in reality, light and superficial, in comparison with those deeper-seated causes of evil which result from the laws of nature.

In a chapter on the benefits attendant upon a system of equality, Mr. Godwin says, “ The  
“ spirit of oppression, the spirit of servility, and  
“ the spirit of fraud, these are the immediate  
“ growth of the established administration of pro-  
“ perty. They are alike hostile to intellectual im-  
“ provement. The other vices of envy, malice,  
“ and revenge, are their inseparable companions.  
“ In a state of society where men lived in the  
“ midst of plenty, and where all shared alike the  
“ bounties of nature, these sentiments would in-  
“ evitably expire. The narrow principle of sel-  
“ fishness would vanish. No man being obliged  
“ to guard his little store, or provide with anxiety  
“ and pain for his restless wants, each would lose  
“ his individual existence in the thought of the  
“ general good. No man would be an enemy to  
“ his neighbors, for they would have no subject  
“ of contention; and of consequence philanthropy  
“ would resume the empire which reason assigns  
“ her. Mind would be delivered from her per-  
“ petual anxiety about corporal support; and free



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Of systems of equality. Godwin.

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“to expatiate in the field of thought which is  
“congenial to her. Each would assist the in-  
“quiries of all.”<sup>1</sup>

This would indeed be a happy state. But that it is merely an imaginary picture with scarcely a feature near the truth, the reader, I am afraid, is already too well convinced.

Man cannot live in the midst of plenty. All cannot share alike the bounties of nature. Were there no established administration of property every man would be obliged to guard with force his little store. Selfishness would be triumphant. The subjects of contention would be perpetual. Every individual would be under a constant anxiety about corporal support, and not a single intellect would be left free to expatiate in the field of thought.

How little Mr. Godwin has turned his attention to the real state of human society will sufficiently appear, from the manner in which he endeavors to remove the difficulty of an overcharged population. He says, “The obvious answer to this  
“objection is, that to reason thus is to foresee dif-  
“ficulties at a great distance. Three fourths of

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<sup>1</sup> Political Justice, b. viii. c. iii. p. 458.



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Of systems of equality. Godwin.

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“ the habitable globe are now uncultivated. The  
“ parts already cultivated are capable of immea-  
“ surable improvement. Myriads of centuries of  
“ still increasing population may pass away, and  
“ the earth be still found sufficient for the subsist-  
“ ence of its inhabitants.”<sup>1</sup>

I have already pointed out the error of supposing that no distress or difficulty would arise from a redundant population, before the earth absolutely refused to produce any more. But let us imagine for a moment Mr. Godwin's system of equality realized in its utmost extent, and see how soon this difficulty might be expected to press, under so perfect a form of society. A theory that will not admit of application cannot possibly be just.

Let us suppose all the causes of vice and misery in this island removed. War and contention cease. Unwholesome trades and manufactories do not exist. Crowds no longer collect together in great and pestilent cities for purposes of court intrigue, of commerce, and vicious gratification. Simple, healthy, and rational amusements take place of drinking, gaming, and de-

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<sup>1</sup> Political Justice, b. viii. c. ix. p. 510.



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Of systems of equality. Godwin.

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bauchery. There are no towns sufficiently large to have any prejudicial effects on the human constitution. The greater part of the happy inhabitants of this terrestrial paradise live in hamlets and farm houses scattered over the face of the country. All men are equal. The labors of luxury are at an end; and the necessary labors of agriculture are shared amicably among all. The number of persons and the produce of the island we suppose to be the same as at present. The spirit of benevolence guided by impartial justice will divide this produce among all the members of society according to their wants. Though it would be impossible that they should all have animal food every day, yet vegetable food, with meat occasionally, would satisfy the desires of a frugal people, and would be sufficient to preserve them in health, strength, and spirits.

Mr. Godwin considers marriage as a fraud and a monopoly.<sup>1</sup> Let us suppose the commerce of the sexes established upon principles of the most perfect freedom. Mr. Godwin does not think himself that this freedom would lead to a promiscuous intercourse; and in this I perfectly agree

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<sup>1</sup> Political Justice, b. viii. c. viii. p. 498 et seq.



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Of systems of equality. Godwin.

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with him. The love of variety is a vicious, corrupt, and unnatural taste, and could not prevail in any great degree in a simple and virtuous state of society. Each man would probably select for himself a partner to whom he would adhere, as long as that adherence continued to be the choice of both parties. It would be of little consequence, according to Mr. Godwin, how many children a woman had, or to whom they belonged. Provisions and assistance would spontaneously flow from the quarter in which they abounded to the quarter in which they were deficient.<sup>1</sup> And every man according to his capacity would be ready to furnish instruction to the rising generation.

I cannot conceive a form of society so favorable upon the whole to population. The irremediableness of marriage, as it is at present constituted, undoubtedly deters many from entering into this state. An unshackled intercourse on the contrary would be a most powerful incitement to early attachments; and as we are supposing no anxiety about the future support of children to exist, I do not conceive that there would be one woman in a

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<sup>1</sup> Political Justice, b<sup>t</sup> viii. c. viii. p. 504.



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Of systems of equality. Godwin.

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hundred, of twenty-three years of age, without a family.

With these extraordinary encouragements to population, and every cause of depopulation, as we have supposed, removed, the numbers would necessarily increase faster than in any society that has ever yet been known. I have before mentioned that the inhabitants of the back settlements of America, appear to double their numbers in fifteen years. England is certainly a more healthy country than the back settlements of America; and as we have supposed every house in the island to be airy<sup>d</sup> and wholesome, and the encouragements to have a family greater even than in America, no probable reason can be assigned why the population should not double itself in less, if possible, than fifteen years. But to be quite sure that we do not go beyond the truth, we will only suppose the period of doubling to be twenty-five years; a ratio of increase which is slower than is known to have taken place throughout all the northern states of America.

There can be little doubt that the equalization of property which we have supposed, added to the circumstance of the labor of the whole communi-



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Of systems of equality. Godwin.

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ty being directed chiefly to agriculture, would tend greatly to augment the produce of the country.— But to answer the demands of a population increasing so rapidly, Mr. Godwin's calculation of half an hour a day would certainly not be sufficient. It is probable that the half of every man's time must be employed for this purpose. Yet with such or much greater exertions, a person who is acquainted with the nature of the soil in this country, and who reflects on the fertility of the lands already in cultivation, and the barrenness of those that are not cultivated, will be very much disposed to doubt whether the whole average produce could possibly be doubled in twenty-five years from the present period. The only chance of success would be from the ploughing up most of the grazing countries, and putting an end almost entirely to animal food. Yet this scheme would probably defeat itself. The soil of England will not produce much without dressing; and cattle seem to be necessary to make that species of manure which best suits the land.

Difficult however as it might be to double the average produce of the island in twenty-five years, let us suppose it effected. At the expiration of the first period therefore, the food, though almost



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Of systems of equality. Godwin.

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entirely vegetable, would be sufficient to support in health the doubled population of 22 millions.

During the next period where will the food be found to satisfy the importunate demands of the increasing numbers? Where is the fresh land to turn up? Where is the dressing necessary to improve that which is already in cultivation? There is no person with the smallest knowledge of land but would say, that it was impossible that the average produce of the country could be increased during the second twenty-five years, by a quantity equal to what it at present yields. Yet we will suppose this increase, however improbable, to take place. The exuberant strength of the argument allows of almost any concession. Even with this concession however, there would be eleven millions at the expiration of the second term unprovided for. A quantity equal to the frugal support of 33 millions would be to be divided among 44 millions.

Alas! what becomes of the picture, where men lived in the midst of plenty, where no man was obliged to provide with anxiety and pain for his restless wants; where the narrow principle of selfishness did not exist; where the mind was delivered from her perpetual anxiety about corporal



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Of systems of equality. Godwin.

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support, and free to expatiate in the field of thought which is congenial to her. This beautiful fabric of the imagination vanishes at the severe touch of truth. The spirit of benevolence, cherished and invigorated by plenty, is repressed by the chilling breath of want. The hateful passions that had vanished reappear. The mighty law of self-preservation expels all the softer and more exalted emotions of the soul. The temptations to evil are too strong for human nature to resist.— The corn is plucked before it is ripe; or secreted in unfair proportions; and the whole black train of vices that belong to falsehood are immediately generated. Provisions no longer flow in for the support of a mother with a large family. The children are sickly from insufficient food. The rosy flush of health gives place to the pallid cheek and hollow eye of misery. Benevolence yet lingering in a few bosoms makes some faint expiring struggles, till at length self-love resumes his wonted empire, and lords it triumphant over the world.

No human institutions here existed, to the perverseness of which Mr. Godwin ascribes the original sin of the worst men.<sup>1</sup> No opposition

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<sup>1</sup> Political Justice, b. viii. c. iii. p. 340.



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Of systems of equality. Godwin.

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had been produced by them between public and private good. No monopoly had been created of those advantages which reason directs to be left in common. No man had been goaded to the breach of order by unjust laws. Benevolence had established her reign in all hearts. And yet in so short a period as fifty years, violence, oppression, falsehood, misery, every hateful vice, and every form of distress which degrade and sadden the present state of society, seem to have been generated by the most imperious circumstances, by laws inherent in the nature of man, and absolutely independent of all human regulations.

If we be not yet too well convinced of the reality of this melancholy picture, let us but look for a moment into the next period of twenty five years, and we shall see 44 millions of human beings without the means of support ; and at the conclusion of the first century the population would be 176 millions, and the food only sufficient for 55 millions, leaving 121 millions unprovided for. In these ages want indeed would be triumphant, and rapine and murder must reign at large : and yet all this time we are supposing the produce of the earth absolutely unlimited, and the yearly increase greater than the boldest speculator can imagine.



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Of systems of equality. Godwin.

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This is undoubtedly a very different view of the difficulty arising from the principle of population, from that which Mr. Godwin gives, when he says, “ Myriads of centuries of still increasing population may pass away, and the earth be still found sufficient for the subsistence of its inhabitants.”

I am sufficiently aware that the redundant millions which I have mentioned could never have existed. It is a perfectly just observation of Mr. Godwin, that “ there is a principle in human society by which population is perpetually kept down to the level of the means of subsistence.” The sole question is, what is this principle? Is it some obscure and occult cause? Is it some mysterious interference of Heaven, which at a certain period strikes the men with impotence, and the women with barrenness? Or is it a cause open to our researches, within our view; a cause which has constantly been observed to operate, though with varied force, in every state in which man has been placed? Is it not misery, and the fear of misery, the necessary and inevitable results of the laws of nature, which human institutions, so far from aggravating, have tended considerably to mitigate, though they can never remove?



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Of systems of equality. Godwin.

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It may be curious to observe in the case that we have been supposing, how some of the principal laws, which at present govern civilized society, would be successively dictated by the most imperious necessity. As man, according to Mr. Godwin, is the creature of the impressions to which he is subject, the goadings of want could not continue long before some violations of public or private stock would necessarily take place. As these violations increased in number and extent, the more active and comprehensive intellects of the society would soon perceive, that while population was fast increasing the yearly produce of the country would shortly begin to diminish. The urgency of the case would suggest the necessity of some immediate measures being taken for the general safety. Some kind of convention would then be called, and the dangerous situation of the country stated in the strongest terms. It would be observed, that while they lived in the midst of plenty it was of little consequence who labored the least, or who possessed the least, as every man was perfectly willing and ready to supply the wants of his neighbor. But that the question was no longer whether one man should give to another that which he did not use himself; but whether



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Of systems of equality. Godwin.

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he should give to his neighbor the food which was absolutely necessary to his own existence. It would be represented, that the number of those who were in want very greatly exceeded the number and means of those who should supply them; that these pressing wants, which, from the state of the produce of the country, could not all be gratified, had occasioned some flagrant violations of justice; that these violations had already checked the increase of food, and would, if they were not by some means or other prevented, throw the whole community into confusion; that imperious necessity seemed to dictate, that a yearly increase of produce should, if possible, be obtained at all events; that in order to effect this first great and indispensable purpose it would be advisable to make a more complete division of land, and to secure every man's property against violation by the most powerful sanctions.

It might be urged perhaps, by some objectors, that as the fertility of the land increased, and various accidents occurred, the shares of some men might be much more than sufficient for their support; and that when the reign of self-love was once established, they would not distribute their surplus produce without some compensation in



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Of systems of equality. Godwin.

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return. It would be observed in answer, that this was an inconvenience greatly to be lamented; but that it was an evil which would bear no comparison to the black train of distresses which would inevitably be occasioned by the insecurity of property; that the quantity of food which one man could consume, was necessarily limited by the narrow capacity of the human stomach; that it was not certainly probable that he should throw away the rest; and if he exchanged his surplus produce for the labor of others, this would be better than that these others should absolutely starve.

It seems highly probable therefore, that an administration of property not very different from that which prevails in civilized states at present would be established as the best though inadequate remedy for the evils which were pressing on the society.

The next subject which would come under discussion, intimately connected with the preceding, is the commerce of the sexes. It would be urged by those who had turned their attention to the true cause of the difficulties under which the community labored, that while every man felt secure that all his children would be well provided for by general benevolence, the powers of the



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Of systems of equality. Godwin.

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earth would be absolutely inadequate to produce food for the population which would inevitably ensue ; that even if the whole attention and labor of the society were directed to this sole point, and if by the most perfect security of property, and every other encouragement that could be thought of, the greatest possible increase of produce were yearly obtained ; yet still the increase of food would by no means keep pace with the much more rapid increase of population ; that some check to population therefore was imperiously called for ; that the most natural and obvious check seemed to be to make every man provide for his own children ; that this would operate in some respect as a measure and a guide in the increase of population, as it might be expected that no man would bring beings into the world for whom he could not find the means of support ; that where this notwithstanding was the case, it seemed necessary for the example of others, that the disgrace and inconvenience attending such a conduct should fall upon that individual who had thus inconsiderately plunged himself and his innocent children into want and misery.

The institution of marriage, or at least of some express or implied obligation, on every man to sup-



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Of systems of equality. Godwin.

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port his own children, seems to be the natural result of these reasonings in a community under the difficulties that we have supposed.

The view of these difficulties presents us with a very natural reason why the disgrace which attends a breach of chastity should be greater in a woman than in a man. It could not be expected that women should have resources sufficient to support their own children. When, therefore, a woman had lived with a man who had entered into no compact to maintain her children; and, aware of the inconveniences that he might bring upon himself, had deserted her, these children must necessarily fall upon the society for support, or starve. And to prevent the frequent recurrence of such an inconvenience, as it would be highly unjust to punish so natural a fault by personal restraint or infliction, the men might agree to punish it with disgrace. The offence is besides more obvious and conspicuous in the woman, and less liable to any mistake. The father of a child may not always be known: but the same uncertainty cannot easily exist with regard to the mother. Where the evidence of the offence was most complete, and the inconvenience to the society at the same time the



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Of systems of equality. Godwin.

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greatest ; there it was agreed that the largest share of blame should fall. The obligation on every man to support his children, the society would enforce by positive laws ; and the greater degree of inconvenience or labor to which a family would necessarily subject him, added to some portion of disgrace, which every human being must incur who leads another into unhappiness, might be considered as a sufficient punishment for the man.

That a woman should at present be almost driven from society for an offence which men commit nearly with impunity, seems to be undoubtedly a breach of natural justice. But the origin of the custom, as the most obvious and effectual method of preventing the frequent recurrence of a serious inconvenience to a community, appears to be natural, though not perhaps perfectly justifiable. This origin however is now lost in the new train of ideas, that the custom has since generated. What at first might be dictated by state necessity is now supported by female delicacy ; and operates with the greatest force on that part of the society, where, if the original intention of the custom were preserved, there is the least real occasion for it.

When these two fundamental laws of society,



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Of systems of equality. Godwin.

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the security of property, and the institution of marriage were once established, inequality of conditions must necessarily follow. Those who were born after the division of property would come into a world already possessed. If their parents from having too large a family were unable to give them sufficient for their support, what could they do in a world where every thing was appropriated? We have seen the fatal effects that would result to society, if every man had a valid claim to an equal share of the produce of the earth. The members of a family which was grown too large for the original division of land appropriated to it could not then demand a part of the surplus produce of others as a debt of justice. It has appeared, that from the inevitable laws of human nature some human beings will be exposed to want. These are the unhappy persons who in the great lottery of life have drawn a blank. The number of these persons would soon exceed the ability of the surplus produce to supply. Moral merit is a very difficult criterion except in extreme cases. The owners of surplus produce would in general seek some more obvious mark of distinction; and it seems to be both natural and just, that except upon



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Of systems of equality. Godwin.

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particular occasions their choice should fall upon those who were able, and professed themselves willing to exert their strength in procuring a further surplus produce, which would at once benefit the community, and enable the proprietors to afford assistance to greater numbers. All who were in want of food would be urged by imperious necessity to offer their labor in exchange for this article, so absolutely necessary to existence. The fund appropriated to the maintenance of labor would be the aggregate quantity of food possessed by the owners of land beyond their own consumption. When the demands upon this fund were great and numerous it would naturally be divided into very small shares. Labor would be ill paid. Men would offer to work for a bare subsistence; and the rearing of families would be checked by sickness and misery. On the contrary, when this fund was increasing fast; when it was great in proportion to the number of claimants, it would be divided in much larger shares. No man would exchange his labor without receiving an ample quantity of food in return. Laborers would live in ease and comfort, and would consequently be able to rear a numerous and vigorous offspring.



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Of systems of equality. Godwin.

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On the state of this fund the happiness or the degree of misery, prevailing among the lower classes of people in every known state, at present chiefly depends; and on this happiness or degree of misery depends principally the increase, stationariness, or decrease of population.

And thus it appears, that a society constituted according to the most beautiful form that imagination can conceive, with benevolence for its moving principle instead of self-love, and with every evil disposition in all its members corrected by reason, not force, would from the inevitable laws of nature, and not from any original depravity of man, or of human institutions, degenerate in a very short period into a society constructed upon a plan not essentially different from that which prevails in every known state at present; a society divided into a class of proprietors and a class of laborers, and with self-love for the main-spring of the great machine.

In the supposition which I have made, I have undoubtedly taken the increase of population smaller, and the increase of produce greater than they really would be. No reason can be assigned why under the circumstances supposed population should not increase faster than in any known



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Of systems of equality. Godwin.

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instance. If then we were to take the period of doubling at fifteen years instead of twenty-five years, and reflect upon the labor necessary to double the produce in so short a time, even if we allow it possible; we may venture to pronounce with certainty, that if Mr. Godwin's system of society were established in its utmost perfection, instead of myriads of centuries, not thirty years could elapse before its utter destruction from the simple principle of population.

I have taken no notice of emigration in this place, for obvious reasons. If such societies were instituted in other parts of Europe, these countries would be under the same difficulties, with regard to population, and could admit no fresh members into their bosoms. If this beautiful society were confined to this island, it must have degenerated strangely from its original purity, and administer but a very small portion of the happiness it proposed, before any of its members would voluntarily consent to leave it, and live under such governments as at present exist in Europe, or submit to the extreme hardships of first settlers in new regions.



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### CHAPTER III.

*Observations on the Reply of Mr. Godwin.*

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MR. GODWIN in a late publication has replied to those parts of the Essay on the Principle of Population, which he thinks bear the hardest on his system. A few remarks on this reply will be sufficient.

In a note to an early part of his pamphlet he observes, that the main attack of the essay is not directed against the principles of his work, but its conclusion.<sup>1</sup> It may be true indeed, that as Mr. Godwin had dedicated one particular chapter towards the conclusion of his work to the consideration of the objections to his system, from the principle of population, this particular chapter is most frequently alluded to: but certainly if the great principle of the essay be admitted it affects his whole work, and essentially alters the founda-

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<sup>1</sup> Reply to the attacks of Dr. Parr, Mr. Mackintosh, the author of an Essay on Population, and others, p. 10.



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Observations on the reply of Mr. Godwin.

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tions of political justice. A great part of Mr. Godwin's book consists of an abuse of human institutions, as productive of all or most of the evils which afflict society. The acknowledgment of a new and totally unconsidered cause of misery would evidently alter the state of these arguments, and make it absolutely necessary that they should be either newly modified or entirely rejected.

In the first book of *Political Justice*, chap. iii. entitled, "The Spirit of Political Institutions," Mr. Godwin observes, that "Two of the greatest  
" abuses relative to the interior policy of nations  
" which at this time prevail in the world consist  
" in the irregular transfer of property, either first  
" by violence, or secondly by fraud." And he goes on to say, that if there existed no desire in individuals to possess themselves of the substance of others, and if every man could with perfect facility obtain the necessaries of life, civil society might become what poetry has feigned of the golden age. Let us inquire, he says, into the principles to which these evils are indebted for existence. After acknowledging the truth of the principal argument in the essay on population, I do not think that he could stop in this inquiry at mere human institutions. Many other parts of his work



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Observations on the reply of Mr. Godwin.

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would be affected by this consideration in a similar manner.

As Mr. Godwin seems disposed to understand, and candidly to admit the truth of the principal argument in the essay, I feel the more mortified that he should think it a fair inference from my positions, that the political superintendents of a community are bound to exercise a paternal vigilance and care over the two great means of advantage and safety to mankind, misery and vice ; and that no evil is more to be dreaded than that we should have too little of them in the world to confine the principle of population within its proper sphere.<sup>1</sup> I am at a loss to conceive what class of evils Mr. Godwin imagines is yet behind, which these salutary checks are to prevent. For my own part I know of no greater evils than vice and misery ; and the sole question is respecting the most effectual mode of diminishing them. The only reason why I object to Mr. Godwin's system is my full conviction, that an attempt to execute it would very greatly increase the quantity of vice and misery in society. If Mr. Godwin will undo this conviction, and prove to me though it be

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<sup>1</sup> Reply, &c. p. 60.



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Observations on the reply of Mr. Godwin.

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only in theory, provided that theory be consistent and founded on a knowledge of human nature, that his system will really tend to drive vice and misery from the earth, he may depend upon having me one of its steadiest and warmest advocates.

Mr. Godwin observes, that he should naturally be disposed to pronounce that man strangely indifferent to schemes of extraordinary improvement in society, who made it a conclusive argument against them, that when they were realized, they might peradventure be of no permanence and duration. And yet, what is morality individual or political, according to Mr. Godwin's own definition of it, but a calculation of consequences? Is the physician the patron of pain who advises his patient to bear a present evil rather than betake himself to a remedy, which though it might give momentary relief would afterwards greatly aggravate all the symptoms? Is the moralist to be called an enemy to pleasure, because he recommends to a young man just entering into life not to ruin his health and patrimony in a few years by an excess of present gratifications, but to economize his enjoyments that he may spread them over a longer period? Of Mr. Godwin's system, according to the present arguments by which it is



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Observations on the reply of Mr. Godwin.

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supported, it is not enough to say, *peradventure* it will be of no permanence ; but we can pronounce with *certainty* that it will be of no permanence : and under such circumstances an attempt to execute it would unquestionably be a great political immorality.

Mr. Godwin observes, that after recovering from the first impression made by the Essay on Population, the first thing that is apt to strike every reflecting mind is, that the excess of power in the principle of population over the principle of subsistence has never, in any past instance, in any quarter or age of the world, produced those great and astonishing effects, that total breaking up of all the structures and maxims of society, which the essay leads us to expect from it in certain cases in future.<sup>1</sup> This is undoubtedly true ; and the reason is, that in no past instance, nor in any quarter or age of the world, has an attempt been made to establish such a system as Mr. Godwin's, and without an attempt of this nature none of these great effects will follow. The convulsions of the social system, described in the last chapter, appear-

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<sup>1</sup> Reply, p. 70



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Observations on the reply of Mr. Godwin.

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ed by a kind of irresistible necessity, to terminate in the establishment of the laws of property and marriage ; but in countries where these laws are already established, as they are in all the common constitutions of society with which we are acquainted, the operation of the principle of population will always be silent and gradual, and not different to what we daily see in our own country. Other persons beside Mr. Godwin have imagined, that I looked to certain periods in future, when population would exceed the means of subsistence in a much greater degree than at present, and that the evils arising from the principle of population were rather in contemplation than in existence ; but this is a total misconception of the argument.<sup>1</sup> Poverty, and not absolute famine, is the specific effect of the principle of population, as I have before endeavored to show. Many countries are now suffering all the evils that can ever be expected to flow from this principle, and even if we were arrived at the absolute limit to all further increase of produce, a point which we shall certainly never reach, I should by no means expect that these evils would be in any marked manner aggravated.

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<sup>1</sup> In other parts of his Reply, Mr. Godwin does not fall into this error.



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Observations on the reply of Mr. Godwin.

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The increase of produce in most European countries is so very slow compared with what would be required to support an unrestricted increase of people, that the checks which are constantly in action to repress the population to the level of a produce increasing so slowly would have very little more to do in wearing it down to a produce absolutely stationary.

But Mr. Godwin says, that if he looks into the past history of the world, he does not see that increasing population has been controlled and confined by vice and misery alone. In this observation I cannot agree with him. I believe Mr. Godwin would find it difficult to name any check, which in past ages has contributed to keep down the population to the level of the means of subsistence, that does not fairly come under some form of vice or misery; except indeed the check of moral restraint, which I have mentioned in the course of this work; and which, to say the truth, whatever hopes we may entertain of its prevalence in future, has undoubtedly in past ages operated with inconsiderable force.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It should be recollected always, that by moral restraint I mean a restraint from marriage from prudential



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 Observations on the reply of Mr. Godwin.
 

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I do not think that I should find it difficult to justify myself in the eyes of my readers from the imputation of being the patron of vice and misery ; but I am not clear that Mr. Godwin would find such a justification so easy. For though he has positively declared that he does not “ regard them with complacency ;” and “ hopes that it may not be considered as a taste absolutely singular in him that he should entertain no vehement partialities for vice and misery ;”<sup>1</sup> yet he has certainly exposed himself to the suspicion of having this singular taste, by suggesting the organization of a very large portion of them for the benefit of society in general. On this subject I need only observe, that I have always ranked the two checks<sup>2</sup> which he

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motives which is not followed by irregular gratifications. In this sense I am inclined to believe that the expression I have here used is not too strong.

<sup>1</sup> Reply, p. 76.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Godwin does not acknowledge the justice of Hume's observation respecting infanticide ; and yet the extreme population and poverty in China, where this custom prevails, tend strongly to confirm the observation. It is still however true, as Mr. Godwin observes, that the expedient is, in its own nature, adequate to the end for which it was cited, (p. 66,) but to make it so in fact, it must be done by the magistrate, and not left to the



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Observations on the reply of Mr. Godwin.

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first mentions among the worst forms of vice and misery.

In one part of his reply, Mr. Godwin makes a supposition respecting the number of children that might be allowed to each prolific marriage; but as he has not entered into the detail of the mode by which a greater number might be prevented, I shall not notice it further than merely to observe, that although he professes to acknowledge the geometrical and arithmetical ratios of population and food, yet in this place he appears to think that practically applied, these different ratios of increase are not of a nature to make the evil resulting

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parents. The almost invariable tendency of this custom to increase population, when it depends entirely on the parents, shows the extreme pain which they must feel in making such a sacrifice, even when the distress arising from excessive poverty may be supposed to have deadened in great measure their sensibility. What must his pain be then upon the supposition of the interference of a magistrate or of a positive law, to make parents destroy a child, which they feel the desire and think they possess the power of supporting? The permission of infanticide is bad enough, and cannot but have a bad effect on the moral sensibility of a nation; but I cannot conceive any thing much more detestable or shocking to the feelings than any direct regulation of this kind, although sanctioned by the names of Plato and Aristotle.



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Observations on the reply of Mr. Godwin.

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from them urgent, or alarmingly to confine the natural progress of population.<sup>1</sup> This observation seems to contradict his former acknowledgment.

The last check which Mr. Godwin mentions, and which I am persuaded is the only one which he would seriously recommend is, “that sentiment, whether virtue, prudence, or pride, which continually restrains the universality and frequent repetition of the marriage contract.”<sup>2</sup> On this sentiment which I have already noticed, it will appear that in the sequel of this work I shall lay considerable stress. Of this check therefore itself I entirely approve; but I do not think that Mr. Godwin’s system of political justice is by any means favorable to its prevalence. The tendency to early marriages is so strong that we want every possible help that we can get to counteract it; and a system which in any way whatever tends to weaken the foundation of private property, and to lessen in any degree the full advantage and superiority which each individual may derive from his prudence, must remove the only counteracting weight to the passion of love, that can be de-

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<sup>1</sup> Reply p. 70.

<sup>2</sup> Id. p. 73.



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Observations on the reply of Mr. Godwin.

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pended upon for any essential effect. Mr. Godwin acknowledges that in his system, “the ill consequences of a numerous family will not come so coarsely home to each man’s individual interest as they do at present.”<sup>1</sup> But I am sorry to say, that from what we know hitherto of the human character we can have no rational hopes of success without this coarse application to individual interest, which Mr. Godwin rejects. If the whole effect were to depend merely on a sense of duty, considering the powerful antagonist that is to be contended with in the present case, I confess that I should absolutely despair. At the same time I am strongly of opinion, that a sense of duty, superadded to a sense of interest, would by no means be without its effect. There are many noble and disinterested spirits, who, though aware of the inconveniences which they may bring upon themselves by the indulgence of an early and virtuous passion, feel a kind of repugnance to listen to the dictates of mere worldly prudence, and a pride in rejecting these low considerations. There is a kind of romantic gallantry in sacrificing all

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<sup>1</sup> Reply, p. 74.



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Observations on the reply of Mr. Godwin.

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for love, naturally fascinating to a young mind ; and to say the truth, if all is to be sacrificed, I do not know in what better cause it can be done. But if a strong sense of duty could in these instances be added to prudential suggestions, the whole question might wear a different color. In delaying the gratification of passion from a sense of duty, the most disinterested spirit, the most delicate honor, might be satisfied. The romantic pride might take a different direction, and the dictates of worldly prudence might be followed with the cheerful consciousness of making a virtuous sacrifice.

If we were to remove or weaken the motive of interest, which would be the case in Mr. Godwin's system, I fear we should have but a weak substitute in a sense of duty. But if to the present beneficial effects known to result from a sense of interest, we could superadd a sense of duty which is the object of the latter part of this work, it does not seem absolutely hopeless, that some partial improvement in society should result from it.



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## CHAPTER IV.

### *Of Emigration.*

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ALTHOUGH the resource of emigration seems to be excluded from such a society as Mr. Godwin has imagined; yet in that partial degree of improvement which alone can rationally be expected, it may fairly enter into our consideration. And as it is not probable that human industry should begin to receive its best direction throughout all the nations of the earth at the same time, it may be said that in the case of a redundant population in the more cultivated parts of the world, the natural and obvious remedy that presents itself is, emigration to those parts that are uncultivated. As these parts are of great extent, and very thinly peopled, this resource might appear, on a first view of the subject, an adequate remedy, or at least of a nature to remove the evil to a distant period: but when we advert to experience, and to the actual state of the uncivilized parts of the globe, instead of any thing like an



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Of Emigration.

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adequate remedy it will appear but a slight palliative.

In the accounts which we have of the peopling of new countries, the dangers, difficulties, and hardships, with which the first settlers have had to struggle, appear to be even greater than we can well imagine they could be exposed to in their parent state. The endeavor to avoid that degree of unhappiness arising from the difficulty of supporting a family might long have left the new world of America unpeopled by Europeans, if those more powerful passions the thirst of gain, the spirit of adventure, and religious enthusiasm, had not directed and animated the enterprise. These passions enabled the first adventurers to triumph over every obstacle; but in many instances in a way to make humanity shudder, and to defeat the true end of emigration. Whatever may be the character of the Spanish inhabitants of Mexico and Peru at the present moment, we cannot read the accounts of the first conquests of these countries without feeling strongly, that the race destroyed was in moral worth as well as numbers superior to the race of their destroyers.

The parts of America settled by the English, from being thinly peopled, were better adapted to



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Of Emigration.

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the establishment of new colonies; yet even here, the most formidable difficulties presented themselves. In the settlement of Virginia, begun by Sir Walter Raleigh, and established by lord Delaware, three attempts completely failed. Nearly half of the first colony was destroyed by the savages, and the rest consumed and worn down by fatigue and famine deserted the country, and returned home in despair. The second colony was cut off to a man in a manner unknown; but they were supposed to be destroyed by the Indians. The third experienced the same dismal fate; and the remains of the fourth, after it had been reduced by famine and disease in the course of six months from 500 to 60 persons, were returning in a famishing and desperate condition to England, when they were met in the mouth of the Chesapeak bay by lord Delaware, with a squadron loaded with provisions, and every thing for their relief and defence.<sup>1</sup>

The first puritan settlers in New England were few in number. They landed in a bad season, and were only supported by their private funds.

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<sup>1</sup> Burke's America, vol. ii. p. 219. Robertson, b. ix. p. 85, 86.



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Of Emigration.

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The winter was premature and terribly cold; the country was covered with wood, and afforded very little for the refreshment of persons sickly with such a voyage, or for the sustenance of an infant people. Nearly half of them perished by the scurvy, by want, and the severity of the climate; yet those who survived were not dispirited by their hardships, but supported by their energy of character, and the satisfaction of finding themselves out of the reach of the spiritual arm, reduced this savage country by degrees to yield them a comfortable subsistence.<sup>1</sup>

Even the plantation of Barbadoes, which increased afterwards with such extraordinary rapidity, had at first to contend with a country utterly desolate, an extreme want of provisions, a difficulty in clearing the ground unusually great from the uncommon size and hardness of the trees, a most disheartening scantiness and poverty in their first crops, and a slow and precarious supply of provisions from England.<sup>2</sup>

The attempt of the French in 1663, to form at once a powerful colony in Guinea, was attended

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<sup>1</sup> Burke's *America*, vol. ii. p. 144.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* p. 85.



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Of Emigration.

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with the most disastrous consequences. Twelve thousand men were landed in the rainy season, and placed under tents and miserable sheds. In this situation, inactive, weary of existence, and in want of all necessaries, exposed to contagious distempers which are always occasioned by bad provisions, and to all the irregularities which idleness produces among the lower classes of society, almost the whole of them ended their lives in all the horrors of despair. The attempt was completely abortive. Two thousand men, whose robust constitutions had enabled them to resist the inclemency of the climate and the miseries to which they had been exposed, were brought back to France, and the 25,000,000 of livres which had been expended in the expedition were totally lost.<sup>1</sup>

In the late settlements at Port Jackson in New Holland, a melancholy and affecting picture is drawn by Collins of the extreme hardships with which, for some years, the infant colony had to struggle before the produce was equal to its support. These distresses were undoubtedly aggravated by the character of the settlers; but those

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<sup>1</sup> Raynal, *Hist. des Indes*, tom. vii. liv. xiii. p. 43. 19 vols. 8vo. 1795.



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Of Emigration.

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which were caused by the unhealthiness of a newly cleared country, the failure of first crops, and the uncertainty of supplies from so distant a mother country, were of themselves sufficiently disheartening, to place in a strong point of view the necessity of great resources, as well as unconquerable perseverance, in the colonization of savage countries.

The establishment of colonies in the more thinly peopled regions of Europe and Asia would evidently require still greater resources. From the power and warlike character of the inhabitants of these countries, a considerable military force would be necessary to prevent their utter and immediate destruction. Even the frontier provinces of the most powerful states are defended with considerable difficulty from such restless neighbors; and the peaceful labors of the cultivator are continually interrupted by their predatory incursions. The late empress Catharine of Russia found it necessary to protect by regular fortresses, the colonies which she had established in the districts near the Wolga; and the calamities which her subjects suffered by the incursions of the Crim Tartars furnished a pretext, and perhaps a just one, for taking possession of the whole of the



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Of Emigration.

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Crimea, and expelling the greatest part of these turbulent neighbors, and reducing the rest to a more tranquil mode of life.

The difficulties attending a first establishment from soil, climate, and the want of proper conveniences, are of course nearly the same in these regions as in America. Mr. Eton, in his account of the Turkish Empire, says, that 75,000 Christians were obliged by Russia to emigrate from the Crimea, and sent to inhabit the country abandoned by the Nogai Tartars; but the winter coming on before the houses built for them were ready, a great part of them had no other shelter from the cold than what was afforded them by holes dug in the ground, covered with what they could procure, and the greatest part of them perished. Only seven thousand remained a few years afterwards. Another colony from Italy to the banks of the Borysthenes had, he says, no better fate, owing to the bad management of those who were commissioned to provide for them.

It is needless to add to these instances, as the accounts given of the difficulties experienced in new settlements are all nearly similar. It has been justly observed by a correspondent of Dr. Franklin, that one of the reasons why we have seen so many



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Of Emigration.

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fruitless attempts to settle colonies at an immense public and private expense by several of the powers of Europe is, that the moral and mechanical habits adapted to the mother country are frequently not so to the new-settled one, and to external events, many of which are unforeseen; and that it is to be remarked, that none of the English colonies became any way considerable till the necessary manners were born and grew up in the country. Pallas particularly notices the want of proper habits in the colonies established by Russia, as one of the causes why they did not increase so fast as might have been expected.

In addition to this it may be observed, that the first establishment of a new colony generally presents an instance of a country peopled considerably beyond its actual produce; and the natural consequence seems to be, that this population, if not amply supplied by the mother country, should at the commencement be diminished to the level of the first scanty productions, and not begin permanently to increase till the remaining numbers had so far cultivated the soil as to make it yield a quantity of food more than sufficient for their own support; and which consequently they could divide with a family. The frequent failures in the establishment



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Of Emigration.

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of new colonies tend strongly to show the order of precedence between food and population.

It must be acknowledged then, that the class of people on whom the distress arising from a too rapidly increasing population would principally fall could not possibly begin a new colony in a distant country. From the nature of their situation, they must necessarily be deficient in those resources which alone could ensure success; and unless they could find leaders among the higher classes urged by the spirit of avarice or enterprise, or of religious or political discontent; or were furnished with means and support by government; whatever degree of misery they might suffer in their own country from the scarcity of subsistence, they would be absolutely unable to take possession of any of those uncultivated regions of which there is such an extent on the earth.

When new colonies have been once securely established, the difficulty of emigration is indeed very considerably diminished; yet, even then, some resources are necessary to provide vessels for the voyage, and support and assistance till the emigrants can settle themselves, and find employment in their adopted country. How far it is incumbent upon a government to furnish these



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Of Emigration.

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resources may be a question ; but whatever be its duty in this particular, perhaps it is too much to expect, that except where any particular colonial advantages are proposed emigration should be actively assisted.

The necessary resources for transport and maintenance are however frequently furnished by individuals or private companies. For many years before the American war, and for some few since, the facilities of emigration to this new world, and the probable advantages in view, were unusually great ; and it must be considered undoubtedly as a very happy circumstance for any country, to have so comfortable an asylum for its redundant population. But I would ask whether, even during these periods, the distress among the common people in this country was little or nothing, and whether every man felt secure before he ventured on marriage, that however large his family might be, he should find no difficulty in supporting it without parish assistance. The answer, I fear, could not be in the affirmative.

It will be said, that when an opportunity of advantageous emigration is offered, it is the fault of the people themselves, if instead of accepting it they prefer a life of celibacy or extreme poverty



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Of Emigration.

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in their own country. Is it then a fault for a man to feel an attachment to his native soil, to love the parents that nurtured him, his kindred, his friends, and the companions of his early years? or is it no evil that he suffers, because he consents to bear it rather than snap these cords which nature has wound in close and intricate folds round the human heart? The great plan of Providence seems to require indeed that these ties should sometimes be broken; but the separation does not, on that account, give less pain; and though the general good may be promoted by it, it does not cease to be an individual evil. Besides, doubts and uncertainty must ever attend all distant emigrations, particularly in the apprehensions of the lower classes of people. They cannot feel quite secure, that the representations made to them of the high price of labor, or the cheapness of land, are accurately true. They are placing themselves in the power of the persons who are to furnish them with the means of transport and maintenance, who may perhaps have an interest in deceiving them; and the sea which they are to pass appears to them like the separation of death from all their former connexions, and in a manner to preclude the possibility of return in case of failure, as they cannot ex-



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Of Emigration.

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pect the offer of the same means to bring them back. We cannot be surprised then that except where a spirit of enterprise is added to the uneasiness of poverty, the consideration of these circumstances should frequently

“ Make them rather bear the ills they suffer,  
“ Than fly to others which they know not of.”

If a tract of rich land as large as this island were suddenly annexed to it, and sold in small lots, or let out in small farms, the case would be very different, and the melioration of the state of the common people would be sudden and striking ; though the rich would be continually complaining of the high price of labor, the pride of the lower classes, and the difficulty of getting work done. These, I understand, are not unfrequent complaints among the men of property in America.

Every resource however, from emigration, if used effectually, as this would be, must be of short duration. There is scarcely a state in Europe except perhaps Russia, the inhabitants of which do not often endeavor to better their condition by removing to other countries. As these states therefore have nearly all rather a redundant than deficient population, in proportion to their produce, they cannot be supposed to afford any







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Of Emigration.

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be held out as a remedy to redundant population is, because from the natural unwillingness of people to desert their native country, and the difficulty of clearing and cultivating fresh soil, it never is or can be adequately adopted. If this remedy were indeed really effectual, and had power so far to relieve the disorders of vice and misery in old states as to place them in the condition of the most prosperous new colonies, we should soon see the phial exhausted, and when the disorders returned with increased virulence, every hope from this quarter would be forever closed.

It is clear therefore, that with any view of making room for an unrestricted increase of population, emigration is perfectly inadequate; but as a partial and temporary expedient, and with a view to the more general cultivation of the earth, and the wider spread of civilization, it seems to be both useful and proper; and if it cannot be proved that governments are bound actively to encourage it, it is not only strikingly unjust, but in the highest degree impolitic in them to prevent it. There are no fears so totally ill-grounded as the fears of depopulation from emigration. The *vis inertiae* of people in general, and their attachment to their homes, are qualities so strong and general, that we



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Of Emigration.

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may rest assured that they will not emigrate, unless from political discontents or extreme poverty they are in such a state, as will make it as much for the advantage of their country as of themselves that they should go out of it. The complaints of high wages in consequence of emigrations are of all others the most unreasonable, and ought the least to be attended to. If the wages of labor in any country be such as to enable the lower classes of people to live with tolerable comfort, we may be quite certain that they will not emigrate; and if they be not such it is cruelty and injustice to detain them



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## CHAPTER V.

### *Of Poor Laws.*

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TO remedy the frequent distresses of the poor, laws to enforce their relief have been instituted; and in the establishment of a general system of this kind, England has particularly distinguished herself. But it is to be feared that though it may have alleviated a little the intensity of individual misfortune, it has spread the evil over a much larger surface.

It is a subject often started in conversation, and mentioned always as a matter of great surprise, that notwithstanding the immense sum which is annually collected for the poor in this country there is still so much distress among them. Some think that the money must be embezzled for private use; others, that the churchwardens and overseers consume the greatest part of it in feasting. All agree, that somehow or other it must be very ill managed. In short, the fact, that even before the late scarcities three millions were col-



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Of Poor Laws.

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lected annually for the poor, and yet that their distresses were not removed, is the subject of continual astonishment. But a man who looks a little below the surface of things would be much more astonished, if the fact were otherwise than it is observed to be; or even if a collection universally of eighteen shillings in the pound, instead of four, were materially to alter it.

Suppose, that by a subscription of the rich, the eighteen-pence or two shillings, which men earn now, were made up five shillings, it might be imagined, perhaps, that they would then be able to live comfortably, and have a piece of meat every day for their dinner. But this would be a very false conclusion. The transfer of three additional shillings a day to each laborer would not increase the quantity of meat in the country. There is not at present enough for all to have a moderate share. What would then be the consequence? the competition among the buyers in the market of meat would rapidly raise the price from eight pence or nine pence to two or three shillings in the pound, and the commodity would not be divided among many more than it is at present. When an article is scarce, and cannot be distri-



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Of Poor Laws.

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buted to all, he that can show the most valid patent, that is, he that offers the most money becomes the possessor. If we can suppose the competition among the buyers of meat to continue long enough for a greater number of cattle to be reared annually, this could only be done at the expense of the corn, which would be a very disadvantageous exchange; for it is well known, that the country could not then support the same population; and when subsistence is scarce in proportion to the number of people it is of little consequence whether the lowest members of the society possess two shillings or five. They must, at all events, be reduced to live upon the hardest fare and in the smallest quantity.

It might be said perhaps, that the increased number of purchasers in every article would give a spur to productive industry, and that the whole produce of the island would be increased. But the spur that these fancied riches would give to population would more than counterbalance it; and the increased produce would be to be divided among a more than proportionably increased number of people.

A collection from the rich of eighteen shillings



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Of Poor Laws.

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in the pound, even if distributed in the most judicious manner, would have an effect similar to that resulting from the supposition which I have just made ; and no possible sacrifices of the rich, particularly in money, could for any time prevent the recurrence of distress among the lower members of society, who ever they were. Great changes might indeed be made. The rich might become poor, and some of the poor rich ; but while the present proportion between population and food continues, a part of society must necessarily find it difficult to support a family, and this difficulty will naturally fall on the least fortunate members.

It may at first appear strange, but I believe it is true, that I cannot by means of money raise the condition of a poor man, and enable him to live much better than he did before, without proportionably depressing others in the same class. If I retrench the quantity of food consumed in my house, and give him what I have cut off, I then benefit him without depressing any but myself and family, who perhaps may be well able to bear it. If I turn up a piece of uncultivated land, and give him the produce, I then benefit both him and all the members of society, because what he before



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**Of Poor Laws.**

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consumed is thrown into the common stock, and probably some of the new produce with it. But if I only give him money, supposing the produce of the country to remain the same, I give him a title to a larger share of that produce than formerly, which share he cannot receive without diminishing the shares of others. It is evident that this effect in individual instances must be so small as to be totally imperceptible; but still it must exist, as many other effects do, which like some of the insects that people the air elude our grosser perceptions.

Supposing the quantity of food in any country to remain the same for many years together, it is evident that this food must be divided according to the value of each man's patent, or the sum of money which he can afford to spend in this commodity so universally in request. It is a demonstrative truth therefore, that the patents of one set of men could not be increased in value, without diminishing the value of the patents of some other set of men. If the rich were to subscribe and give five shillings a day to five hundred thousand men, without retrenching their own tables, no doubt can exist that as these men would live more at their ease, and consume a greater quantity of



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Of Poor Laws.

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provisions, there would be less food remaining to divide among the rest; and consequently each man's patent would be diminished in value, or the same number of pieces of silver would purchase a smaller quantity of subsistence, and the price of provisions would universally rise.

These general reasonings have been strikingly confirmed during the late scarcities. The supposition which I have made of a collection from the rich of eighteen shillings in the pound has been nearly realized; and the effect has been such as might have been expected. If the same distribution had been made when no scarcity existed, a considerable advance in the price of provisions would have been a necessary consequence; but following as it did a scarcity, its effect must have been doubly powerful. No person, I believe, will venture to doubt, that if we were to give three additional shillings a day to every laboring man in the kingdom, as I before supposed, in order that he might have meat for his dinner, the price of meat would rise in the most rapid and unexampled manner. But surely, in a deficiency of corn, which renders it impossible for every man to have his usual share, if we still continue to fur-



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Of Poor Laws.

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nish each person with the means of purchasing the same quantity as before, the effect must be in every respect similar.

It seems in great measure to have escaped observation, that the price of corn in a scarcity will depend much more upon the obstinacy with which the same degree of consumption is persevered in, than on the degree of the actual deficiency. A deficiency of one half of a crop, if the people could immediately consent to consume only one half of what they did before, would produce little or no effect on the price of corn. A deficiency of one twelfth, if exactly the same consumption were to continue for ten or eleven months, might raise the price of corn to almost any height. The more is given in parish assistance, the more power is furnished of persevering in the same consumption, and of course the higher will the price rise before the necessary diminution of consumption is effected.

It has been asserted by some people that high prices do not diminish consumption. If this were really true, we should see the price of a bushel of corn at a hundred pounds or more, in every deficiency, which could not be fully and completely remedied by importation. But the fact is, that



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Of Poor Laws.

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high prices do ultimately diminish consumption; but on account of the riches of the country, the unwillingness of the people to resort to substitutes, and the immense sums which are distributed by parishes, this object cannot be attained till the prices become excessive, and force even the middle classes of society, or at least those immediately above the poor, to save in the article of bread from the actual inability of purchasing it in the usual quantity. The poor who were assisted by their parishes had no reason whatever to complain of the high price of grain; because it was the excessiveness of this price, and this alone, which by enforcing such a saving left a greater quantity of corn for the consumption of the lowest classes, which corn the parish allowances enable them to command. The greatest sufferers in the scarcity were undoubtedly the classes immediately above the poor; and these were in the most marked manner depressed by the excessive bounties given to those below them. Almost all poverty is relative; and I much doubt whether these people would have been rendered so poor if a sum equal to half of these bounties had been taken directly out of their pockets, as they were, by that new distribution of



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Of Poor Laws.

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the money of the society which actually took place.<sup>a</sup> This distribution by giving to the poorer classes a command of food, so much greater than that to which their degree of skill and industry entitled them, in the actual circumstances of the country, diminished exactly in the same proportion that command over the necessaries of life, which the classes above them, by their superior skill and industry, would naturally possess; and it may be a question whether the degree of assistance which the poor received, and which prevented them from resorting to the use of those substitutes,

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<sup>a</sup> Supposing the lower classes to earn on an average ten shillings a week, and the classes just above them twenty, it is not to be doubted, that in a scarcity these latter would be more straightened in their power of commanding the necessaries of life, by a donation of ten shillings a week to those below them, than by the subtraction of five shillings a week from their own earnings. In the one case, they would be all reduced to a level; the price of provisions would rise in an extraordinary manner from the greatness of the competition; and all would be straightened for subsistence. In the other case, the classes above the poor would still maintain a considerable part of their relative superiority; the price of provisions would by no means rise in the same degree; and their remaining fifteen shillings would purchase much more than their twenty shillings in the former case.



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Of Poor Laws.

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which in every other country on such occasions the great law of necessity teaches, was not more than overbalanced by the severity of the pressure on so large a body of people from the extreme high prices, and the permanent evil which must result from forcing so many persons on the parish, who before thought themselves almost out of the reach of want.

If we were to double the fortunes of all those who possess above a hundred a year, the effect on the price of grain would be slow and inconsiderable; but if we were to double the price of labor throughout the kingdom, the effect in raising the price of grain would be rapid and great. The general principles on this subject will not admit of dispute; and that in the particular case which we have been considering, the bounties to the poor were of a magnitude to operate very powerfully in this manner will sufficiently appear, if we recollect, that before the late scarcities the sum collected for the poor was estimated at three millions, and that during the year 1801 it was said to be ten millions. An additional seven millions acting at the bottom of the scale,<sup>1</sup> and employed

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<sup>1</sup> See a small pamphlet published in November 1800,



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Of Poor Laws.

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exclusively in the purchase of provisions, joined to a considerable advance in the price of wages in many parts of the kingdom, and increased by a prodigious sum expended in voluntary charity, must have had a most powerful effect in raising the price of the necessaries of life, if any reliance can be placed on the clearest general principles confirmed as much as possible by appearances. A man with a family has received, to my knowledge, fourteen shillings a week from the parish. His common earnings were ten shillings a week, and his weekly revenue therefore, twenty-four. Before the scarcity he had been in the habit of purchasing a bushel of flour a week with eight shillings perhaps, and consequently had two shillings out of his ten, to spare for other necessaries. During the scarcity he was enabled to purchase

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entitled, *An investigation of the cause of the present high price of provisions*. This pamphlet was mistaken by some for an inquiry into the cause of the scarcity, and as such it would naturally appear to be incomplete, adverting, as it does, principally to a single cause. But the sole object of the pamphlet was to give the principal reason for the extreme high price of provisions, in proportion to the degree of the scarcity, admitting the deficiency of one fourth, as stated in the Duke of Portland's letter; which, I am much inclined to think was very near the truth.



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Of Poor Laws.

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the same quantity at nearly three times the price. He paid twenty-two shillings for his bushel of flour, and had as before two shillings remaining for other wants. Such instances could not possibly have been universal, without raising the price of wheat very much higher than it really was during any part of the dearth. But similar instances were by no means infrequent, and the system itself of measuring the relief given by the price of grain was general.

If the circulation of the country had consisted entirely of specie, which could not have been immediately increased, it would have been impossible to give such an additional sum as seven millions to the poor without embarrassing to a great degree the operations of commerce. On the commencement therefore of this extensive relief, which would necessarily occasion a proportionate expenditure in provisions throughout all the ranks of society, a great demand would be felt for an increased circulating medium. The nature of the medium then principally in use was such, that it could be created immediately on demand. From the accounts of the bank of England, as laid before Parliament, it appeared that no very great



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Of Poor Laws.

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additional issues of paper took place from this quarter. The three millions and a half added to its former average issues were not probably much above what was sufficient to supply the quantity of specie, that had been withdrawn from the circulation. If this supposition be true, and the small quantity of gold which made its appearance at that time furnishes the strongest reason for believing that nearly as much as this must have been withdrawn, it would follow that the part of the circulation originating in the bank of England, though changed in its nature, had not been much increased in its quantity; and with regard to the effect of the circulating medium on the price of all commodities it cannot be doubted, that it would be precisely the same whether it were made up principally of guineas, or of pound notes and shillings which would pass current for guineas.

The demand therefore for an increased circulating medium was left to be supplied principally by the country banks, and it could not be expected that they should hesitate in taking advantage of so profitable an opportunity. The paper issues of a country bank are, as I conceive, measured by the quantity of its notes which will remain in circulation; and this quantity is again measured, suppo-



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Of Poor Laws.

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sing a confidence to be established, by the sum of what is wanted to carry on all the money transactions of the neighborhood. From the high price of provisions, all these transactions became more expensive. In the single article of the weekly payment of laborers' wages, including the parish allowances, it is evident that a very great addition to the circulating medium of the neighborhood would be wanted. Had the country banks attempted to issue the same quantity of paper without such a particular demand for it, they would quickly have been admonished of their error by its rapid and pressing return upon them ; but at this time it was wanted for immediate and daily use, and was therefore eagerly absorbed into the circulation.

It may even admit of a question, whether under similar circumstances the country banks would not have issued nearly the same quantity of paper, if the bank of England had not been restricted from payment in specie. Before this event the issues of the country banks in paper were regulated by the quantity that the circulation would take up, and after, as well as before, they were obliged to pay the notes which returned upon them in bank of England circulation. The difference in



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Of Poor Laws.

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the two cases would arise principally from the pernicious custom, adopted since the restriction of the bank, of issuing one and two pound notes, and from the little preference that many people might feel, if they could not get gold, between country bank paper and bank of England paper.

The very great issue of country bank paper during the years 1800 and 1801 was evidently therefore, in its origin rather a consequence than a cause of the high price of provisions ; but being once absorbed into the circulation, it must necessarily affect the price of all commodities, and throw very great obstacles in the way of returning cheapness. This is the great mischief of the system. During the scarcity, it is not to be doubted that the increased circulation, by preventing the embarrassments which commerce and speculation must otherwise have felt, enabled the country to continue all the branches of its trade with less interruption, and to import a much greater quantity of grain than it could have done otherwise ; but to overbalance these temporary advantages, a lasting evil might be entailed upon the community, and the prices of a time of scarcity might become permanent, from the difficulty of reabsorbing this increased circulation.



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Of Poor Laws.

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In this respect however, it is much better that the great issue of paper should have come from the country banks than from the bank of England. During the restriction of payment in specie, there is no possibility of forcing the bank to retake its notes when too abundant; but with regard to the country banks, as soon as their notes are not wanted in the circulation they will be returned; and if the bank of England notes be not increased, the whole circulating medium will thus be diminished.

We may consider ourselves as peculiarly fortunate, that the two years of scarcity were succeeded by two events the best calculated to restore plenty and cheapness—an abundant harvest and a peace; which together produced a general conviction of plenty, in the minds both of buyers and sellers; and by rendering the first slow to purchase, and the others eager to sell, occasioned a glut in the market, and a consequent rapid fall of price, which has enabled parishes to take off their allowances to the poor, and thus to prevent a return of high prices when the alarm among the sellers was over.

If the two years of scarcity had been succeeded merely by years of average crops, I am strongly



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Of Poor Laws.

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disposed to believe, that as no glut would have taken place in the market, the price of grain would have fallen only in an inconsiderable degree, the parish allowances could not have been resumed, the increased quantity of paper would still have been wanted, and the prices of all commodities might by degrees have been regulated permanently, according to the increased circulating medium.

If instead of giving the temporary assistance of parish allowances, which might be withdrawn on the first fall of price, we had raised universally the wages of labor, it is evident that the obstacles to a diminution of the circulation, and to returning cheapness, would have been still further increased; and the high price of labor would have become permanent, without any advantage whatever to the laborer.

There is no one that more ardently desires to see a real advance in the price of labor than myself; but the attempt to effect this object by forcibly raising the nominal price, which was practised to a certain degree, and recommended almost universally during the late scarcities, every thinking man must reprobate as puerile and ineffectual.

The price of labor, when left to find its natural level, is a most important political barometer, ex-



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Of Poor Laws.

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pressing the relation between the supply of provisions, and the demand for them; between the quantity to be consumed, and the number of consumers; and taken on the average, independently of accidental circumstances, it further expresses clearly the wants of the society respecting population; that is, whatever may be the number of children to a marriage necessary to maintain exactly the present population, the price of labor will be just sufficient to support this number, or be above it, or below it, according to the state of the real funds for the maintenance of labor, whether stationary, progressive, or retrograde. Instead however, of considering it in this light, we consider it as something which we may raise or depress at pleasure, something which depends principally upon his majesty's justices of the peace. When an advance in the price of provisions already expresses that the demand is too great for the supply, in order to put the laborer in the same condition as before, we raise the price of labor, that is, we increase the demand, and are then much surprised that the price of provisions continues rising. In this we act much in the same manner as if, when the quicksilver in the common weather-glass stood at *stormy*, we were to raise it by some mechanical



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Of Poor Laws.

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pressure to *settled fair*, and then be greatly astonished that it continued raining.

Dr. Smith has clearly shown, that the natural tendency of a year of scarcity is either to throw a number of laborers out of employment, or to oblige them to work for less than they did before, from the inability of masters to employ the same number at the same price. The raising of the price of wages tends necessarily to throw more out of employment, and completely to prevent the good effects which, he says, sometimes arise from a year of moderate scarcity, that of making the lower classes of people do more work and become more careful and industrious. The number of servants out of place, and the manufacturers wanting employment, during the late scarcities, were melancholy proofs of the truth of these reasonings. If a general rise in the wages of labor had taken place proportioned to the price of provisions, none but farmers and a few gentlemen could have afforded to employ the same number of workmen as before. Additional crowds of servants and manufacturers would have been turned off; and those who were thus thrown out of employment would of course have no other refuge than the parish. In the natural order of things a scarcity



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Of Poor Laws.

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must tend to lower, instead of to raise, the price of labor.

After the publication and general circulation of such a work as Dr. Smith's I confess it appears to me strange that so many men who would yet aspire to be thought political economists should still think that it is in the power of the justices of the peace, or even of the omnipotence of parliament, to alter by a *fiat* the whole circumstances of the country ; and when the demand for provisions is greater than the supply, by publishing a particular edict to make the supply at once equal to or greater than the demand. Many men who would shrink at the proposal of a maximum would propose themselves, that the price of labor should be proportioned to the price of provisions, and do not seem to be aware that the two proposals are very nearly of the same nature, and that both tend directly to famine. It matters not whether we enable the laborer to purchase the same quantity of provisions which he did before by fixing their price, or by raising in proportion the price of labor. The only advantage on the side of raising the price of labor is, that the rise in the price of provisions which necessarily follows it encourages importation ; but putting importation out of the question, which



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Of Poor Laws.

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might possibly be prevented by war, or other circumstances, a universal rise of wages in proportion to the price of provisions, aided by adequate parish allowances to those who were thrown out of work, would, by preventing any kind of saving, in the same manner as a maximum, cause the whole crop to be consumed in nine months which ought to have lasted twelve, and thus produce a famine. At the same time we must not forget that both humanity and true policy imperiously require, that we should give every assistance to the poor on these occasions that the nature of the case will admit. If provisions were to continue at the price of scarcity, the wages of labor must necessarily rise or sickness and famine would quickly diminish the number of laborers, and the supply of labor being unequal to the demand, its price would soon rise in a still greater proportion than the price of provisions. But even one or two years of scarcity, if the poor were left entirely to shift for themselves, might produce some effect of this kind, and consequently it is our interest as well as our duty to give them temporary aid in such seasons of distress. It is on such occasions that every cheap substitute for bread, and every mode of economizing food should be



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Of Poor Laws.

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resorted to. Nor should we be too ready to complain of that high price of corn which by encouraging importation increases the supply.

As the inefficacy of poor laws, and of attempts forcibly to raise the price of labor, are most conspicuous in a scarcity, I have thought myself justified in considering them under this view; and as these causes of increased price received great additional force during the late scarcity from the increase of the circulating medium, I trust that the few observations which I have made on this subject will be considered as an allowable digression.



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## CHAPTER VI.

*Subject of Poor Laws continued.*

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INDEPENDENTLY of any considerations respecting a year of deficient crops it is evident, that an increase of population without a proportional increase of food must lower the value of each man's earnings. The food must necessarily be distributed in smaller quantities, and consequently a day's labor will purchase a smaller quantity of provisions. An increase in the price of provisions will arise either from an increase of population faster than the means of subsistence, or from a different distribution of the money of the society. The food of a country which has been long peopled, if it be increasing, increases slowly and regularly, and cannot be made to answer any sudden demands; but variations in the distribution of the money of the society are not unfrequently occurring and are undoubtedly among the causes which occasion the continual variations in the prices of provisions.



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Subject of Poor Laws, continued.

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The poor laws of England tend to depress the general condition of the poor in these two ways. Their first obvious tendency is to increase population without increasing the food for its support. A poor man may marry with little or no prospect of being able to support a family without parish assistance. They may be said therefore, to create the poor which they maintain; and as the provisions of the country must, in consequence of the increased population, be distributed to every man in smaller proportions, it is evident that the labor of those who are not supported by parish assistance will purchase a smaller quantity of provisions than before, and consequently more of them must be driven to apply for assistance.

Secondly, the quantity of provisions consumed in workhouses, upon a part of the society that cannot in general be considered as the most valuable part, diminishes the shares that would otherwise belong to more industrious and more worthy members, and thus, in the same manner, forces more to become dependent. If the poor in the workhouses were to live better than they do now, this new distribution of the money of the society would tend more conspicuously to depress the condition of those out of the workhouses by occasioning an advance in the price of provisions.



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Subject of Poor Laws, continued.

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

Hard as it may appear in individual instances, dependent poverty ought to be held disgraceful. Such a stimulus seems to be absolutely necessary to promote the happiness of the great mass of mankind; and every general attempt to weaken this stimulus, however benevolent its intention, will always defeat its own purpose. If men be induced to marry from the mere prospect of parish provision, they are not only unjustly tempted to bring unhappiness and dependence upon themselves and children, but they are tempted without knowing it, to injure all in the same class with themselves.

The parish laws of England appear to have contributed to raise the price of provisions, and to lower the real price of labor. They have therefore contributed to impoverish that class of people whose only possession is their labor. It is also difficult to suppose that they have not power-



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Subject of Poor Laws, continued.

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fully contributed to generate that carelessness and want of frugality observable among the poor, so contrary to the disposition generally to be remarked among petty tradesmen and small farmers. The laboring poor, to use a vulgar expression, seem always to live from hand to mouth. Their present wants employ their whole attention; and they seldom think of the future. Even when they have an opportunity of saving they seldom exercise it; but all that they earn beyond their present necessities goes, generally speaking, to the alehouse. The poor laws may therefore be said to diminish both the power and the will to save among the common people, and thus to weaken one of the strongest incentives to sobriety and industry, and consequently to happiness.

It is a general complaint among master manufacturers that high wages ruin all their workmen; but it is difficult to conceive that these men would not save a part of their high wages for the future support of their families, instead of spending it in drunkenness and dissipation, if they did not rely on parish assistance for support in case of accidents. And that the poor employed in manufactures consider this assistance as a reason why they may spend all the wages which they earn, and en-



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Subject of Poor Laws, continued.

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joy themselves while they can, appears to be evident, from the number of families that upon the failure of any great manufactory immediately fall upon the parish; when perhaps the wages earned in this manufactory while it flourished were sufficiently above the price of common country labor, to have allowed them to save enough for their support, till they could find some other channel for their industry.

A man who might not be deterred from going to the alehouse from the consideration, that on his death or sickness he should leave his wife and family upon the parish, might yet hesitate in thus dissipating his earnings, if he were assured that in either of these cases his family must starve, or be left to the support of casual bounty.

The mass of happiness among the common people cannot but be diminished, when one of the strongest checks to idleness and dissipation is thus removed; and positive institutions which render dependent poverty so general; weaken that disgrace, which for the best and most humane reasons ought to be attached to it.

The poor laws of England were undoubtedly instituted for the most benevolent purpose; but it is evident they have failed in attaining it. They



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Subject of Poor Laws, continued.

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certainly mitigate some cases of severe distress which might otherwise occur, though the state of the poor who are supported by parishes, considered in all its circumstances is very miserable. But one of the principal objections to the system is, that for the assistance which some of the poor receive, in itself almost a doubtful blessing, the whole class of common people of England is subjected to a set of grating, inconvenient, and tyrannical laws, totally inconsistent with the genuine spirit of the constitution. The whole business of settlements, even in its present amended state, is contradictory to all ideas of freedom. The parish persecution of men whose families are likely to become chargeable, and of poor women who are near lying in, is a most disgraceful and disgusting tyranny. And the obstructions continually occasioned in the market of labor by these laws have a constant tendency, to add to the difficulties of those who are struggling to support themselves without assistance.

These evils attendant on the poor laws seem to be irremediable. If assistance be to be distributed to a certain class of people, a power must be lodged somewhere of discriminating the proper objects, and of managing the concerns of the insti-



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Subject of Poor Laws, continued.

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tutions that are necessary ; but any great interference with the affairs of other people is a species of tyranny, and in the common course of things, the exercise of this power may be expected to become grating to those who are driven to ask for support. The tyranny of justices, churchwardens, and overseers, is a common complaint among the poor ; but the fault does not lie so much in these persons, who probably before they were in power were not worse than other people, but in the nature of all such institutions.

I feel persuaded, that if the poor laws had never existed in this country, though there might have been a few more instances of very severe distress, the aggregate mass of happiness among the common people would have been much greater than it is at present.

The radical defect of all systems of the kind is that of tending to increase population without increasing the means for its support, and by thus depressing the condition of those that are not relieved by parishes to create more poor. If, indeed, we examine some of our statutes strictly with reference to the principle of population, we shall find that they attempt an absolute impossibility ; and



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Subject of Poor Laws, continued.

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we cannot be surprised therefore, that they should constantly fail in the attainment of their object.

The famous 43d of Elizabeth, which has been so often referred to and admired, enacts, that the overseers of the poor, “ shall take order from time  
“ to time, by and with the consent of two or more  
“ justices, for setting to work the children of all  
“ such whose parents shall not by the said per-  
“ sons be thought able to keep and maintain their  
“ children ; and also such persons married or un-  
“ married, as having no means to maintain them,  
“ use no ordinary and daily trade of life to get their  
“ living by. And also to raise, weekly or other-  
“ wise, by taxation of every inhabitant, and every  
“ occupier of lands in the said parish, (in such  
“ competent sums as they shall think fit) a conve-  
“ nient stock of flax, hemp, wool, thread, iron,  
“ and other necessary ware and stuff, to set the  
“ poor to work.”

What is this but saying that the funds for the maintenance of labor in this country may be increased at will, and without limit, by a *fiat* of government, or an assessment of the overseers. Strictly speaking, this clause is as arrogant and as absurd as if it had enacted that two ears of wheat

vol. ii. a a



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Subject of Poor Laws, continued.

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should in future grow where one only had grown before. Canute, when he commanded the waves not to wet his princely foot, did not in reality assume a greater power over the laws of nature. No directions are given to the overseers how to increase the funds for the maintenance of labor; the necessity of industry, economy, and enlightened exertion, in the management of agricultural and commercial capital is not insisted on for this purpose; but it is expected that a miraculous increase of these funds should immediately follow an edict of the government used at the discretion of some ignorant parish officers.

If this clause were really and *bona fide* put in execution, and the shame attending the receiving of parish assistance worn off, every laboring man might marry as early as he pleased, under the certain prospect of having all his children properly provided for; and as according to the supposition, there would be no check to population from the consequences of poverty after marriage, the increase of people would be rapid beyond example in old states. After what has been said in the former parts of this work it is submitted to the reader, whether the utmost exertions of the most



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Subject of Poor Laws, continued.

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enlightened government could, in this case, make the food keep pace with the population, much less a mere arbitrary edict, the tendency of which is certainly rather to diminish than to increase the funds for the maintenance of productive labor.

In the actual circumstances of every country, the prolific power of nature seems to be always ready to exert nearly its full force ; but within the limit of possibility, there is nothing perhaps more improbable, or more out of the reach of any government to effect, than the direction of the industry of its subjects in such a manner as to produce the greatest quantity of human sustenance that the earth could bear. It evidently could not be done without the most complete violation of the law of property, from which every thing that is valuable to man has hitherto arisen. Such is the disposition to marry, particularly in very young people, that if the difficulties of providing for a family were entirely removed, very few would remain single at twenty-two. But what statesman or rational government could propose, that all animal food should be prohibited, that no horses should be used for business or pleasure, that all the people should live upon potatoes, and that the whole industry of



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Subject of Poor Laws, continued.

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the nation should be exerted in the production of them, except what was necessary for the mere necessaries of cloathing and houses. Could such a revolution be effected, would it be desirable; particularly as in a few years, notwithstanding all these exertions, want, with less resource than ever, would inevitably recur.

After a country has once ceased to be in the peculiar situation of a new colony, we shall always find, that in the actual state of its cultivation, or in that state which may rationally be expected from the most enlightened government, the increase of its food can never allow for any length of time an unrestricted increase of population; and therefore the due execution of the clause in the 43d of Elizabeth, as a permanent law, is a physical impossibility.

It will be said perhaps, that the fact contradicts the theory, and that the clause in question has remained in force, and has been executed during the last two hundred years. In answer to this I should say without hesitation, that it has not really been executed; and that it is merely owing to its incomplete execution, that it remains on our statute book at present.



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Subject of Poor Laws, continued.

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The scanty relief granted to persons in distress, the capricious and insulting manner in which it is sometimes distributed by the overseers, and the natural and becoming pride not yet quite extinct among the peasantry of England, have deterred the more thinking and virtuous part of them from venturing on marriage, without some better prospect of maintaining their families than mere parish assistance. The desire of bettering our condition and the fear of making it worse, like the *vis medicatrix naturæ* in physicks, is the *vis medicatrix reipublicæ* in politics, and is continually counteracting the disorders arising from narrow human institutions. In spite of the prejudices in favor of population, and the direct encouragements to marriage from the poor laws, it operates as a preventive check to increase; and happy for this country is it that it does so. But besides that spirit of independence and prudence which checks the frequency of marriage notwithstanding the encouragements of the poor laws, these laws themselves occasion a check of no inconsiderable magnitude, and thus counteract with one hand what they encourage with the other. As each parish is obliged to maintain its own poor, it is naturally



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Subject of Poor Laws, continued.

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fearful of increasing their number, and every landholder is in consequence more inclined to pull down than to build cottages. This deficiency of cottages operates necessarily as a strong check to marriage, and this check is probably the principal reason why we have been able to continue the system of the poor laws so long.

Those who are not prevented for a time from marrying by these causes, are either relieved very scantily at their own homes, where they suffer all the consequences arising from squalid poverty; or they are crowded together in close and unwholesome workhouses, where a great mortality almost universally takes place, particularly among the young children. The dreadful account given by Jonas Hanway of the treatment of parish children in London is well known; and it appears from Mr. Howlett and other writers that in some parts of the country their situation is not very much better. A great part of the redundant population occasioned by the poor laws is thus taken off by the operation of the laws themselves, or at least by their ill execution. The remaining part which survives, by causing the funds for the maintenance of labor to be divided among a great-



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Subject of Poor Laws, continued.

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er number than can be properly maintained by them, and by turning a considerable share from the support of the diligent and careful workman, to the support of the idle and the negligent, depresses the condition of all those who are out of the workhouses, forces more every year into them, and has ultimately produced the enormous evil which we all so justly deplore, that of the great and unnatural proportion of the people which is now become dependent upon charity.

If this be a just representation of the manner in which the clause in question has been executed, and of the effects which it has produced, it must be allowed, that we have practiced an unpardonable deceit upon the poor, and have promised what we have been very far from performing. It may be asserted without danger of exaggeration, that the poor laws have destroyed many more lives than they have preserved.

The attempts to employ the poor on any great scale in manufactures have almost invariably failed, and the stock and materials have been wasted. In those few parishes which, by better management or larger funds, have been enabled to persevere in this system, the effect of these new manufactures in the market must have been to throw out of em-



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Subject of Poor Laws, continued.

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ployment many independent workmen who were before engaged in fabrications of a similar nature. This effect has been placed in a strong point of view by Daniel de Foe, in an address to parliament, entitled, *Giving alms no charity*. Speaking of the employment of parish children in manufactures he says, For every skein of worsted these poor children spin there must be a skein the less spun by some poor family that spun it before; and for every piece of bays so made in London, there must be a piece the less made at Colchester, or somewhere else.<sup>1</sup> Sir F. M. Eden, on the same subject, observes, that whether mops and brooms are made by parish children or by private workmen, no more can be sold than the public is in want of.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See extracts from Daniel de Foe, in Sir F. M. Eden's valuable work on the poor, vol. i. p. 261.

<sup>2</sup> Sir F. Eden, speaking of the supposed right of the poor to be supplied with employment while able to work, and with a maintenance when incapacitated from labor, very justly remarks, "It may however be doubted, whether any right, the gratification of which seems to be impracticable, can be said to exist," vol. i. p. 447. No man has collected so many materials for forming a judgment on effects of the poor laws as Sir F. Eden, and the result he thus expresses. "Upon the whole therefore there seems to be just grounds for concluding, that the sum



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Subject of Poor Laws, continued.

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It will be said perhaps that the same reasoning might be applied to any new capital brought into competition in a particular trade or manufacture, which can rarely be done without injuring, in some degree, those that were engaged in it before. But there is a material difference in the two cases. In this, the competition is perfectly fair, and what every man on entering into business must lay his account to. He may rest secure that he will not be supplanted, unless his competitor possess superior skill and industry. In the other case, the competition is supported by a great bounty, by which means, notwithstanding very inferior skill and industry on the part of his competitors, the independent workman may be undersold, and unjustly excluded from the market. He himself perhaps is made to contribute to this competition against his own earnings, and the funds for the maintenance of labor are thus turned from the support of a trade which yields a proper profit, to one which cannot maintain itself without a bounty. It should be

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“ of good to be expected from a compulsory maintenance  
“ of the poor will be far out-balanced by the sum of evil  
“ which it will inevitably create,” vol. i. p. 467. I am  
happy to have the sanction of so practical an inquirer to  
my opinion of the poor laws.



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Subject of Poor Laws, continued.

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observed in general that when a fund for the maintenance of labor is raised by assessment, the greatest part of it is not a new capital brought into trade, but an old one, which before was much more profitably employed, turned into a new channel. The farmer pays to the poor's rates for the encouragement of a bad and unprofitable manufacture, what he would have employed on his land with infinitely more advantage to his country. In the one case, the funds for the maintenance of labor are daily diminished; in the other, daily increased. And this obvious tendency of assessments for the employment of the poor, to decrease the real funds for the maintenance of labor in any country, aggravates the absurdity of supposing that it is in the power of a government to find employment for all its subjects, however fast they may increase.

It is not intended that these reasonings should be applied against every mode of employing the poor on a limited scale, and with such restrictions as may not encourage at the same time their increase. I would never wish to push general principles too far, though I think that they ought always to be kept in view. In particular cases, the individual good to be obtained may be so great,



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Subject of Poor Laws, continued.

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and the general evil so slight, that the former may clearly overbalance the latter.

The intention is merely to show, that the poor laws as a general system are founded on a gross error; and that the common declamation on the subject of the poor, which we see so often in print, and hear continually in conversation, namely, that the market price of labor ought always to be sufficient decently to support a family, and that employment ought to be found for all those who are willing to work is in effect to say, that the funds for the maintenance of labor in this country are not only infinite, but might be made to increase with such rapidity, that supposing us to have at present six millions of laborers, including their families, we might have 96 millions in another century; or if these funds had been properly managed since the beginning of the reign of Edward I. supposing that there were then only two millions of laborers, we might now have possessed above four million millions of laborers, or about four thousand times as many laborers as it has been calculated that there are people now on the face of the earth.



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## CHAPTER VII.

*Of increasing Wealth as it affects the Condition  
of the Poor.*

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THE professed object of Dr. Smith's inquiry is, the nature and causes of the wealth of nations. There is another however perhaps still more interesting, which he occasionally mixes with it, the causes that affect the happiness and comfort of the lower orders of society, which in every nation form the most numerous class. I am sufficiently aware of the near connexion of these two subjects, and that generally speaking, the causes which contribute to increase the wealth of a state tend also to increase the happiness of the lower classes of the people. But perhaps Dr. Smith has considered these two inquiries, as still more nearly connected than they really are ; at least he has not stopped to take notice of those instances, where the wealth of a society may increase according to his definition of wealth, without having a proportional tendency to increase the comforts of the laboring part of it.



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Of increasing wealth as it affects, &c.

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I do not mean to enter into any philosophical discussion of what constitutes the proper happiness of man, but shall merely consider two universally acknowledged ingredients, the command of the necessaries and comforts of life, and the possession of health.

The comforts of the laboring poor must necessarily depend upon the funds destined for the maintenance of labor ; and will generally be in proportion to the rapidity of their increase. The demand for labor, which such increase occasions, will of course raise the value of labor ; and till the additional number of hands required are reared, the increased funds will be distributed to the same number of persons as before, and therefore every laborer will live comparatively at his ease. The error of Dr. Smith lies in representing every increase of the revenue or stock of a society, as a proportional increase of these funds. Such surplus stock or revenue will indeed always be considered by the individual possessing it, as an additional fund from which he may maintain more labor ; but with regard to the whole country, it will not be an effectual fund for the maintenance of an additional number of laborers, unless part of it be convertible into an additional quantity of provisions ; and it



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will not be so convertible where the increase has arisen merely from the produce of labor, and not from produce of the land. A distinction may in this case occur between the number of hands which the stock of the society could employ and the number which its territory can maintain.

Dr. Smith defines the wealth of a state to be the annual produce of its land and labor. This definition evidently includes manufactured produce as well as the produce of the island. Now supposing a nation for a course of years to add what it saved from its yearly revenue to its manufacturing capital solely, and not to its capital employed upon land, it is evident that it might grow richer according to the above definition, without a power of supporting a greater number of laborers, and therefore without any increase in the real funds for the maintenance of labor. There would notwithstanding be a demand for labor, from the extension of manufacturing capital. This demand would of course raise the price of labor; but if the yearly stock of provisions in the country were not increasing, this rise would soon turn out to be merely nominal, as the price of provisions must necessarily rise with it. The demand for manufacturing laborers would probably entice some



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the Condition of the Poor.

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from private service, and some even from agriculture; but we will suppose any effects of this kind on agriculture to be compensated by improvements in the instruments or mode of culture, and the quantity of provisions therefore to remain the same. Improvements in manufacturing machinery would of course take place; and this circumstance, added to the greater number of hands employed in manufactures, would augment considerably the annual produce of the labor of the country. The wealth therefore of the country would be increasing annually according to the definition, and might not be increasing very slowly.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I have supposed here a case which, in a landed nation, I allow to be very improbable in fact; but approximations to it are perhaps not unfrequently taking place. My intention is merely to show, that the funds for the maintenance of labor do not increase exactly in proportion to the increase in the produce of the land and labor of a country, but with the same increase of produce, may be more or less favorable to the laborer, according as the increase has arisen principally from agriculture or from manufactures. On the supposition of a physical impossibility of increasing the food of a country it is evident, that by improvements in machinery it might grow yearly richer in the exchangeable value of its manufactured produce, but the laborer though he might be better clothed and lodged, could not be better fed.



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Of increasing wealth as it affects

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The question is, how far wealth increasing in this way has a tendency to better the condition of the laboring poor. It is a self-evident proposition, that any general advance in the price of labor, the stock of provisions remaining the same, can only be a nominal advance, as it must shortly be followed by a proportional rise in provisions. The increase in the price of labor which we have supposed, would have no permanent effect therefore in giving to the laboring poor a greater command over the necessaries of life. In this respect they would be nearly in the same state as before. In some other respects they would be in a worse state. A greater proportion of them would be employed in manufactures, and a smaller proportion in agriculture. And this exchange of professions will be allowed, I think, by all to be very unfavorable to health, one essential ingredient of happiness, and to be further disadvantageous on account of the greater uncertainty of manufacturing labor, arising from the capricious taste of man, the accidents of war, and other causes which occasionally produce very severe distress among the lower classes of society. On the state of the poor employed in manufactories, with respect to health and other circumstances which affect their happi-



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the Condition of the Poor.

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ness, I will beg leave to quote a passage from Dr. Aikin's description of the country round Manchester.

“ The invention and improvements of machines  
“ to shorten labor have had a surprising influence  
“ to extend our trade, and also to call in hands  
“ from all parts, especially children for the cotton  
“ mills. It is the wise plan of providence, that in  
“ this life there shall be no good without its at-  
“ tendant inconvenience. There are many which  
“ are too obvious in these cotton mills and similar  
“ factories, which counteract that increase of po-  
“ pulation usually consequent on the improved  
“ facility of labor. In these, children of very ten-  
“ der age are employed, many of them collected  
“ from the workhouses in London and Westmin-  
“ ster, and transported in crowds as apprentices  
“ to masters, resident many hundred miles distant,  
“ where they serve unknown, unprotected, and for-  
“ gotten by those to whose care nature or the laws  
“ had consigned them. These children are usually  
“ too long confined to work in close rooms, often  
“ during the whole night. The air they breathe  
“ from the oil, &c. employed in the machinery,  
“ and other circumstances, is injurious ; little at-



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Of increasing wealth as it affects

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“ tention is paid to their cleanliness ; and frequent  
“ changes from a warm and dense to a cold and  
“ thin atmosphere are predisposing causes to sick-  
“ ness and disability, and particularly to the epide-  
“ mic fever which is so generally to be met with  
“ in these factories. It is also much to be ques-  
“ tioned, if society does not receive detriment  
“ from the manner in which children are thus em-  
“ ployed during their early years. They are not ge-  
“ nerally strong to labor, or capable of pursuing  
“ any other branch of business when the term of  
“ their apprenticeship expires. The females are  
“ wholly uninstructed in sowing, knitting, and  
“ other domestic affairs, requisite to make them  
“ notable and frugal wives and mothers. This is  
“ a very great misfortune to them and the public,  
“ as is sadly proved by a comparison of the fami-  
“ lies of laborers in husbandry, and those of ma-  
“ nufacturers in general. In the former we meet  
“ with neatness, cleanliness, and comfort ; in the  
“ latter, with filth, rags, and poverty, although  
“ their wages may be nearly double to those of  
“ the husbandman. It must be added that the  
“ want of early religious instruction and example,  
“ and the numerous and indiscriminate association



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the Condition of the Poor.

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“ in these buildings, are very unfavorable to their  
“ future conduct in life.”<sup>1</sup>

In addition to the evils mentioned in this passage, we all know how subject particular manufactures are to fail, from the caprice of taste, or the accident of war. The weavers of Spitalfields were plunged into the most severe distress by the fashion of muslins instead of silks; and numbers of the workmen in Sheffield and Birmingham were for a time thrown out of employment, from the adoption of shoe-strings and covered buttons, instead of buckles and metal buttons. Our manufactures, taken in the mass, have increased with great rapidity, but in particular places they have failed, and the parishes where this has happened are invariably loaded with a crowd of poor in the most distressed and miserable condition. In the work of Dr. Aikin just alluded to, it appears that the register for the collegiate church at Manchester, from Christmas 1793 to Christmas 1794, stated a decrease of 168 marriages, 538 christenings,

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<sup>1</sup> Page 219. Endeavors have been made, Dr. Aikin says, to remedy these evils, and in some factories they have been attended with success. An act of parliament has of late also passed on this subject, from which it is hoped that much good will result.



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Of increasing wealth as it affects

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and 250 burials. And in the parish of Rochdale in the neighborhood, a still more melancholy reduction, in proportion to the number of people, took place. In 1792 the births were 746, the burials 646, and the marriages 339. In 1794 the births were 373, the burials 671, and the marriages 199. The cause of this sudden check to population was the commencement of the war, and the failure of commercial credit, which occurred about this time; and such a check could not have taken place in so sudden a manner, without being occasioned by the most severe distress.

Under such circumstances of situation, unless the increase of the riches of a country from manufactures give the lower classes of the society, on an average, a decidedly greater command over the necessaries and conveniences of life, it will not appear that their condition is improved.

It will be said perhaps, that the advance in the price of provisions will immediately turn some additional capital into the channel of agriculture, and thus occasion a much greater produce. But from experience it appears, that this is an effect which sometimes follows very slowly, particularly if heavy taxes that affect agricultural industry,



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the Condition of the Poor.

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and an advance in the price of labor, had preceded the advance in the price of provisions.

It may also be said, that the additional capital of the nation would enable it to import provisions sufficient for the maintenance of those whom its stock could employ. A small country with a large navy, and great accommodations for inland carriage, may indeed import and distribute an effectual quantity of provisions; but in large landed nations, if they may be so called, an importation adequate at all times to the demand is scarcely possible.

It seems in great measure to have escaped attention, that a nation which, from its extent of territory and population, must necessarily support the greater part of its people on the produce of its own soil, but which yet in average years draws a small portion of its corn from abroad, is in a much more precarious situation, with regard to the constancy of its supplies, than such states as draw almost the whole of their provisions from other countries. The demands of Holland and Hamburgh may be known with considerable accuracy by those who supply them. If they increase, they increase gradually, and are not subject from year to year to any great and sudden



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Of increasing wealth as it affects

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variations. But it is otherwise with such a country as England. Supposing it, in average years, to want about four hundred thousand quarters of wheat. Such a demand will of course be very easily supplied. But a year of deficient crops occurs, and the demand is suddenly two millions of quarters. If the demand had been on an average two millions, it might perhaps have been adequately supplied, from the extended agriculture of those countries which are in the habit of exporting corn: but we cannot expect that it can easily be answered thus suddenly; and indeed we know from experience that an unusual demand of this nature, in a nation capable of paying for it, cannot exist, without raising the price of wheat very considerably in all the ports of Europe. Hamburg, Holland, and the ports of the Baltic, felt very sensibly the high prices of England during the late scarcity; and I have been informed from very good authority, that the price of bread in New York was little inferior to the highest price in London.

A nation possessed of a large territory is unavoidably subject to this uncertainty in its means of subsistence, when the commercial part of its population is either equal to or has increased beyond the surplus produce of its cultivators. No



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the Condition of the Poor.

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reserve being in these cases left in exportation, the full effect of every deficiency from unfavorable seasons must necessarily be felt; and though the riches of such a country may enable it for a certain period to continue raising the nominal price of wages, so as to give the lower classes of the society a power of purchasing imported corn at a high price; yet, as a sudden demand can very seldom be fully answered, the competition in the market will invariably raise the price of provisions, in full proportion to the advance in the price of labor; the lower classes will be but little relieved; and the dearth will operate severely throughout all the ranks of society.

According to the natural order of things, years of scarcity must occasionally recur in all landed nations. They ought always therefore to enter into our consideration; and the prosperity of any country may justly be considered as precarious, in which the funds for the maintenance of labor are liable to great and sudden fluctuations from every unfavorable variation in the seasons.

But putting, for the present, years of scarcity out of the question; when the commercial population of any country increases so much beyond the surplus produce of the cultivators, that the demand



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Of increasing wealth as it affects

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for imported corn is not easily supplied, and the price rises in proportion to the price of wages, no further increase of riches will have any tendency to give the laborer a greater command over the necessaries of life. In the progress of wealth this will naturally take place; either from the largeness of the supply wanted; the increased distance from which it is brought, and consequently the increased expense of importation; the greater consumption of it in the countries in which it is usually purchased; or what must unavoidably happen, the necessity of a greater distance of inland carriage in these countries. Such a nation, by increasing industry, and increasing ingenuity in the improvement of machinery, may still go on increasing the yearly quantity of its manufactured produce; but its funds for the maintenance of labor, and consequently its population will be perfectly stationary. This point is the natural limit to the population of all commercial states.<sup>1</sup> In countries at a great

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<sup>1</sup> Sir James Steuart's Political Economy, vol. i. b. i. c. xviii. p. 119. It is probable that Holland before the revolution had nearly reached this point, not so much however from the difficulty of obtaining more foreign corn, but from the very heavy taxes which were imposed on this first necessary of life. All the great landed nations of Eu-



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the condition of the Poor.

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distance from this limit, an effect approaching to what has been here described will take place whenever the march of commerce and manufactures is more rapid than that of agriculture. During the last ten or twelve years it cannot be doubted, that the annual produce of the land and labor of England has very rapidly increased, and in consequence the nominal wages of labor have greatly increased; but the real recompense of the laborer, though increased, has not increased in proportion.

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

Dr. Smith observes, that China has probably long been as rich as the nature of her laws and institutions will admit; but that, with other laws and institutions, and if foreign commerce were held in honor she might still be much richer. The question is, would such an increase of wealth be an increase of the real funds for the maintenance

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rope are certainly at a considerable distance from this point at present.



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Of increasing wealth as it affects

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of labor, and consequently tend to place the lower classes of people in China in a state of greater plenty?

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



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the condition of the Poor.

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be employed in China in preparing manufactures for foreign trade, without taking off so many laborers from agriculture, as to alter this state of things, and in some degree, to diminish the produce of the country. The demand for manufacturing laborers would naturally raise the price of labor; but as the quantity of subsistence would not be increased, the price of provisions would keep pace with it, or even more than keep pace with it, if the quantity of provisions were really decreasing. The country would however be evidently advancing in wealth; the exchangeable value of the annual produce of its land and labor would be annually augmented; yet the real funds for the maintenance of labor would be stationary or even declining; and consequently the increasing wealth of the nation would tend rather to depress than to raise the condition of the poor.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The condition of the poor in China is, indeed, very miserable at present; but this is not owing to their want of foreign commerce, but to their extreme tendency to marriage and increase; and if this tendency were to continue the same, the only way in which the introduction of a greater number of manufactures could possibly make the lower classes of people richer, would be by increasing the mortality amongst them, which is certainly not a very desirable mode of growing rich.



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Of increasing wealth as it affects

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With regard to the command over the necessaries of life they would be in the same or rather worse state than before ; and a great part of them would have exchanged the healthy labors of agriculture for the unhealthy occupations of manufacturing industry.

The argument perhaps appears clearer when applied to China, because it is generally allowed that its wealth has long been stationary, and its soil cultivated nearly to the utmost. With regard to any other country it might always be a matter of dispute, at which of the two periods compared, wealth was increasing the fastest, as it is upon the rapidity of the increase of wealth at any particular period, that Dr. Smith says, the condition of the poor depends. It is evident however, that two nations might increase exactly with the same rapidity in the exchangeable value of the annual produce of their land and labor ; yet, if one had applied itself chiefly to agriculture, and the other chiefly to commerce, the funds for the maintenance of labor, and consequently the effect of the increase of wealth in each nation, would be extremely different. In that which had applied itself chiefly to agriculture the poor would live in greater plenty, and population would rapidly increase.



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the condition of the Poor.

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In that which had applied itself chiefly to commerce the poor would be comparatively but little benefited, and consequently population would either be stationary or increase very slowly.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The condition of the laboring poor, supposing their habits to remain the same, cannot be very essentially improved but by giving them a greater command over the means of subsistence. But any advantage of this kind must from its nature be temporary, and is therefore really of less value to them than any permanent change in their habits. But manufactures by inspiring a taste for comforts, tend to promote a favorable change in these habits, and in this way perhaps counterbalance all their disadvantages. The laboring classes of society in nations merely agricultural are generally on the whole poorer than in manufacturing nations, though less subject to those occasional variations which among manufacturers often produce the most severe distress. But the considerations which relate to a change of habits in the poor belong more properly to a subsequent part of this work.



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## CHAPTER VIII.

### *Of the Definitions of Wealth. Agricultural and Commercial Systems.*

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THERE are none of the definitions of the wealth of a state that are not liable to some objections. If we take the gross produce of the land it is evident, that the funds for the maintenance of labor, the population, and the wealth may increase very rapidly, while the nation is apparently poor, and has very little disposeable revenue. If we take Dr. Smith's definition, wealth may increase, as has before been shown, without tending to increase the funds for the maintenance of labor and the population. If we take the clear surplus produce of the land, according to the Economists, in this case the funds for the maintenance of labor and the population may increase, without an increase of wealth, as in the instance of the cultivation of new lands, which will pay a profit but not a rent; and *vice versa*, wealth may increase without increasing the funds for the maintenance of



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Of the definitions of wealth. &c.

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labor, and the population, as in the instance of improvements in agricultural instruments, and in the mode of agriculture, which may make the land yield the same produce, with fewer persons employed upon it; and consequently the disposable wealth or revenue would be increased without a power of supporting a greater number of people.

The objections however to the two last definitions do not prove that they are incorrect; but merely that an increase of wealth, though generally, is not necessarily and invariably accompanied by an increase of the funds for the maintenance of labor, and consequently by the power of supporting a greater number of people, or of enabling the former number to live in greater plenty and happiness.

Whichever of these two definitions is adopted as the best criterion of the wealth, power, and prosperity of a state, the position of the Economists will always remain true, that the surplus produce of the cultivators is the great fund which ultimately pays all those who are not employed upon the land. Throughout the whole world the number of manufacturers, of proprietors, and of persons engaged in the various civil and military professions, must be exactly proportioned to this surplus produce,



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Of the definitions of wealth.

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and cannot in the nature of things increase beyond it. If the earth had been so niggardly of her produce as to oblige all her inhabitants to labor for it, no manufacturers or idle persons could ever have existed. But her first intercourse with man was a voluntary present, not very large indeed, but sufficient as a fund for his subsistence, till by the proper exercise of his faculties he could procure a greater. In proportion as the labor and ingenuity of man exercised upon the land, have increased this surplus produce, leisure has been given to a greater number of persons to employ themselves in all the inventions which embellish civilized life. And though, in its turn, the desire to profit by these inventions has greatly contributed to stimulate the cultivators to increase their surplus produce; yet the order of precedence is clearly the surplus produce; because the funds for the subsistence of the manufacturer must be advanced to him before he can complete his work: and if we were to imagine, that we could command this surplus produce, whenever we willed it, by forcing manufactures, we should be quickly admonished of our gross error, by the inadequate support which the workman would receive, in spite of any rise that might take place in his no-



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Agricultural and commercial systems.

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minal wages. If in asserting the peculiar productiveness of labor employed upon land, we look only to the clear monied rent yielded to a certain number of proprietors, we undoubtedly consider the subject in a very contracted point of view. The quantity of the surplus produce of the cultivators is indeed in part measured by this clear rent, but its real value consists in its affording the means of subsistence, and the materials of cloathing and lodging to a certain number of people, according to its extent, some of whom may live without manual exertions, and others employ themselves in modifying the raw materials of nature into the forms best suited to the gratification of man.

A clear monied revenue, arising from manufactures, of the same extent, and to the same number of individuals, would by no means be accompanied by the same circumstances. It would throw the country in which it existed into an absolute dependance for food and materials on the surplus produce of other nations, and if this foreign supply were by any accident to fail, the revenue would immediately cease.

The skill to modify the raw materials produced from the land would be absolutely of no value,



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Of the definitions of wealth.

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and the individuals possessing it would immediately perish, if these raw materials, and the food necessary to support those who are working them up could not be obtained; but if the materials and the food were secure, it would be easy to find the skill sufficient to render them of considerable value.

According to the system of the Economists, manufactures are an object on which revenue is spent, and not any part of the revenue itself.<sup>1</sup> But though from this description of manufactures, and the epithet sterile sometimes applied to them, they seem rather to be degraded by the terms of the Economists, it is a very great error to suppose

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<sup>1</sup> Even upon this system there is one point of view in which manufactures appear greatly to add to the riches of a state. The use of a revenue, according to the Economists, is to be spent; and a great part of it will of course be spent in manufactures. But if by the judicious employment of manufacturing capital, these commodities grow considerably cheaper, the surplus produce becomes proportionably of so much greater value, and the real revenue of the nation is virtually increased. If this view of the subject do not, in the eyes of the Economists, completely justify Dr. Smith in calling manufacturing labor *productive*, in the strict sense of that term, it must fully warrant all the pains he has taken in explaining the nature and effects of commercial capital, and of the division of manufacturing labor.



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Agricultural and commercial systems.

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that their system is really unfavorable to them. On the contrary, I am disposed to believe, that it is the only system by which commerce and manufactures can prevail to a very great extent, without bringing with them at the same time the seeds of their own ruin. Before the late revolution in Holland, the high price of the necessaries of life had destroyed many of its manufactures.<sup>1</sup> Monopolies are always subject to be broken; and even the advantage of capital and machinery, which may yield extraordinary profits for a time, is liable to be greatly lessened by the competition of other nations. In the history of the world, the nations whose wealth has been derived principally from manufactures and commerce, have been perfectly ephemeral beings, compared with those, the basis of whose wealth has been agriculture. It is in the nature of things that a state which subsists upon a revenue furnished by other countries, must be infinitely more exposed to all the accidents of time and chance, than one which produces its own.

No error is more frequent than that of mistaking effects for causes. We are so blinded by the

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<sup>1</sup> Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, vol. iii. b. v. c. ii. p. 392.



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Of the definitions of wealth.

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showiness of commerce and manufactures, as to believe, that they are almost the sole cause of the wealth, power, and prosperity of England. But perhaps they may be more justly considered as the consequences than the cause of this wealth. According to the definition of the Economists, which considers only the produce of land, England is the richest country in Europe in proportion to her size. Her system of agriculture is beyond comparison better, and consequently her surplus produce is more considerable. France is very greatly superior to England in extent of territory and population; but when the surplus produce, or disposable revenue of the two nations are compared, the superiority of France almost vanishes. And it is this great surplus produce in England, arising from her agriculture, which enables her to support such a vast body of manufacturers, such formidable fleets and armies, such a crowd of persons engaged in the liberal professions, and a proportion of the society living on money rents very far beyond what has ever been known in any other country of the world. According to the returns lately made of the population of England and Wales, it appears that the number of persons employed in agriculture is considerably less than a fifth part of



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*Agricultural and commercial systems.*

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the whole. There is reason to believe that the classifications in these returns are incorrect; but making very great allowances for errors of this nature, it can scarcely admit of a doubt that the number of persons employed in agriculture is very unusually small in proportion to the actual produce. Of late years indeed the part of the society, not connected with agriculture has unfortunately increased beyond this produce; but the average importation of corn, as yet, bears but a small proportion to that which is grown in the country, and consequently the power which England possesses of supporting so vast a body of idle consumers must be attributed principally to the greatness of her surplus produce.

It will be said that it was her commerce and manufactures which encouraged her cultivators to obtain this great surplus produce, and therefore indirectly, if not directly, created it. That commerce and manufactures produce this effect in a great degree is true; but that they sometimes produce a contrary effect when carried to excess, is equally true. Undoubtedly agriculture cannot flourish without a vent for its commodities, either at home or abroad; but when this want has been adequately supplied, the interests of agriculture demand nothing more. When too great a part of



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Of the definitions of wealth.

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a nation is engaged in commerce and manufactures, it is a clear proof that, either from undue encouragement, or from other particular causes, a capital is employed in this way to much greater advantage than in domestic agriculture; and under such circumstances, it is impossible that the land should not be robbed of much of the capital which would naturally have fallen to its share. Dr. Smith justly observes, that the navigation act, and the monopoly of the colony trade, necessarily forced into a particular and not very advantageous channel, a greater proportion of the capital of Great Britain than would otherwise have gone to it; and by thus taking capital from other employments, and at the same time universally raising the rate of British mercantile profit, discouraged the improvement of the land.<sup>1</sup> If the improvement of land, he goes on to say, affords a greater capital than what can be drawn from an equal capital in any mercantile employment, the land will draw capital from mercantile employments. If the profit be less, mercantile employments will draw capital from the improvement of land. The monopoly therefore, by raising the rate of British mercantile pro-

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<sup>1</sup> Wealth of Nations, vol. ii. b. iv. c. vii. p. 435.



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Agricultural and commercial systems.

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fit, and thus discouraging agricultural improvement, has necessarily retarded the natural increase of a great original source of revenue, the rent of land.<sup>1</sup>

The East and West Indies are indeed so great an object, and afford employment with high profits, to so great a capital, that it is impossible that they should not draw capital from other employments, and particularly from the cultivation of the soil, the profits upon which in general are very small.

All corporations, patents, and exclusive privileges of every kind, which abound so much in the mercantile system, have in proportion to their extent the same effect. And the experience of the last twenty years seems to warrant us in concluding, that the high price of provisions arising from the abundance of commercial wealth, accompanied as it has been by very great variations, and by a great rise in the price of labor, does not operate as an encouragement to agriculture sufficient to make it keep pace with the rapid strides of commerce.

It will be said perhaps, that land is always im-

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<sup>1</sup> Wealth of Nations, vol. ii. b. iv. c. vii. p. 436.



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Of the definitions of wealth.

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proved by the redundancy of commercial capital. But this effect is late and slow, and in the nature of things cannot operate powerfully, till this capital is really redundant, which it never is, while the interest of money and the profits of mercantile stock are high. We cannot look forwards to any considerable effect of this kind till the interest of money sinks to 3 per cent. When men can get 5 or 6 per cent. for their money, without any trouble, they will hardly venture a capital upon land, where, including risks, and the profits upon their own labor and attendance, they may not get much more. Wars and loans, as far as internal circumstances are concerned, impede but little the progress of those branches of commerce where the profits of stock are high; but affect very considerably the increase of that more essential and permanent source of wealth, the improvement of the land. It is in this point, I am inclined to believe, that the national debt of England has been most injurious to her. By absorbing the redundancy of commercial capital, and keeping up the rate of interest, it has prevented this capital from overflowing upon the soil. And a large mortgage<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The principal error of the French Economists appears



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Agricultural and commercial systems.

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has thus been established on the lands of England, the interest of which is drawn from the payment of productive labor, and dedicated to the support of idle consumers.

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to be on the subject of taxation. Admitting that the surplus produce of the land is the fund which pays every thing besides the food of the cultivators; yet it seems to be a mistake to suppose that the owners of land are the sole proprietors of this surplus produce. It appears to me, that every man who has realized a capital in money has virtually a mortgage on the land for a certain portion of the surplus produce; and as long as the conditions of this mortgage remain unaltered, (and the taxes which affect him only in the character of a consumer, do not alter these conditions) the mortgagee pays a tax in the same manner as the landholder, finally. As consumers indeed it cannot be doubted, that even those who live upon the profits of stock and the wages of labor, particularly of professional labor, pay some taxes on necessaries for a very considerable time, and many on luxuries permanently; because the consumption of individuals who possess large shares of the wealth which is paid in profits and wages, may be curtailed and turned into another channel, without impeding, in any degree, the continuance of the same quantity of stock, or the production of the same quantity of labor.

The real surplus produce of this country, or all the produce not actually consumed by the cultivators, is a very different thing, and should carefully be distinguished from the sum of the net rents of the landlords. This sum, it is supposed, does not much exceed a fifth part of



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Of the definitions of wealth.

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It must be allowed therefore, upon the whole, that our commerce has not done so much for our agriculture as our agriculture has for our commerce; and that the improved system of cultiva-

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the gross produce. The remaining four fifths is certainly not consumed by the laborers and horses employed in agriculture; but a very considerable portion of it is paid by the farmer in tithes, in taxes, in the instruments of agriculture, and in the manufactures used in his own family, and in the families of his laborers. It is in this manner that a kind of mortgage is ultimately established on the land, by taxes, and the progress of commercial wealth; and in this sense, all taxes may be said to fall wholly upon the land, though not wholly on the landholders. It seems a little hard therefore, in taxing surplus produce, to make the landlords pay for what they do not receive. At the same time it must be confessed, that independently of these considerations which makes a land tax partial, it is the best of all taxes, as it is the only one which does not tend to raise the price of commodities. Taxes on consumption by which alone monied revenues can be reached, without an income tax, necessarily raise all prices to a degree greatly injurious to a country.

A land tax, or tax upon net rent, has little or no effect in discouraging the improvement of land, as many have supposed. It is only a tithe, or a tax, in proportion to the gross produce which does this. No man in his senses will be deterred from getting a clear profit of 20l. instead of 10l. because he is always to pay a fourth or fifth of his clear gains; but when he is to pay a tax in proportion to his gross produce, which in the case of capital laid out



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Agricultural and commercial systems.

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tion which has taken place, in spite of considerable discouragements, creates yearly a surplus produce, which enables the country, with but little assistance, to support so vast a body of people engaged in pursuits unconnected with the land.

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in improvements is scarcely ever accompanied with a proportional increase of his clear gains, it is a very different thing, and must necessarily impede, in a great degree, the progress of cultivation. I am astonished, that so obvious and easy a commutation for tithes as a land tax on improved rents has not been adopted. Such a tax would be paid by the same persons as before, only in a better form; and the change would not be felt, except in the advantage that would accrue to all the parties concerned, the landlord, the tenant, and the clergyman. Tithes undoubtedly operate as a high bounty on pasture, and a great discouragement to tillage, which in the present peculiar circumstances of the country is a very great disadvantage.



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## CHAPTER IX.

### *Different Effects of the Agricultural and Commercial Systems.*

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ABOUT the middle of the last century we were genuinely, and in the strict sense of the Economists, an agricultural nation. Our commerce and manufactures were however then in a very respectable and thriving state; and if they had continued to bear the same relative proportion to our agriculture, they would evidently have gone on increasing considerably, with the improving cultivation of the country. There is no apparent limit to the quantity of manufactures which might in time be supported in this way. The increasing wealth of a country in such a state seems to be out of the reach of all common accidents. There is no discoverable germ of decay in the system; and in theory there is no reason to say that it might not go on increasing in wealth and prosperity for thousands of years.

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cultural system, into a state in which the commercial system clearly predominates ; and there is but too much reason to fear that even our commerce and manufactures will ultimately feel the disadvantage of the change. It has been already observed that we are exactly in the situation in which a country feels most fully the effect of those common years of deficient crops, which in the natural course of things are to be expected. The competition of increasing commercial wealth, operating upon a supply of corn not increasing in the same proportion, must at all times tend to raise the nominal price of labor ; but when scarce years are taken into the consideration, its effect in this way must ultimately be very great. During the late scarcities the price of labor has been continually rising, and it will not readily fall again. In every country there will be many causes, which, in practice, operating like friction in mechanics, prevent the price of labor from rising and falling exactly in proportion to the price of its component parts. But besides these causes, there is one very powerful cause in theory, which operates to prevent the price of labor from falling when once it has been raised. Supposing it to be raised by a temporary cause, such as a scarcity of pro-



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visions, it is evident that it will not fall again, unless some kind of stagnation take place in the competition among the purchasers of labor; but the power which the increase of the real price of labor, on the return of plenty, gives to the laborer of purchasing a greater quantity both of rude and manufactured produce, tends to prevent this stagnation, and strongly to counteract that fall in the price which would otherwise take place.

Labor is a commodity the price of which will not be so readily affected by the price of its component parts as any other. The reason why the consumer pays a tax on any commodity, or an advance in the price of any of its component parts, is, because if he cannot or will not pay this advance of price, the commodity will not be produced in the same quantity, and the next year there will be only such a proportion in the market as is accommodated to the number of persons that will consent to pay the advance. But in the case of labor, the operation of withdrawing the commodity is much slower and more painful. Although the purchasers refuse to pay the advanced price, the same supply will necessarily remain in the market, not only the next year, but for some years to come. Consequently, if no increase take



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agricultural and commercial systems.

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place in the demand, and the tax or advance in the price of provisions be not so great as to make it immediately obvious that the laborer cannot support his family, it is probable, that he will continue to pay this advance, till a relaxation in the rate of the increase of population causes the market to be under supplied with labor, and then of course the competition among the purchasers will raise the price above the proportion of the advance, in order to restore the necessary supply. In the same manner, if an advance in the price of labor take place during two or three years of scarcity, it is probable that on the return of plenty, the real recompense of labor will continue higher than the usual average, till a too rapid increase of population causes a competition among the laborers, and a consequent diminution of the price of labor below the usual rate.

When a country in average years grows more corn than it consumes, and is in the habit of exporting a part of it, those great variations of price which from the competition of commercial wealth often produce lasting effects, cannot occur to the same extent. The wages of labor can never rise very much above the common price in other



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commercial countries; and under such circumstances, England would have nothing to fear from the fullest and most open competition. The increasing prosperity of other countries would only open to her a more extensive market for her commodities, and give additional spirit to all her commercial transactions.

The high price of corn and of rude produce in general, as far as it is occasioned by the freest competition among the nations of Europe, is a very great advantage, and is the best possible encouragement to agriculture; but when occasioned merely by the competition of monied wealth at home, its effect is different. In the one case, a great encouragement is given to production in general, and the more is produced the better. In the other case, the produce is necessarily confined to the home consumption. The cultivators are justly afraid of growing too much corn, as a considerable loss will be sustained upon that part of it which is sold abroad; and a glut in the home market will universally make the price fall below the fair and proper recompense to the grower. It is impossible that a country under such circumstances should not be subject to great and frequent variations in the price of corn.



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Agricultural and commercial systems.

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If we were to endeavor to lower the price of labor by encouraging the importation of foreign corn, we should probably aggravate the evil tenfold. Experience warrants us in saying, that the fall in the price of labor would be slow and uncertain; but the decline of our agriculture would be certain. The British grower of corn could not, in his own markets, stand the competition of the foreign grower, in average years. Arable lands of a moderate quality would hardly pay the expense of cultivation. Rich soils alone would yield a rent. Round all our towns the appearances would be the same as usual; but in the interior of the country, much of the land would be neglected, and almost universally, where it was practicable, pasture would take place of tillage. This state of things would continue, till the equilibrium was restored, either by the fall of British rent and wages, or an advance in the price of foreign corn, or, what is more probable, by the union of both causes. But a period would have elapsed of considerable relative encouragement to manufactures, and relative discouragement to agriculture. A certain portion of capital would be taken from the land, and when the equilibrium was at length restored, the nation would probably be found depen-



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Different effects of the

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dent upon foreign supplies for a great portion of her subsistence ; and unless some particular cause were to occasion a foreign demand greater than the home demand, her independence in this respect, could not be recovered. During this period even her commerce and manufactures would be in a most precarious state ; and circumstances by no means improbable in the present state of Europe might reduce her population within the limits of her reduced cultivation.<sup>1</sup>

In the natural course of things a country which depends for a considerable part of its supply of corn upon its poorer neighbors, may expect to see this

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<sup>1</sup> Though it be true that the high price of labor or taxes on agricultural capital ultimately fall on the rent, yet we must by no means throw out of our consideration the current leases. In the course of twenty years, I am inclined to believe, that the state of agriculture in any country might be very flourishing, or very much the reverse, according as the current leases had tended to encourage or discourage improvement. A general fall in the rent of land would be preceded by a period most unfavorable to the investment of agricultural capital ; and consequently every tax which affects agricultural capital is peculiarly pernicious. Taxes which affect capitals in trade are almost immediately shifted off on the consumer ; but taxes which affect agricultural capital fall, during the current leases, wholly on the farmer.



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Agricultural and commercial systems.

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supply gradually diminish, as these countries increase in riches and population, and have less surplus of their rude produce to spare.

The political relations of such a country may expose it, during a war, to have that part of its supplies of provisions which it derives from foreign states suddenly stopped, or greatly diminished; an event which could not take place without producing the most calamitous effects.

A nation in which commercial wealth predominates has an abundance of all those articles which form the principal consumption of the rich, but is exposed to be straightened in its supplies of that article, which is absolutely necessary to all, and in which by far the greatest portion of the revenue of the industrious classes is expended.

A nation in which agricultural wealth predominates, though it may not produce at home such a surplus of luxuries and conveniences as the commercial nation, and may therefore be exposed possibly to some want of these commodities, has, on the other hand, a surplus of that article which is essential to the well being of the whole state, and is therefore secure from want in what is of the greatest importance.

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what we derive from others, as of what we produce at home, it seems to be an advantageous policy in a nation, whose territory will allow of it, to secure a surplus of that commodity, a deficiency of which would strike most deeply at its happiness and prosperity.

It has been almost universally acknowledged, that there is no branch of trade more profitable to a country, even in a commercial point of view, than the sale of rude produce. In general its value bears a much greater proportion to the expense incurred in procuring it, than that of any other commodity whatever, and the national profit on its sale is in consequence greater. This is often noticed by Dr. Smith; but in combating the arguments of the Economists, he seems for a moment to forget it and to speak of the superior advantage of exporting manufactures.

He observes, that a trading and manufacturing country exports what can subsist and accommodate but very few, and imports the subsistence and accommodation of a great number. The other exports the subsistence and accommodation of a great number, and imports that of a very few only. The inhabitants of the one must always enjoy a much greater quantity of subsistence than



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Agricultural and commercial systems.

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what their own lands in the actual state of their cultivation could afford. The inhabitants of the other must always enjoy a much smaller quantity.<sup>1</sup>

In this passage he does not seem to argue with his usual accuracy. Though the manufacturing nation may export a commodity which, in its actual shape, can only subsist and accommodate a very few ; yet it must be recollected, that in order to prepare this commodity for exportation, a considerable part of the revenue of the country had been employed in subsisting and accommodating a great number of workmen. And with regard to the subsistence and accommodation which the other nation exports, whether it be of a great or a small number, it is certainly no more than sufficient to replace the subsistence that had been consumed in the manufacturing nation, together with the profits of the master manufacturer and merchant, which, probably, are not so great as the profits of the farmer and the merchant in the agricultural nation. And though it may be true that the inhabitants of the manufacturing nation enjoy a greater quantity of subsistence than what their own lands in the actual state of their cultivation

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<sup>1</sup> *Wealth of Nations*, vol. iii. b. iv. c. ix. p. 27.



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Different effects of the

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could afford ; yet an inference in favor of the manufacturing system by no means follows, because the adoption of the one or the other system will make the greatest difference in their actual state of cultivation. If during the course of a century, two landed nations were to pursue these two different systems, that is, if one of them were regularly to export manufactures, and import subsistence ; and the other to export subsistence, and import manufactures, there would be no comparison at the end of the period between the state of cultivation in the two countries ; and no doubt could rationally be entertained that the country which exported its raw produce, would be able to subsist and accommodate a much greater population than the other.

In the ordinary course of things, the exportation of corn is sufficiently profitable to the individuals concerned in it. But with regard to national advantage, there are four very strong reasons why it is to be preferred to any other kind of export. In the first place, corn pays from its own funds the expenses of procuring it, and the whole of what is sold is a clear national profit. If I set up a new manufacture, the persons employed in it must be supported out of the funds of subsistence al-



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Agricultural and commercial systems.

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ready existing in the country, the value of which must be deducted from the price for which the commodity is sold, before we can estimate the clear national profit. But if I cultivate fresh land, or employ more men in the improvement of what was before cultivated, I increase the general funds of subsistence in the country. With a part of this increase I support all the additional persons employed, and the whole of the remainder which is exported and sold is a clear national gain; besides the advantage to the country, of supporting an additional population equal to the additional number of persons so employed, without the slightest tendency to diminish the plenty of the rest.

Secondly, in all wrought commodities, the same quantity of capital, skill, and labor, employed, will produce the same or very nearly the same quantity of complete manufacture. But owing to the variations of the seasons, the same quantity of capital, skill, and labor in husbandry may produce in different years very different quantities of corn. Consequently, if the two commodities were equally valuable to man, from the greater probability of the occasional failure of corn than of manufactures, it would be of more consequence to have an average surplus of the former than of the latter.



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Different effects of the

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Thirdly, corn being an article of the most absolute necessity, in comparison with which all others will be sacrificed, a deficiency of it must necessarily produce a much greater advance of price than a deficiency of any other kind of produce; and as the price of corn influences the price of so many other commodities, the evil effects of a deficiency will not only be more severe and more general, but more lasting, than the effects of a deficiency in any other commodity.

Fourthly, there appear to be but three ways of rendering the supplies of corn in a particular country more equable, and of preventing the evil effects of those deficiencies from unfavorable seasons, which in the natural course of things must be expected occasionally to recur. These are, 1. An immediate supply from foreign nations, as soon as the scarcity occurs. 2. Large public granaries. 3. The habitual growth of a quantity of corn for a more extended market than the average home consumption affords. Of the first, experience has convinced us that the suddenness of the demand prevents it from being effectual. To the second it is acknowledged by all, that these are very great and weighty objections. There remains then only the third.



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Agricultural and commercial systems.

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These considerations seem to make it a point of the first consequence to the happiness and permanent prosperity of any country, to be able to carry on the export trade of corn as one considerable branch of its commercial transactions.

But how to give this ability, how to turn a nation from the habit of importing corn to the habit of exporting it, is the great difficulty. It has been generally acknowledged, and is frequently noticed by Dr. Smith, that the policy of modern Europe has led it to encourage the industry of the towns more than the industry of the country, or, in other words, trade more than agriculture. In this policy, England has certainly not been behind the rest of Europe; perhaps indeed, except in one instance,<sup>1</sup> it may be said that she has been the foremost. If things had been left to take their natural course, there is no reason to think, that the commercial part of the society would have increased beyond the surplus produce of the cultivators; but the high profits of commerce from monopolies, and other peculiar encouragements, have altered this natural course of things: and the body politic is in an artificial, and in some degree

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<sup>1</sup> The bounty on the exportation of corn.



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diseased state, with one of its principal members out of proportion to the rest. Almost all medicine is in itself bad ; and one of the great evils of illness is the necessity of taking it. No person can well be more averse to medicine in the animal economy, or a system of expedients in political economy, than myself ; but in the present state of the country something of the kind may be necessary to prevent greater evils. It is a matter of very little comparative importance, whether we are fully supplied with broadcloth, linens, and muslins, or even with tea, sugar, and coffee ; and no rational politician therefore would think of proposing a bounty upon such commodities. But it is certainly a matter of the very highest importance, whether we are fully supplied with food ; and if a bounty would produce such a supply, the most liberal political economist might be justified in proposing it ; considering food as a commodity distinct from all others, and pre-eminently valuable.



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## CHAPTER X.

### *Of Bounties on the Exportation of Corn.*

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IN discussing the policy of a bounty on the exportation of corn, it should be premised, that the private interests of the farmers and proprietors should never enter in the question. The sole object of our consideration ought to be the permanent interest of the consumer, in the character of which is comprehended the whole nation.

According to the general principles of political economy, it cannot be doubted, that it is for the interest of the civilized world that each nation should purchase its commodities wherever they can be had the cheapest.

According to these principles, it is rather desirable that some obstacles should exist to the excessive accumulation of wealth in any particular country, and that rich nations should be tempted to purchase their corn of poorer nations, as by these means the wealth of the civilized world will not only be more rapidly increased, but more equably diffused.



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Of bounties on the exportation of corn.

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It is evident, however, that local interests and political relations may modify the application of these general principles; and in a country with a territory fit for the production of corn, an independent, and at the same time a more equable supply of this necessary of life, may be an object of such importance as to warrant a deviation from them.

It is undoubtedly true, that every thing will ultimately find its level, but this level is sometimes effected in a very harsh manner. England may export corn a hundred years hence without the assistance of a bounty; but this is much more likely to happen from the destruction of her manufactures, than from the increase of her agriculture; and a policy which, in so important a point, may tend to soften the harsh corrections of general laws, seems to be justifiable.

The regulations respecting importation and exportation adopted in the corn laws that were established in 1688 and 1700, seemed to have the effect of giving that encouragement to agriculture, which it so much wanted, and the apparent result was gradually to produce a growth of corn in the country considerably above the wants of the actual population, to lower the average price of it, and



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Of bounties on the exportation of corn.

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give a steadiness to prices that had never been experienced before.

During the seventeenth century, and indeed the whole period of our history previous to it, the prices of wheat were subject to great fluctuations, and the average price was very high. For fifty years before the year 1700, the average price of wheat per quarter was 3*l.* 11*d.* and before 1650 it was 6*l.* 8*s.* 10*d.*<sup>1</sup> From the time of the completion of the corn laws in 1700 and 1706, the prices became extraordinarily steady; and the average price for forty years previous to the year 1750, sunk so low as 1*l.* 16*s.* per quarter. This was the period of our greatest exportations. In the year 1757, the laws were suspended, and in the year 1773 they were totally altered. The exports of corn have since been regularly decreasing, and the imports increasing. The average price of wheat for the forty years ending in 1800, was 2*l.* 9*s.* 5*d.*; and for the last five years of this period, 3*l.* 6*s.* 6*d.* During this last term, the balance of the imports of all sorts of grain is estimated at 2,938,357,<sup>2</sup> and the dreadful fluctuations of price

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<sup>1</sup> Dirom's Inquiry into the Corn Laws, Appendix, No. I.

<sup>2</sup> Anderson's Investigation of the Circumstances which led to Scarcity, Table, p. 40.



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Of bounties on the exportation of corn.

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which have occurred of late years, we are but too well acquainted with.

It is at all times dangerous to be hasty in drawing general inferences from partial experience; but, in the present instance, the period that has been considered is of so considerable an extent, and the changes from fluctuating and high prices to steady and low prices, with a return to fluctuating and high prices again, correspond so accurately with the establishment and full vigor of the corn laws, and with their subsequent alterations and inefficacy, that it was certainly rather a bold assertion in Dr. Smith to say, that the fall in the price of corn must have happened in spite of the bounty, and could not possibly have happened in consequence of it.<sup>1</sup> We have a right to expect that he should defend a position so contrary to all apparent experience, by the most powerful arguments. As in the present state of this country, the subject seems to be of the highest importance, it will be worth while to examine the validity of these arguments.

He observes, that both in years of plenty, and in years of scarcity, the bounty necessarily tends

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<sup>1</sup> *Wealth of Nations*, vol. ii. b. iv. c. v. p. 264.



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Of bounties on the exportation of corn.

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to raise the money price of corn somewhat higher than it otherwise would be in the home market.<sup>1</sup>

That it does so in years of plenty is undoubtedly true ; but that it does so in years of scarcity appears to me as undoubtedly false. The only argument by which Dr. Smith supports this latter position is, by saying that the exportation prevents the plenty of one year from relieving the scarcity of another. But this is certainly a very insufficient reason. The scarce year may not immediately follow the most plentiful year ; and it is totally contrary to the habits and practice of farmers, to save the superfluity of six or seven years for a contingency of this kind. Great practical inconveniences generally attend the keeping of so large a reserved store. Difficulties often occur from a want of proper accommodations for it. It is at all times liable to damage from vermin and other causes. When very large, it is apt to be viewed with a jealous and grudging eye by the common people. And in general, the farmer may either not be able to remain so long without his returns ; or may not be willing to employ so considerable a capital in a way in which the returns must necessarily be dis-

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<sup>1</sup> Wealth of Nations, vol. ii. b. iv. c. v. p. 265.



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Of bounties on the exportation of corn.

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tant and precarious. On the whole, therefore, we cannot reasonably expect that, upon this plan, the reserved store should in any degree be equal to that, which in a scarce year would be kept at home, in a country which was in the habit of constant exportation to a considerable amount; and we know that even a very little difference in the degree of deficiency will often make a very great difference in the price.

Dr. Smith then proceeds to state very justly, that the defenders of the corn laws do not insist so much upon the price of corn in the actual state of tillage, as upon their tendency to improve this actual state, by opening a more extensive foreign market to the corn of the farmer, and securing to him a better price than he could otherwise expect for his commodity; which double encouragement, they imagine, must in a long period of years occasion such an increase in the production of corn, as may lower its price in the home market much more than the bounty can raise it, in the state of tillage then actually existing.<sup>1</sup>

In answer to this he observes, that whatever extension of the foreign market can be occasioned by

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<sup>1</sup> *Wealth of Nations*, vol. ii. b. iv. c. v. p. 265.



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Of bounties on the exportation of corn.

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the bounty, must in every particular year be altogether at the expense of the home market, as every bushel of corn which is exported by means of the bounty, and which would not have been exported without the bounty, would have remained in the home market to increase the consumption and to lower the price of that commodity.

In this observation he appears to me a little to misuse the term market. Because, by selling a commodity below its natural price, it is possible to get rid of a greater quantity of it, in any particular market, than would have gone off otherwise, it cannot justly be said that by this process such a market is proportionally extended. Though the removal of the two taxes mentioned by Dr. Smith, as paid on account of the bounty, would certainly rather increase the power of the lower classes to purchase; yet in each particular year the consumption must be ultimately limited by the population; and the increase of consumption from the removal of these taxes might by no means be sufficient to take off the whole superfluity of the farmers, without lowering the general price of corn, so as to deprive them of their fair recompence. If the price of British corn in the home market rise in consequence of the bounty, it is an unanswerable proof,



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Of bounties on the exportation of corn.

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that the effectual market for British corn is extended by it; and that the diminution of demand at home, whatever it may be, is more than counterbalanced by the extension of the demand abroad.

There cannot be a greater discouragement to the production of any commodity in a large quantity, than the fear of overstocking the market with it. Nor can there be a greater encouragement to such a production, than the certainty of finding an effectual market for any quantity, however great, that can be obtained. It should be observed further, that one of the principal objects of the bounty is to obtain a surplus above the home consumption which may supply the deficiency of unfavorable years; but it is evident that no possible extension of the home market can attain this object.

Dr. Smith goes on to say, that if the two taxes paid by the people on account of the bounty, namely, the one to the government to pay this bounty, and the other paid in the advanced price of the commodity, do not, in the actual state of the crop, raise the price of labor, and thus return upon the farmer, they must reduce the ability of the laboring poor to bring up their children, and by thus restraining the population and industry of the country, must tend to stunt and restrain the gradual extension of the home market, and thereby,



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Of bounties on the exportation of corn.

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in the long run, rather to diminish than to augment, the whole market and consumption of corn.<sup>1</sup>

I think it has been shown, and indeed it will scarcely admit of a doubt, that the system of exportation arising from the bounty has an evident tendency in years of scarcity to increase the supplies of corn, or to prevent their being so much diminished as they otherwise would be, which comes to the same thing. Consequently the laboring poor will be able to live better, and the population will be less checked in these particular years, than they would have been without the system of exportation arising from the bounty. But if the effect of the bounty, in this view of the subject, be only to repress a little the population in years of plenty, while it encourages it comparatively in years of scarcity, its effect is evidently to regulate the population more equally according to that quantity of subsistence, which can permanently, and without occasional defalcations, be supplied. And this effect I have no hesitation in saying, is one of the greatest advantages which can possibly occur to a society, and contributes more to the happiness of the laboring poor, than can easily be

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<sup>1</sup> Wealth of Nations, vol. ii. b. iv. c. v. p. 267.



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Of bounties on the exportation of corn.

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conceived by those who have not deeply considered the subject. In the whole compass of human events, I doubt if there be a more fruitful source of misery, or one more invariably productive of disastrous consequences, than a sudden start of population from two or three years of plenty, which must necessarily be repressed on the first return of scarcity, or even of average crops. It has been suggested, that if we were in the habit of exporting corn in consequence of a bounty, the price would fall still lower in years of extraordinary abundance, than without such a bounty and such exportation; because the exuberance belonging to that part of the crop usually exported would fall upon the home market. But there seems to be no reason for supposing that this would be the case. The quantity annually exported would by no means be fixed, but would depend upon the state of the crop, and the demands of the home market. One great advantage of a foreign market, both with regard to buying and selling, is the improbability, that years of scarcity, or years of abundance, should in many different countries occur at the same time. In a year of abundance the fixed sum of the bounty would always bear a greater proportion to the cost of production. A greater encouragement would therefore be given to export, and



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Of bounties on the exportation of corn.

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a very moderate lowering of price would probably enable the farmer to dispose of the whole of his excess in foreign markets.

The most plausible argument that Dr. Smith adduces against the corn laws is, that as the money price of corn regulates that of all other home-made commodities, the advantage to the proprietor from the increased money price is merely apparent, and not real; since what he gains in his sales, he must lose in his purchases.

This position however, is not true, without many limitations. The money price of corn in a particular country is undoubtedly by far the most powerful ingredient in regulating the price of labor, and of all other commodities; but it is not enough for Dr. Smith's position, that it should be the most powerful ingredient; it must be shown that other causes remaining the same, the price of every article will rise and fall exactly in proportion to the price of corn, and this does not appear to be the case. Dr. Smith himself excepts all foreign commodities; but when we reflect upon the sum of our imports, and the quantity of foreign articles used in our manufactures, this exception alone

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<sup>1</sup> Wealth of Nations, vol. ii. b. iv. c. v. p. 269.



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Of bounties on the exportation of corn.

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is of very great importance. Wool and raw hides, two most important materials of home growth, do not, according to Dr. Smith's own reasonings, (Book i. c. xi. p. 363, et seq.) depend much upon the price of corn and the rent of land; and the price of flax is of course greatly influenced by the quantity we import. But woollen cloths, leather, linen, cottons, tea, sugar, &c. which are comprehended in the above named articles, form almost the whole of the clothing and luxuries of the industrious classes of society. Consequently, although that part of the wages of labor which is expended in food will rise in proportion to the price of corn, the whole of the wages will not rise in the same proportion. When great improvements in manufacturing machinery have taken place in any country, that part of the price of the wrought commodity which pays the interest of the fixed capital employed in producing it, as this capital had been accumulated before the advance in the price of labor, will not rise in consequence of this advance, except as it requires gradual renovation. And in the case of great and numerous taxes on consumption, as those who live by the wages of labor must always receive wherewithal to pay them, at least all those upon necessaries, a rise or fall in the price of corn, though it would increase or decrease that



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Of bounties on the exportation of corn.

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part of the wages of labor which resolves itself into food, evidently would not increase or decrease that part which was destined for the payment of taxes.

It cannot then be admitted as a general position, that the money price of corn in any country is an accurate measure of the real value of silver in that country. But all these considerations, though of great weight to the owners of land, will not influence the growth of corn beyond the current leases. At the expiration of a lease any particular advantage which the farmer had received from a favorable proportion between the price of corn and of labor, would be taken from him, and any disadvantage from an unfavorable proportion made up to him. The sole cause which would determine the quantity of effective capital employed in agriculture would be the extent of the effectual demand for corn, and if the bounty had really enlarged this demand, which it certainly would have done, it is impossible to suppose that more capital would not be employed upon the land.

When Dr. Smith says, that the nature of things has stamped upon corn a real value, which cannot be altered by merely altering the money price; and that no bounty upon exportation, no monopoly of the home market, can raise that value, nor the



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Of bounties on the exportation of corn.

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freest competition lower it,<sup>1</sup> it is evident, that he changes the question from the profits of the growers of corn or the proprietors of land, to the physical and absolute value of corn in itself. I certainly do not mean to say, that the bounty alters the physical value of corn, and makes a bushel of it support a greater number of laborers for a day than it did before ; but I certainly do mean to say, that the bounty to the British cultivator does, in the actual state of things, really increase the demand for British corn ; and thus encourages him to sow more than he otherwise would do, and enables him in consequence to employ more bushels of corn in the maintenance of a greater number of laborers.

If Dr. Smith's theory were strictly true, and the real price of corn, or its price in the sum of all other commodities, never suffered any variation, it would be difficult to give a reason why we grow more corn now than we did 200 years ago. If no rise in the nominal price of corn were a real rise, or could enable the farmer to cultivate better or determine more of the national capital of the land, it would appear that agriculture was indeed in a most unfortunate situation, and that no adequate

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<sup>1</sup> Wealth of Nations, vol. ii. b. iv. c. v. p. 278.



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Of bounties on the exportation of corn.

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motive could exist to the further investment of capital in this branch of industry. But surely we cannot doubt that the real price of corn varies, though it may not vary so much as the real price of other commodities, and that there are periods when all wrought commodities are cheaper, and periods when they are dearer, in proportion to the price of corn; and in the one case capital flows from manufactures to agriculture, and in the other from agriculture to manufactures. To overlook these periods, or consider them of slight importance, is unpardonable, because in every branch of trade these periods form the grand encouragement to an increase of supply. Undoubtedly the profits of trade in any particular branch of industry, can never long remain higher than in others, but how are they lowered except by influx of capital occasioned by these high profits? It never can be a national object permanently to increase the profits of any particular set of dealers. The national object is in the increase of supply, but this object cannot be attained but by previously increasing the profits of these dealers, and thus determining a greater quantity of capital to this particular employment. The ship-owners and sailors do not make greater profits now, than they did before the



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Of bounties on the exportation of corn.

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navigation act ; but the object of the nation was not to increase the profits of ship-owners and sailors, but the quantity of shipping and seamen, and this could not be done but by a law, which by increasing the demand for them, raised the profits of the capital before employed in this way, and determined a greater quantity to flow into the same channel. The object of the nation in the corn laws is not the increase of the profits of the farmers, or the rents of the landlords, but the determination of a greater quantity of the national capital to the land, and the consequent increase of supply ; and though in the case of an advance in the price of corn from an increased demand, the rise of wages, the rise of rents, and the fall of silver, tend to obscure in some degree our view of the subject ; yet we cannot refuse to acknowledge, that the real price of corn varies during periods sufficiently long to affect the determination of capital, or we shall be reduced to the dilemma of owning that no motive can exist to the further investment of capital in the production of corn.

The mode in which a bounty upon the exportation of corn operates seems to be this. Let us suppose that the price at which the British grower can afford to sell his corn in average years is 55



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Of bounties on the exportation of corn.

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shillings, and the price at which the foreign grower can sell it, 53 shillings. Thus circumstanced, it is evident that the British grower cannot export corn even in years considerably above an average crop. In this state of things let a bounty of five shillings per quarter be granted on exported corn. Immediately as this bounty was established the exportation would begin, and go on, till the price in the home market had risen to the price at which British corn could be sold abroad with the addition of the bounty. The abstraction of a part of the home supply, or even the apprehension of it, would soon raise the price in the home market, and it is probable that the quantity exported before this rise had taken place would not, at the most, bear such a proportion to the whole quantity in the ports of Europe, as to lower the general price more than a shilling in the quarter. Consequently the British grower would sell his corn abroad for 52 shillings, which with the addition of the bounty would be 57 shillings, and what was sold at home would bear exactly the same price, throwing out of our consideration at present the expenses of freight, &c. The British grower therefore, instead of 55 shillings at which he could afford to sell, would get 57 shillings for



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Of bounties on the exportation of corn.

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his whole crop. Dr. Smith has supposed that a bounty of five shillings would raise the price of corn in the home market four shillings, but this is evidently upon the supposition that the growing price of the corn was not lower abroad than at home, and in this case his supposition would probably be correct. In the case before supposed however, the extra profits of the farmer would be only two shillings. As far as this advance would go, it would raise the profits of farming, and encourage him to grow more corn. The next year therefore the supply would be increased in proportion to the number of purchasers of the year before, and to make this additional quantity go off the price must fall; and it would of course fall both in the foreign and the home market, as while any exportation continues, the price in the home market will be regulated by the price in foreign markets with the addition of the bounty. This fall may be inconsiderable, but still the effect will be in this direction, and after the first year, the price of corn will for some time continue to fall towards its former level. In the mean time however, the cheapness of corn abroad might gradually tend to increase the number of purchasers, and extend the effectual demand for corn, not only



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Of bounties on the exportation of corn.

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at the late reduced prices, but at the original or even higher prices. But every extension of this kind would tend to raise the price of corn abroad to a nearer level with the growing price at home, and consequently would give the British farmer a greater advantage from the bounty. If the demand abroad extended only in proportion to the cheapness, the effect would be, that part of the agriculture of foreign countries would be checked to make room for the increased agriculture of Britain, and some of the foreign growers, who traded upon the smallest profits would be justled out of the markets.

At what time the advanced price at home would begin to affect the price of labor and of all other commodities, it would be very difficult to say; but it is probable that the interval might be considerable, because the first and greatest rise, upon the supposition that has been made, would not be above three pence in the bushel, and this advance would for some time diminish every year. But after the full effect from this advance, whatever it might be, had taken place, the influence of the bounty would by no means be lost. For some years it would give the British grower an absolute



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Of bounties on the exportation of corn.

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advantage over the foreign grower. This advantage would of course gradually diminish, because it is the nature of all effectual demand to be ultimately supplied, and to oblige the producers to sell at the lowest price that they can afford. But after having experienced a period of very decided encouragement, the British grower will find himself at last on a level with the foreign grower, which he was not before the bounty, and in the habit of supplying a larger market than his own upon equal terms with his competitors. And after this, if the foreign and British markets continued to extend themselves equally, the British grower would continue to proportion his supplies to both, because unless a particular increase of demand were to take place at home, he could never withdraw his foreign supply without lowering the price of his whole crop; and the nation would thus be in possession of a constant store for years of scarcity.

To the present state of things, indeed, the supposition here made will not apply. In average years we do not grow enough for our own consumption. Our first object must therefore be to supply our own wants before we aim at obtaining an excess, and the restrictive laws on importation



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Of bounties on the exportation of corn.

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are strongly calculated to produce this effect. It is difficult to conceive a more decided encouragement to the investment of capital in agriculture, than the certainty, that for many years to come, the price will never fall so low as the growing price. If such a certainty has no tendency to give encouragement to British agriculture, on account of the advance it may occasion in the price of labor, it may safely be pronounced, that no possible increase of wealth and population can ever encourage the production of corn.<sup>1</sup> In a nation which never imported corn except in a scarcity, commerce could never get the start of agriculture; and restrictive laws on importation, as far as they

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<sup>1</sup> If the operation of the corn laws, as they were established in 1700, had continued uninterrupted, I cannot bring myself to believe, that we should be now in the habit of importing so much corn as we do at present. Putting the bounty on exportation out of the question, the restrictive laws on importation alone would have made it impossible. The demand for British corn would, for the last 30 years, have been both greater and more uniform than it has been; and it is contrary to every principle of supply and demand to suppose, that this would not have occasioned a greater growth. Dr. Smith's argument clearly proves too much, which is as bad as proving too little.



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Of bounties on the exportation of corn.

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go, tend to give a relative discouragement to manufactures, and a relative encouragement to agriculture. If without diminishing manufactures, they were merely to determine a greater part of the future annual accumulation to fall on the land, the effect would undoubtedly be in the highest degree desirable; but even allowing that the present very rapid march of wealth in general were to suffer a slight relaxation in its progress, if there be any foundation whatever for the alarms that have of late been expressed respecting the advantageous employment of so rapidly increasing a capital, we might surely be willing to sacrifice a small portion of present riches, in order to attain a greater degree of security, independence, and permanent prosperity.

Having considered the effect of the bounty on the farmer, it remains to consider its effect on the consumer. It must be allowed, that all the direct effects of the bounty are to raise, and not to lower the price of corn to the consumer; but its indirect effects are both to lower the average price, and to prevent the variations above and below that price. If we take any period of some length prior to the establishment of the bounty, we shall find that the



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Of bounties on the exportation of corn.

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average price of corn is most powerfully affected by years of scarcity. From 1637 to 1700, both inclusive, the average price of corn, according to Dr. Smith, was 2*l.* 11*s.* 0 $\frac{1}{3}$ ; yet in 1688 the growing price, according to an estimate of Gregory King, which Dr. Smith supposes to be correct, was only 1*l.* 8*s.* It appears therefore, that during this period it was the monopoly price from deficiency of supply, rather than the growing price which influenced the general average. But this high average price would not proportionally encourage the cultivation of corn. Though the farmer might feel very sanguine during one or two years of high price, and project many improvements, yet the glut in the market which would follow, would depress him in the same degree, and destroy all his projects. Sometimes, indeed, a year of high price really tends to impoverish the land, and prepare the way for future scarcity.—The period is too short to determine more capital to the land, and a temporary plenty is often restored by sowing ground that is not ready for it, and thus injuring the permanent interests of agriculture. It may easily happen therefore that a very fluctuating price, although the general average be

*vol.* ii. 11



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Of bounties on the exportation of corn.

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high, will not tend to encourage the determination of capital to the land in the same degree as a steadier price with a lower general average, provided that this average is above the growing price. And if the bounty has any tendency to encourage a greater supply, and to cause the general average to be more affected by the growing price than the price of scarcity, it may produce a benefit of very high magnitude to the consumer, while at the same time it furnishes a better encouragement to the farmer, two objects which have been considered as incompatible, though not with sufficient reason. For let us suppose that the growing price in this country is 55 shillings per quarter, and that for three years out of the last ten, the price from scarcity had been five guineas, for four years 55 shillings, and for the remaining three years 52 shillings. In this case the average of the ten years will be a little above 3*l.* 9*s.* This is a most encouraging price, but the three years which were below the growing price would destroy, in a great measure, its effect, and it cannot be doubted that agriculture would have received a much more beneficial impulse, if the price had continued steadily at 3 guineas during the whole time. With regard to the consumer, the advantage of the latter average need not be insisted on.



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Of bounties on the exportation of corn.

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When Dr. Smith asserted that a fall in the price of corn could not possibly happen in consequence of a bounty, he overlooked a distinction which it is necessary to make in this case between the growing price of corn in years of common plenty, and the average price of a period including years of scarcity, which are in fact two very different things. Supposing the wages of labor to be regulated more frequently by the former than the latter price, which perhaps is the case, it will readily be allowed that the bounty could not lower the growing price, though it might very easily lower the average price of a long period, and I have no doubt whatever had this effect in a considerable degree during the first half of the last century.

The operation of the bounty on the value of silver is, in the same manner, in its direct effects to depreciate it, but its indirect effects may perhaps tend more powerfully to prevent it from falling. In the progress of wealth, when commerce outstrips agriculture, there is a constant tendency to a depreciation of silver, and a tendency to an opposite effect, when the ballance leans to the side of agriculture. During the first half of the last century agriculture seemed to flourish more than commerce, and silver, according to Dr. Smith, seem-



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Of bounties on the exportation of corn.

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ed to rise in value in most of the countries in Europe. During the latter half of the century, commerce seemed to have got the start of agriculture, and the effect not being counteracted by a deficiency of circulating medium, silver has been very generally depreciated. As far as this depreciation is common to the commercial world, it is comparatively<sup>1</sup> of little importance; but undoubtedly those nations will feel it most, where this cause

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<sup>1</sup> Even the depreciation which is common to the commercial world produces much evil to individuals who have fixed incomes, and one important national evil, that of indisposing landlords to let long leases of farms. With regard to leases, the operation of the bounty would certainly be favorable. It has appeared, that after the advance occasioned on its first establishment, the price of corn would for many years tend to fall towards its former level, and if no other causes intervened a very considerable time might elapse before it had regained the height from which it began to sink. Consequently after the first depreciation, future depreciation would be checked, and of course long leases more encouraged. The absolute depreciation occasioned by the establishment of the bounty, would be perfectly inconsiderable, compared with the other causes of depreciation, which are constantly operating in this country. Independently of the funding system, the extended use of paper, the influx of commercial wealth, and the comparative deficiency of corn, every tax on the necessaries of life tends to lower the value of silver.



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Of bounties on the exportation of corn.

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has prevailed in the greatest degree, and where the nominal price of labor has risen the highest, and has been most affected by the competition of commercial wealth, operating on a comparative deficiency of corn. It will certainly be allowed that those landed nations which supply the ports of Europe with corn, will be the least liable to this disadvantage, and even those small states whose wants are known will probably suffer less than those whose wants, at the same time that they are quite uncertain, may be very considerable. That England is in the latter situation, and that the rapid progress of commercial wealth, combined with years of scarcity, has raised the nominal price of wages more than in any other country of Europe, will not be denied; and the natural consequence is, that silver is more depreciated here than in the rest of Europe.

If the bounty has any effect in weakening this cause of depreciation, by preventing the average price of corn from being so much affected by the price of scarcity, the ultimate advantage which its indirect operation occasions, with regard to the value of silver, may more than counterbalance the present disadvantage of its direct operation.

On the whole therefore it appears, that the corn



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Of bounties on the exportation of corn.

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laws by opening a larger, but more particularly, by opening a steadier demand for British corn, must give a decided encouragement to British agriculture.<sup>1</sup>

This, it will be allowed, is an advantage of considerable magnitude ; but this advantage cannot be attained without the attendant evil of establishing a fixed difference between the price of corn in Britain and in the ports of Europe, and as far as

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<sup>1</sup> On account of the tendency of population to increase in proportion to the means of subsistence, it has been supposed by some, that there would always be a sufficient demand at home for any quantity of corn which could be grown. But this is an error. It is undoubtedly true, that if the farmers could gradually increase their growth of corn to any extent, and could sell it *sufficiently cheap*, that a population would arise at home to demand the whole of it. But in this case, the great increase of demand arises solely from the cheapness, and must therefore be totally of a different nature from such a demand as, in the actual circumstances of the country, would encourage an increased supply. If the makers of superfine broad cloths would sell their commodity for a shilling a yard instead of a guinea, it cannot be doubted that the demand would increase more than ten fold ; but the certainty of such an increase of demand, in such a case, would have no tendency whatever, in the actual circumstances of any known country, to encourage the manufacture of broad cloths.



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Of bounties on the exportation of corn.

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the nominal price of corn regulates the price of all other commodities, a proportional difference in the value of silver. With regard to the *permanent* interests of commerce there is great reason to believe, that this disadvantage would be more than counterbalanced by the tendency of a fuller and steadier supply of corn to prevent the future depreciation of silver in this country, but still it is a present evil; and the good and evil of the system must be compared with the good and evil of a perfect freedom in the commerce of grain, the name of which is undoubtedly most fascinating. The advantages of an unlimited freedom of importation and exportation are obvious. The specific evil to be apprehended from it in a rich and commercial country is, that the rents of land and the wages of labor would not fall in proportion to the fall in the price of corn. If land yielded no other produce than corn, the proprietors would be absolutely obliged to lower their rents exactly in proportion to the diminished demand and diminished price, because, universally, it is price that determines rent, not rent that determines price; but in a country where the demands for the products of pasture are very great, and daily increasing, the rents of land would not be entirely determined by



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Of bounties on the exportation of corn.

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the price of corn ; and though they would fall with a fall in the price of corn, they would not fall in proportion. In the same manner, the wages of labor being influenced not only by the price of corn, but by the competition of commercial wealth, and the other causes before enumerated, though they would probably fall with a fall in the price of corn would not fall in proportion. During the first half of the last century the average price of corn fell considerably, but owing to the demand for labor arising from an increasing commerce, the price of labor did not fall with it. High rents and high wages occasioned by an increased demand and an increased price of corn, cannot possibly stop cultivation, for the obvious reason, that the power of paying the advance is given previous to the advance taking place ; but high rents and high wages supported by other causes than the price of corn tend most powerfully to stop it. Under these circumstances land on which little labor has been bestowed, will generally yield a higher rent than that on which much has been bestowed, and the bringing of fresh land under cultivation is most powerfully checked. A rich and commercial nation is thus by the natural course of things



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Of bounties on the exportation of corn.

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led more to pasture than tillage, and is tempted to become daily more dependent upon others for its supplies of corn. If all the nations of Europe could be considered as one great country, and if any one state could be as secure of its supplies from others, as the pasture districts of a particular state are from the corn districts in their neighborhood, there would be no harm in this dependence, and no person would think of proposing corn laws. But can we safely consider Europe in this light? The fortunate situation of this country, and the excellence of its laws and government exempt it, above any other nation from foreign invasion and domestic tumult, and it is a pardonable love of one's country, which under such circumstances produces an unwillingness to expose it, in so important a point as the supply of its principal food, to share in the changes and chances which may happen to the continent. How would the miseries of France have been aggravated during the revolution if she had been dependent on foreign countries for the support of two or three millions of her people.

That we can readily turn ourselves from an importing to an exporting nation, in the article of corn, I would by no means pretend to say; but



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Of bounties on the exportation of corn.

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both theory, and the experience of the first half of the last century, warrant us in concluding it practicable; and we cannot but allow that it is worth the experiment, as the permanence of our national prosperity may depend upon it.<sup>1</sup> If we proceed in our present course, let us but for a moment reflect on the probable consequences. We can hardly doubt that in the course of some years, we shall draw from America, and the nations bordering on the Baltic, as much as two millions of quarters of wheat. besides other corn, the support of above two millions of people. If under these circumstances, any commercial discussion, or other dispute, were to arise with these nations, with what a weight of power they would negotiate! Not the whole British navy could offer a more convincing argument than the simple threat of shutting all their ports. I am not unaware, that in general, we may securely depend upon people's not acting di-

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<sup>1</sup> Since this was first written, a new system of corn laws has been established by the legislature, but it is not so powerful in its operation as that of 1688 and 1700. The new laws tend strongly to encourage the growth of an independent supply of corn, but not so strongly the production of an excess. An independent supply however is certainly the first and most important object.



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Of bounties on the exportation of corn.

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rectly contrary to their interest. But this consideration, all powerful as it is, will sometimes yield voluntarily to national indignation, and is sometimes forced to yield to the resentment of a sovereign. It is of sufficient weight in practice when applied to manufactures; because a delay in their sale is not of such immediate consequence, and from their smaller bulk they are easily smuggled. But in the case of corn, a delay of three or four months may produce the most complicated misery, and from the great bulk of corn, it will generally be in the power of a sovereign to execute almost completely his resentful purpose. Small commercial states which depend nearly for the whole of their supplies on foreign powers, will always have many friends. They are not of sufficient consequence to excite any general indignation against them, and if they cannot be supplied from one quarter, they will from another. But this is by no means the case with such a country as Great Britain, whose commercial ambition is peculiarly calculated to excite a general jealousy, and in fact has excited it to a very great degree. If our commerce continue increasing for a few years, and our commercial population with it, we shall be laid so bare to the shafts of fortune, that nothing



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Of bounties on the exportation of corn.

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but a miracle can save us from being struck. The periodical return of such seasons of dearth, as those which we have of late experienced, I consider as absolutely certain, upon our present importing system : but excluding from the question at present the dreadful distress that they occasion, which however no man of humanity can long banish from his mind, I would ask, is it politic, merely with a view to our national greatness, to render ourselves thus dependent upon others for our support, and put it in the power of a combination against us, to diminish our population two millions ?

To restore our independence, and build our national greatness and commercial prosperity on the sure foundation of agriculture, it is evidently not sufficient, to propose premiums for tillage, to cultivate this or that waste, or even to pass a general inclosure bill, though these are all excellent as far as they go. If the increase of the commercial population keep pace with these efforts, we shall only be where we were before, with regard to the necessity of importation. The object required is to alter the relative proportion between the commercial and the agricultural population of the country, which can only be done by some system which



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Of bounties on the exportation of corn.

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will determine a greater proportion of the national capital to the land. I see no other way at present of effecting this object, but by corn laws adapted to the peculiar circumstances of the country and the state of foreign markets. All systems of peculiar restraints and encouragements are undoubtedly disagreeable, and the necessity of resorting to them may justly be lamented. But the objection which Dr. Smith brings against bounties in general, that of forcing some part of the industry of the country into a channel less advantageous than that in which it would run of its own accord,<sup>1</sup> does not apply in the present instance, on account of the pre-eminent qualities of the products of agriculture, and the dreadful consequences that attend the slightest failure of them. The nature of things has indeed stamped upon corn a peculiar value ;<sup>2</sup> and this remark, made by Dr. Smith for another purpose, may fairly be applied to justify the exception of this commodity from the objections against bounties in general. If throughout the commercial world every kind of trade were perfectly free, one should undoubtedly feel the greatest reluctance in

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<sup>1</sup> Wealth of Nations, vol. ii. b. iv. c. v. p. 278.

<sup>2</sup> Idem.



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Of bounties on the exportation of corn.

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proposing any interruption to such a system of general liberty; and indeed, under such circumstances, agriculture would not need peculiar encouragements. But under the present universal prevalence of the commercial system, with all its different expedients of encouragement and restraint, it is folly to except from our attention the great manufacture of corn which supports all the rest. The high duties paid on the importation of foreign manufactures are so direct an encouragement to the manufacturing part of the society, that nothing but some encouragement of the same kind can place the manufacturers and cultivators of this country on a fair footing. Any system of encouragement therefore, which might be found necessary for the commerce of grain, would evidently be owing to the prior encouragements which had been given to manufactures. If all be free, I have nothing to say; but if we protect and encourage, it seems to be folly not to encourage that production, which of all others is the most important and valuable.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Though I have dwelt much on the importance of raising a quantity of corn in the country beyond the demands of the home consumption, yet I do not mean to



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Of bounties on the exportation of corn.

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Let it not however be imagined, that the most enlightened system of agriculture, though it will

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recommend that general system of ploughing, which takes place in most parts of France, and defeats its own purpose. A large stock of cattle is not only necessary as a very valuable part of the food of the country, and as contributing very greatly to the comforts of a considerable portion of its population; but it is also necessary in the production of corn itself. A large surplus produce, in proportion to the number of persons employed, can never be obtained without a great stock of cattle. At the same time it does not follow, that we should throw all the land that is fit for it into pasture. It is an observation of Mr. Young, and I should think a just one, that the first and most obvious improvement in agriculture is to make the fallows of a country support the additional cattle and sheep wanted in it. (*Travels in France*, vol. i. p. 361.) I am by no means sanguine however, as to the practicability of converting England again into an exporting country, while the demands for the products of pasture are daily increasing, from the increasing riches of the commercial part of the nation. But should this be really considered as impracticable, it seems to point out to us one of the great causes of the decay of nations. We have always heard that states and empires have their periods of declension; and we learn from history that the different nations of the earth have flourished in a kind of succession, and that poor countries have been continually rising on the ruins of their richer neighbors. Upon the commercial system, this kind of succession seems to be in the natural and necessary course of things, independently of the effects of war. If from the increasing riches of the commercial



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Of bounties on the exportation of corn.

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undoubtedly be able to produce food beyond the demands of the actual population, can ever be

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part of any nation, and the consequently increasing demands for the products of pasture, more land were daily laid down to grass, and more corn imported from other countries, the unavoidable consequence seems to be, that the increasing prosperity of these countries, which their exportations of corn would contribute to accelerate, must ultimately diminish the population and power of the countries which had fostered them. The ancients always attributed this natural weakness and old age of states to luxury. But the moderns who have generally considered luxury as a principal encouragement to commerce and manufactures, and consequently a powerful instrument of prosperity, have, with great appearance of reason, been unwilling to consider it as a cause of decline. But allowing, with the moderns, all the advantages of luxury, and when it falls short of actual vice, they are certainly great, there seems to be a point beyond which it must necessarily become prejudicial to a state, and bring with it the seeds of weakness and decay. This point is, when it is pushed so far as to trench on the funds necessary for its support, and to become an impediment instead of an encouragement to agriculture.

I should be much misunderstood, if, from any thing that I have said in the four last chapters, I should be considered as not sufficiently aware of the advantages derived from commerce and manufactures. I look upon them as the most distinguishing characteristics of civilization, the most obvious and striking marks of the improvement of society, and calculated to enlarge our enjoyments, and add to the sum of human happiness. No



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Of bounties on the exportation of corn.

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made to keep pace with an unchecked population. The errors that have arisen from the constant appearance of a full supply, produced by the agri-

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great surplus produce of agriculture could exist without them, and if it did exist, it would be comparatively of very little value. But still they are rather the ornaments and embellishments of the political structure than its foundations. While these foundations are perfectly secure, we cannot be too solicitous to make all the apartments convenient and elegant; but if there be the slightest reason to fear that the foundations themselves may give way, it seems to be folly to continue directing our principal attention to the less essential parts. There has never yet been an instance in history, of a large nation continuing with undiminished vigor, to support four or five millions of its people on imported corn; nor do I believe that there ever will be such an instance in future. England is, undoubtedly, from her insular situation, and commanding navy, the most likely to form an exception to this rule; but in spite even of the peculiar advantages of England, it appears to me clear that if she continue yearly to increase her importations of corn, she cannot ultimately escape that decline which seems to be the natural and necessary consequence of excessive commercial wealth. I am not now speaking of the next twenty or thirty years, but of the next two or three hundred. And though we are little in the habit of looking so far forwards, yet it may be questioned, whether we are not bound in duty to make some exertions to avoid a system which must necessarily terminate in the weakness and decline of our posterity. But whether we make any practical application of such a discussion or not, it is curious to contemplate the causes



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Of bounties on the exportation of corn.

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cultural system, and the source of some other prejudices on the subject of population, will be noticed in the following chapter.

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of those reverses in the fates of empires, which so frequently changed the face of the world in past times, and may be expected to produce similar, though perhaps not such violent changes in future. War was undoubtedly in ancient times, the principal cause of these changes; but it frequently only finished a work which excess of luxury and the neglect of agriculture had begun. Foreign invasions, or internal convulsions, produce but a temporary and comparatively slight effect on such countries as Lombardy, Tuscany, and Flanders, but are fatal to such states as Holland and Hamburgh; and though the commerce and manufactures of England will probably always be supported in a great degree by her agriculture, yet that part which is not so supported will still remain subject to the reverses of dependent states.

We should recollect, that it is only within the last twenty or thirty years that we have become an importing nation. In so short a period, it could hardly be expected that the evils of the system should be perceptible. We have however already felt some of its inconveniences; and if we persevere in it, its evil consequences may by no means be a matter of remote speculation.



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## CHAPTER XI.

*On the prevailing Errors respecting Population and  
Plenty.*

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IT has been observed, that many countries at the period of their greatest degree of populousness have lived in the greatest plenty, and have been able to export corn; but at other periods, when their population was very low, have lived in continual poverty and want, and have been obliged to import corn. Egypt, Palestine, Rome, Sicily, and Spain, are cited as particular exemplifications of this fact; and it has been inferred, that an increase of population in any state, not cultivated to the utmost, will tend rather to augment than diminish the relative plenty of the whole society; and that, as Lord Kaimes observes, a country cannot easily become too populous for agriculture; because agriculture has the signal property of producing food in proportion to the number of consumers.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sketches of the History of Man, b. i. sketch i. p. 106, 107. 8vo. 1788.



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On the prevailing errors

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The general facts from which these inferences are drawn, there is no reason to doubt; but the inferences by no means follow from the premises. It is the nature of agriculture, particularly when well conducted, to produce support for a considerable number above that which it employs; and consequently if these members of the society, or as Sir James Steuart calls them, the free hands, do not increase, so as to reach the limit of the number which can be supported by the surplus produce, the whole population of the country may continue for ages increasing with the improving state of agriculture, and yet always be able to export corn. But this increase after a certain period, will be very different from the natural and unrestricted increase of population; it will merely follow the slow augmentation of produce from the gradual improvement of agriculture, and population will still be checked by the difficulty of procuring subsistence. It is very justly observed by Sir James Steuart, that the population of England in the middle of the last century when the exports of corn were considerable, was still checked for want of food.<sup>1</sup> The precise measure of the population in

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<sup>1</sup> Polit. Econ. vol. i. b. i. c. xv. p. 100.



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respecting population and plenty.

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a country thus circumstanced, will not indeed be the quantity of food, because part of it is exported, but the quantity of employment. The state of this employment however will necessarily regulate the wages of labor, on which depends the power of the lower classes of people to procure food; and according as the employment of the country is increasing, whether slowly or rapidly, these wages will be such, as either to check or to encourage early marriages, such, as to enable a laborer to support only two or three, or as many as five or six children.

The quantity of employment in any country will not of course vary from year to year, in the same manner as the quantity of produce must necessarily do, from the variation of the seasons; and consequently the check from want of employment will be much more steady in its operation, and be much more favorable to the lower classes of people, than the check from the immediate want of food. The first will be the preventive check; the second the positive check. When the demand for labor is either stationary, or increasing very slowly, people not seeing any employment open by which they can support a family, or the wages of common labor being inadequate to this purpose,



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On the prevailing errors

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will of course be deterred from marrying. But if a demand for labor continue increasing with some rapidity, although the supply of food be uncertain, on account of variable seasons, and a dependence on other countries, the population will evidently go on, till it is positively checked by famine, or the diseases arising from severe want.

Scarcity and extreme poverty therefore may or may not accompany an increasing population, according to circumstances ; but they must necessarily accompany a permanently declining population ; because there never has been, nor probably ever will be, any other cause than want of food, which makes the population of a country permanently decline. In the numerous instances of depopulation which occur in history, the causes of it may always be traced to the want of industry, or the ill direction of that industry, arising from violence, bad government, ignorance, &c. which first occasions a want of food, and of course depopulation follows. When Rome adopted the custom of importing all her corn, and laying all Italy into pasture, she soon declined in population. The causes of the depopulation of Egypt and Turkey have already been alluded to ; and in the case of Spain, it was certainly not the numerical loss of



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respecting population and plenty.

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people occasioned by the expulsion of the Moors ; but the industry and capital thus expelled, which permanently injured her population. When a country has been depopulated by violent causes, if a bad government, with its usual concomitant insecurity of property ensue, which has generally been the case in all those countries which are now less peopled than formerly, neither the food nor the population can recover themselves, and the inhabitants will probably live in severe want. But when an accidental depopulation takes place, in a country which was before populous and industrious, and in the habit of exporting corn, if the remaining inhabitants be left at liberty to exert, and do exert, their industry in the same direction as before, it is a strange idea to entertain that they would then be unable to supply themselves with corn in the same plenty ; particularly as the diminished numbers would of course cultivate principally the more fertile parts of their territory, and not be obliged as in their more populous state, to apply to ungrateful soils. Countries in this situation would evidently have the same chance of recovering their former number, as they had originally of reaching this number ; and indeed if absolute populousness were necessary to relative plen-



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On the prevailing errors

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ty, as some agriculturists have supposed,<sup>1</sup> it would be impossible for new colonies to increase with the same rapidity as old states.

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<sup>1</sup> Among others, I allude more particularly to Mr. Anderson, who, in a *Calm Investigation of the Circumstances which have led to the present Scarcity of grain in Britain*, (published in 1801) has labored with extraordinary earnestness, and I believe with the best intentions possible, to impress this curious truth on the minds of his countrymen. The particular position which he attempts to prove is, *that an increase of population in any state whose fields have not been made to attain their highest possible degree of productiveness, (a thing that probably has never yet been seen on this globe) will necessarily have its means of subsistence rather augmented than diminished, by that augmentation of its population; and the reverse.* The proposition is, to be sure, expressed rather obscurely; but from the context, his meaning evidently is, that every increase of population tends to increase relative plenty, and vice versà. He concludes his proofs by observing, that if the facts which he has thus brought forward and connected do not serve to remove the fears of those who doubt the possibility of this country producing abundance to sustain its increasing population, were it to augment in a ratio greatly more progressive than it has yet done, he should doubt whether they could be convinced of it, were one even to rise from the dead to tell them so. Mr. A. is perhaps justified in this doubt, from the known incredulity of the age, which might cause people to remain unconvinced in both cases. I agree with Mr. A. however, entirely, respecting the importance of directing a greater part of the national industry to agri-



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respecting population and plenty.

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The prejudices on the subject of population bear a very striking resemblance to the old prejudices about specie, and we know how slowly and with what difficulty these last have yielded to juster conceptions. Politicians observing, that states which were powerful and prosperous were almost invariably populous, have mistaken an effect for a cause, and concluded that their population was the cause of their prosperity, instead of their prosperity being the cause of their population; as the old political economists concluded, that the abundance of specie was the cause of national wealth, instead of the effect of it. The annual produce of the land and labor, in both these instances, became in consequence a secondary consideration, and its increase, it was conceived, would naturally follow the increase of specie in the one case, or of population in the other. The folly of endeavoring by forcible means to increase the quantity of specie in any country, and the ab-

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culture; but from the circumstance of its being possible for a country, with a certain direction of its industry, always to export corn, although it may be very populous, he has been led into the strange error of supposing, that an agricultural country could support an unchecked population.



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On the prevailing errors

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solute impossibility of accumulating it beyond a certain level by any human laws that can be devised, are now fully established, and have been completely exemplified in the instances of Spain and Portugal ; but the illusion still remains respecting population ; and under this impression, almost every political treatise has abounded in proposals to encourage population, with little or no comparative reference to the means of its support. Yet surely the folly of endeavoring to increase the quantity of specie in any country without an increase of the commodities which it is to circulate, is not greater, than that of endeavoring to increase the number of people without an increase of the food which is to maintain them ; and it will be found, that the level above which no human laws can raise the population of a country, is a limit more fixed and impassable than the limit to the accumulation of specie. However improbable in fact, it is possible to conceive, that means might be invented of retaining a quantity of specie in a state, greatly beyond what was demanded by the produce of its land and labor ; but when by great encouragements, population has been raised to such a height, that this produce is meted out to each individual in the smallest portions that can



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respecting population and plenty.

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support life, no stretch of ingenuity can even conceive the possibility of going further.

It has appeared, I think, clearly, in the review of different societies given in the former part of this work, that those countries the inhabitants of which were sunk in the most barbarous ignorance, or oppressed by the most cruel tyranny, however low they might be in actual population, were very populous in proportion to their means of subsistence; and upon the slightest failure of the seasons generally suffered the severities of want. Ignorance and despotism seem to have no tendency to destroy the passion which prompts to increase; but they effectually destroy the checks to it from reason and foresight. The improvident barbarian who thinks only of his present wants, or the miserable peasant, who, from his political situation, feels little security of reaping what he has sown, will seldom be deterred from gratifying his passions by the prospect of inconveniences which cannot be expected to press on him under three or four years. But though this want of foresight which is fostered by ignorance and despotism tend thus rather to encourage the procreation of children, it is absolutely fatal to the industry which is to support them. Industry cannot exist without foresight



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On the prevailing errors

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and security. The indolence of the savage is well known ; and the poor Egyptian or Abyssinian farmer without capital, who rents land which is let out yearly to the highest bidder, and who is constantly subject to the demands of his tyrannical masters, to the casual plunder of an enemy, and, not unfrequently, to the violation of his miserable contract, can have no heart to be industrious, and if he had, could not exercise that industry with success. Even poverty itself, which appears to be the great spur to industry, when it has once passed certain limits, almost ceases to operate. The indigence which is hopeless, destroys all vigorous exertion, and confines the efforts to what is sufficient for bare existence. It is the hope of bettering our condition, and the fear of want, rather than want itself, that is the best stimulus to industry ; and its most constant and best directed efforts will almost invariably be found among a class of people above the class of the wretchedly poor.

The effect of ignorance and oppression will therefore always be to destroy the springs of industry, and consequently to diminish the annual produce of the land and labor in any country ; and this diminution will inevitably be followed by a decrease of the population, in spite of the birth of



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respecting population and plenty.

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any number of children whatever, annually. The desire of immediate gratification, and the removal of the restraints to it from prudence, may perhaps, in such countries, prompt universally to early marriages; but when these habits have once reduced the people to the lowest possible state of poverty, they can evidently have no further effect upon the population. Their only effect must be on the degree of mortality; and there is no doubt, that if we could obtain accurate bills of mortality in those southern countries, where very few women remain unmarried, and all marry young, the proportion of the annual deaths would be 1 in 17, 18, or 20, instead of 1 in 34, 36, or 40, as in European states, where the preventive check operates.

That an increase of population, when it follows in its natural order, is both a great positive good in itself, and absolutely necessary to a further increase in the annual produce of the land and labor of any country, I should be the last to deny. The only question is, what is the natural order of its progress? In this point, Sir James Steuart who has in general explained this subject so well, appears to me to have fallen into an error. He determines that multiplication is the efficient cause of agriculture, and not agriculture of multiplica-



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On the prevailing errors

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tion.<sup>1</sup> But though it may be allowed, that the increase of people beyond what could easily subsist on the natural fruits of the earth, first prompted man to till the ground; and that the view of maintaining a family, or of obtaining some valuable consideration in exchange for the products of agriculture, still operates as the principal stimulus to cultivation; yet it is clear, that these products, in their actual state, must be beyond the lowest wants of the existing population, before any permanent increase can possibly be supported. We know that a multiplication of births has in numberless instances taken place, which has produced no effect upon agriculture, and has merely been followed by an increase of diseases; but perhaps there is no instance where a permanent increase of agriculture, has not effected a permanent increase of population, somewhere or other. Consequently, agriculture may with more propriety be termed the efficient cause of population, than population of agriculture,<sup>2</sup> though they certainly re-act

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<sup>1</sup> Polit. Econ. vol. i. b. i. c. xviii. p. 114.

<sup>2</sup> Sir James Steuart explains himself afterwards by saying that he means principally the multiplication of those persons who have some valuable consideration to give for the products of agriculture; but this is evidently not



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respecting population and plenty.

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upon each other, and are mutually necessary to each other's support. This indeed seems to be the hinge on which the subject turns, and all the prejudices respecting population have, perhaps, arisen from a mistake about the order of precedence.

The author of *L'Ami des Hommes*, in a chapter on the effects of a decay of agriculture upon population, acknowledges that he had fallen into a fundamental error in considering population as the source of revenue; and that he was afterwards fully convinced that revenue was the source of population.<sup>1</sup> From a want of attention to this most important distinction, statesmen, in pursuit of the desirable object of population, have been led to encourage early marriages, to reward the fathers of families, and to disgrace celibacy; but this, as the same author justly observes, is to dress and water a piece of land without sowing it, and yet to expect a crop.

Among the other prejudices which have prevailed on the subject of population, it has been

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mere increase of population, and such an explanation seems to admit the incorrectness of the general proposition.

<sup>1</sup> Tom. viii. p. 84. 12mo. 9 vols. 1762.



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On the prevailing errors

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generally thought, that while there is either waste among the rich, or land remaining uncultivated in any country, the complaints for want of food cannot be justly founded, or at least that the pressure of distress upon the poor is to be attributed to the ill conduct of the higher classes of society, and the bad management of the land. The real effect however of these two circumstances is merely to narrow the limit of the actual population; but they have little or no influence on what may be called the average pressure of distress on the poorer members of society.—If our ancestors had been so frugal and industrious, and had transmitted such habits to their posterity, that nothing superfluous was now consumed by the higher classes, no horses were used for pleasure, and no land was left uncultivated, a striking difference would appear in the state of the actual population; but probably none whatever, in the state of the lower classes of people, with respect to the price of labor, and the facility of supporting a family. The waste among the rich, and the horses kept for pleasure, have indeed a little the effect of the consumption of grain in distilleries, noticed before with regard to China. On the supposition that the food consumed in this manner may be withdrawn on the occasion of a



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respecting population and plenty.

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scarcity, and be applied to the relief of the poor, they operate certainly as far as they go, like granaries which are only opened at the time that they are most wanted, and must therefore tend rather to benefit than to injure the lower classes of society.

With regard to uncultivated land, it is evident, that its effect upon the poor is neither to injure nor to benefit them. The sudden cultivation of it will indeed tend to improve their condition for a time, and the neglect of lands before cultivated will certainly make their situation worse for a certain period ; but when no changes of this kind are going forward, the effect of uncultivated land on the lower classes operates merely like the possession of a smaller territory. It is indeed a point of very great importance to the poor, whether a country be in the habit of exporting or importing corn ; but this point is not necessarily connected with the complete or incomplete cultivation of the whole territory, but depends upon the proportion of the surplus produce, to those who are supported by it ; and in fact this proportion is generally the greatest, in countries which have not yet completed the cultivation of all their territory. If every inch of land in this country were well culti-



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On the prevailing errors

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vated, there would be no reason to expect, merely from this circumstance, that we should be able to export corn. Our power in this respect would depend entirely on the proportion of the surplus produce to the commercial population; and this, of course, would in its turn depend on the direction of capital to agriculture or commerce.

It is not probable that any country with a large territory should ever be completely cultivated; and I am inclined to think that we often draw very inconsiderate conclusions against the industry and government of states from the appearance of uncultivated lands in them. It seems to be the clear and express duty of every government to remove all obstacles, and give every facility to the inclosure and cultivation of land; but when this has been done, the rest must be left to the operation of individual interest; and upon this principle it cannot be expected that any new land should be brought into cultivation, the manure and the labor necessary for which, might be employed to greater advantage on the improvement of land already in cultivation; and this is a case which will very frequently occur. In countries possessed of a large territory, there will always be a great quantity of



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respecting population and plenty.

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land of a middling quality, which requires constant dressing to prevent it from growing worse, but which would admit of very great improvement, if a greater quantity of manure and labor could be employed upon it. The great obstacle to the melioration of land is the difficulty, the expense, and sometimes the impossibility of procuring a sufficient quantity of dressing. As this instrument of improvement, therefore, is in practice limited, whatever it may be in theory, the question will always be, how it may be most profitably employed; and in any instance where a certain quantity of dressing and labor employed to bring new land into cultivation, would have yielded a permanently greater produce if employed upon old land, both the individual and the nation are losers. Upon this principle, it is not uncommon for farmers in some situations never to dress their poorest land, but to get from it merely a scanty crop every three or four years, and to employ the whole of their manure, which they practically feel is limited, on those parts of their farms, where it will produce a greater proportional effect.

The case will be different of course, in a small territory with a great population, supported on



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On the prevailing errors

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funds not derived from their own soil. In this case there will be little or no choice of land, and a comparative superabundance of manure; and under such circumstances the poorest soils may be brought under cultivation. But for this purpose, it is not mere population that is wanted, but a population which can obtain the produce of other countries, while it is gradually improving its own; otherwise it would be immediately reduced in proportion to the limited produce of this small and barren territory and the melioration of the land might perhaps never take place; or if it did, it would take place very slowly indeed, and the population would always be exactly measured by this tardy rate, and could not possibly increase beyond it.

This subject is illustrated in the cultivation of the Campine in Brabant, which, according to the Abbé Mann,<sup>1</sup> consisted originally of the most barren and arid sand. Many attempts were made by private individuals to bring it under cultivation, but without success; which proves that, as a farm-

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<sup>1</sup> Memoir on the Agriculture of the Netherlands, published in vol. i. of Communications to the board of Agriculture, p. 225.



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respecting population and plenty.

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ing project, and considered as a sole dependence, the cultivation of it would not answer. Some religious houses however, at last settled there, and being supported by other funds, and improving the land merely as a secondary object, they by degrees, in the course of some centuries, brought nearly the whole under cultivation, letting it out to farmers as soon as it was sufficiently improved.

There is no spot, however barren, which might not be made rich this way, or by the concentrated population of a manufacturing town; but this is no proof whatever that with respect to population and food, population has the precedence, because this concentrated population could not possibly exist, without the preceding existence of an adequate quantity of food in the surplus produce of some other district.

In a country like Brabant or Holland, where territory is the principal want and not manure, such a district as the Campine is described to be, may perhaps be cultivated with advantage. But in countries possessed of a large territory, and with a considerable quantity of land of a middling quality, the attempt to cultivate such a spot, would be a palpable misdirection and waste both of individual and national resources.



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On the prevailing errors

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The French have already found their error in bringing under cultivation too great a quantity of poor land. They are now sensible that they have employed in this way a portion of labor and dressing, which would have produced a permanently better effect, if it had been applied to the further improvement of better land. Even in China, which is so fully cultivated and so fully peopled, barren heaths have been noticed in some districts, which prove that distressed as the people appear to be for subsistence, it does not answer to them to employ any of their manure on such spots. These remarks will be still further confirmed, if we recollect, that in the cultivation of a large surface of bad land, there must necessarily be a very great waste of seed corn.

We should not therefore be too ready to make inferences against the internal economy of a country from the appearance of uncultivated heaths, without other evidence. But the fact is, that as no country has ever reached, or probably ever will reach, its highest possible acme of produce, it appears always as if the want of industry, or the ill-direction of that industry, was the actual limit to a further increase of produce and population, and not the absolute refusal of nature to



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respecting population and plenty.

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yield any more ; but a man who is locked up in a room may be fairly said to be confined by the walls of it, though he may never touch them ; and with regard to the principle of population, it is never the question, whether a country will produce *any more*, but whether it may be made to produce a sufficiency to keep pace with an unchecked increase of people. In China, the question is not, whether a certain additional quantity of rice might be raised by improved culture, but whether such an addition could be expected during the next twenty-five years, as would be sufficient to support an additional three hundred millions of people. And in this country, it is not the question, whether by cultivating all our commons, we could raise considerably more corn than at present ; but whether we could raise sufficient for a population of twenty millions in the next twenty-five years, and forty millions in the next fifty years.

The allowing of the produce of the earth to be absolutely unlimited, scarcely removes the weight of a hair from the argument, which depends entirely upon the differently increasing ratios of population and food : and all that the most en-



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On the prevailing errors, &c.

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lightened governments, and the most persevering and best guided efforts of industry can do, is to make the necessary checks to population operate more equably, and in a direction to produce the least evil ; but to remove them is a task absolutely hopeless.



# ESSAY, &c.

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## BOOK IV.

OF OUR FUTURE PROSPECTS RESPECTING THE REMOVAL  
OR MITIGATION OF THE EVILS ARISING FROM  
THE PRINCIPLE OF POPULATION.

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### CHAPTER I.

*Of moral Restraint, and our Obligation to Practise  
this Virtue.*

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AS it appears that in the actual state of every society which has come within our review, the natural progress of population has been constantly and powerfully checked; and as it seems evident, that no improved form of government, no plans of emigration, no benevolent institutions, and no degree or direction of national industry, can prevent the continued action of a great check to population in some form or other; it follows that

vol. ii.                      99



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Of moral restraint.

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we must submit to it as an inevitable law of nature ; and the only inquiry that remains is, how it may take place with the least possible prejudice to the virtue and happiness of human society. All the immediate checks to population which have been observed to prevail in the same and different countries, seem to be resolvable into moral restraint, vice, and misery ; and if our choice be confined to these three, we cannot long hesitate in our decision respecting which it would be most eligible to encourage.

In the first edition of this essay I observed, that as from the laws of nature it appeared, that some check to population must exist, it was better that this check should arise from a foresight of the difficulties attending a family, and the fear of dependent poverty, than from the actual presence of want and sickness. This idea will admit of being pursued further, and I am inclined to think that from the prevailing opinions respecting population, which undoubtedly originated in barbarous ages, and have been continued and circulated by that part of every community which may be supposed to be interested in their support, we have been prevented from attending to the clear dictates of reason and nature on this subject.



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Of moral restraint.

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Natural and moral evil seem to be the instruments employed by the Deity in admonishing us to avoid any mode of conduct, which is not suited to our being, and will consequently injure our happiness. If we be intemperate in eating and drinking, we are disordered; if we indulge the transports of anger, we seldom fail to commit acts of which we afterwards repent; if we multiply too fast, we die miserably of poverty and contagious diseases. The laws of nature in all these cases are similar and uniform. They indicate to us, that we have followed these impulses too far, so as to trench upon some other law which equally demands attention. The uneasiness we feel from repletion, the injuries that we inflict on ourselves or others in anger, and the inconveniences we suffer on the approach of poverty, are all admonitions to us to regulate these impulses better; and if we heed not this admonition, we justly incur the penalty of our disobedience, and our sufferings operate as a warning to others.

From the inattention of mankind hitherto to the consequences of increasing too fast, it must be presumed that these consequences are not immediately and powerfully connected with the conduct which leads to them, as in the other instances; but



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Of moral restraint.

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the delayed knowledge of any particular effects does not alter their nature, nor our obligation to regulate our conduct accordingly, as soon as we are satisfied of what this conduct ought to be.— In many other instances it has not been till after long and painful experience, that the conduct most favorable to the happiness of man has been forced upon his attention. The kind of food, and the mode of preparing it, best suited to the purposes of nutrition and the gratification of the palate; the treatment and remedies of different disorders; the bad effects on the human frame of low and marshy situations; the invention of the most convenient and comfortable clothing; the construction of good houses; and all the advantages and extended enjoyments which distinguish civilized life, were not pointed out to the attention of man at once; but were the slow and late result of experience, and of the admonitions received by repeated failures.

Diseases have been generally considered as the inevitable inflictions of Providence; but perhaps a great part of them may more justly be considered as indications that we have offended against some of the laws of nature. The plague at Constantino-ple, and in other towns of the East, is a constant admonition of this kind to the inhabitants. The



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Of moral restraint.

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human constitution cannot support such a state of filth and torpor ; and as dirt, squalid poverty, and indolence, are in the highest degree unfavorable to happiness and virtue, it seems a benevolent dispensation, that such a state should by the laws of nature produce disease and death, as a beacon to others to avoid splitting on the same rock.

The prevalence of the plague in London till the year 1666, operated in a proper manner on the conduct of our ancestors ; and the removal of nuisances, the construction of drains, the widening of the streets, and the giving more room and air to their houses, had the effect of eradicating completely this dreadful disorder, and of adding greatly to the health and happiness of the inhabitants.

In the history of every epidemic it has almost invariably been observed, that the lower classes of people, whose food was poor and insufficient, and who lived crowded together in small and dirty houses, were the principal victims. In what other manner can nature point out to us, that if we increase too fast for the means of subsistence, so as to render it necessary for a considerable part of the society to live in this miserable manner, we have offended against one of her laws. This law she has declared exactly in the same manner, as



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Of moral restraint.

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she declares that intemperance in eating and drinking will be followed by ill health, and that however grateful it may be to us at the moment to indulge these passions to excess, this indulgence will ultimately produce unhappiness. It is as much a law of nature that repletion is bad for the human frame, as that eating and drinking, unattended with this consequence, is good for it.

An implicit obedience to the impulses of our natural passions would lead us into the wildest and most fatal extravagancies; and yet we have the strongest reasons for believing that all these passions are so necessary to our being, that they could not be generally weakened or diminished, without injuring our happiness. The most powerful and universal of all our desires is the desire of food, and of those things, such as clothing, houses, &c. which are immediately necessary to relieve us from the pains of hunger and cold. It is acknowledged by all, that these desires put in motion the greatest part of that activity, from which the multiplied improvements and advantages of civilized life are derived; and that the pursuit of these objects, and the gratification of these desires, form the principal happiness of the larger half of mankind, civilized or uncivilized, and are indis-



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Of moral restraint.

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pensably necessary to the more refined enjoyments of the other half. We are all conscious of the inestimable benefits that we derive from these desires, when directed in a certain manner; but we are equally conscious of the evils resulting from them, when not directed in this manner; so much so, that society has taken upon itself to punish most severely what it considers as an irregular gratification of them. And yet the desires in both cases are equally natural, and abstractedly considered, equally virtuous. The act of the hungry man who satisfies his appetite by taking a loaf from the shelf of another, is in no respect to be distinguished from the act of him who does the same thing with a loaf of his own, but by its consequences. From the consideration of these consequences, we feel the most perfect conviction that if people were not prevented from gratifying their natural desires with the loaves in the possession of others, the number of loaves would universally diminish. This experience is the foundation of the laws relating to property, and of the distinctions of virtue and vice, in the gratification of desires, otherwise perfectly the same.

If the pleasure arising from the gratification of these propensities were universally diminished in



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Of moral restraint.

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vividness, violations of property would become less frequent ; but this advantage would be greatly overbalanced by the narrowing of the sources of enjoyment. The diminution in the quantity of all those productions which contribute to human gratification would be much greater in proportion than the diminution of thefts ; and the loss of general happiness on the one side, would be beyond comparison greater than the gain to happiness on the other. When we contemplate the constant and severe toils of the greatest part of mankind, it is impossible not to be forcibly impressed with the reflection that the sources of human happiness would be most cruelly diminished, if the prospect of a good meal, a warm house, and a comfortable fireside in the evening, were not incitements sufficiently vivid, to give interest and cheerfulness to the labors and privations of the day.

After the desire of food, the most powerful and general of our desires is the passion between the sexes taken in an enlarged sense. Of the happiness spread over human life by this passion, very few are unconscious. Virtuous love, exalted by friendship, seems to be that sort of mixture of sensual and intellectual enjoyment, particularly suited to the nature of man, and most powerfully calcula-



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Of moral restraint.

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ted to awaken the sympathies of the soul, and produce the most exquisite gratifications. Perhaps there is scarcely a man who has once experienced the genuine delight of virtuous love, however great his intellectual pleasures may have been, that does not look back to the period as the sunny spot in his whole life, where his imagination loves most to bask, which he recollects and contemplates with the fondest regret, and which he would most wish to live over again.

It has been said by Mr. Godwin, in order to show the evident inferiority of the pleasures of sense, "Strip the commerce of the sexes of all its attendant circumstances, and it would be generally despised." He might as well say to a man who admired trees, strip them of their spreading branches and lovely foliage, and what beauty can you see in a bare pole? But it was the tree with the branches and foliage, and not without them, that excited admiration. It is "the symmetry of person, the vivacity, the voluptuous softness of temper, the affectionate kindness of feeling, the imagination and the wit"<sup>1</sup> of a woman, which

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<sup>1</sup> Political Justice, vol. i. b. i. c. v. p. 72. 8vo,  
vol. ii.



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Of moral restraint.

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excite the passion of love, and not the mere distinction of her being a female.

It is a very great mistake to suppose that the passion between the sexes only operates and influences human conduct, when the immediate gratification of it is in contemplation. The formation and steady pursuit of some particular plan of life, has been justly considered as one of the most permanent sources of happiness; but I am inclined to believe that there are not many of these plans formed that are not connected in a considerable degree with the prospect of the gratification of this passion, and with the support of children arising from it. The evening meal, the warm house, and the comfortable fireside, would lose half of their interest, if we were to exclude the idea of some object of affection with whom they were to be shared.

We have also great reason to believe that the passion between the sexes has the most powerful tendency to soften and meliorate the human character, and keep it more alive to all the kindlier emotions of benevolence and pity. Observations on savage life have generally tended to prove, that nations in which this passion appeared to be less vivid were distinguished by a ferocious and malign-



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Of moral restraint.

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nant spirit, and particularly by tyranny and cruelty to the sex. If indeed this bond of conjugal affection were considerably weakened, it seems probable, either that the man would make use of his superior physical strength and turn his wife into a slave, as among the generality of savages, or at best, that every little inequality of temper which must necessarily occur between two persons, would produce a total alienation of affection; and this could hardly take place, without a diminution of parental fondness and care, which would have the most fatal effect on the happiness of society.

It may be further remarked, that observations on the human character in different countries warrant us in the conclusion, that the passion is stronger, and its general effects in producing gentleness, kindness, and suavity of manners, much more powerful, where obstacles are thrown in the way of very early and universal gratification. In some of the southern countries where every impulse may be almost immediately indulged, the passion sinks into mere animal desire, is soon weakened and almost extinguished by excess; and its influence on the character is extremely confined. But in European countries, where, though the women be not secluded, yet manners have imposed consider-



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Of moral restraint.

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able restraints on this gratification, the passion not only rises in force, but in the universality and beneficial tendency of its effects, and has often the most influence in the formation and improvement of the character where it is the least gratified.

Considering then the passion between the sexes in all its bearings and relations, and including the endearing engagement of parent and child resulting from it, few will be disposed to deny that it is one of the principal ingredients of human happiness. Yet experience teaches us that much evil flows from the irregular gratification of it; and though the evil be of little weight in the scale, when compared with the good, yet its absolute quantity cannot be inconsiderable on account of the strength and universality of the passion. It is evident however, from the general conduct of all governments in their distribution of punishments, that the evil resulting from this cause is not so great and so immediately dangerous to society, as the irregular gratification of the desire of property; but placing this evil in the most formidable point of view, we should evidently purchase a diminution of it at a very dear price, by the extension or diminution of the passion which causes it; a change, which would probably convert human life, either into a



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Of moral restraint.

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cold and cheerless blank, or a scene of savage and merciless ferocity.

A careful attention to the remote as well as immediate effects of all the human passions, and all the general laws of nature, leads us strongly to the conclusion, that under the present constitution of things, few or none of them would admit of being greatly diminished, without narrowing the sources of good, more powerfully than the sources of evil. And the reason seems to be obvious. They are, in fact, the materials of all our pleasures, as well as of all our pains; of all our happiness, as well as of all our misery; of all our virtues, as well as of all our vices. It must therefore be regulation and direction that are wanted, not diminution or extinction.

It is justly observed by Dr. Paley, that “ Hu-  
“ man passions are either necessary to human wel-  
“ fare, or capable of being made, and in a great  
“ majority of instances, in fact, made conducive to  
“ its happiness. These passions are strong and  
“ general; and perhaps would not answer their  
“ purpose, unless they were so. But strength and  
“ generality, when it is expedient that particular  
“ circumstances should be respected, become, if  
“ left to themselves, excess and misdirection. From  
“ which excess and misdirection the vices of man-



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Of moral restraint.

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“ kind (the causes no doubt of much misery) ap-  
“ appear to spring. This account while it shows  
“ us the principle of vice, shows us at the same  
“ time, the province of reason and self-govern-  
“ ment’.”

Our virtue therefore, as reasonable beings, evidently consists in educing from the general materials which the Creator has placed under our guidance, the greatest sum of human happiness; and as our natural impulses are abstractedly considered good, and only to be distinguished by their consequences, a strict attention to these consequences, and the regulation of our conduct conformably to them, must be considered as our principal duty.

The fecundity of the human species is, in some respects, a distinct consideration from the passion between the sexes, as it evidently depends more upon the power of women in bearing children, than upon the strength or weakness of this passion.— It is however a law exactly similar in its great features to all the other laws of nature. It is strong and general, and apparently would not admit of any very considerable diminution, without being inadequate to its object; the evils arising from it are in-

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<sup>1</sup> Natural Theology, c. xxvi. p. 547.



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Of moral restraint.

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cidental to these necessary qualities of strength and generality; and these evils are capable of being very greatly mitigated, and rendered comparatively light by human energy and virtue. We cannot but conceive that it is an object of the Creator that the earth should be replenished, and it appears to me clear that this could not be effected without a tendency in population to increase faster than food; and as with the present law of increase, the peopling of the earth does not proceed very rapidly, we have undoubtedly some reason to believe that this law is not too powerful for its apparent object. The desire of the means of subsistence would be comparatively confined in its effects, and would fail of producing that general activity so necessary to the improvement of the human faculties, were it not for the strong and universal effort of population, to increase with greater rapidity than its supplies. If these two tendencies were exactly balanced, I do not see what motive there would be, sufficiently strong to overcome the acknowledged indolence of man, and make him proceed in the cultivation of the soil. The population of any large territory, however fertile, would be as likely to stop at five hundred, or five thousand, as at five millions, or fifty millions. Such a



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Of moral restraint.

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balance therefore, would clearly defeat one great purpose of creation ; and if the question be merely a question of degree, a question of a little more or a little less strength, we may fairly distrust our competence to judge of the precise quantity necessary to answer the object with the smallest sum of incidental evil. In the present state of things we appear to have under our guidance a great power, capable of peopling a desert region in a small number of years ; and yet under other circumstances, capable of being confined by human energy and virtue to any limits however narrow, at the expense of a small comparative quantity of evil. The analogy of all the other laws of nature would be completely violated, if in this instance alone, there were no provision for accidental failures, no resources against the vices of mankind, or the partial mischiefs resulting from other general laws. To effect the apparent object without any attendant evil, it is evident that a perpetual change in the law of increase would be necessary, varying with the varying circumstances of each country. But instead of this, it is not only more consonant to the analogy of the other parts of nature, but we have reason to think, that it is more conducive to the formation and improvement of



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the human mind, that the law should be uniform, and the evils incidental to it, under certain circumstances, be left to be mitigated or removed by man himself. His duties in this case vary with his situation; and he is thus kept more alive to the consequences of his actions, and his faculties have evidently greater play and opportunity of improvement, than if the evil were removed by a perpetual change of the law according to circumstances.

Even if from passions too easily subdued, or the facility of illicit intercourse, a state of celibacy were a matter of indifference, and not a state of some privation, the end of nature in the peopling of the earth would be apparently liable to be defeated. It is of the very utmost importance to the happiness of mankind, that they should not increase too fast; but it does not appear that the object to be accomplished would admit of any very considerable diminution in the desire of marriage. It is clearly the duty of each individual not to marry till he has a prospect of supporting his children; but it is at the same time to be wished that he should retain undiminished his desire of marriage, in order that he may exert himself to realize this prospect, and be stimulated to make provision for the support of greater numbers.

It is evidently therefore, regulation and direc-



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Of moral restraint.

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tion that is required with regard to the principle of population, not diminution or alteration. And if moral restraint be the only virtuous mode of avoiding the incidental evils arising from this principle, our obligation to practise it will evidently rest exactly upon the same foundation, as our obligation to practise any of the other virtues, the foundation of utility.

Whatever indulgence we may be disposed to allow to occasional failures in the discharge of a duty of acknowledged difficulty; yet of the strict line of duty, we cannot doubt. Our obligation not to marry till we have a fair prospect of being able to support our children, will appear to deserve the attention of the moralist, if it can be proved, that an attention to this obligation is of more effect in the prevention of misery, than all the other virtues combined; and that if in violation of this duty, it were the general custom to follow the first impulse of nature, and marry at the age of puberty, the universal prevalence of every known virtue, in the greatest conceivable degree, would fail of rescuing society from the most wretched and desperate state of want, and all the diseases and famines which usually accompany it.



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## CHAPTER II.

*Of the effects which would result to society from  
the prevalence of this virtue.*

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ONE of the principal reasons which has prevented an assent to the doctrine of the constant tendency of population to increase beyond the means of subsistence, is a great unwillingness to believe, that the Deity would by the laws of nature bring beings into existence, which by the laws of nature could not be supported in that existence. But if in addition to that general activity and direction of our industry put in motion by these laws, we further consider, that the incidental evils arising from them are constantly directing our attention to the proper check to population, moral restraint; and if it appear, that by a strict obedience to those duties which are pointed out to us by the light of nature and reason, and are confirmed and sanctioned by revelation, these evils may be avoided, the objection will, I trust, be removed, and all apparent imputation on the goodness of the Deity be done away.

The heathen moralists never represented hap



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Of the effects on society

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piness as attainable on earth, but through the medium of virtue; and among their virtues prudence ranked in the first class, and by some was even considered as including every other. The Christian religion places our present as well as future happiness in the exercise of those virtues which tend to fit us for a state of superior enjoyment; and the subjection of the passions to the guidance of reason, which, if not the whole, is a principal branch of prudence, is in consequence most particularly inculcated.

If for the sake of illustration, we might be permitted to draw a picture of society, in which each individual endeavored to attain happiness by the strict fulfilment of those duties, which the most enlightened of the ancient philosophers deduced from the laws of nature, and which have been directly taught, and received such powerful sanctions in the moral code of Christianity, it would present a very different scene from that which we now contemplate. Every act which was prompted by the desire of immediate gratification, but which threatened an ultimate overbalance of pain, would be considered as a breach of duty; and consequently no man whose earnings were only sufficient to maintain two children, would put himself in a



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of moral restraint.

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situation in which he might have to maintain four or five, however he might be prompted to it by the passion of love. This prudential restraint, if it were generally adopted, by narrowing the supply of labor in the market, would, in the natural course of things, soon raise its price. The period of delayed gratification would be passed in saving the earnings which were above the wants of a single man, and in acquiring habits of sobriety, industry, and economy, which would enable him in a few years to enter into the matrimonial contract without fear of its consequences. The operation of the preventive check in this way, by constantly keeping the population within the limits of the food, though constantly following its increase, would give a real value to the rise of wages, and the sums saved by laborers before marriage, very different from those forced advances in the price of labor, or arbitrary parochial donations, which, in proportion to their magnitude and extensiveness, must of necessity be followed by a proportional advance in the price of provisions. As the wages of labor would thus be sufficient to maintain with decency a large family, and as every married couple would set out with a sum for contingencies, all squalid poverty would be



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Of the effects on society

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removed from society, or at least, be confined to a very few, who had fallen into misfortunes against which no prudence or foresight could provide.

The interval between the age of puberty and the period at which each individual might venture on marriage must, according to the supposition, be passed in strict chastity; because the law of chastity cannot be violated without producing evil. The effect of any thing like a promiscuous intercourse which prevents the birth of children, is evidently to weaken the best affections of the heart, and in a very marked manner to degrade the female character. And any other intercourse would without improper arts, bring as many children into the society as marriage, with a much greater probability of their becoming a burden to it.

These considerations show that the virtue of chastity is not, as some have supposed, a forced produce of artificial society; but that it has the most real and solid foundation in nature and reason; being apparently the only virtuous mean of avoiding the vice and misery which result so often from the principle of population.

In such a society as we have been supposing, it might be necessary for both sexes to pass many of the early years of life in the single state; and if



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this were general, there would certainly be room for a much greater number to marry afterwards, so that fewer, upon the whole, would be condemned to pass their lives in celibacy. If the custom of not marrying early prevailed generally, and if violations of chastity were equally dishonorable in both sexes, a more familiar and friendly intercourse between them might take place without danger. Two young people might converse together intimately without its being immediately supposed that they either intended marriage or intrigue; and a much better opportunity would thus be given to both sexes of finding out kindred dispositions, and of forming those strong and lasting attachments, without which the married state is generally more productive of misery than of happiness. The earlier years of life would not be spent without love, though without the full gratification of it. The passion instead of being extinguished, as it now too frequently is by early sensuality, would only be repressed for a time, that it might afterwards burn with a brighter, purer, and steadier flame; and the happiness of the married state, instead of an opportunity of immediate indulgence, would be looked forward to as the prize of indus-



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Of the effects on society

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try and virtue, and the reward of a genuine and constant attachment.<sup>1</sup>

The passion of love is a powerful stimulus in the formation of character, and often prompts to the most noble and generous exertions; but this is only when the affections are centered in one object; and generally, when full gratification is delayed by difficulties.<sup>2</sup> The heart is perhaps

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Currie, in his interesting observations on the character and condition of the Scotch peasantry, which he has prefixed to his life of Burns, remarks, with a just knowledge of human nature, that "in appreciating  
" the happiness and virtue of a community, there is  
" perhaps no single criterion on which so much depen-  
" dence may be placed as the state of the intercourse be-  
" tween the sexes. Where this displays ardor of attach-  
" ment, accompanied by purity of conduct, the character  
" and the influence of women rise, our imperfect nature  
" mounts in the scale of moral excellence; and from the  
" source of this single affection, a stream of felicity de-  
" scends, which branches into a thousand rivulets that  
" enrich and adorn the field of life. Where the attach-  
" ment between the sexes sinks into an appetite, the herit-  
" age of our species is comparatively poor, and man ap-  
" proaches to the condition of the brutes that perish."  
Vol. i. p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Currie observes, that the Scottish peasant in the course of his passion, often exerts a spirit of adventure, of which a Spanish cavalier need not be ashamed. Burns' Works, vol. i. p. 16. It is not to be doubted, that this kind of romantic passion which Dr. C. says, characterizes



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never so much disposed to virtuous conduct, and certainly at no time is the virtue of chastity so little difficult to men, as when under the influence of such a passion. Late marriages taking place in this way would be very different from those of the same name at present, where the union is too frequently prompted solely by interested views, and the parties meet not unfrequently with exhausted constitutions, and generally with exhausted affections. The late marriages at present are indeed principally confined to the men; and there are few, however advanced in life they may be, who if they determine to marry, do not fix their choice on a very young wife. A young woman without fortune, when she has passed her twenty-fifth year, begins to fear, and with reason, that she may lead a life of celibacy; and with a heart capable of forming a strong attachment, feels as each year creeps on, her hopes of finding an object on which to rest her affections gradually diminishing, and the uneasiness of her situation aggravated by the

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the attachments of the humblest people of Scotland, and which has been greatly fostered by the elevation of mind given to them by a superior education, has had a most powerful and most beneficial influence on the national character.



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Of the effects on society

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silly and unjust prejudices of the world. If the general age of marriage among women were later, the period of youth and hope would be prolonged, and fewer would be ultimately disappointed.

That a change of this kind would be a most decided advantage to the more virtuous half of society, we cannot for a moment doubt. However impatiently the privation might be borne by the men, it would be supported by the women readily and cheerfully ; and if they could look forwards with just confidence to marriage at twenty-eight or thirty, I fully believe that if the matter were left to their free choice, they would clearly prefer waiting till this period, to the being involved in all the cares of a large family at twenty-five. The most eligible age of marriage however, could not be fixed ; but must depend entirely on circumstances and situation. There is no period of human life at which nature more strongly prompts to an union of the sexes, than from seventeen or eighteen to twenty. In every society above that state of depression which almost excludes reason and foresight, these early tendencies must necessarily be restrained ; and if in the actual state of things, such a restraint on the impulses of nature be found unavoidable, at what time can we be consistently



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released from it, but at that period, whatever it may be, when, in the existing circumstances of the society, a fair prospect presents itself of maintaining a family.

The difficulty of moral restraint will perhaps be objected to this doctrine. To him who does not acknowledge the authority of the Christian religion, I have only to say, that after the most careful investigation, this virtue appears to be absolutely necessary, in order to avoid certain evils which would otherwise result from the general laws of nature. According to his own principles, it is his duty to pursue the greatest good consistent with these laws; and not to fail in this important end, and produce an overbalance of misery, by a partial obedience to some of the dictates of nature while he neglects others. The path of virtue, though it be the only path which leads to permanent happiness, has always been represented by the heathen moralists as of difficult ascent.

To the Christian I would say, that the scriptures most clearly and precisely point it out to us as our duty, to restrain our passions within the bounds of reason; and it is a palpable disobedience of this law, to indulge our desires in such a manner as reason tells us will unavoidably end in misery. The



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Christian cannot consider the difficulty of moral restraint as any argument against its being his duty; since in almost every page of the sacred writings, man is described as encompassed on all sides by temptations, which it is extremely difficult to resist; and though no duties are enjoined which do not contribute to his happiness on earth as well as in a future state, yet an undeviating obedience is never represented as an easy task.

There is in general so strong a tendency to love in early youth, that it is extremely difficult at this period to distinguish a genuine from a transient passion. If the earlier years of life were passed by both sexes in moral restraint, from the greater facility that this would give to the meeting of kindred dispositions, it might even admit of a doubt whether more happy marriages would not take place, and consequently more pleasure from the passion of love, than in a state such as that of America, the circumstances of which would allow of a very early union of the sexes. But if we compare the intercourse of the sexes in such a society as I have been supposing, with that which now exists in Europe, taken under all its circumstances, it may safely be asserted, that independently of the load of misery which would be removed, the sum of plea-



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asurable sensations from the passion of love would be increased in a very great degree.

If we could suppose such a system general, the accession of happiness to society in its internal economy, would scarcely be greater than in its external relations. It might fairly be expected that war, that great pest of the human race, would, under such circumstances, soon cease to extend its ravages so widely and so frequently, as it does at present.

One of its first causes and most powerful impulses, was undoubtedly an insufficiency of room and food; and greatly as the circumstances of mankind have changed since it first began, the same cause still continues to operate and to produce, though in a smaller degree, the same effects. The ambition of princes would want instruments of destruction, if the distresses of the lower classes of people did not drive them under their standards. A recruiting serjeant always prays for a bad harvest, and a want of employment, or in other words, a redundant population.

In the earlier ages of the world, when war was the great business of mankind, and the drains of population from this cause were, beyond comparison, greater than in modern times, the legislators



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Of the effects on society

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and statesmen of each country, adverting principally to the means of offence and defence, encouraged an increase of people in every possible way, fixed a stigma on barrenness and celibacy, and honored marriage. The popular religions followed these prevailing opinions. In many countries the prolific power of nature was the object of solemn worship. In the religion of Mahomet, which was established by the sword, and the promulgation of which, in consequence, could not be unaccompanied by an extraordinary destruction of its followers, the procreation of children to glorify the Creator was laid down as one of the principal duties of man; and he who had the most numerous offspring, was considered as having best answered the end of his creation. The prevalence of such moral sentiments had naturally a great effect in encouraging marriage; and the rapid procreation which followed was partly the effect and partly the cause of incessant war. The vacancies occasioned by former desolations made room for the rearing of fresh supplies; and the overflowing rapidity with which these supplies followed, constantly furnished fresh incitements and fresh instruments for renewed hostilities. Under the influence of



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such moral sentiments it is difficult to conceive how the fury of incessant war should ever abate.

It is a pleasing confirmation of the truth and divinity of the Christian religion, and of its being adapted to a more improved state of human society, that it places our duties respecting marriage and the procreation of children, in a different light from that in which they were before beheld.

Without entering minutely into the subject, which would evidently lead too far, I think it will be admitted, that if we apply the spirit of St. Paul's declarations respecting marriage to the present state of society, and the known constitution of our nature, the natural inference seems to be, that when marriage does not interfere with higher duties, it is right; when it does, it is wrong. According to the genuine principles of moral science, "The method of coming at the will of God from the light of nature, is to inquire into the tendency of the action to promote or diminish the general happiness."<sup>1</sup> There are perhaps few actions that tend so directly to diminish the general happiness, as to marry without the means of supporting children. He who commits

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<sup>1</sup> Paley's Moral Philosophy, vol. i. b. ii c. iv. p. 65.



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Of the effects on society

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this act therefore, clearly offends against the will of God, and having become a burden on the society in which he lives, and plunged himself and family into a situation in which virtuous habits are preserved with more difficulty than in any other, he appears to have violated his duty to his neighbors and to himself, and thus to have listened to the voice of passion in opposition to his higher obligations.

In a society, such as I have supposed, all the members of which endeavor to attain happiness by obedience to the moral code derived from the light of nature, and enforced by strong sanctions in revealed religion, it is evident that no such marriages could take place ; and the prevention of a redundant population, in this way, would remove one of the principal encouragements to offensive war ; and at the same time tend powerfully to eradicate those two fatal political disorders, internal tyranny and internal tumult, which mutually produce each other.

Indisposed to a war of offence, in a war of defence, such a society would be strong as a rock of adamant. Where every family possessed the necessaries of life in plenty, and a decent portion of its comforts and conveniencies, there could not



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exist that hope of change, or at best that melancholy and disheartening indifference to it, which sometimes prompts the lower classes of people to say, "let what will come we cannot be worse off than we are now." Every heart and hand would be united to repel an invader, when each individual felt the value of the solid advantages which he enjoyed, and a prospect of change presented only a prospect of being deprived of them.

As it appears therefore, that it is in the power of each individual to avoid all the evil consequences to himself and society resulting from the principle of population, by the practice of a virtue clearly dictated to him by the light of nature, and expressly enjoined in revealed religion; and as we have reason to think, that the exercise of this virtue to a certain degree, would rather tend to increase than diminish individual happiness; we can have no reason to impeach the justice of the Deity, because his general laws make this virtue necessary, and punish our offences against it by the evils attendant upon vice, and the pains that accompany the various forms of premature death. A really virtuous society, such as I have supposed, would avoid these evils. It is the apparent object of the Creator to deter us from vice by the



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pains which accompany it, and to lead us to virtue by the happiness that it produces. This object appears to our conceptions to be worthy of a benevolent Creator. The laws of nature respecting population tend to promote this object. No imputation therefore, on the benevolence of the Deity, can be founded on these laws, which is not equally applicable to any of the evils necessarily incidental to an imperfect state of existence,



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### CHAPTER III.

*Of the only effectual mode of improving the condition of the Poor.*

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HE who publishes a moral code, or system of duties, however firmly he may be convinced of the strong obligation on each individual strictly to conform to it, has never the folly to imagine that it will be universally or even generally practised. But this is no valid objection against the publication of the code. If it were, the same objection would always have applied; we should be totally without general rules; and to the vices of mankind arising from temptation, would be added a much longer list than we have at present, of vices from ignorance.

Judging merely from the light of nature if we feel convinced of the misery arising from a redundant population on the one hand, and of the evils and unhappiness, particularly to the female sex, arising from promiscuous intercourse, on the other, I do not see how it is possible for any person who acknowledges the principle of utility as the great



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foundation of morals, to escape the conclusion, that moral restraint, or the abstaining from marriage till we are in a condition to support a family, with a perfectly moral conduct during that period, is the strict line of duty ; and when revelation is taken into the question, this duty undoubtedly receives very powerful confirmation. At the same time I believe that few of my readers can be less sanguine in their expectations of any great change in the general conduct of men on this subject than I am ; and the chief reason why in the last chapter I allowed myself to suppose the universal prevalence of this virtue was, that I might endeavor to remove any imputation on the goodness of the Deity, by showing that the evils arising from the principle of population were exactly of the same nature as the generality of other evils which excite fewer complaints, that they were increased by human ignorance and indolence, and diminished by human knowledge and virtue ; and on the supposition that each individual strictly fulfilled his duty, would be almost totally removed ; and this, without any general diminution of those sources of pleasure, arising from the regulated indulgence of the passions, which have been justly considered as the principal ingredients of human happiness.



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If it will answer any purpose of illustration, I see no harm in drawing the picture of a society in which each individual is supposed strictly to fulfil his duties; nor does a writer appear to be justly liable to the imputation of being visionary, unless he make such universal or general obedience necessary to the practical utility of his system, and to that degree of moderate and partial improvement, which is all that can rationally be expected from the most complete knowledge of our duties.

But, in this respect, there is an essential difference between that improved state of society which I have supposed in the last chapter, and most of the other speculations on this subject. The improvement there supposed, if we ever should make approaches towards it, is to be effected in the way in which we have been in the habit of seeing all the greatest improvements effected, by a direct application to the interest and happiness of each individual. It is not required of us to act from motives to which we are unaccustomed, to pursue a general good which we may not distinctly comprehend, or the effect of which may be weakened by distance and diffusion. The happiness of the whole is to be the result of the happiness of individuals, and to begin first with them. No co-



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operation is required. Every step tells. He who performs his duty faithfully will reap the full fruits of it, whatever may be the number of others who fail. This duty is express and intelligible to the humblest capacity. It is merely that he is not to bring beings into the world for whom he cannot find the means of support. When once this subject is cleared from the obscurity thrown over it by parochial laws and private benevolence, every man must feel the strongest conviction of such an obligation. If he cannot support his children they must starve; and if he marry in the face of a fair probability that he shall not be able to support his children, he is guilty of all the evils which he thus brings upon himself, his wife, and his offspring. It is clearly his interest, and will tend greatly to promote his happiness, to defer marrying, till by industry and economy he is in a capacity to support the children that he may reasonably expect from his marriage; and as he cannot in the mean time gratify his passions, without violating an express command of God, and running a great risk of injuring himself, or some of his fellow creatures, considerations of his own interest and happiness will dictate to him the strong obligation to a moral conduct while he remains unmarried.



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However powerful may be the impulses of passion, they are generally in some degree modified by reason. And it does not seem entirely visionary to suppose, that if the true and permanent cause of poverty were clearly explained, and forcibly brought home to each man's bosom, it would have some, and perhaps not an inconsiderable influence on his conduct: at least the experiment has never yet been fairly tried. Almost every thing that has been hitherto done for the poor has tended, as if with solicitous care, to throw a veil of obscurity over this subject, and to hide from them the true cause of their poverty. When the wages of labor are hardly sufficient to maintain two children, a man marries and has five or six. He of course finds himself miserably distressed. He accuses the insufficiency of the price of labor to maintain a family. He accuses his parish for their tardy and sparing fulfilment of their obligation to assist him. He accuses the avarice of the rich, who suffer him to want what they can so well spare. He accuses the partial and unjust institutions of society, which have awarded him an inadequate share of the produce of the earth. He accuses perhaps the dispensations of Providence, which have assigned to him a place in society so beset with unavoidable



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distress and dependance. In searching for objects of accusation, he never adverts to the quarter from which all his misfortunes originate. The last person that he would think of accusing is himself, on whom in fact the principal blame lies, except in as far as he has been deceived by the higher classes of society. He may perhaps wish that he had not married, because he now feels the inconveniences of it; but it never enters into his head that he can have done any thing wrong. He has always been told that to raise up subjects for his king and country is a very meritorious act. He has done this act, and yet is suffering for it. He naturally thinks that he is suffering for righteousness sake; and it cannot but strike him as most extremely unjust and cruel in his king and country, to allow him thus to suffer, in return for giving them what they are continually declaring that they particularly want.

Till these erroneous ideas have been corrected, and the language of nature and reason has been generally heard on the subject of population, instead of the language of error and prejudice, it cannot be said that any fair experiment has been made with the understandings of the common people; and we cannot justly accuse them of improvidence



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and want of industry, till they act as they do now, after it has been brought home to their comprehensions, that they are themselves the cause of their own poverty; that the means of redress are in their own hands, and in the hands of no other persons whatever; that the society in which they live, and the government which presides over it, are without any direct power in this respect; and however ardently they may desire to relieve them, and whatever attempts they may make to do so, are really and truly unable to execute what they benevolently wish, but unjustly promise; that when the wages of labor will not maintain a family, it is an incontrovertible sign that their king and country do not want more subjects, or at least that they cannot support them; that if they marry in this case, so far from fulfilling a duty to society, they are throwing a useless burden on it, at the same time that they are plunging themselves into distress; and that they are acting directly contrary to the will of God, and bringing down upon themselves various diseases, which might all, or the greater part, have been avoided, if they had attended to the repeated admonitions which he gives by the general laws of nature, to every being capable of reason.



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Of the only effectual mode of

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Dr. Paley, in his *Moral Philosophy*, observes, that “in countries in which subsistence is become scarce, it behoves the state to watch over the public morals with increased solicitude; for nothing but the instinct of nature, under the restraint of chastity, will induce men to undertake the labor, or consent to the sacrifice of personal liberty and indulgence, which the support of a family in such circumstances requires.”<sup>1</sup> That it is always the duty of a state to use every exertion likely to be effectual in discouraging vice and promoting virtue, and that no temporary circumstances ought to cause any relaxation in these exertions is certainly true. The means therefore proposed are always good; but the particular end in view in this case, appears to be absolutely criminal. We wish to force people into marriage, when from the acknowledged scarcity of subsistence, they will have little chance of being able to support their children. We might as well force people into the water who are unable to swim. In both cases we rashly tempt Providence. Nor have we more reason to believe, that a miracle will be

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<sup>1</sup> Vol. ii. c. xi. p. 352.



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improving the condition of the poor.

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worked to save us from the misery and mortality resulting from our conduct in the one case, than in the other.

The object of those who really wish to better the condition of the lower classes of society, must be to raise the relative proportion between the price of labor and the price of provisions, so as to enable the laborer to command a larger share of the necessaries and comforts of life. We have hitherto principally attempted to attain this end by encouraging the married poor, and consequently increasing the number of laborers, and overstocking the market with a commodity which we still say that we wish to be dear. It would seem to have required no great spirit of divination to foretell the certain failure of such a plan of proceeding.

There is nothing however like experience. It has been tried in many different countries, and for many hundred years, and the success has always been answerable to the nature of the scheme. It is really time now to try something else.

When it was found that oxygene, or pure vital air, would not cure consumptions, as was expected, but rather aggravated their symptoms; a trial was made of an air of the most opposite kind. I



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Of the only effectual mode of

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wish we had acted with the same philosophical spirit in our attempts to cure the disease of poverty ; and having found that the pouring in of fresh supplies of labor only tended to aggravate the symptoms, had tried what would be the effect of withholding a little these supplies.

In all old and fully-peopled states it is from this method, and this alone, that we can rationally expect any essential and permanent melioration in the condition of the lower classes of people.

In an endeavor to raise the proportion of the quantity of provisions to the number of consumers in any country, our attention would naturally be first directed to the increasing of the absolute quantity of provisions ; but finding that as fast as we did this, the number of consumers more than kept pace with it, and that with all our exertions we were still as far as ever behind, we should be convinced that our efforts directed only in this way would never succeed. It would appear to be setting the tortoise to catch the hare. Finding therefore, that from the laws of nature we could not proportion the food to the population, our next attempt should naturally be to proportion the population to the food. If we can persuade the hare to go to sleep



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improving the condition of the poor.

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the tortoise may have some chance of overtaking her.

We are not however to relax our efforts in increasing the quantity of provisions ; but to combine another effort with it, that of keeping the population when once it has been overtaken, at such a distance behind as to effect the relative proportion which we desire ; and thus unite the two grand desiderata, a great actual population and a state of society, in which squalid poverty and dependence are comparatively but little known ; two objects which are far from being incompatible.

If we be really serious in what appears to be the object of such general research, the mode of essentially and permanently bettering the condition of the poor, we must explain to them the true nature of their situation, and show them that the withholding of the supplies of labor is the only possible way of really rising its price ; and that they themselves being the possessors of this commodity have alone the power to do this.

I cannot but consider this mode of diminishing poverty, as so perfectly clear in theory, and so invariably confirmed by the analogy of every other



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commodity that is brought to market, that nothing but its being shown to be calculated to produce greater evils than it proposes to remedy, can justify us in not making the attempt to put it into execution.



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## CHAPTER IV.

### *Objections to this mode considered.*

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ONE objection which perhaps will be made to this plan, is that from which alone it derives its value—a market rather understocked with labor. This must undoubtedly take place in a certain degree ; but by no means in such a degree as to affect the wealth and prosperity of the country. The way in which we are going on at present, and the enormous increase in the price of provisions, which seems to threaten us, will tend much more effectually to enable foreigners to undersell us in the markets of Europe than the plan now proposed. If the population of this country were better proportioned to its food, the nominal price of labor might be lower than it is now, and yet be sufficient to maintain a wife and six children.— But putting this subject of a market understocked with labor, in the most unfavorable point of view, if the rich will not submit to a slight inconvenience necessarily attendant on the attainment of what they profess to desire, they cannot really be in



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Objections to this mode considered.

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earnest in their professions. Their benevolence to the poor must be either childish play or hypocrisy ; it must be either to amuse themselves or to pacify the minds of the common people with a mere show of attention to their wants. To wish to better the condition of the poor by enabling them to command a greater quantity of the necessaries and comforts of life, and then to complain of high wages, is the act of a silly boy who gives away his cake and then cries for it. A market overstocked with labor, and an ample remuneration to each laborer, are objects perfectly incompatible with each other. In the annals of the world they never existed together ; and to couple them even in imagination betrays a gross ignorance of the simplest principles of political economy.

A second objection that may be made to this plan is, the diminution of population that it would cause. It is to be considered however, that this diminution is merely relative ; and when once this relative diminution had been effected, by keeping the population stationary, while the supply of food had increased, it might then start afresh, and continue increasing for ages, with the increase of food,



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Objections to this mode considered.

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maintaining always the same relative proportion to it. I can easily conceive, that this country, with a proper direction of the national industry, might, in the course of some centuries, contain two or three times its present population, and yet every man in the kingdom be much better fed and clothed than he is at present. While the springs of industry continue in vigor, and a sufficient part of that industry is directed to agriculture, we need be under no apprehensions of a deficient population; and nothing perhaps would tend so strongly to excite a spirit of industry and economy among the poor, as a thorough knowledge that their happiness must always depend principally upon themselves; and that if they obey their passions in opposition to their reason, or be not industrious and frugal while they are single men, to save a sum for the common contingencies of the married state, they must expect to suffer the natural evils which Providence has prepared for those who disobey its repeated admonitions.

A third objection which may be started to this plan, and the only one which appears to me to have any kind of plausibility is, that by endeavoring to urge the duty of moral restraint on the poor, we may increase the quantity of vice relating to the sex.



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Objections to this mode considered.

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I should be extremely sorry to say any thing, which could either directly or remotely be construed unfavorably to the cause of virtue ; but I certainly cannot think that the vices which relate to the sex, are the only vices which are to be considered in a moral question ; or that they are even the greatest and most degrading to the human character. They can rarely or never be committed without producing unhappiness somewhere or other, and therefore ought always to be strongly reprobated ; but there are other vices, the effects of which are still more pernicious ; and there are other situations which lead more certainly to moral offences than the refraining from marriage. Powerful as may be the temptations to a breach of chastity, I am inclined to think that they are impotent, in comparison of the temptations arising from continued distress. A large class of women, and many men, I have no doubt, pass a considerable part of their lives in chastity ; but I believe there will be found very few who pass through the ordeal of squalid and hopeless poverty, or even of long continued embarrassed circumstances, without a considerable moral degradation of character.

In the higher and middle classes of society, it



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Objections to this mode considered.

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is a melancholy and distressing sight to observe, not unfrequently, a man of a noble and ingenuous disposition, once feelingly alive to a sense of honor and integrity, gradually sinking under the pressure of circumstances, making his excuses at first with a blush of conscious shame, afraid of seeing the faces of his friends from whom he may have borrowed money, reduced to the meanest tricks and subterfuges to delay or avoid the payment of his just debts; till ultimately grown familiar with falsehood, and at enmity with the world, he loses all the grace and dignity of man.

To the general prevalence of indigence, and the extraordinary encouragements which we afford in this country to a total want of foresight and prudence among the common people,<sup>1</sup> is to be attri-

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<sup>1</sup> Mr. Colquhoun, speaking of the poor laws, observes, that "in spite of all the ingenious arguments which have been used in favor of a system, admitted to be wisely conceived in its origin, the effects it has produced incontestibly prove, that with respect to the mass of the poor, there is something radically wrong in the execution. If it were not so, it is impossible that there could exist in the metropolis such an inconceivable portion of human misery amidst examples of munificence and benevolence unparalleled in any age or country." *Police of Metropolis*, c. xiii. p. 359.



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Objections to this mode considered.

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buted the principal part of those continual depredations on property, and other more atrocious crimes, which drive us to the painful resource of such a number of executions.<sup>1</sup> According to Mr. Colquhoun, above twenty thousand miserable individuals of various classes rise up every morning without knowing how or by what means they are to be supported during the passing day, or where in many instances, they are to lodge on the succeeding night.<sup>2</sup> It is by these unhappy persons that the principal depredations on the public are committed; and supposing but few of them to be married, and driven to these acts, from the necessity of supporting their children; yet still it will not cease to be true, that the too great frequency of marriage among the poorest classes is one of the principal causes of the temp-

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In the effects of the poor laws, I fully agree with Mr. Colquhoun; but I cannot agree with him in admitting that the system was well conceived in its origin. I attribute still more evil to the original ill conception, than to the subsequent ill execution.

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Colquhoun observes, that "Indigence in the present state of society, may be considered as a principal cause of the increase of crimes." *Police of Metropolis*, c. xiii. p. 352.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* c. xi. p. 313.



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Objections to this mode considered.

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tations to these crimes. A considerable part of these unhappy wretches will probably be found to be the offspring of such marriages, educated in workhouses where every vice is propogated, or bred up at home in filth and rags, and with an utter ignorance of every moral obligation.<sup>1</sup> A still greater part perhaps consists of persons who being unable for some time to get employment owing to the full supply of labor, have been urged to these extremities by their temporary wants, and having thus lost their characters, are rejected, even when their labor may be wanted, by the well-founded caution of civil society.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Police of Metropolis, c. xi. xii. p. 355, 370.

<sup>2</sup> Police of the Metropolis, c. xiii. p. 353 et seq. In so large a town as London, which must necessarily encourage a prodigious influx of strangers from the country, there must be always a great many persons out of work; and it is probable that some public institution for the relief of the casual poor, upon a plan similar to that proposed by Mr. Colquhoun (c. xiii. p. 371.) would, under very judicious management, produce more good than evil. But for this purpose it would be absolutely necessary, that if work were provided by the institution, the sum that a man could earn by it should be less than the worst paid common labor; otherwise the claimants would rapidly increase, and the funds would soon be inadequate to their object. In the institution at Hamburgh, which



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Objections to this mode considered.

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When indigence does not produce overt acts of vice, it palsies every virtue. Under the continued temptations to a breach of chastity, occasional failures may take place, and the moral sensibility in

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appears to have been the most successful of any yet established, the nature of the work was such, that though paid above the usual price, a person could not easily earn by it more than eighteen pence a week. It was the determined principle of the managers of the institution to reduce the support which they gave, lower than what any industrious man or woman in such circumstances could earn. (Account of the management of the poor in Hamburgh, by C. Voght, p. 18.) And it is to this principle that they attribute their success. It should be observed however, that neither the institution at Hamburgh, nor that planned by Count Rumford in Bavaria, has subsisted long enough for us to be able to pronounce on their permanent good effects. It will not admit of a doubt that institutions for the relief of the poor, on their first establishment, remove a great quantity of distress. The only question is, whether, as succeeding generations arise, the increasing funds necessary for their support, and the increasing numbers that become dependent, are not greater evils than that which was to be remedied; and whether the country will not ultimately be left with as much mendicity as before, besides all the poverty and dependence accumulated in the public institutions. This seems to be nearly the case in England at present. I do not believe that we should have more beggars if we had no poor laws.



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Objections to this mode considered.

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other respects, not be very strikingly impaired ; but the continued temptations which beset hopeless poverty, and the strong sense of injustice that generally accompanies it from an ignorance of its true cause, tend so powerfully to sour the disposition, to harden the heart, and deaden the moral sense, that, generally speaking, virtue takes her flight clear away from the tainted spot, and does not often return.

Even with respect to the vices which relate to the sex, marriage has been found to be by no means a complete remedy. Among the higher classes, our Doctors Commons, and the lives that many married men are known to lead, sufficiently prove this ; and the same kind of vice, though not so much heard of among the lower classes of people, owing to their indifference and want of delicacy on these subjects, is probably not very much less frequent.

Add to this, that squalid poverty, particularly when joined with idleness, is a state the most unfavorable to chastity that can well be conceived.— The passion is as strong, or nearly so, as in other situations, and every restraint on it from personal respect, or a sense of morality is generally remov-



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Objections to this mode considered.

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ed. There is a degree of squalid poverty, in which, if a girl was brought up, I should say that her being really modest at twenty was an absolute miracle. Those persons must have extraordinary minds indeed, and such as are not usually formed under similar circumstances, who can continue to respect themselves, when no other person whatever respects them. If the children thus brought up were even to marry at twenty, it is probable that they would have passed some years in vicious habits before that period.

If after all, however, these arguments should appear insufficient; if we reprobate the idea of endeavoring to encourage the virtue of moral restraint among the poor, from a fear of producing vice; and if we think that to facilitate marriage by all possible means is a point of the first consequence to the morality and happiness of the people, let us act consistently, and before we proceed, endeavor to make ourselves acquainted with the mode by which alone we can effect our object.



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## CHAPTER V.

*Of the consequences of pursuing the opposite mode.*

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IT is an evident truth, that whatever may be the rate of increase in the means of subsistence, the increase of population must be limited by it, at least after the food has once been divided into the smallest shares that will support life. All the children born beyond what would be required to keep up the population to this level, must necessarily perish, unless room be made for them by the deaths of grown persons. It has appeared indeed, clearly in the course of this work, that in all old states the marriages and births depend principally upon the deaths, and that there is no encouragement to early unions so powerful as a great mortality. To act consistently therefore, we should facilitate, instead of foolishly and vainly endeavoring to impede the operations of nature in producing this mortality ; and if we dread the too frequent visitation of the horrid form of famine, we should sedulously encourage the other forms of destruction which we



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 Of the consequences of
 

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compel nature to use. Instead of recommending cleanliness to the poor, we should encourage contrary habits. In our towns, we should make the streets narrower, crowd more people into the houses, and court the return of the plague. In the country, we should build our villages near stagnant pools, and particularly encourage settlements in all marshy and unwholesome situations.<sup>1</sup> But above all, we should reprobate specific remedies for ravaging diseases, and those benevolent, but much mistaken men, who have thought they were doing a service to mankind by projecting schemes for the total extirpation of particular disorders.— If by these and similar means, the annual mortali-

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<sup>1</sup> Necker, speaking of the proportion of the births in France, makes use of a new and instructive expression on this subject, though he hardly seems to be sufficiently aware of it himself. He says, “Le nombre des naissances est a celui des habitans de un a vingt-trois et vingt-quatre dans les lieux *contraries par la nature, ou par des circonstances morales* : ce meme rapport dans la plus grande partie de la France, est de un a 25, 25 $\frac{1}{2}$ , and 26.” Administ. des Finances, tom. i. c. ix. p. 254. 12mo. It would appear therefore, that we had nothing more to do, than to settle people in marshy situations, and oppress them by a bad government, in order to attain what politicians have hitherto considered as so desirable—a great proportion of marriages and a great proportion of births.



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ty were increased from 1 in 36 or 40, to 1 in 18 or 20, we might probably every one of us marry at the age of puberty, and yet few be absolutely starved.

If however we all marry at this age, and yet still continue our exertions to impede the operations of nature, we may rest assured that all our efforts will be vain. Nature will not, nor cannot be defeated in her purposes. The necessary mortality must come, in some form or other; and the extirpation of one disease will only be the signal for the birth of another perhaps more fatal. We cannot lower the waters of misery by pressing them down in different places, which must necessarily make them rise somewhere else: the only way in which we can hope to effect our purpose is by drawing them off. To this course nature is constantly directing our attention by the chastisements which await a contrary conduct. These chastisements are more or less severe, in proportion to the degree in which her admonitions produce their intended effect. In this country at present, these admonitions are by no means entirely neglected. The preventive check to population prevails to a considerable degree, and her chastisements are in



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Of the consequences of

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consequence moderate : but if we were all to marry at the age of puberty they would be severe indeed. Political evils would probably be added to physical. A people goaded by constant distress, and visited by frequent returns of famine, could not be kept down by a cruel despotism. We should approach to the state of the people in Egypt or Abyssinia; and I would ask, whether in that case it is probable that we should be more virtuous ?

Physicians have long remarked the great changes which take place in diseases ; and that, while some appear to yield to the efforts of human care and skill, others seem to become in proportion more malignant and fatal. Dr. William Heberden published not long since, some valuable observations on this subject deduced from the London bills of mortality. In his preface, speaking of these bills, he says, “ the gradual changes they exhibit in particular diseases, correspond to the alterations which in time are known to take place, in the channels through which the great stream of mortality is constantly flowing.”<sup>1</sup> In the

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<sup>1</sup> Observations on the Increase and Decrease of different Diseases. Preface, p. v. 4to. 1801.



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body of his work afterwards, speaking of some particular diseases, he observes with that candour which always distinguishes true science; “It is not easy to give a satisfactory reason for all the changes which may be observed to take place in the history of diseases. Nor is it any disgrace to physicians, if their causes are often so gradual in their operation, or so subtle as to elude investigation.”<sup>1</sup>

I hope I shall not be accused of presumption, in venturing to suggest, that under certain circumstances, such changes must take place; and perhaps without any alteration in those proximate causes which are usually looked to on these occasions. If this should appear to be true, it will not seem extraordinary that the most skilful and scientific physicians, whose business it is principally to investigate proximate causes, should sometimes search for these causes in vain.

In a country which keeps its population at a certain standard, if the average number of marriages and births be given, it is evident that the

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<sup>1</sup> Observations on the Increase and Decrease of different Diseases, p. 43. 4to. 1801.



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Of the consequences of

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average number of deaths will also be given ; and to use Dr. Heberden's metaphor, the channels through which the great stream of mortality is constantly flowing, will always convey off a given quantity. Now if we stop up any of these channels, it is most perfectly clear that the stream of mortality must run with greater force through some of the other channels ; that is, if we eradicate some diseases, others will become proportionally more fatal. In this case the only distinguishable cause is the damming up a necessary outlet of mortality.<sup>1</sup> Nature, in the attainment of her great purposes, seems always to seize upon the weakest part. If this part be made strong by human skill, she seizes upon the next weakest part, and so on in succession ; not like a capricious deity, with an intention to sport with our sufferings, and constantly to defeat our labors ; but like a kind though sometimes severe instructor, with the intention of teaching us to make all parts strong, and to chace vice and misery from the earth. In avoiding one fault we are too apt to run into some

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<sup>1</sup> The way in which it operates is probably by increasing poverty, in consequence of a supply of labor too rapid for the demand.



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other; but we always find nature faithful to her great object, at every false step we commit, ready to admonish us of our errors, by the infliction of some physical or moral evil. If the prevalence of the preventive check to population in a sufficient degree, were to remove many of those diseases which now afflict us, yet be accompanied by a considerable increase of the vice of promiscuous intercourse, it is probable that the disorders and unhappiness, the physical and moral evils arising from this vice, would increase in strength and degree, and admonishing us severely of our error, would point to the only line of conduct approved by nature, reason, and religion, abstinence from marriage till we can support our children and chastity till that period arrives.

In the case just stated, in which the population and the number of marriages are supposed to be fixed, the necessity of a change in the mortality of some diseases, from the diminution or extinction of others, is capable of mathematical demonstration. The only obscurity which can possibly involve this subject, arises from taking into consideration the effect that might be produced by a diminution of mortality in increasing the popula-



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Of the consequences of

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tion, or in decreasing the number of marriages. That the removal of any of the particular causes of mortality can have no further effect upon population than the means of subsistence will allow; and that it has little influence on these means of subsistence is a fact, of which I hope the reader is already convinced. Of its operation in tending to prevent marriage, by diminishing the demand for fresh supplies of children, I have no doubt; and there is reason to think that it had this effect, in no inconsiderable degree, on the extinction of the plague, which had so long and so dreadfully ravaged this country. Dr. Heberden draws a striking picture of the favorable change observed in the health of the people of England since this period; and justly attributes it to the improvements which have gradually taken place, not only in London but in all great towns; and in the manner of living throughout the kingdom, particularly with respect to cleanliness and ventilation<sup>1</sup>. But these causes would not have produced the effect observed, if they had not been accompanied by an increase of the preventive check; and probably the spirit of

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<sup>1</sup> *Observ. on Inc. and Dec. of Diseases*, p. 35.



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pursuing the opposite mode.

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cleanliness, and better mode of living, which then began to prevail, by spreading more generally a decent and useful pride, principally contributed to this increase. The diminution in the number of marriages however, was not sufficient to make up for the great decrease of mortality, from the extinction of the plague, and the striking reduction of the deaths in the dysentery.<sup>1</sup> While these, and some other disorders became almost evanescent, consumption, palsy, apoplexy, gout, lunacy, and the small-pox, became more mortal.<sup>2</sup> The widening of these drains was necessary to carry off the population which still remained redundant, notwithstanding the increased operation of the preventive check, and the part which was annually disposed of and enabled to subsist by the increase of agriculture.

Dr. Haygarth, in the sketch of his benevolent plan for the extermination of the casual small-pox, draws a frightful picture of the mortality which has been occasioned by this distemper, attributes to it the slow progress of population, and makes

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<sup>1</sup> Observ. on Inc. and Dec. of Diseases, p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> Idem, p. 36 et seq.



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Of the consequences of

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some curious calculations on the favorable effects which would be produced in this respect by its extermination.<sup>1</sup> His conclusions however, I fear, would not follow from his premises. I am far from doubting that millions and millions of human beings have been destroyed by the small-pox. But were its devastations, as Dr. Haygarth supposes, many thousand degrees greater than the plague,<sup>2</sup> I should still doubt whether the average population of the earth had been diminished by them. The small-pox is certainly one of the channels, and a very broad one, which nature has opened for the last thousand years, to keep down the population to the level of the means of subsistence; but had this been closed, others would have become wider, or new ones would have been formed. In ancient times the mortality from war and the plague was incomparably greater than in modern. On the gradual diminution of this stream of mortality, the generation, and almost universal prevalence of the small-pox is a great and striking instance of one of those changes in the channels of

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<sup>1</sup> Vol. i. part ii. sect. v. and vi.

<sup>2</sup> Id. s. viii. p. 164.



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mortality, which ought to awaken our attention, and animate us to patient and persevering investigation. For my own part, I feel not the slightest doubt, that if the introduction of the cow-pox should extirpate the small-pox, and yet the number of marriages continue the same, we shall find a very perceptible difference in the increased mortality of some other diseases. Nothing could prevent this effect but a sudden start in our agriculture; and should this take place, which I fear we have not much reason to expect, it will not be owing to the number of children saved from death by the cow-pox inoculation, but to the alarms occasioned among the people of property by the late scarcities, and to the increased gains of farmers, which have been so absurdly reprobated. I am strongly however inclined to believe, that the number of marriages will not, in this case, remain the same; but that the gradual light which may be expected to be thrown on this interesting topic of human inquiry, will teach us how to make the extinction of a mortal disorder, a real blessing to us, a real improvement in the general health and happiness of the society.

If, on contemplating the increase of vice which



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might contingently follow an attempt to inculcate the duty of moral restraint, and the increase of misery that must necessarily follow the attempts to encourage marriage and population, we come to the conclusion, not to interfere in any respect, but to leave every man to his own free choice, and responsible only to God for the evil which he does in either way ; this is all I contend for ; I would on no account do more ; but I contend that at present we are very far from doing this.

Among the lower classes, where the point is of the greatest importance, the poor laws afford a direct, constant, and systematical encouragement to marriage, by removing from each individual that heavy responsibility which he would incur by the laws of nature, for bringing beings into the world which he could not support. Our private benevolence has the same direction as the poor laws, and almost invariably tends to facilitate the rearing of families, and to equalize as much as possible, the circumstances of married and single men.

Among the higher classes of people, the superior distinctions which married women receive, and the marked inattentions to which single women of advanced age are exposed, enable many



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pursuing the opposite mode.

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men who are neither agreeable in mind or person, and are besides in the wane of life, to choose a partner among the young and fair instead of being confined, as nature seems to dictate, to persons of nearly their own age and accomplishments. It is scarcely to be doubted, that the fear of being an old maid, and of that silly and unjust ridicule which folly sometimes attaches to this name, drives many women into the marriage union with men whom they dislike, or at best to whom they are perfectly indifferent. Such marriages must to every delicate mind appear little better than legal prostitutions; and they often burden the earth with unnecessary children, without compensating for it by an accession of happiness and virtue to the parties themselves.

Throughout all the ranks of society, the prevailing opinions respecting the duty and obligation of marriage, cannot but have a very powerful influence. The man who thinks that in going out of the world without leaving representatives behind him, he shall have failed in an important duty to society, will be disposed to force rather than to repress his inclinations on this subject; and when his reason represents to him the difficulties attend-



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Of the consequences of, &c.

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ing a family, he will endeavor not to attend to these suggestions, will still determine to venture, and will hope that in the discharge of what he conceives to be his duty, he shall not be deserted by Providence.

In a civilized country, such as England, where a taste for the decencies and comforts of life prevail among a very large class of people, it is not possible that the encouragements to marriage from positive institutions and prevailing opinions, should entirely obscure the light of nature and reason on this subject; but still they contribute to make it comparatively weak and indistinct. And till this obscurity is entirely removed, and the poor are undeceived with respect to the principal cause of their past poverty, and taught to know that their future happiness or misery must depend chiefly upon themselves, it cannot be said that with regard to the great question of marriage, we leave every man to his own free and fair choice.



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## CHAPTER VI.

*Effects of the knowledge of the principal cause of poverty on Civil Liberty.*

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IT may appear, perhaps, that a doctrine which attributes the greatest part of the sufferings of the lower classes of society exclusively to themselves, is unfavorable to the cause of liberty, as affording a tempting opportunity to governments of oppressing their subjects at pleasure, and laying the whole blame on the laws of nature and the imprudence of the poor. We are not however to trust to first appearances; and I am strongly disposed to believe that those who will be at the pains to consider this subject deeply will be convinced, that nothing would so powerfully contribute to the advancement of rational freedom, as a thorough knowledge generally circulated of the principal cause of poverty; and that the ignorance of this cause, and the natural consequences of this ignorance form at present one of the chief obstacles to its progress.



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The pressure of distress on the lower classes of people, with the habit of attributing this distress to their rulers, appears to me to be the rock of defence, the castle, the guardian spirit of despotism. It affords to the tyrant the fatal and unanswerable plea of necessity. It is the reason that every free government tends constantly to its destruction; and that its appointed guardians become daily less jealous of the encroachments of power. It is the reason that so many noble efforts in the cause of freedom have failed, and that almost every revolution, after long and painful sacrifices, has terminated in a military despotism. While any dissatisfied man of talents has power to persuade the lower classes of people that all their poverty and distress arise solely from the iniquity of the government, though perhaps the greatest part of what they suffer is unconnected with this cause, it is evident that the seeds of fresh discontents and fresh revolutions are continually sowing. When an established government has been destroyed, finding that their poverty is not removed, their resentment naturally falls upon the successors to power; and when these have been immolated without producing the desired effect, other sacrifices are called







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treme reluctance that I am compelled to acknowledge, that had it not been for the great organized force in the country, the distresses of the people during the late scarcities, encouraged by the extreme ignorance and folly of many among the higher classes, might have driven them to commit the most dreadful outrages, and ultimately to involve the country in all the horrors of famine. Should such periods often recur, a recurrence which we have too much reason to apprehend from the present state of the country, the prospect which opens to our view is melancholy in the extreme. The English constitution will be seen hastening with rapid strides to the *Euthanasia* foretold by Hume, unless its progress be interrupted by some popular commotion; and this alternative presents a picture still more appalling to the imagination. If political discontents were blended with the cries of hunger, and a revolution were to take place by the instrumentality of a mob clamoring for want of food, the consequences would be unceasing change and unceasing carnage, the bloody career of which nothing but the establishment of some complete despotism could arrest.

We can scarcely believe that the appointed guar-



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dians of British liberty should quietly have acquiesced in those gradual encroachments of power, which have taken place of late years, but from the apprehension of these still more dreadful evils. Great as has been the influence of corruption, I cannot yet think so meanly of the country gentlemen of England as to believe that they would thus have given up a part of their birthright of liberty, if they had not been actuated by a real and genuine fear, that it was then in greater danger from the people than from the crown. They appeared to surrender themselves to government on condition of being protected from the mob; but they never would have made this melancholy and disheartening surrender, if such a mob had not existed either in reality or in imagination. That the fears on this subject were artfully exaggerated and increased beyond the limits of just apprehension is undeniable; but I think it is also undeniable, that the frequent declamation which was heard against the unjust institutions of society, and the delusive arguments on equality which were circulated among the lower classes, gave us just reason to suppose that if the *vox populi* had been allowed to speak it would have appeared to be the voice of error and absurdity, instead of the *vox Dei*.



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To say that our conduct is not to be regulated by circumstances, is to betray an ignorance of the most solid and incontrovertible principles of morality. Though the admission of this principle may sometimes afford a cloak to changes of opinion that do not result from the purest motives; yet the admission of a contrary principle would be productive of infinitely worse consequences. The phrase of existing circumstances has, I believe, not unfrequently created a smile in the English House of Commons; but the smile should have been reserved for the application of the phrase, and not have been excited by the phrase itself. A very frequent repetition of it has indeed, of itself, rather a suspicious air; and its application should always be watched with the most jealous and anxious attention; but no man ought to be judged *in limine* for saying, that existing circumstances had obliged him to alter his opinions and conduct. The country gentlemen were perhaps too easily convinced that existing circumstances called upon them to give up some of the most valuable privileges of Englishmen; but as far as they were really convinced of this obligation, they acted consistently with the clearest rule of morality.



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The degree of power to be given to the civil government, and the measure of our submission to it, must be determined by general expediency; and in judging of this expediency, every circumstance is to be taken into consideration; particularly the state of public opinion, and the degree of ignorance and delusion prevailing among the common people. The patriot who might be called upon by the love of his country to join with heart and hand in a rising of the people for some specific attainable object or reform, if he knew that they were enlightened respecting their own situation and would stop short when they had attained their demand, would be called upon by the same motive to submit to very great oppression rather than give the slightest countenance to a popular tumult, the members of which, at least the greater number of them, were persuaded that the destruction of the Parliament, the lord mayor, and the monopolizers, would make bread cheap, and that a revolution would enable them all to support their families. In this case it is more the ignorance and delusion of the lower classes of people that occasions the oppression, than the actual disposition of the government to tyranny.



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That there is however in all power a constant tendency to encroach is an incontrovertible truth, and cannot be too strongly inculcated. The checks which are necessary to secure the liberty of the subject will always, in some degree, embarrass and delay the operations of the executive government. The members of this government feeling these inconveniencies, while they are exerting themselves, as they conceive, in the service of their country, and conscious perhaps of no ill intention towards the people, will naturally be disposed on every occasion, to demand the suspension or abolition of these checks; but if once the convenience of ministers be put into competition with the liberties of the people, and we get into a habit of relying on fair assurances and personal character, instead of examining, with the most scrupulous and jealous care, the merits of each particular case, there is an end of British freedom. If we once admit the principle, that the government must know better, with regard to the quantity of power which it wants, than we can possibly do with our limited means of information, and that therefore it is our duty to surrender up our private judgments, we may just as well at the same time surrender up



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the whole of our constitution. Government is a quarter in which liberty is not, nor cannot be very faithfully preserved. If we are wanting to ourselves, and inattentive to our great interests in this respect, it is the height of folly and unreasonableness to expect that government will attend to them for us. Should the British constitution ultimately lapse into a despotism, as has been prophesied, I shall think that the country gentlemen of England will have really much more to answer for than the ministers.

To do the country gentlemen justice, however, I should readily acknowledge, that in the partial desertion of their posts as guardians of British freedom which has already taken place, they have been actuated more by fear than corruption. And the principal reason of this fear was, I conceive, the ignorance and delusions of the common people, and the prospective horrors which were contemplated, if in such a state of mind, they should by any revolutionary movement obtain an ascendant.

The circulation of Paine's Rights of Man, it is supposed, has done great mischief among the lower and middling classes of people in this country. This is probably true; but not because man is



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without rights, or that these rights ought not to be known; but because Mr. Paine has fallen into some fundamental errors respecting the principles of government, and in many important points has shown himself totally unacquainted with the structure of society, and the different moral effects to be expected from the physical difference between this country and America. Mobs of the same description as those collections of people known by this name in Europe could not exist in America. The number of people without property is there, from the physical state of the country, comparatively small; and therefore the civil power which is to protect property, cannot require the same degree of strength. Mr. Paine very justly observes, that whatever the apparant cause of any riots may be, the real one is always want of happiness; but when he goes on to say, it shows that something is wrong in the system of government, that injures the felicity by which society is to be preserved, he falls into the common error of attributing all want of happiness to government. It is evident that this want of happiness might have existed, and from ignorance might have been the principal cause of the riots, and yet be almost







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fail in their object, but that the poor who were intended to be benefited, should suffer most cruelly from this inhuman deceit which is practised upon them.

The Abbé Raynal has said, that “ Avant toutes  
“ les loix sociales l’homme avoit le droit de sub-  
“ sister.”<sup>1</sup> He might with just as much propriety have said, that before the institution of social laws, every man had a right to live a hundred years. Undoubtedly he had then, and has still, a good right to live a hundred years, nay a thousand, *if he can*, without interfering with the right of others to live; but the affair in both cases is principally an affair of power, not of right. Social laws very greatly increase this power, by enabling a much greater number to subsist than could subsist without them, and so far very greatly enlarge *le droit de subsister*; but neither before nor after the institution of social laws could an unlimited number subsist; and before, as well as since, he who ceased to have the power, ceased to have the right.

If the great truths on these subjects were more generally circulated, and the lower classes of peo-

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<sup>1</sup> Raynal, Hist. des Indes, vol. x. s. x. p. 322, 8vo



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the principal cause of poverty, &c.

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ple could be convinced, that by the laws of nature, independently of any particular institutions, except the great one of property, which is absolutely necessary in order to attain any considerable produce, no person has any claim of *right* on society for subsistence, if his labor will not purchase it, the greatest part of the mischievous declamation on the unjust institutions of society would fall powerless to the ground. The poor are by no means inclined to be visionary. Their distresses are always real, though they are not attributed to the real causes. If these real causes were properly explained to them, and they were taught to know how small a part of their present distress was attributable to government, and how great a part to causes totally unconnected with it, discontent and irritation among the lower classes of people would show themselves much less frequently than at present; and when they did show themselves, would be much less to be dreaded. The efforts of turbulent and discontented men in the middle classes of society might safely be disregarded, if the poor were so far enlightened respecting the real nature of their situation, as to be aware that by aiding them in their schemes of renovation, they would



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Effects of the knowledge of

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probably be promoting the ambitious views of others, without, in any respect, benefiting themselves. And the country gentlemen, and men of property in England, might securely return to a wholesome jealousy of the encroachments of power; and instead of daily sacrificing the liberties of the subject on the alter of public safety, might, without any just apprehension from the people, not only tread back all their late steps, but firmly insist upon those gradual reforms, which the lapse of time and the storms of the political world, have rendered necessary to prevent the gradual destruction of the British constitution.

All improvements in government must necessarily originate with persons of some education, and these will of course be found among the people of property. Whatever may be said of a few, it is impossible to suppose that the great mass of the people of property should be really interested in the abuses of government. They merely submit to them from the fear that an endeavor to remove them might be productive of greater evils. Could we but take away this fear, reform and improvement would proceed with as much facility as the removal of nuisances, or the paving and



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the principal cause of poverty, &c.

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lighting of the streets. In human life we are continually called upon to submit to a lesser evil in order to avoid a greater; and it is the part of a wise man to do this readily and cheerfully; but no wise man will submit to any evil if he can get rid of it without danger. Remove all apprehension from the tyranny or folly of the people, and the tyranny of government could not stand a moment. It would then appear in its proper deformity, without palliation, without pretext, without protector. Naturally feeble in itself, when it was once stripped naked, and deprived of the support of public opinion and of the great plea of necessity, it would fall without a struggle. Its few interested defenders would hide their heads abashed, and would be ashamed any longer to advocate a cause for which no human ingenuity could invent a plausible argument.

The most successful supporters of tyranny are without doubt those general declaimers, who attribute the distresses of the poor, and almost all the evils to which society is subject, to human institutions and the iniquity of governments. The falsity of these accusations, and the dreadful consequences that would result from their being ge-



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nerally admitted and acted upon, make it absolutely necessary that they should at all events be resisted; not only on account of the immediate revolutionary horrors to be expected from a movement of the people acting under such impressions, a consideration which must at all times have very great weight, but on account of the extreme probability that such a revolution would terminate in a much worse despotism than that which it had destroyed. On these grounds a genuine friend of freedom, a zealous advocate for the real rights of man, might be found among the defenders of a considerable degree of tyranny. A cause bad in itself might be supported by the good and the virtuous, merely because that which was opposed to it was much worse; and at the moment, it was absolutely necessary to make a choice between the two. Whatever therefore may be the intention of those indiscriminate accusations against governments, their real effect undoubtedly is, to add a weight of talents and principles to the prevailing power which it never would have received otherwise.

It is a truth which I trust has been sufficiently proved in the course of this work, that under a



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government constructed upon the best and purest principles, and executed by men of the highest talents and integrity, the most squalid poverty and wretchedness might universally prevail from an inattention to the prudential check to population. And as this cause of unhappiness has hitherto been so little understood, that the efforts of society have always tended rather to aggravate than to lessen it, we have the strongest reasons for supposing that in all the governments with which we are acquainted, a great part of the misery to be observed among the lower classes of the people arises from this cause.

The inference therefore which Mr. Paine and others have drawn against governments from the unhappiness of the people, is palpably unfair; and before we give a sanction to such accusations, it is a debt we owe to truth and justice, to ascertain how much of this unhappiness arises from the principle of population, and how much is fairly to be attributed to government. When this distinction has been properly made, and all the vague, indefinite, and false accusations removed, government would remain, as it ought to be, clearly responsible for the rest; and the amount of this



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would still be such as to make the responsibility very considerable. Though government has but little power in the direct and immediate relief of poverty, yet its indirect influence on the prosperity of its subjects is striking and incontestible. And the reason is, that though it is comparatively impotent in its efforts to make the food of a country keep pace with an unrestricted increase of population, yet its influence is great in giving the best direction to those checks which in some form or other must necessarily take place. It has clearly appeared in the former part of this work, that the most despotic and worst-governed countries, however low they might be in actual population, were uniformly the most populous in proportion to their means of subsistence, and the necessary effect of this state of things must of course be very low wages. In such countries the checks to population arise more from the sickness and mortality consequent on poverty, than from the prudence and foresight which restrains the frequency and universality of early marriages. The checks are more of the positive and less of the preventive kind.

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Effects of the knowledge of

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crease the riches and prosperity of the lower classes of the community, than if the same laws had existed under a despotism.

But though the tendency of a free constitution and a good government to diminish poverty be certain; yet its effect in this way must necessarily be indirect and slow, and very different from the direct and immediate relief which the lower classes of people are too frequently in the habit of looking forward to as the consequence of a revolution. This habit of expecting too much, and the irritation occasioned by disappointment, continually give a wrong direction to their efforts in favor of liberty, and constantly tend to defeat the accomplishment of those gradual reforms in government, and that slow melioration of the condition of the lower classes of society, which are really attainable.

It is of the very highest importance therefore to know distinctly what government cannot do, as well as what it can do. If I were called upon to name the cause, which, in my conception, had more than any other contributed to the very slow progress of freedom, so disheartening to every liberal mind, I should say that it was the confusion that had existed respecting the causes of the unhappiness and discontents which prevail in socie-



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the principal cause of poverty, &c.

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ty; and the advantage which governments had been able to take, and indeed had been compelled to take, of this confusion, to confirm and strengthen their power. I cannot help thinking therefore, that a knowledge generally circulated, that the principal cause of want and unhappiness is only indirectly connected with government, and totally beyond its power directly to remove; and that it depends upon the conduct of the poor themselves, would instead of giving any advantage to governments, give a great additional weight to the popular side of the question, by removing the dangers with which from ignorance it is at present accompanied; and thus tend, in a very powerful manner, to promote the cause of rational freedom.



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## CHAPTER VII.

*Plan of a gradual abolition of the Poor Laws  
proposed.*

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IF the principles in the preceding chapters should stand the test of examination, and we should ever feel the obligation of endeavoring to act upon them, the next inquiry would be, in what way we ought practically to proceed. The first grand obstacle which presents itself in this country is the system of the poor laws, which has been justly stated to be an evil, in comparison of which the national debt, with all its magnitude of terror, is of little moment.<sup>1</sup> The rapidity with which the poor rates have increased of late years, presents us indeed with the prospect of such an extraordinary proportion of paupers in the society, as would seem to be incredible in a nation flourishing in arts, agriculture, and commerce, and with a govern-

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<sup>1</sup> Reports of the Society for bettering the condition of the poor, vol. iii. p. 21.



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Plan of a gradual abolition, &c.

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ment which has generally been allowed to be the best that has hitherto stood the test of experience.<sup>1</sup>

Greatly as we may be shocked at such a prospect, and ardently as we may wish to remove it, the evil is now so deeply seated, and the relief given by the poor laws so widely extended, that no man of humanity could venture to propose their immediate abolition. To mitigate their effects however, and stop their future increase, to which, if left to continue upon their present plan, we can see no probable termination, it has been proposed to fix the whole sum to be raised, at its present rate, or any other that might be determined upon; and to make a law that on no account this sum should be exceeded. The objection to this plan is, that a very large sum would be still to be raised, and a great number of people to be supported; the consequence of which would be, that the poor would not be easily able to distinguish the

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<sup>1</sup> It has been said that during the late scarcities, half of the population of the country received relief. If the poor rates continue increasing as rapidly as they have done on the average of the last ten years, how melancholy are our future prospects? The system of the poor laws has been justly stated by the French to be *la plaie politique de l'Angleterre la plus dévorante.* (Comité de Mendicité.)



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alteration that had been made. Each individual would think that he had as good a right to be supported when he was in want as any other person; and those who unfortunately chanced to be in distress when the fixed sum had been collected, would think themselves particularly ill used on being excluded from all assistance, while so many others were enjoying this advantage. If the sum collected were divided among all that were in want, however their numbers might increase, though such a plan would not be so unfair with regard to those who became dependent after the sum had been fixed, it would undoubtedly be very hard up on those who had been in the habit of receiving a more liberal supply, and had done nothing to justify its being taken from them; and in both cases, it would be certainly unjust in the society to undertake the support of the poor, and yet if their numbers increased, to feed them so sparingly that they must necessarily die of hunger and disease.

I have reflected much on the subject of the poor laws, and hope therefore that I shall be excused in venturing to suggest a mode of their gradual abolition, to which I confess that at present I can



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see no material objection. Of this indeed I feel nearly convinced, that should we ever become sufficiently sensible of the wide-spreading tyranny, dependence, indolence, and unhappiness, which they create, as seriously to make an effort to abolish them, we shall be compelled by a sense of justice to adopt the principle, if not the plan, which I shall mention. It seems impossible to get rid of so extensive a system of support, consistently with humanity, without applying ourselves directly to its vital principle, and endeavoring to counteract that deeply-seated cause, which occasions the rapid growth of all such establishments, and invariably renders them inadequate to their object. As a previous step even to any considerable alteration in the present system, which would contract, or stop the increase of the relief to be given, it appears to me that we are bound in justice and honor formally to disclaim the *right* of the poor to support.

To this end, I should propose a regulation to be made, declaring that no child born from any marriage, taking place after the expiration of a year from the date of the law; and no illegitimate child born two years from the same date, should ever be entitled to parish assistance. And to give



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a more general knowledge of this law, and to enforce it more strongly on the minds of the lower classes of people, the clergyman of each parish should after the publication of banns, read a short address, stating the strong obligation on every man to support his own children; the impropriety and even immorality, of marrying without a fair prospect of being able to do this; the evils which had resulted to the poor themselves, from the attempt which had been made to assist by public institutions in a duty which ought to be exclusively appropriated to parents; and the absolute necessity which had at length appeared, of abandoning all such institutions, on account of their producing effects totally opposite to those which were intended.

This would operate as a fair, distinct, and precise notice, which no man could well mistake; and without pressing hard on any particular individuals, would at once throw off the rising generation from that miserable and helpless dependence upon the government and the rich, the moral as well as physical consequences of which are almost incalculable.

After the public notice which I have proposed had been given, and the system of poor laws had



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ceased with regard to the rising generation, if any man chose to marry, without a prospect of being able to support a family, he should have the most perfect liberty so to do. Though to marry, in this case, is in my opinion clearly an immoral act, yet it is not one which society can justly take upon itself to prevent or punish; because the punishment provided for it by the laws of nature, falls directly and most severely upon the individual who commits the act, and through him, only more remotely and feebly, on the society. When nature will govern and punish for us, it is a very miserable ambition to wish to snatch the rod from her hands, and draw upon ourselves the odium of executioner. To the punishment therefore of nature he should be left, the punishment of want. He has erred in the face of a most clear and precise warning, and can have no just reason to complain of any person but himself, when he feels the consequences of his error. All parish assistance should be denied him; and if the hand of private charity be stretched forth in his relief, the interests of humanity imperiously require that it should be administered sparingly. He should be taught to know that the laws of nature, which are the laws



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Plan of a gradual abolition

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of God, had doomed him and his family to suffer for disobeying their repeated admonitions; that he had no claim of *right* on society for the smallest portion of food, beyond that which his labor would fairly purchase; and that if he and his family were saved from suffering the extremities of hunger, he would owe it to the pity of some kind benefactor, to whom, therefore, he ought to be bound by the strongest ties of gratitude.

If this system were pursued, we need be under no apprehensions that the number of persons in extreme want would be beyond the power and the will of the benevolent to supply. The sphere for the exercise of private charity would, I am confident, be less than it is at present; and the only difficulty would be, to restrain the hand of benevolence from assisting those in distress in so indiscriminate a manner as to encourage indolence and want of foresight in others.

With regard to illegitimate children, after the proper notice had been given, they should not be allowed to have any claim to parish assistance, but be left entirely to the support of private charity. If the parents desert their child they ought to be made answerable for the crime. The in-



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fant is, comparatively speaking, of little value to the society, as others will immediately supply its place. Its principal value is on account of its being the object of one of the most delightful passions in human nature—parental affection. But if this value be disregarded by those who are alone in a capacity to feel it, the society cannot be called upon to put itself in their place; and has no further business in its protection, than to punish the crime of desertion or intentional ill-treatment in the persons whose duty it is to provide for it.

At present the child is taken under the protection of the parish,<sup>1</sup> and generally dies, at least in London, within the first year. The loss to the society is the same; but the crime is diluted by the number of people concerned, and the death passes as a visitation of Providence, instead of being considered as the necessary consequence of the conduct of its parents, for which they ought to be held responsible to God and to society.

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<sup>1</sup> I fully agree with Sir F. M. Eden, in thinking that the constant public support which deserted children receive, is the cause of their very great numbers in the two most opulent countries of Europe, France and England. *State of the Poor*, vol. i. p. 339.



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Plan of a gradual abolition

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The desertion of both parents, however, is not so common as the desertion of one. When a servant or laboring man has an illegitimate child, his running away is perfectly a matter of course ; and it is by no means uncommon for a man with a wife and large family to withdraw into a distant county, and leave them to the parish ; indeed I once heard a hard-working good sort of man propose to do this, as the best mode of providing for a wife and six children.<sup>1</sup> If the simple fact of these frequent desertions were related in some countries, a strange inference would be drawn against the English character ; but the wonder would cease when our public institutions were explained.

By the laws of nature, a child is confided directly and exclusively to the protection of its parents. By the laws of nature, the mother of a child is confided almost as strongly and exclusively to the man who is the father of it. If these ties

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<sup>1</sup> “That many of the poorer classes of the community avail themselves of the liberality of the law, and leave their wives and children on the parish, the reader will find abundant proof in the subsequent part of this work.”  
Sir F. M. Eden on the State of the Poor, vol. i. p. 339.



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were suffered to remain in the state in which nature has left them, and the man were convinced that the woman and the child depended solely upon him for support, I scarcely believe that there are ten men breathing so atrocious as to desert them. But our laws, in opposition to the laws of nature, say, that if the parents forsake their child, other persons will undertake to support it; or if the man forsake the woman she shall still meet with protection elsewhere; that is, we take all possible pains to weaken and render null the ties of nature, and then say that men are unnatural. But the fact is, that the society itself, in its body politic, is the unnatural character, for framing laws that thus counteract the laws of nature, and give premiums to the violation of the best and most honorable feelings of the human heart.

It is a common thing in most parishes, when the father of an illegitimate child can be seized, to endeavor to frighten him into marriage by the terrors of a jail; but such a proceeding cannot surely be too strongly reprobated. In the first place, it is a most shallow policy in the parish officers; for if they succeed, the effect upon the present system will generally be, the having three



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Plan of a gradual abolition

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or four children to provide for instead of one. And in the next place, it is difficult to conceive a more gross and scandalous profanation of a religious ceremony. Those who believe that the character of a woman is salved by such a forced engagement, or that the moral worth of the man is enhanced by affirming a lie before God, have, I confess, very different ideas of delicacy and morality, from those which I have been taught to consider as just. If a man deceive a woman into a connexion with him under a promise of marriage, he has undoubtedly been guilty of a most atrocious act, and there are few crimes which merit a more severe punishment; but the last that I should choose is that which will oblige him to affirm another falsehood, which will probably render the woman that he is to be joined to miserable, and will burden the society with a family of paupers.

The obligation on every man to support his children, whether legitimate or illegitimate, is so clear and strong, that it would be just to arm society with any power to enforce it, which would be likely to answer the purpose. But I am inclined to believe that no exercise of the civil power, however rigorous, would be half so effec-



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tual, as a knowledge generally circulated that children were in future to depend solely for support upon their parents, and would be left only to casual charity if they were deserted.

It may appear to be hard, that a mother and her children, who had been guilty of no particular crime themselves, should suffer for the ill conduct of the father; but this is one of the invariable laws of nature; and knowing this, we should think twice upon the subject, and be very sure of the ground on which we go, before we presume *systematically* to counteract it.

I have often heard the goodness of the Deity impeached on account of that part of the decalogue, in which he declares, that he will visit the sins of the father upon the children; but the objection has not perhaps been sufficiently considered. Without a most complete and fundamental change in the whole constitution of human nature; without making man an angel, or at least something totally different from what he is at present; it seems absolutely necessary that such a law should prevail. Would it not require a perpetual miracle, which is perhaps, a contradiction in terms, to prevent children from being affected



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in their moral and civil condition by the conduct of their parents? What man is there that has been brought up by his parents, who is not at the present moment enjoying something from their virtues, or suffering something from their vices; who, in his moral character, has not been elevated in some degree, by their prudence, their justice, their benevolence, their temperance, or depressed by the contraries; who, in his civil condition, has not been raised, by their reputation, their foresight, their industry, their good fortune, or lowered by their want of character, their imprudence, their indolence, and their adversity? And how much does a knowledge of this transmission of blessings contribute to excite and invigorate virtuous exertion? Proceeding upon this certainty, how ardent and incessant are the efforts of parents to give their children a good education, and to provide for their future situation in the world. If a man could neglect or desert his wife and children without their suffering any injury, how many individuals there are, who not being very fond of their wives, or being tired of the shackles of matrimony, would withdraw from household cares and difficulties, and resume their liberty and in-



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dependence as single men. But the consideration that children may suffer for the faults of their parents has a strong hold even upon vice, and many who are in such a state of mind as to disregard the consequences of their habitual course of life, as far as relates to themselves, are yet greatly anxious that their children should not suffer from their vices and follies. In the moral government of the world, it seems evidently necessary that the sins of the fathers should be visited upon the children; and if in our over-weening vanity we imagine that we can govern a private society better by endeavoring *systematically* to counteract this law, I am inclined to believe that we shall find ourselves very greatly mistaken.

If the plan which I have proposed, were adopted, the poor rates in a few years would begin very rapidly to decrease, and in no great length of time would be completely extinguished; and yet, as far as it appears to me at present, no individual would be either deceived or injured, and consequently no person could have a just right to complain.

The abolition of the poor laws however, is not of itself sufficient; and the obvious answer to those who lay too much stress upon this system is, to



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Plan of a gradual abolition

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desire them to look at the state of the poor in some other countries, where such laws do not prevail, and to compare it with their condition in England. But this comparison, it must be acknowledged, is in many respects unfair; and would by no means decide the question of the utility or inutility of such a system. England possesses very great natural and political advantages, in which perhaps the countries that we should, in this case, compare with her, would be found to be palpably deficient. The nature of her soil and climate is such, that those almost universal failures in the crops of grain, which are known in some countries, never occur in England. Her insular situation and extended commerce are peculiarly favorable for importation. Her numerous manufactures employ nearly all the hands that are not engaged in agriculture, and afford the means of a regular distribution of the annual produce of the land and labor to the whole of her inhabitants. But above all, throughout a very large class of the people, a decided taste for the conveniencies and comforts of life, a strong desire of bettering their condition, that master-spring of public prosperity, and in consequence, a most laudable spirit of in-



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dustry and foresight are observed to prevail. These dispositions, so contrary to the hopeless indolence remarked in despotic countries, are generated by the constitution of the English government, and the excellence of its laws, which secure to every individual the produce of his industry. When therefore, on a comparison with other countries, England appears to have the advantage in the state of her poor, the superiority is entirely to be attributed to these favorable circumstances, and not to the poor laws. A woman with one bad feature may greatly excel in beauty some other, who may have this individual feature tolerably good; but it would be rather strange to assert, in consequence, that the superior beauty of the former was occasioned by this particular deformity. The poor laws have constantly tended to counteract the natural and acquired advantages of this country. Fortunately these advantages have been so considerable that though weakened they could not be overcome; and to these advantages, together with the checks to marriage, which the laws themselves create, it is owing that England has been able to bear up so long against this pernicious system. Probably there is not any other



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Plan of a gradual abolition

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country in the world, except perhaps Holland before the revolution, which could have acted upon it so completely, for the same period of time without utter ruin.

It has been proposed by some to establish poor laws in Ireland; but from the wretched and degraded state of the common people, and the total want of that decent pride which in England prevents so many from having recourse to parish assistance, there is little reason to doubt that on the establishment of such laws, the whole of the landed property would very soon be absorbed, or the system be given up in despair.

In Sweden, from the dearths which are not uncommon, owing to the general failure of crops in an unpropitious climate, and the impossibility of great importations in a poor country, an attempt to establish a system of parochial relief such as that in England, if it were not speedily abandoned from the physical impossibility of executing it, would level the property of the kingdom from one end to the other, and convulse the social system in such a manner as absolutely to prevent it from recovering its former state on the return of plenty.



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of the poor laws proposed.

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Even in France, with all her advantages of situation and climate, the tendency to population is so great, and the want of foresight among the lower classes of the people so conspicuous, that if poor laws were established the landed property would soon sink under the burden, and the wretchedness of the people at the same time be increased. On these considerations the committee *de Mendicité*, at the beginning of the revolution, very properly and judiciously rejected the establishment of such a system which had been proposed.

The exception of Holland, if it were an exception, would arise from very particular circumstances—her extensive foreign trade, and her numerous colonial emigrations, compared with the smallness of her territory; and the extreme unhealthiness of a great part of the country, which occasions a much greater average mortality than is common in other states. These, I conceive, were the unobserved causes which principally contributed to render Holland so famous for the management of her poor, and able to employ and support all who applied for relief.

No part of Germany is sufficiently rich to support an extensive system of parochial relief; but



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Plan of a gradual abolition

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I am inclined to think, that from the absence of it, the lower classes of the people in some parts of Germany are in a better situation than those of the same class in England. In Switzerland, for the same reason, their condition, before the late troubles, was perhaps universally superior. And in a journey through the dutchies of Holstein and Sleswick belonging to Denmark, the houses of the lower classes of people appeared to me to be neater and better, and in general there were fewer indications of poverty and wretchedness among them, than among the same ranks in this country.

Even in Norway, notwithstanding the disadvantage of a severe and uncertain climate, from the little that I saw in a few weeks residence in the country, and the information that I could collect from others, I am inclined to think that the poor were, on the average, better off than in England. Their houses and clothing were superior, and though they had no white bread, they had much more meat, fish, and milk, than our laborers; and I particularly remarked, that the farmers' boys were much stouter and healthier looking lads than those of the same description in England. This degree of happiness, superior to what could



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of the poor laws proposed.

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be expected from the soil and climate, arises almost exclusively from the degree in which the preventive check to population operates; and the establishment of a system of poor laws, which would destroy this check, would at once sink the lower classes of the people into a state of the most miserable poverty and wretchedness; would diminish their industry, and consequently the produce of the land and labor of the country; would weaken the resources of ingenuity in times of scarcity; and ultimately involve the country in all the horrors of continual famines.

If, as in Ireland and in Spain, and many of the southern countries, the people be in so degraded a state as to propagate their species like brutes, totally regardless of consequences, it matters little whether they have poor laws or not. Misery in all its various forms must be the predominant check to their increase. Poor laws, indeed, will always tend to aggravate the evil, by diminishing the general resources of the country, and in such a state of things could exist only for a very short time; but with or without them, no stretch of human ingenuity and exertion could rescue the people from the most extreme poverty and wretchedness.



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## CHAPTER VIII.

*Of the modes of correcting the prevailing opinions  
on Population.*

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IT is not enough to abolish all the positive institutions which encourage population; but we must endeavor at the same time, to correct the prevailing opinions, which have the same, or perhaps even a more powerful effect. This must necessarily be a work of time; and can only be done by circulating juster notions on these subjects, in writings and conversation; and by endeavoring to impress as strongly as possible on the public mind, that it is not the duty of man simply to propagate his species, but to propagate virtue and happiness; and that, if he has not a tolerably fair prospect of doing this, he is by no means called upon to leave descendants.

Among the higher ranks of society, we have not much reason to apprehend the too great frequency of marriage. Though the circulation of juster notions on this subject might, even in this



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Of the modes of correcting the, &c.

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part of the community, do much good, and prevent many unhappy marriages; yet whether we make particular exertions for this purpose, or not, we may rest assured that the degree of proper pride and spirit of independence almost invariably connected with education, and a certain rank in life, will secure the operation of the prudential check to marriage to a considerable extent. All that the society can reasonably require of its members is, that they should not have families without being able to support them. This may be fairly enjoined as a positive duty. Every restraint beyond this must be considered as a matter of choice and taste; but from what we already know of the habits which prevail among the higher ranks of life, we have reason to think that little more is wanted to attain the object required, than to award a greater degree of respect and of personal liberty to single women, and to place them nearer upon a level with married women; a change, which independently of any particular purpose in view, the plainest principles of equity seem to demand.

If among the higher classes of society, the object of securing the operation of the prudential check to marriage to a sufficient degree appear to



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Of the modes of correcting the

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be attainable without much difficulty, the obvious mode of proceeding with the lower classes of society, where the point is of the principal importance, is to endeavor to infuse into them a portion of that knowledge and foresight, which so much facilitates the attainment of this object in the educated part of the community.

The fairest chance of accomplishing this end would probably be by the establishment of a system of parochial education upon a plan similar to that proposed by Dr. Smith.<sup>1</sup> In addition to the usual subjects of instruction, and those which he has mentioned, I should be disposed to lay considerable stress on the frequent explanation of the real state of the lower classes of society, as affected by the principle of population, and their consequent dependence on themselves for the chief part of their happiness or misery. It would be by no means necessary or proper in these explanations, to under-rate in the smallest degree, the desirableness of marriage. It should always be represented as, what it really is, a state peculiarly suited to the nature of man, and calculated greatly to advance his

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<sup>1</sup> Wealth of Nations, vol. iii. b. v. c. i. p. 187.



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prevailing opinions on population.

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happiness, and remove the temptations to vice ; but like property or any other desirable object, its advantages should be shown to be unattainable, except under certain conditions. And a strong conviction in a young man of the desirableness of marriage, with a conviction at the same time, that the power of supporting a family was the only condition which would enable him really to enjoy its blessings, would be the most effectual motive imaginable to industry and sobriety before marriage, and would powerfully urge him to save that superfluity of income which single laborers necessarily possess, for the accomplishment of a rational and desirable object, instead of dissipating it, as is now usually done, in idleness and vice.

If in the course of time, a few of the simplest principles of political economy could be added to the instructions given in these schools, the benefit to society would be almost incalculable.<sup>1</sup> In some

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Smith proposes that the elementary parts of geometry and mechanics should be taught in these parish schools ; and I cannot help thinking that the common principles by which markets are regulated might be made sufficiently clear to be of considerable use. It is certainly a subject that, as it interests the lower classes of people



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Of the modes of correcting the

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conversations with laboring men, during the late scarcities, I confess that I was to the last degree disheartened, at observing their inveterate prejudices on the subject of grain; and I felt very

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nearly, would be likely to attract their attention. At the same time it must be confessed, that it is impossible to be in any degree sanguine on this point, recollecting how very ignorant in general the educated part of the community is of these principles. If, however, political economy cannot be taught to the common people, I really think that it ought to form a branch of a university education. Scotland has set us an example in this respect, which we ought not to be so slow to imitate. It is of the very utmost importance that the gentlemen of the country, and particularly the clergy, should not, from ignorance, aggravate the evils of scarcity every time that it unfortunately occurs. During the late dearths, half of the gentlemen and clergymen in the kingdom richly deserved to have been prosecuted for sedition. After inflaming the minds of the common people against the farmers and corn-dealers, by the manner in which they talked of them, or preached about them, it was but a feeble antidote to the poison which they had infused, coldly to observe, that however the poor might be oppressed or cheated, it was their duty to keep the peace. It was little better than Anthony's repeated declaration, that the conspirators were all honorable men; which did not save either their houses or their persons from the attacks of the mob. Political economy is perhaps the only science of which it may be said, that the ignorance of it is not merely a deprivation of good, but produces great positive evil.



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prevailing opinions on population.

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strongly the almost absolute incompatibility of a government really free, with such a degree of ignorance. The delusions are of such a nature, that if acted upon, they must at all events be repressed by force; and it is extremely difficult to give such a power to the government as will be sufficient at all times for this purpose, without the risk of its being employed improperly, and endangering the liberty of the subject.

We have lavished immense sums on the poor, which we have every reason to think have constantly tended to aggravate their misery. But in their education, and in the circulation of those important political truths that most nearly concern them, which are perhaps the only means in our power of really raising their condition, and of making them happier men and more peaceable subjects, we have been miserably deficient. It is surely a great national disgrace, that the education of the lower classes of people in England should be left merely to a few Sunday schools, supported by a subscription from individuals, who of course can give to the course of instruction in them any kind of bias which they please. And even the improvement of Sunday schools, (for ob-



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Of the modes of correcting the

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jectionable as they are in some points of view, and imperfect in all, I cannot but consider them as an improvement) is of very late date.

The arguments which have been urged against instructing the people appear to me to be not only illiberal, but to the last degree feeble; and they ought, on the contrary, to be extremely forcible, and to be supported by the most obvious and striking necessity, to warrant us in withholding the means of raising the condition of the lower classes of people, when they are in our power. Those who will not listen to any answer to these arguments drawn from theory, cannot, I think, refuse the testimony of experience; and I would ask, whether the advantage of superior instruction which the lower classes of people in Scotland are known to possess, has appeared to have any tendency towards creating a spirit of tumult and discontent amongst them. And yet from the natural inferiority of its soil and climate, the pressure of want is more constant, and the dearths are not only more frequent, but more dreadful than in England. In the case of Scotland, the knowledge circulated among the common people, though not sufficient essentially to better their condition by in-



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prevailing opinions on population.

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creasing, in an adequate degree, their habits of prudence and foresight, has yet the effect of making them bear with patience the evils which they suffer, from being aware of the folly and inefficacy of turbulence. The quiet and peaceable habits of the instructed Scotch peasant, compared with the turbulent disposition of the ignorant Irishman, ought not to be without effect upon every impartial reasoner.

The principal argument that I have heard advanced against a system of national education in England is, that the common people would be put in a capacity to read such works as those of Paine, and that the consequences would probably be fatal to government. But on this subject I agree most cordially with Dr. Smith<sup>1</sup> in thinking, that an instructed and well-informed people would be much less likely to be led away by inflammatory writings, and would be much better able to detect the false declamation of interested and ambitious demagogues, than an ignorant people. One or two readers in a parish are sufficient to circulate any quantity of sedition; and if these be gained to the de-

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<sup>1</sup> Wealth of Nations, vol. iii. b. v. c. i. p. 192.



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Of the modes of correcting the

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mocratic side, they will probably have the power of doing much more mischief, by selecting the passages best suited to their hearers, and choosing the moments when their oratory is likely to have the most effect, than if each individual in the parish had been in a capacity to read and judge of the whole work himself; and at the same time to read and judge of the opposing arguments, which we may suppose would also reach him.

But in addition to this, a double weight would undoubtedly be added to the observation of Dr. Smith, if these schools were made the means of instructing the people in the real nature of their situation; if they were taught, what is really true, that without an increase of their own industry and prudence, no change of government could essentially better their condition; that though they might get rid of some particular grievance, yet that in the great point of supporting their families, they would be but little, or perhaps not at all benefited; that a revolution would not alter in their favor the proportion of the supply of labor to the demand, or the quantity of food to the number of the consumers; and that, if the supply of labor were greater than the demand, and the demand for food greater than the supply, they might suf-







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Of the modes of correcting the

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whose habits, generally speaking, are certainly superior.

In most countries among the lower classes of people, there appears to be something like a standard of wretchedness, a point below which, they will not continue to marry and propagate their species. This standard is different in different countries, and is formed by various concurring circumstances of soil, climate, government, degree of knowledge, and civilization, &c. The principal circumstances which contribute to raise it are liberty, security of property, the spread of knowledge, and a taste for the conveniencies and the comforts of life. Those which contribute principally to lower it are despotism and ignorance.

In an attempt to better the condition of the lower classes of society, our object should be to raise this standard as high as possible, by cultivating a spirit of independence, a decent pride, and a taste for cleanliness and comfort. The effect of a good government in increasing the prudential habits and personal respectability of the lower classes of society has already been insisted on; but certainly this effect will always be incomplete without a good system of education, and indeed it may be



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prevailing opinions on population.

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said that no government can approach to perfection that does not provide for the instruction of the people. The benefits derived from education are among those which may be enjoyed without restriction of numbers, and as it is in the power of governments to confer these benefits, it is undoubtedly their duty to do it.



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## CHAPTER IX.

### *Of the direction of our charity.*

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AN important and interesting inquiry yet remains, relating to the mode of directing our private charity, so as not to interfere with the great object in view, of meliorating the condition of the lower classes of people, by preventing the population from pressing too hard against the limits of the means of subsistence.

The emotion which prompts us to relieve our fellow-creatures in distress is, like all our other natural passions, general, and in some degree indiscriminate and blind. Our feelings of compassion may be worked up to a higher pitch by a well-wrought scene in a play, or a fictitious tale in a novel, than by almost any events in real life; and if, among ten petitioners we were to listen only to the first impulses of our feelings, without making further inquiries, we should undoubtedly give our assistance to the best actor of the party. It is evi-



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Of the direction of our charity.

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dent therefore, that the impulse of benevolence, like the impulses of love, of anger, of ambition, the desire of eating and drinking, or any other of our natural propensities, must be regulated by experience, and frequently brought to the test of utility, or it will defeat its intended purpose.

The apparent object of the passion between the sexes is, the continuation of the species, and the formation of such an intimate union of views and interets between two persons, as will best promote their happiness, and at the same time secure the proper degree of attention to the helplessness of infancy and the education of the rising generation; but if every man were to obey at all times the impulses of nature in the gratification of this passion, without regard to consequences, the principal part of these important objects would not be attained, and even the continuation of the species might be defeated by a promiscuous intercourse.

The apparent end of the impulse of benevolence, is to draw the whole human race together, but more particularly that part of it which is of our own nation and kindred, in the bonds of brotherly love; and by giving men an interest in the happiness and misery of their fellow creatures, to prompt



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Of the direction of our charity.

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them, as they have power, to mitigate the partial evils arising from general laws, and thus to increase the sum of human happiness; but if our benevolence be indiscriminate, and the degree of apparent distress be made the sole measure of our liberality, it is evident that it will be exercised almost exclusively upon common beggars, while modest unobtrusive merit, struggling with unavoidable difficulties, yet still maintaining some slight appearances of decency and cleanliness, will be totally neglected. We shall raise the worthless above the worthy; we shall encourage indolence and check industry; and in the most marked manner, subtract from the sum of human happiness.

Our experience has indeed informed us that the impulse of benevolence is not so strong as the passion between the sexes, and that generally speaking, there is much less danger to be apprehended from the indulgence of the former than of the latter; but independently of this experience, and of the moral codes founded upon it, a youth of eighteen would be as completely justified in indulging the sexual passion with every object capable of exciting it, as in following indiscrimi-



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Of the direction of our charity.

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nately every impulse of his benevolence. They are both natural passions which are excited by their appropriate objects, and to the gratification of which, we are prompted by the pleasurable sensations which accompany them. As animals, or till we know their consequences, our only business is to follow these dictates of nature; but as reasonable beings, we are under the strongest obligations to attend to their consequences; and if they be evil to ourselves or others, we may justly consider it as an indication that such a mode of indulging these passions is not suited to our state, or conformable to the will of God. As moral agents therefore, it is clearly our duty to restrain their indulgence in these particular directions; and by thus carefully examining the consequences of our natural passions, and frequently bringing them to the test of utility, gradually to acquire a habit of gratifying them, only in that way, which being unattended with evil, will clearly add to the sum of human happiness, and fulfil the apparent purpose of the Creator.

Though utility therefore can never be the immediate excitement to the gratification of any passion, it is the test by which alone we can



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Of the direction of our charity.

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know, whether it ought or ought not to be indulged; and is therefore the surest foundation of all morality which can be collected from the light of nature. All the moral codes which have inculcated the subjection of the passions to reason, have been, as I conceive, really built upon this foundation, whether the promulgators of them were aware of it or not.

I remind the reader of these truths, in order to apply them to the habitual direction of our charity; and if we keep the criterion of utility constantly in view, we may find ample room for the exercise of our benevolence, without interfering with the great purpose which we have to accomplish.

One of the most valuable parts of charity, is its effect upon the giver. It is more blessed to give than to receive. Supposing it to be allowed, that the exercise of our benevolence in acts of charity is not, upon the whole, really beneficial to the poor, yet we could never sanction any endeavor to extinguish an impulse, the proper gratification of which has so evident a tendency to purify and exalt the human mind. But it is particularly satisfactory and pleasing to find that the mode of



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Of the direction of our charity.

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exercising our charity, which when brought to the test of utility, will appear to be most beneficial to the poor, is precisely that which will have the best and most improving effect on the mind of the donor.

The quality of charity like that of mercy,

“ Is not strained ;

“ It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven

“ Upon the earth beneath.”

The immense sums distributed to the poor in this country, by the parochial laws, are improperly called charity. They want its most distinguishing attribute; and as it might be expected from an attempt to force that which loses its essence the moment that it ceases to be voluntary, their effects upon those from whom they are collected are as prejudicial as on those to whom they are distributed. On the side of the receivers of this mis-called charity, instead of real relief, we find accumulated distress and more extended poverty; on the side of the givers, instead of pleasurable sensations, unceasing discontent and irritation.

In the great charitable institutions supported by voluntary contributions, some of which are certainly of a prejudicial tendency, the subscriptions, I am inclined to fear, are sometimes given grudging-



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Of the direction of our charity.

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ingly, and rather because they are expected by the world from certain stations and certain fortunes, than because they are prompted by motives of genuine benevolence; and as the greater part of the subscribers do not interest themselves in the management of the funds, or in the fate of the particular objects relieved, it is not to be expected that this kind of charity should have any strikingly beneficial influence on the minds of the majority who exercise it.

Even in the relief of common beggars, we shall find that we are often as much influenced by the desire of getting rid of the importunities of a disgusting object, as by the pleasure of relieving it. We wish that it had not fallen in our way, rather than rejoice in the opportunity given us of assisting a fellow-creature. We feel a painful emotion at the sight of so much apparent misery; but the pittance we give does not relieve it. We know that it is totally inadequate to produce any essential effect. We know besides, that we shall be addressed in the same manner at the corner of the next street; and we know that we are liable to the grossest impositions. We hurry therefore sometimes by them, and shut our ears to their importunate demands. We give no more than we



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Of the direction of our charity.

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can help giving without doing actual violence to our feelings. Our charity is in some degree forced, and like forced charity, it leaves no satisfactory impression on the mind, and cannot therefore have any very beneficial and improving effect on the heart and affections.

But it is far otherwise with that voluntary and active charity, which makes itself acquainted with the objects which it relieves; which seems to feel, and to be proud of the bond that unites the rich with the poor; which enters into their houses, informs itself not only of their wants, but of their habits and dispositions; checks the hopes of clamorous and obtrusive poverty, with no other recommendation but rags; and encourages with adequate relief the silent and retiring sufferer, laboring under unmerited difficulties. This mode of exercising our charity presents a very different picture from that of any other; and its contrast with the common mode of parish relief cannot be better described than in the words of Mr. Townsend, in the conclusion of his admirable dissertation on the Poor Laws. “Nothing in nature can be  
“more disgusting than a parish pay-table, attend-  
“ant upon which in the same objects of misery,  
“are too often found combined, snuff, gin, rags,



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Of the direction of our charity.

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“ vermin, insolence, and abusive language ; nor in  
“ nature can any thing be more beautiful than  
“ the mild complacency of benevolence hastening  
“ to the humble cottage to relieve the wants of in-  
“ dustry and virtue, to feed the hungry, to clothe  
“ the naked, and to soothe the sorrows of the wi-  
“ dow with her tender orphans ; nothing can be  
“ more pleasing, unless it be their sparkling eyes,  
“ their bursting tears, and their uplifted hands, the  
“ artless expressions of unfeigned gratitude for un-  
“ expected favors. Such scenes will frequently  
“ occur whenever men shall have power to dispose  
“ of their own property.”

I conceive it to be almost impossible that any person could be much engaged in such scenes without daily making advances in virtue. No exercise of our affections can have a more evident tendency to purify and exalt the human mind. It is almost exclusively this species of charity that blesseth him that gives ; and, in a general view, it is almost exclusively this species of charity which blesseth him that takes ; at least it may be asserted, that there is hardly any other mode of exercising our charity, in which large sums can be distributed, without a greater chance of producing evil than good.



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Of the direction of our charity.

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The discretionary power of giving or withholding relief, which is, to a certain extent, vested in parish officers and justices, is of a very different nature, and will have a very different effect, from the discrimination which may be exercised by voluntary charity. Every man in this country, under certain circumstances, is entitled by law to parish assistance; and unless his disqualification be clearly proved, has a right to complain if it be withheld. The inquiries necessary to settle this point, and the extent of the relief to be granted, too often produce evasion and lying on the part of the petitioner, and afford an opening to partiality and oppression in the overseer. If the proposed relief be given, it is of course received with unthankfulness; and if it be denied, the party generally thinks himself severely aggrieved, and feels resentment and indignation at his treatment.

In the distribution of voluntary charity, nothing of this kind can take place. The person who receives it is made the proper subject of the pleasurable sensation of gratitude; and those who do not receive it cannot possibly conceive themselves in the slightest degree injured. Every man has a right to do what he will with his own, and cannot,



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Of the direction of our charity.

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in justice be called upon to render a reason why he gives in the one case and abstains from it in the other. This kind of despotic power, essential to voluntary charity, gives the greatest facility to the selection of worthy objects of relief, without being accompanied by any ill consequences; and has further a most beneficial effect from the degree of uncertainty which must necessarily be attached to it. It is in the highest degree important to the general happiness of the poor, that no man should look to charity as a fund on which he may confidently depend. He should be taught that his own exertions, his own industry and foresight, were his only just ground of dependence; that if these failed, assistance in his distresses could only be the subject of rational hope, and that even the foundation of this hope must be in his own good conduct, and the consciousness that he had not involved himself in these difficulties by his indolence or imprudence.

That in the distribution of our charity, we are under a strong moral obligation to inculcate this lesson on the poor by a proper discrimination, is a truth of which I cannot feel a doubt. If all could be completely relieved, and poverty banished from the country, even at the expense of three-fourths



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Of the direction of our charity.

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of the fortunes of the rich, I would be the last to say a single syllable against relieving all, and making the degree of distress alone the measure of our bounty. But as experience has proved, I believe without a single exception, that poverty and misery have always increased in proportion to the quantity of indiscriminate charity, are we not bound to infer, reasoning as we usually do from the laws of nature, that it is an intimation that such a mode of distribution is not the proper office of benevolence?

The laws of nature say, with St. Paul, "If a man will not work, neither shall he eat." They also say, that he is not rashly to trust to Providence. They appear indeed to be constant and uniform for the express purpose of telling him what he is to trust to, and that if he marry without being able to support a family, he must expect severe want. These intimations appear from the constitution of human nature to be absolutely necessary, and to have a strikingly beneficial tendency. If in the direction either of our public or our private charity we say, that though a man will not work, yet he shall eat; and though he marry without being able to support a family, yet his family shall be supported; it is evident that we do



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Of the direction of our charity.

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not merely endeavor to mitigate the partial evils arising from general laws, but regularly and systematically to counteract the obviously beneficial effects of these general laws themselves. And we cannot easily conceive that the Deity should implant any passion in the human breast for such a purpose.

In the great course of human events, the best-founded expectations will sometimes be disappointed; and industry, prudence, and virtue, not only fail of their just reward, but be involved in unmerited calamities. Those who are thus suffering in spite of the best-directed endeavors to avoid it, and from causes which they could not be expected to foresee, are the genuine objects of charity. In relieving these we exercise the appropriate office of benevolence, that of mitigating the partial evils arising from general laws; and in this direction of our charity therefore, we need not apprehend any ill consequences. Such objects ought to be relieved, according to our means, liberally and adequately, even though the worthless were starving.

When indeed this first claim on our benevolence was satisfied, we might then turn our attention to the idle and improvident; but the interests of human happiness most clearly require that the



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Of the direction of our charity.

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relief which we afford them should be scanty. We may perhaps take upon ourselves, with great caution, to mitigate the punishments which they are suffering from the laws of nature, but on no account to remove them entirely. They are deservedly at the bottom in the scale of society; and if we raise them from this situation, we not only palpably defeat the end of benevolence, but commit a most glaring injustice to those who are above them. They should on no account be enabled to command so much of the necessaries of life, as can be obtained by the worst-paid common labor. The brownest bread, with the coarsest and scantiest apparel, is the utmost which they should have the means of purchasing.

It is evident that these reasonings do not apply to those cases of urgent distress arising from disastrous accidents, unconnected with habits of indolence and improvidence. If a man break a leg or an arm, we are not to stop to inquire into his moral character before we lend him our assistance; but in this case we are perfectly consistent, and the touchstone of utility completely justifies our conduct. By affording the most indiscriminate assistance in this way, we are in little danger of



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Of the direction of our charity.

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encouraging people to break their arms and legs. According to the touchstone of utility, the high approbation which Christ gave to the conduct of the good Samaritan, who followed the immediate impulse of his benevolence in relieving a stranger in the urgent distress of an accident, does not, in the smallest degree, contradict the expression of St. Paul, "If a man will not work, neither shall he eat."

We are not however, in any case, to lose a present opportunity of doing good, from the mere supposition that we may possibly meet with a worthier object. In all doubtful cases, it may safely be laid down as our duty to follow the natural impulse of our benevolence; but when in fulfilling our obligation as reasonable beings to attend to the consequences of our actions, we have, from our own experience and that of others, drawn the conclusion, that the exercise of our benevolence in one mode is prejudicial, and in another is beneficial, in its effects, we are certainly bound, as moral agents, to check our natural propensities in the one direction, and to encourage them and acquire the habits of exercising them, in the other.



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## CHAPTER X.

*Different plans of improving the condition of the Poor considered.*

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IN the distribution of our charity, or in any efforts which we may make to better the condition of the lower classes of society, there is another point relating to the main argument of this work, to which we must be particularly attentive. We must on no account do any thing which tends directly to encourage marriage, or to remove, in any regular and systematic manner, that inequality of circumstances which ought always to exist between the single man and the man with a family. The writers who have best understood the principle of population appear to me all to have fallen into very important errors on this point.

Sir James Steuart, who is fully aware of what he calls vicious procreation, and of the misery that attends a redundant population, recommends, notwithstanding, the general establishment of foundling hospitals; the taking of children under certain



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Different plans of improving the

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circumstances, from their parents, and supporting them at the expense of the state; and particularly laments the inequality of condition between the married and single man, so ill-proportioned to their respective wants.<sup>1</sup> He forgets, in these instances, that if, without the encouragement to multiplication, of foundling hospitals, or of public support for the children of some married persons, and under the discouragement of great pecuniary disadvantages on the side of the married man, population be still redundant, which is evinced by the inability of the poor to maintain all their children, it is a clear proof that the funds destined for the maintenance of labor cannot properly support a greater population; and that if further encouragements to multiplication be given and discouragements removed, the result must be, an increase somewhere or other of that vicious procreation which he so justly reprobates.

Mr. Townsend, who in his dissertation on the Poor Laws, has treated this subject with great skill and perspicuity, appears to me to conclude with a proposal which violates the principles on

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<sup>1</sup> Political Economy, vol. i. b. i. c. xii.



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condition of the poor considered.

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which he had reasoned so well. He wishes to make the benefit clubs, or friendly societies, which are now voluntarily established in many parishes, compulsory and universal; and proposes as a regulation that an unmarried man should pay a fourth part of his wages, and a married man with four children, not more than a thirtieth part.<sup>1</sup>

I must first remark, that the moment these subscriptions are made compulsory, they will necessarily operate exactly like a direct tax upon labor, which as Dr. Smith justly states, will always be paid, and in a more expensive manner, by the consumer. The landed interest therefore, would receive no relief from this plan, but would pay the same sum as at present, only in the advanced price of labor and of commodities, instead of in the parish rates. A compulsory subscription of this kind would have almost all the ill effects of the present system of relief, and though altered in name would still possess the essential spirit of the poor laws.

Dean Tucker, in some remarks on a plan of the same kind, proposed by Mr. Pew, observed, that

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<sup>1</sup> Dissertation on the Poor Laws, p. 89. 2d. edit. 1787.



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Different plans of improving the

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after much talk and reflection on the subject, he had come to the conclusion, that they must be voluntary associations, and not compulsory assemblies. A voluntary subscription is like a tax upon a luxury, and does not necessarily raise the price of labor.

It should be recollected also, that in a voluntary association of a small extent, over which each individual member can exercise a superintendance, it is highly probable that the original agreements will all be strictly fulfilled, or if they be not, every man may at least have the redress of withdrawing himself from the club. But in an universal compulsory subscription, which must necessarily become a national concern, there would be no security whatever for the fulfilment of the original agreements; and when the funds failed, which they certainly would do, when all the idle and dissolute were included, instead of some of the most industrious and provident, as at present, a larger subscription would probably be demanded, and no man would have the right to refuse it. The evil would thus go on increasing as the poor rates do now. If indeed the assistance given were always specific, and on no account to be increased,



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condition of the poor considered.

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as in the present voluntary associations, this would certainly be a striking advantage ; but the same advantage might be completely attained by a similar distribution of the sums collected by the parish rates. On the whole therefore, it appears to me that if the friendly societies were made universal and compulsory, it would be merely a different mode of collecting parish rates ; and any particular mode of distribution might be as well adopted upon one system as upon the other.

With regard to the proposal of making single men pay a fourth part of their earnings weekly, and married men with families only a thirtieth part, it would evidently operate as a heavy fine upon bachelors, and a high bounty upon children ; and is therefore directly adverse to the general spirit in which Mr. Townsend's excellent dissertation is written. Before he introduces this proposal, he lays it down as a general principle, that no system for the relief of the poor can be good which does not regulate population by the demand for labor ;<sup>1</sup> but this proposal clearly tends to encourage population without any reference to

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<sup>1</sup> Page 84.



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Different plans of improving the

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the demand for labor, and punishes a young man for his prudence in refraining from marriage, at a time perhaps, when this demand is so small, that the wages of labor are totally inadequate to the support of a family. I should be averse to any compulsory system whatever for the poor; but certainly if single men were compelled to pay a contribution for the future contingencies of the married state, they ought in justice to receive a benefit proportioned to the period of their privation; and the man who had contributed a fourth of his earnings for merely one year, ought not to be put upon a level with him who has contributed this proportion for ten years.

Mr. Arthur Young, in most of his works, appears clearly to understand the principle of population, and is fully aware of the evils which must necessarily result from an increase of people beyond the demand for labor and the means of comfortable subsistence. In his tour through France he has particularly labored this point, and shown most forcibly the misery which results in that country from the excess of population occasioned by the too great division of property. Such an increase he justly calls merely a multiplication of



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condition of the poor considered.

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wretchedness. “ Couples marry and procreate on  
“ the idea, not the reality, of a maintenance; they  
“ increase beyond the demand of towns and ma-  
“ nufactures; and the consequence is, distress,  
“ and numbers dying of diseases arising from in-  
“ sufficient nourishment.”<sup>1</sup>

In another place he quotes a very sensible pas-  
sage from the report of the committee of men-  
dicity, which, alluding to the evils of over-popula-  
tion, concludes thus, “ Il faudroit enfin neces-  
“ sairement que le prix de travail baissat par la  
“ plus grand concurrence de travailleurs, d’ou re-  
“ sulteroit un indigence complete pour ceux qui  
“ ne trouveroient pas de travail, et une subsistence  
“ incomplete pour ceux mêmes aux quels il ne  
“ seriot pas refusé.” And in remarking upon  
this passage, he observes, “ France itself affords  
“ an irrefragable proof of the truth of these senti-  
“ ments; for I am clearly of opinion, from the  
“ observations I made in every province of the  
“ kingdom, that her population is so much be-  
“ yond the proportion of her industry and labor,  
“ that she would be much more powerful and in-

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<sup>1</sup> Travels in France, vol. i. c. xii. p. 408.



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Different plans of improving the

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“ finitely more flourishing, if she had five or six  
“ millions less of inhabitants. From her too great  
“ population she presents in every quarter, such  
“ spectacles of wretchedness as are absolutely in-  
“ consistent with that degree of national felicity  
“ which she was capable of attaining, even under  
“ the old government. A traveller much less at-  
“ tentive than I was to objects of this kind, must  
“ see at every turn most unequivocal signs of dis-  
“ tress. That these should exist, no one can  
“ wonder, who considers the price of labor and of  
“ provisions, and the misery into which a small  
“ rise in the price of wheat throws the lower  
“ classes.”<sup>1</sup>

“ If you would see,” he says, “ a district with  
“ as little distress in it as is consistent with the  
“ political system of the old government of France,  
“ you must assuredly go where there are no little  
“ properties at all. You must visit the great  
“ farms in Beauce, Picardy, part of Normandy,  
“ and Artois, and there you will find no more po-  
“ pulation than what is regularly employed and  
“ regularly paid; and if in such districts you

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<sup>1</sup> Travels in France, vol. i. c. xvii. p. 469.



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condition of the poor considered.

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“ should, contrary to this rule, meet with much  
“ distress, it is twenty to one but that it is in a  
“ parish which has some commons, which tempt  
“ the poor to have cattle—to have property—  
“ and in consequence misery. When you are  
“ engaged in this political tour, finish it by seeing  
“ England, and I will show you a set of peasants  
“ well clothed, well nourished, tolerably drunken  
“ from superfluity, well lodged, and at their ease ;  
“ and yet amongst them, not one in a thousand has  
“ either land or cattle.” A little further on, al-  
luding to encouragements to marriage, he says  
of France ; “ the predominant evil of the kingdom  
“ is the having so great a population, that she can  
“ neither employ nor feed it ; why then encou-  
“ rage marriage ? would you breed more people  
“ because you have more already than you know  
“ what to do with ? You have so great a compe-  
“ tition for food, that your people are starving or  
“ in misery ; and you would encourage the pro-  
“ duction of more to increase that competition.  
“ It may almost be questioned whether the con-  
“ trary policy ought not to be embraced ; whether

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<sup>1</sup> Id. page 471.



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Different plans of improving the

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“ difficulties should not be laid on the marriage  
“ of those who cannot make it appear that they  
“ have the prospect of maintaining the children  
“ that shall be the fruit of it? But why encourage  
“ marriages which are sure to take place in all situ-  
“ ations in which they ought to take place? There  
“ is no instance to be found of plenty of regular  
“ employment being first established where mar-  
“ riages have not followed in a proportionate de-  
“ gree. The policy therefore, at best, is useless,  
“ and may be pernicious.”

After having once so clearly understood the principle of population as to express these and many other sentiments on the subject, equally just and important, it is not a little surprising to find Mr. Young in a pamphlet, entitled, *The Question of Scarcity plainly stated, and Remedies considered*, (*published in 1800,*) observing, that “ the means  
“ which would of all others perhaps tend most  
“ surely to prevent future scarcities so oppressive  
“ to the poor as the present, would be to secure to  
“ every country laborer in the kingdom, that has  
“ three children and upwards, half an acre of land  
“ for potatoes, and grass enough to feed one or



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condition of the poor considered.

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“two cows.’ \* \* \* \* If each had his ample potatoe ground and a cow, the price of wheat would be of little more consequence to them, than it is to their brethren in Ireland.”

“Every one admits the system to be good, but the question is how to enforce it.”

I was by no means aware, that the excellence of the system had been so generally admitted. For myself I strongly protest against being included in the general term of *every one*, as I should consider the adoption of this system, as the most cruel and fatal blow to the happiness of the lower classes of people in this country, that they had ever received.

Mr. Young however goes on to say, that “The magnitude of the object should make us disregard any difficulties but such as are insuperable : none such would probably occur if something like the following means were resorted to.

“I. Where there are common pastures, to give to a laboring man having children, a right to demand an allotment proportioned to the family, to be set out by the parish officers, &c.



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Different plans of improving the

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“ \* \* \* and a cow bought. Such laborer to have  
 “ both for life, paying 40s. a year till the price of  
 “ the cow, &c. was reimbursed : at his death to go  
 “ to the laborer having the most numerous family;  
 “ for life, paying                    shillings a week to the  
 “ widow of his predecessor.

“ II. Laborers thus demanding allotments by  
 “ reason of their families to have land assigned and  
 “ cows bought, till the proportion so allotted  
 “ amounts to one                    of the extent of the  
 “ common.

“ III. In parishes where there are no commons,  
 “ and the quality of the land adequate, every cot-  
 “ tager having                    children, to whose cot-  
 “ tage there is not within a given time land suf-  
 “ ficient for a cow, and half an acre of potatoes,  
 “ assigned at a fair average rent, subject to appeal  
 “ to the sessions, to have a right to demand  
 “                    shillings per week of the parish for  
 “ every child, till such land be assigned ; leaving  
 “ to landlords and tenants the means of doing it.  
 “ Cows to be found by the parish, under an annual  
 “ reimbursement.”



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condition of the poor considered.

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“The great object is, by means of milk and  
“potatoes, to take the mass of the country poor  
“from the consumption of wheat, and to give  
“them substitutes equally wholesome and nourish-  
“ing, and as independent of scarcities, natural and  
“artificial, as the providence of the Almighty  
“will admit.”<sup>1</sup>

Would not this plan operate in the most direct manner, as an encouragement to marriage and bounty on children, which Mr. Young has with so much justice reprobated in his travels in France? and does he seriously think that it would be an eligible thing to feed the mass of the people in this country on milk and potatoes, and make them as independent of the price of corn, and of the demand for labor, as their brethren in Ireland?

The specific cause of the poverty and misery of the lower classes of people in France and Ireland is, that from the extreme subdivision of property in the one country, and the facility of obtaining a cabin and potatoes in the other, a population is brought into existence, which is not demanded by the quantity of capital and employment in the

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<sup>1</sup> Page 79.



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Different plans of improving the

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country; and the consequence of which must therefore necessarily be, as is very justly expressed in the report of the committee of mendicity before mentioned, to lower in general the price of labor by too great competition; from which must result complete indigence to those who cannot find employment, and an incomplete subsistence even to those who can.

The obvious tendency of Mr. Young's plan is, by encouraging marriage and furnishing a cheap food, independent of the price of corn, and of course of the demand for labor, to place the lower classes of people exactly in this situation.

It may perhaps be said, that our poor laws at present regularly encourage marriage and children, by distributing relief in proportion to the size of families; and that this plan, which is proposed as a substitute, would merely do the same thing in a less objectionable manner. But surely, in endeavoring to get rid of the evil of the poor laws, we ought not to retain their most pernicious quality: and Mr. Young must know as well as I do, that the principal reason why poor laws have invariably been found ineffectual in the relief of the poor is, that they tend to encourage a population which is



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condition of the poor considered.

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not regulated by the demand for labor. Mr. Young himself, indeed, expressly takes notice of this effect in England, and observes, that notwithstanding the unrivalled prosperity of her manufactures, “population is sometimes too active, as we see clearly by the dangerous increase of poor’s rates in country villages.”<sup>1</sup>

But the fact is, that Mr. Young’s plan would be incomparably more powerful in encouraging a population beyond the demand for labor, than our present poor laws. A laudable repugnance to the receiving of parish relief, arising partly from a spirit of independence not yet extinct, and partly from the disagreeable mode in which the relief is given, undoubtedly deters many from marrying with a certainty of falling on the parish; and the proportion of births and marriages to the whole population, which has before been noticed, clearly proves that the poor laws do not encourage marriage so much as might be expected from theory. But the case would be very different if, when a

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<sup>1</sup> Travels in France, vol. i. c. xvii. p. 470.



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Different plans of improving the

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laborer had an early marriage in contemplation, the terrific forms of workhouses and parish officers which might disturb his resolution, were to be exchanged for the fascinating visions of land and cows. If the love of property, as Mr. Young has repeatedly said, will make a man do much, it would be rather strange if it would not make him marry, an action to which it appears from experience, that he is by no means disinclined.

The population which would be thus called into being, would be supported by the extended cultivation of potatoes, and would of course go on without any reference to the demand for labor. In the present state of things, notwithstanding the flourishing condition of our manufactures, and the numerous checks to our population, there is no practical problem so difficult as to find employment for the poor; but this difficulty would evidently be aggravated a hundred fold, under the circumstances here supposed.

In Ireland, or in any other country, where the common food is potatoes, and every man who wishes to marry may obtain a piece of ground sufficient when planted with this root, to support



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condition of the poor considered.

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a family, prizes may be given till the treasury is exhausted for essays on the best means of employing the poor ; but till some stop to the progress of population naturally arising from this state of things takes place, the object in view is really a physical impossibility.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Young has intimated, that if the people were fed upon milk and potatoes, they would be more independent of scarcities than at present ; but why this should be the case I really cannot comprehend. Undoubtedly people who live upon potatoes will not be much affected by a scarcity of wheat ; but is there any contradiction in the supposition of a failure in the crops of potatoes ? I believe it is generally understood that they are more liable to suffer damage during the winter

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Crumpe's prize essay on the best means of finding employment for the people, is an excellent treatise, and contains much valuable information ; but till the capital of the country is better proportioned to its population, it is perfectly chimerical to expect success in any project of the kind. I am also strongly disposed to believe that the indolent and turbulent habits of the lower Irish can never be corrected, while the potatoe system enables them to increase so much beyond the regular demand for labor.



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Different plans of improving the

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than grain. From the much greater quantity of food yielded by a given piece of land, when planted with potatoes, than under any other kind of cultivation, it would naturally happen, that for some time after the introduction of this root as the general food of the lower classes of people, a greater quantity would be grown than was demanded, and they would live in plenty. Mr. Young, in his travels through France, observes, that, “ In districts which contain immense quantities of waste land of a certain degree of fertility, as in the roots of the Pyrenees, belonging to communities ready to sell them, economy and industry, animated with the views of settling and marrying, flourish greatly ; in such neighborhoods something like an American increase takes place, and if the land be cheap little distress is found. But as procreation goes on rapidly under such circumstances, the least check to subsistence is attended with great misery ; as wastes becoming dearer, or the best portions being sold, or difficulties arising in the acquisition ; all which circumstances I met with in those mountains. The moment that any im-



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condition of the poor considered.

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“pediment happens the distress of such people  
“will be proportioned to the activity and vigor  
“which had animated population.”<sup>1</sup>

This description will apply exactly to what would take place in this country, on the distribution of small portions of land to the common people, and the introduction of potatoes as their general food. For a time the change might appear beneficial, and of course the idea of property would make it, at first, highly acceptable to the poor; but as Mr. Young in another place says, “You  
“presently arrive at the limit beyond which, the  
“earth, cultivate it as you please, will feed no more  
“mouths; yet those simple manners which insti-  
“gate to marriage still continue; what then is the  
“consequence but the most dreadful misery ima-  
“ginable.”<sup>2</sup>

When the commons were all divided and difficulties began to occur in procuring potatoe grounds the habit of early marriages which had been introduced, would occasion the most complicated distress; and when from the increasing population,

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<sup>1</sup> Travels in France, vol. i. c. xvii. p. 409.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.



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Different plans of improving the

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and diminishing sources of subsistence, the average growth of potatoes was not more than the average consumption, a scarcity of potatoes would be, in every respect, as probable as a scarcity of wheat at present, and when it did arrive, it would be beyond all comparison more dreadful.

When the common people of a country live principally upon the dearest grain, as they do in England on wheat, they have great resources in a scarcity; and barley, oats, rice, cheap soups, and potatoes, all present themselves as less expensive, yet at the same time wholesome means of nourishment; but when their habitual food is the lowest in this scale, they appear to be absolutely without resource, except in the bark of trees, like the poor Swedes; and a great portion of them must necessarily be starved. Wheaten bread, roast beef, and turbot, which might not fail at the same time, are indeed in themselves unexceptionable substitutes for potatoes, and would probably be accepted as such without murmuring by the common people; but the misfortune is, that a large population which had been habitually supported by milk and potatoes, would find it difficult to obtain these substitutes in sufficient quantities, even if the whole



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condition of the poor considered.

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benevolence of the kingdom were called into action for the purpose.

The wages of labor will always be regulated by the proportion of the supply to the demand. And as, upon the potatoe system, a supply more than adequate to the demand would very soon take place, and this supply might be continued at a very cheap rate, on account of the cheapness of the food which would furnish it, the common price of labor would soon be regulated principally by the price of potatoes instead of the price of wheat, as at present; and the rags and wretched cabins of Ireland would follow of course.

When the demand for labor occasionally exceeds the supply, and wages are regulated by the price of the dearest grain, they will generally be such as to yield something besides mere food, and the common people may be able to obtain decent houses and decent clothing. If the contrast between the state of the French and English laborers which Mr. Young has drawn, be in any degree near the truth, the advantage on the side of England has been occasioned precisely and exclusively by these two circumstances; and if by the adop-



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Different plans of improving the

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tion of milk and potatoes as the general food of the common people, these circumstances were totally altered, so as to make the supply of labor constantly in a great excess above the demand for it, and regulate wages by the price of the cheapest food, the advantage would be immediately lost, and no efforts of benevolence could prevent the most general and abject poverty.

Upon the same principle it would by no means be eligible that the cheap soups of count Rumford should be adopted as the general food of the common people. They are excellent inventions for public institutions, and as occasional resources; but if they were once universally adopted by the poor, it would be impossible to prevent the price of labor from being regulated by them; and the laborer, though at first he might have more to spare for other expenses, besides food, would ultimately have much less to spare than before.

The desirable thing, with a view to the happiness of the common people, seems to be that their habitual food should be dear, and their wages regulated by it; but that in a scarcity, or other occasional distress, the cheaper food should be readily



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condition of the poor considered.

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and cheerfully adopted.<sup>1</sup> With a view of rendering this transition easier, and at the same time of making a useful distinction between those who are dependent on parish relief, and those who are not, I should think that one plan which Mr. Young proposes would be extremely eligible. This is “to pass an act prohibiting relief, so far  
“as subsistence is concerned, in any other man-  
“ner than by potatoes, rice, and soup, not merely  
“as a measure of the moment, but permanent-  
“ly.”<sup>2</sup> I do not think that this plan would necessarily introduce these articles as the common food of the lower classes; and if it merely made the transition to them in periods of distress easier, and at the same time, drew a more marked line than at present, between dependence and independence, it would have a very beneficial effect.

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<sup>1</sup> It is certainly to be wished that every cottage in England should have a garden to it, well stocked with vegetables. A little variety of food is in every point of view highly useful. Potatoes are undoubtedly a most valuable assistance, though I should be very sorry ever to see them the principal dependence of our laborers.

<sup>2</sup> Question of Scarcity, &c. p. 80. This might be done, at least with regard to workhouses. In assisting the poor at their own homes, it might be subject to some practical difficulties.



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Different plans of improving the

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As it is acknowledged that the introduction of milk and potatoes, or of cheap soups, as the general food of the lower classes of people, would lower the price of labor, perhaps some cold politician might propose to adopt the system, with a view of underselling foreigners in the markets of Europe. I should not envy the feelings which could suggest such a proposal. I really cannot conceive any thing much more detestable, than the idea of knowingly condemning the laborers of this country to the rags and wretched cabins of Ireland, for the purpose of selling a few more broad cloths and calicoes. <sup>1</sup> The wealth and power of nations

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<sup>1</sup> In this observation I have not the least idea of alluding to Mr. Young, who, I firmly believe, ardently wishes to meliorate the condition of the lower classes of people, though I do not think that his plan would effect the object in view. He either did not see those consequences which I apprehend from it; or he has a better opinion of the happiness of the common people in Ireland than I have. In his Irish tour he seemed much struck with the plenty of potatoes which they possessed, and the absence of all apprehension of want. Had he travelled in 1800 and 1801, his impressions would by all accounts have been very different. From the facility which has hitherto prevailed in Ireland of procuring potatoe grounds, scarcities have certainly been rare, and all the effects of the



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condition of the poor considered.

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are, after all, only desirable as they contribute to happiness. In this point of view, I should be very far from undervaluing them, considering them, in general, as absolutely necessary means to attain the end; but if any particular case should

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system have not yet been felt, though certainly enough to make it appear very far from desirable.

Mr. Young has since pursued his idea more in detail, in a pamphlet entitled, *An Inquiry into the Propriety of applying Wastes to the better Maintenance and Support of the Poor*. But the impression on my mind is still the same; and it appears to me calculated to assimilate the condition of the laborers of this country to that of the lower classes of the Irish. Mr. Young seems, in a most unaccountable manner, to have forgotten all his general principles on this subject. He has treated the question of a provision for the poor, as if it was merely, How to provide in the cheapest and best manner for a *given number* of people? If this had been the sole question, it would never have taken so many hundred years to resolve. But the real question is, How to provide for those who are in want, in such a manner, as to prevent a continual accumulation of their numbers? and it will readily occur to the reader, that a plan of giving them land and cows cannot promise much success in this respect. If, after all the commons had been divided, the poor laws were still to continue in force, no good reason can be assigned why the rates should not in a few years be as high as they are at present, independently of all that had been expended in the purchase of land and stock.



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Different plans of improving the, &c.

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occur, in which they appeared to be in direct opposition to each other, we cannot rationally doubt which ought to be postponed.

Fortunately however, even on the narrowest political principles, the adoption of such a system would not answer. It has always been observed, that those who work chiefly on their own property, work very indolently and unwillingly when employed for others; and it must necessarily happen, when, from the general adoption of a very cheap food, the population of a country increases considerably beyond the demand for labor, that habits of idleness and turbulence will be generated, most peculiarly unfavorable to a flourishing state of manufactures. In spite of the cheapness of labor in Ireland, there are few manufactures which can be prepared in that country for foreign sale so cheap as in England: and this is in great measure owing to the want of those industrious habits which can only be produced by regular employment.



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## CHAPTER XI.

*Of the necessity of general principles on this subject.*

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IT has been observed by Hume, that of all sciences, there is none where first appearances are more deceitful than in politics.<sup>1</sup> The remark is undoubtedly very just, and is most peculiarly applicable to that department of the science which relates to the modes of improving the condition of the lower classes of society.

We are continually hearing declamations against theory and theorists, by men who pride themselves upon the distinction of being practical. It must be acknowledged that bad theories are very bad things, and the authors of them useless, and sometimes pernicious members of society. But these advocates of practice do not seem to be aware, that they themselves very often come under this

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<sup>1</sup> Essay xi. vol. i. p. 431. 8vo.



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Of the necessity of general

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description, and that a great part of them may be classed among the most mischievous theorists of their time. When a man faithfully relates any facts which have come within the scope of his own observation, however confined it may have been, he undoubtedly adds to the sum of general knowledge, and confers a benefit on society. But when from this confined experience, from the management of his own little farm, or the details of the work-house in his neighborhood, he draws a general inference, as is very frequently the case, he then at once erects himself into a theorist, and is the more dangerous, because experience being the only just foundation for theory, people are often caught merely by the sound of the word, and do not stop to make the distinction between that partial experience which, on such subjects, is no foundation whatever for a just theory, and that general experience, on which alone a just theory can be founded.

There are perhaps few subjects on which human ingenuity has been more exerted, than in the endeavor to meliorate the condition of the poor; and there is certainly no subject in which it has so completely failed. The question between the theo-



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principles on this subject.

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rist who calls himself practical, and the genuine theorist is, whether this should prompt us to look into all the holes and corners of work-houses, and content ourselves with mulcting the parish officers for their waste of cheese parings and candle ends, and with distributing more soups and popatoes; or to recur to general principles which show us at once the cause of the failure, and prove that the system has been from the beginning radically erroneous. There is no subject to which general principles have been so seldom applied; and yet in the whole compass of human knowledge, I doubt, if there be one in which it is so dangerous to lose sight of them; because the partial and immediate effects of a particular mode of giving assistance are so often directly opposite to the general and permanent effects.

It has been observed in particular districts, where cottagers are possessed of small pieces of land, and are in the habit of keeping cows, that during the late scarcities some of them were able to support themselves without parish assistance, and others with comparatively little.'

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' See an Inquiry into the State of Cottagers in the Counties of Lincoln and Rutland by Robert Gourlay. *Annals of Agriculture*, vol. xxxvii. p. 514.



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Of the necessity of general

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According to the partial view in which this subject has been always contemplated, a general inference has been drawn from such instances, that if we could place all our laborers in a similar situation, they would all be equally comfortable, and equally independent of the parish. This is an inference however, that by no means follows. The advantage which cottagers who at present keep cows enjoy, arises in a great measure from its being peculiar, and would be considerably diminished if it were made general.

A farmer or gentleman has, we will suppose, a certain number of cottages on his farm. Being a liberal man, and liking to see all the people about him comfortable, he may join a piece of land to his cottages sufficient to keep one or two cows, and give besides high wages. His laborers will of course live in plenty, and be able to rear up large families; but his farm may not require many hands; and though he may choose to pay those that he employs well, he will not probably wish to have more laborers on his land than his work requires. He does not therefore build more houses; and the children of the laborers whom he employs must evidently emigrate and settle in other countries. While such a system continues







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Of the necessity of general

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dual years was scarce ; yet if the system were universal, there can be no reason assigned why they would not be subject to suffer as much from a scarcity of grass and a mortality among cows,<sup>1</sup> as our common laborers do now from a scarcity of wheat. We should be extremely cautious therefore of trusting to such appearances, and of drawing a general inference from this kind of partial experience.

The main principle on which the society for increasing the comforts, and bettering the condition of the poor, professes to proceed is excellent. To give effect to that masterspring of industry, the desire of bettering our condition, is the true mode of improving the state of the lower classes ; and we may safely agree with Mr. Bernard, in

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<sup>1</sup> At present the loss of a cow which must now and then happen, is generally remedied by a petition and subscription, and as the event is considered as a most serious misfortune to a laborer, these petitions are for the most part attended to ; but if the cow system were universal, losses would occur so frequently that they could not possibly be repaired in the same way, and families would be continually dropping from comparative plenty into want.

<sup>2</sup> Preface to vol. ii. of the Reports.



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principles on this subject.

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one of his able prefaces, that whatever encourages and promotes habits of industry, prudence, foresight, virtue, and cleanliness, among the poor, is beneficial to them and to the country ; and whatever removes or diminishes the incitements to any of these qualities, is detrimental to the state, and pernicious to the individual.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Bernard indeed himself seems in general to be fully aware of the difficulties which the society has to contend with in the accomplishment of its object. But still it appears to be in some danger of falling into the error before alluded to, of drawing general inferences from insufficient experience. Without adverting to the plans respecting cheaper foods and parish shops, recommended by individuals, the beneficial effects of which depend entirely upon their being peculiar to certain families or certain parishes, and would be lost if they were general, by lowering the wages of labor ; I shall only notice one observation of a more comprehensive nature, which occurs in the preface to the second volume of the Reports. It is there remark-

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<sup>1</sup> Preface to vol. iii. of the Reports.



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Of the necessity of general

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ed, that the experience of the society seemed to warrant the conclusion, that the best mode of relieving the poor was, by assisting them at their own homes, and placing out their children as soon as possible in different employments, apprenticeships, &c. I really believe that this is the best, and it is certainly the most agreeable mode, in which occasional and discriminate assistance can be given. But it is evident that it must be done with caution, and cannot be adopted as a general principle, and made the foundation of universal practice. It is open exactly to the same objection as the cow system which has just been noticed, and that part of the act of the 43d of Elizabeth which directs the overseers to employ and provide for the children of the poor. A particular parish, where all the children, as soon as they were of a proper age, were taken from their parents and placed out in proper situations, might be very comfortable; but if the system were general, and the poor saw that all their children would be thus provided for, every employment would presently be overstocked with hands, and the consequence need not be again repeated.

Nothing can be more clear than that it is within



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principles on this subject.

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the power of money, and the exertions of the rich, adequately to relieve a particular family, a particular parish, and even a particular district. But it will be equally clear, if we reflect a moment on the subject, that it is totally out of their power to relieve the whole country in the same way; at least without providing a regular vent for the overflowing numbers in emigration, or without the prevalence of a particular virtue among the poor, which the distribution of this assistance tends obviously to discourage.

Even industry itself is, in this respect, not very different from money. A man who possesses a certain portion of it, above what is usually possessed by his neighbors, will, in the actual state of things, be almost sure of a competent livelihood; but if all his neighbors were to become at once as industrious as himself, the absolute portion of industry which he before possessed would no longer be a security against want. Hume fell into a very great error, when he asserted, that “almost all the moral, as well as natural evils of human life, arise from idleness;” and for the cure of these ills, required only that the whole species should possess naturally an equal diligence with that which



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Of the necessity of general

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many individuals are able to attain by habit and reflection.<sup>1</sup> It is evident that this given degree of industry possessed by the whole species, if not combined with another virtue of which he takes no notice, would totally fail of rescuing society from want and misery, and would scarcely remove a single moral or physical evil of all those to which he alludes.

I am aware of an objection which will, with great appearance of justice, be urged against the general tenor of these reasonings. It will be said, that to argue thus, is at once to object to every mode of assisting the poor, as it is impossible, in the nature of things, to assist people individually, without altering their relative situation in society, and proportionally depressing others; and that as those who have families, are the persons naturally most subject to distress, and as we are certainly not called upon to assist those who do not want our aid, we must necessarily, if we act at all, relieve those who have children, and thus encourage marriage and population.

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<sup>1</sup> Dialogues on Natural Religion, Part xi. p. 212.



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principles on this subject.

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I have already observed however, and I here repeat it again, that the general principles on these subjects ought not to be pushed too far, though they should always be kept in view; and that many cases may occur in which the good resulting from the relief of the present distress, may more than overbalance the evil to be apprehended from the remote consequence.

All relief in instances of distress, not arising from idle and improvident habits, clearly comes under this description; and in general it may be observed, that it is only that kind of *systematic* and *certain* relief, on which the poor can confidently depend, whatever may be their conduct, that violates general principles in such a manner as to make it clear that the general consequence is worse than the particular evil.

Independently of this discriminate and occasional assistance, the beneficial effects of which I have fully allowed in a preceding chapter, I have before endeavored to show, that much might be expected from a better and more general system of education. Every thing that can be done in this way, has indeed a very peculiar value; because educa-



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Of the necessity of general

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tion is one of those advantages, which not only all may share without interfering with each other, but the raising of one person may actually contribute to the raising of others. If, for instance, a man by education acquires that decent kind of pride, and those juster habits of thinking, which will prevent him from burdening society with a family of children which he cannot support, his conduct, as far as an individual instance can go, tends evidently to improve the condition of his fellow laborers; and a contrary conduct from ignorance, would tend as evidently to depress it.

I cannot help thinking also, that something might be done towards bettering the situation of the poor by a general improvement of their cottages; if care were taken, at the same time, not to make them so large as to allow of two families settling in them; and not to increase their number faster than the demand for labor required. One of the most salutary, and least pernicious checks to the frequency of early marriages in this country, is the difficulty of procuring a cottage, and the laudable habits which prompt a laborer rather to defer his marriage some years in the expectation of



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principles on this subject.

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a vacancy, than to content himself with a wretched mud cabin, like those in Ireland.<sup>1</sup>

Even the cow system, upon a more confined plan, might not be open to objection. With any view of making it a substitute for the Poor Laws, and of giving laborers a right to demand land and cows in proportion to their families; or of taking the common people from the consumption of wheat, and feeding them on milk and potatoes, it appears to me, I confess, truly preposterous: but if it were so ordered as merely to provide a comfortable situation for the better and more industrious class of laborers, and to supply at the same time, a very important want among the poor in general, that of milk for their children, I think that it would be extremely beneficial, and might be

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<sup>1</sup> Perhaps, however, this is not often left to his choice, on account of the fear which every parish has of increasing its poor. There are many ways by which our poor laws operate in counteracting their first obvious tendency to increase population, and this is one of them. I have little doubt that it is almost exclusively owing to these counteracting causes, that we have been able to persevere in this system so long, and that the condition of the poor has not been so much injured by it as might have been expected.



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Of the necessity of general

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made a very powerful incitement to habits of industry, economy, and prudence. With this view however, it is evident, that only a certain portion of the laborers in each parish could be embraced in the plan; that good conduct, and not mere distress, should have the most valid claim to preference; that too much attention should not be paid to the number of children; and that universally, those who had saved money enough for the purchase of a cow, should be preferred, to those who required to be furnished with one by the parish.<sup>1</sup>

To facilitate the saving of small sums of money for this purpose, and encourage young laborers to economize their earnings with a view to a provision for marriage, it might be extremely useful to have country banks, where the smallest sums would be received, and a fair interest paid for them. At present, the few laborers who save a little money,

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<sup>1</sup> The act of Elizabeth which prohibited the building of cottages, unless four acres of land were annexed to them, is probably impracticable in a manufacturing country like England; but upon this principle, certainly the greatest part of the poor might possess land; because the difficulty of procuring such cottages would always operate as a powerful check to their increase. The effect of such a plan would be very different from that of Mr. Young.



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principles on the subject.

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are often greatly at a loss to know what to do with it; and under such circumstances we cannot be much surprised that it should sometimes be ill employed, and last but a short time. It would probably be essential to the success of any plan of this kind, that the laborer should be able to draw out his money whenever he wanted it, and have the most perfect liberty of disposing of it in every respect as he pleased. Though we may regret, that money so hardly earned should sometimes be spent to little purpose; yet it seems to be a case in which we have no right to interfere; nor if we had, would it in a general view, be advantageous; because the knowledge of possessing this liberty would be of more use in encouraging the practice of saving, than any restriction of it, in preventing the misuse of money so saved.

One should undoubtedly be extremely unwilling not to make as much use as possible of that known stimulus to industry and economy, the desire of, and the attachment to property: but it should be recollected, that the good effects of this stimulus show themselves principally when this property is to be procured, or preserved, by personal exertions; and that they are by no means so general



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Of the necessity of general

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under other circumstances. If any idle man with a family could demand and obtain a cow and some land, I should expect to see both very often neglected.

It has been observed that those cottagers who keep cows, are more industrious and more regular in their conduct, than those who do not. This is probably true, and what might naturally be expected; but the inference that the way to make all people industrious is to give them cows, may by no means be quite so certain. Most of those who keep cows at present have purchased them with the fruits of their own industry. It is therefore more just to say, that their industry has given them a cow, than that a cow has given them their industry; though I would by no means be understood to imply, that the sudden possession of property never generates industrious habits.

The practical good effects which have been already experienced, from cottagers keeping cows,<sup>1</sup> arise in fact from the system being nearly such as

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<sup>1</sup> Inquiry into the State of Cottagers in the counties of Lincoln and Rutland, by Robert Gourlay. *Annals of Agriculture*, vol. xxxvii. p. 514.



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principles on this subject.

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the confined plan which I have mentioned. In the districts where cottagers of this description most abound, they do not bear a very large proportion to the population of the whole parish; they consist in general of the better sort of laborers, who have been able to purchase their own cows; and the peculiar comforts of their situation arise more from the relative than the positive advantages which they possess.

From observing therefore their industry and comforts, we should be very cautious of inferring that we could give the same industry and comforts to all the lower classes of people, by giving them the same possessions. There is nothing that has given rise to such a cloud of errors, as a confusion between relative and positive, and between cause and effect.

It may be said however, that any plan of generally improving the cottages of the poor, or of enabling more of them to keep cows, would evidently give them the power of rearing a greater number of children, and by thus encouraging population, violate the principles which I have endeavored to establish. But if I have been successful in making the reader comprehend the principal bent of this work, he will be aware that the



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Of the necessity of general

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precise reason why I think that more children ought not to be born than the country can support is, that the greatest possible number of those that are born may be supported. We cannot, in the nature of things, assist the poor in any way, without enabling them to rear up to manhood a greater number of their children. But this is, of all other things, the most desirable, both with regard to individuals and the public. Every loss of a child from the consequences of poverty, must evidently be preceded and accompanied by great misery to individuals; and in a public view, every child that dies under ten years of age is a loss to the nation of all that had been expended in its subsistence till that period. Consequently, in every point of view, a decrease of mortality at all ages is what we ought to aim at. We cannot however effect this object, without first crowding the population in some degree by making more children grow up to manhood; but we shall do no harm in this respect, if, at the same time, we can impress these children with the idea that to possess the same advantages as their parents, they must defer marriage till they have a fair prospect of being able to maintain a family. And it must be can-



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principles on this subject.

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didly confessed that if we cannot do this, all our former efforts will have been thrown away. It is not in the nature of things that any permanent and general improvement in the condition of the poor can be effected, without an increase in the preventive check; and unless this take place, either with or without our efforts, every thing that is done for the poor must be temporary and partial: a diminution of mortality at present, will be balanced by an increased mortality in future; and the improvement of their condition in one place, will proportionably depress it in another. This is a truth so important and so little understood, that it can scarcely be too often insisted on. The generality of charitable people and of the encouragers of marriage, are not in the smallest degree aware of the real effects of what they do.

Dr. Paley, in a chapter on population, provision, &c. in his *Moral Philosophy*, observes, that the condition most favorable to the population of a country, and at the same time to its general happiness is, "that of a laborious frugal people ministering to the demands of an opulent luxurious nation."<sup>1</sup> Such a form of society has not, it

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<sup>1</sup> Vol. ii. c. xi. p. 359. From a passage in Dr. Paley's



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Of the necessity of general

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must be confessed, an inviting aspect. Nothing but the conviction of its being absolutely necessary, could reconcile us to the idea of ten millions of people condemned to incessant toil, and to the privation of every thing but absolute necessaries, in order to minister to the excessive luxuries of the other million. But the fact is, that such a form of society is by no means necessary. It is by no means necessary that the rich should be excessively luxurious, in order to support the manufactures of a country, or that the poor should be deprived of all luxuries, in order to make them sufficiently numerous. The best and in every point of view the most advantageous manufactures in this country, are those which are consumed by the great body of the people. The manufactures

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late work on Natural Theology, I am inclined to think that subsequent reflection has induced him to modify some of his former ideas on the subject of population. He has stated most justly (chap. xxv. p. 539.) that mankind will in every country breed up to a certain point of distress. If this be allowed, that country will evidently be the happiest, where the degree of distress at this point is the least, and consequently, if the spread of luxury by producing the check sooner, tend to diminish this degree of distress, it is certainly desirable.



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principles on this subject.

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which are confined exclusively to the rich, are not only trivial on account of the comparative smallness of their quantity ; but are further liable to the great disadvantage of producing much occasional misery among those employed in them, from changes of fashion. It is the spread of luxury therefore among the mass of the people, and not an excess of it in a few, that seems to be most advantageous, both with regard to national wealth and national happiness ; and what Dr. Paley considers as the true evil and proper danger of luxury, I should be disposed to consider as its true good and peculiar advantage. If indeed, it be allowed that in every society, not in the state of a new colony, some powerful check to population must prevail ; and if it be observed that a taste for the comforts and conveniencies of life will prevent people from marrying under the certainty of being deprived of these advantages ; it must be allowed that we can hardly expect to find any check to marriage so little prejudicial to the happiness and virtue of society as the general prevalence of such a taste ; and consequently that the spread of luxury<sup>1</sup> in

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<sup>1</sup> In a note to the tenth chapter of the last book, I have  
*vol. ii.*



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Of the necessity of general

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this sense of the term, is particularly desirable ; and one of the best means of raising that standard of wretchedness alluded to in the eighth chapter of this book.

It has been generally found that the middle parts of society are most favorable to virtuous and industrious habits, and to the growth of all kinds of talents. But it is evident that all cannot be in the middle. Superior and inferior parts are in the nature of things absolutely necessary ; and not only necessary, but strikingly beneficial. If no man could hope to rise, or fear to fall in society ; if industry did not bring with it its reward, and indolence its punishment ; we could not expect to see that animated activity in bettering our condition, which now forms the master-spring of public prosperity. But in contemplating the different states of Europe, we observe a very considerable difference in the relative proportions of the

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mentioned the point at which alone, it is probable that luxury becomes really prejudicial to a country. But this point does not depend upon the spread of luxury as diminishing the frequency of marriage among the poor, but upon the proportion which those employed in preparing or procuring luxuries, bear to the funds which are to support them.



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principles on this subject.

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superior, the middle and the inferior parts; and from the effect of these differences, it seems probable that our best grounded expectations of an increase in the happiness of the mass of human society, are founded in the prospect of an increase in the relative proportions of the middle parts. And if the lower classes of people had acquired the habit of proportioning the supplies of labor to a stationary or even decreasing demand, without an increase of misery and mortality as at present, we might even venture to indulge a hope, that at some future period the processes for abridging human labor, the progress of which has of late years been so rapid, might ultimately supply all the wants of the most wealthy society with less personal labor than at present; and if they did not diminish the severity of individual exertion, might, at least, diminish the number of those employed in severe toil. If the lowest classes of society were thus diminished, and the middle classes increased, each laborer might indulge a more rational hope of rising by diligence and exertion into a better station; the rewards of industry and virtue would be increased in number; the lottery of human society would appear to consist of fewer blanks and more



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Of the necessity of general

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prizes; and the sum of social happiness would be evidently augmented.

To indulge however in any distant views of this kind, unaccompanied by the evils usually attendant on a stationary or decreasing demand for labor, we must suppose the general prevalence of such prudential habits among the poor, as would prevent them from marrying, when the actual price of labor, joined to what they might have saved in their single state, would not give them the prospect of being able to support a wife and six children without assistance. And in every point of view, such a degree of prudential restraint would be extremely beneficial; and would produce a very striking melioration in the condition of the lower classes of people.

It may be said perhaps, that even this degree of prudence might not always avail, as when a man marries he cannot tell what number of children he shall have, and many have more than six. This is certainly true; and in this case I do not think that any evil would result from making a certain allowance to every child above this number; not with a view of rewarding a man for his large family, but merely, of relieving him from a species



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principles on this subject.

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of distress, which it would be unreasonable in us to expect that he should calculate upon. And with this view, the relief should be merely such as to place him exactly in the same situation as if he had had six children. Montesquieu disapproves of an edict of Lewis the fourteenth, which gave certain pensions to those who had ten and twelve children, as being of no use in encouraging population.<sup>1</sup> For the very reason that he disapproves of it, I should think that some law of the kind might be adopted without danger, and might relieve particular individuals from a very pressing and unlooked-for distress, without operating in any respect as an encouragement to marriage.

If at some future period, any approach should be made towards the more general prevalence of prudential habits with respect to marriage among the poor, from which alone any permanent and general improvement of their condition can arise; I do not think that the narrowest politician need be alarmed at it, from the fear of its occasioning such an advance in the price of labor as will enable our commercial competitors to undersell us in

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<sup>1</sup> *Esprit des Loix*, liv. xxiii. c. xxvii.



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foreign markets. There are four circumstances that might be expected to accompany it, which would probably either prevent or fully counter-balance any effect of this kind. These are, 1st, The more equable and lower price of provisions, from the demand being less frequently above the supply. 2dly, The removal of that heavy burden on agriculture, and that great addition to the present wages of labor, the poors rates. 3dly, The national saving of a great part of that sum which is expended without return, in the support of those children who die prematurely, from the consequences of poverty. And, lastly, The more general prevalence of economical and industrious habits, particularly among unmarried men, which would prevent that indolence, drunkenness, and waste of labor, which at present are too frequently a consequence of high wages.



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## CHAPTER XII.

*Of our rational expectations respecting the future  
improvement of Society.*

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IN taking a general and concluding view of our rational expectations respecting the mitigation of the evils arising from the principle of population, it may be observed, that though the increase of population in a geometrical ratio be incontrovertible, and the period of doubling, when unchecked, has been uniformly stated in this work, rather below than above the truth; yet there are some natural consequences of the progress of society and civilization, which necessarily repress its full effects. These are, more particularly, great towns and manufactures, in which we can scarcely hope, and certainly not expect to see any very material change. It is undoubtedly our duty, and in every point of view highly desirable, to make towns and manufacturing employments as little injurious as possible to the duration of human life; but, after all our efforts, it is probable



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Of our rational expectations

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that they will always remain less healthy than country situations and country employments; and consequently operating as positive checks, will diminish in some degree the necessity of the preventive check.

In every old state it is observed, that a considerable number of grown up people remain for a time unmarried. The duty of practising the common and acknowledged rules of morality during this period, has never been controverted in theory, however it may have been opposed in practice. This branch of the duty of moral restraint has scarcely been touched by the reasonings of this work. It rests on the same foundation as before, neither stronger nor weaker. And knowing how incompletely this duty has hitherto been fulfilled, it would certainly be visionary to expect any very material change for the better, in future.

The part which has been affected by the reasonings of this work is not therefore, that which relates to our conduct during the period of celibacy, but to the duty of extending this period till we have a prospect of being able to maintain our children. And it is by no means visionary to in-



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dulge a hope of some favorable change in this respect; because it is found by experience, that the prevalence of this kind of prudential restraint is extremely different in different countries, and in the same countries at different periods.

It cannot be doubted, that throughout Europe in general, and most particularly in the northern states, a decided change has taken place in the operation of this prudential restraint, since the prevalence of those warlike and enterprising habits which destroyed so many people. In later times the gradual diminution and almost total extinction of the plagues which so frequently visited Europe in the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries, produced a change of the same kind. And in this country it is not to be doubted that the proportion of marriages has become smaller since the improvement of our towns, the less frequent returns of epidemics, and the adoption of habits of greater cleanliness. During the late scarcities it appears that the number of marriages diminished; and the same motives which prevented many people from marrying during such a period, would operate precisely in the same way, if, in future, the additional number of children reared

*vol.* ii.                      r r r



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Of our rational expectations

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to manhood from the introduction of the cow-pox, were to be such as to crowd all employments, lower the price of labor, and make it more difficult to support a family.

Universally, the practice of mankind on the subject of marriage has been much superior to their theories ; and however frequent may have been the declamations on the duty of entering into this state, and the advantage of early unions to prevent vice, each individual has practically found it necessary to consider of the means of supporting a family, before he ventured to take so important a step. That great *vis medicatrix reipublicæ*, the desire of bettering our condition, and the fear of making it worse, has been constantly in action, and has been constantly directing people into the right road in spite of all the declamations which tended to lead them aside. Owing to this powerful spring of health in every state, which is nothing more than an inference from the general course of the laws of nature irresistibly forced on each man's attention, the prudential check to marriage has increased in Europe ; and it cannot be unreasonable to conclude that it will still make further advances. If this take place, without any marked



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and decided increase of a vicious intercourse with the sex, the happiness of society will evidently be promoted by it ; and with regard to the danger of such increase, it is consolatory to remark, that those countries in Europe where marriages are the least frequent, are by no means particularly distinguished by vices of this kind. It has appeared that Norway, Switzerland, England, and Scotland, are above all the rest in the prevalence of the preventive check ; and though I do not mean to insist particularly on the virtuous habits of these countries, yet I think that no person would select them as the countries most marked for profligacy of manners. Indeed, from the little that I know of the continent, I should have been inclined to select them as most distinguished for contrary habits, and as rather above than below their neighbors in the chastity of their women, and consequently in the virtuous habits of their men. Experience therefore seems to teach us, that it is possible for moral and physical causes to counteract the effects that might at first be expected from an increase of the check to marriage ; but allowing all the weight to these effects which is in any degree probable, it may be safely asserted, that the



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diminution of the vices arising from indigence would fully counterbalance them; and that all the advantages of diminished mortality, and superior comforts, which would certainly result from an increase of the preventive check, may be placed entirely on the side of the gains to the cause of happiness and virtue.

It is less the object of the present work to propose new plans of improving society, than to inculcate the necessity of resting contented with that mode of improvement, which is dictated by the course of nature, and of not obstructing the advances which would otherwise be made in *this* way.

It would be undoubtedly highly advantageous that all our positive institutions, and the whole tenor of our conduct to the poor, should be such as actively to co-operate with that lesson of prudence inculcated by the common course of human events; and if we take upon ourselves sometimes to mitigate the natural punishments of imprudence, that we should balance it by increasing the rewards of an opposite conduct. But much would be done, if merely the institutions which directly tend to encourage marriage were gradually changed, and



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we ceased to circulate opinions and inculcate doctrines, which positively counteract the lessons of nature.

The limited good which it is sometimes in our power to effect, is often lost by attempting too much, and by making the adoption of some particular plan essentially necessary even to a partial degree of success. In the practical application of the reasonings of this work, I hope that I have avoided this error. I wish to press on the recollection of the reader, that, though I may have given some new views of old facts, and may have indulged in the contemplation of a considerable degree of *possible* improvement, that I might not absolutely shut out that prime cheerer hope; yet in my expectations of probable improvement, and in suggesting the means of accomplishing it, I have been very cautious. The gradual abolition of the poor laws has already often been proposed, in consequence of the practical evils which have been found to flow from them, and the danger of their becoming a weight absolutely intolerable on the landed property of the kingdom. The establishment of a more extensive system of national education has neither the advantage of novelty



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Of our rational expectations

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with some, nor its disadvantages with others, to recommend it. The practical good effects of education have long been experienced in Scotland; and almost every person who has been placed in a situation to judge, has given his testimony that education appears to have a considerable effect in the prevention of crimes,<sup>1</sup> and the promotion of industry, morality, and regular conduct. Yet these are the only plans which have been offered; and though the adoption of them in the modes suggested would very powerfully contribute to forward the object of this work, and better the condition of the poor; yet if nothing be done in this way, I shall not absolutely despair of some partial good effects from the general tenor of the reasoning.

If the principles which I have endeavored to

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<sup>1</sup> Mr. Howard found fewer prisoners in Switzerland and Scotland, than in other countries, which he attributed to a more regular education among the lower classes of the Swiss and the Scotch. During the number of years which the late Mr. Fielding presided at Bow-street, only six Scotchmen were brought before him. He used to say that of the persons committed the greater part were Irish. Preface to vol. iii. of the Reports of the Society for bettering the condition of the poor, p. 32.



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respecting future improvement.

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establish be false, I most sincerely hope to see them completely refuted; but if they be true the subject is so important, and interests the question of human happiness so nearly, that it is impossible that they should not in time be more fully known, and more generally circulated, whether any particular efforts be made for the purpose or not.

Among the higher and middle classes of society, the effect of this knowledge would, I hope, be to direct without relaxing their efforts in bettering the condition of the poor; to show them what they can, and what they cannot do; and that although much may be done by advice and instruction, by encouraging habits of prudence and cleanliness, by occasional and discriminate charity, and by any mode of bettering the present condition of the poor, which is followed by an increase of the preventive check; yet that, without this last effect, all the former efforts would be futile; and that, in any old and well-peopled state, to assist the poor in such a manner as to enable them to marry as early as they please, and rear up large families, is a physical impossibility. This knowledge, by tending to prevent the rich from destroying the good



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Of our rational expectations

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effects of their own exertions, and wasting their efforts in a direction where success is unattainable, would confine their attention to the proper objects, and thus enable them to do more good.

Among the poor themselves, its effects would be still more important. That the principal and most permanent cause of poverty, has little or no direct relation to forms of government, or the unequal division of property; and that, as the rich do not in reality possess the power of finding employment and maintenance for the poor, the poor cannot, in the nature of things, possess the right to demand them, are important truths flowing from the principle of population, which, when properly explained, would by no means be above the most ordinary comprehensions, and it is evident, that every man in the lower classes of society, who became acquainted with these truths, would be disposed to bear the distresses in which he might be involved with more patience, would feel less discontent and irritation at the government and the higher classes of society on account of his poverty, would be on all occasions less disposed to insubordination and turbulence; and if he received assistance, either from any public institution, or from







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Of our rational expectations

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revolutionary excesses, the fear of which, at present, threatens to deprive Europe even of that degree of liberty which she had before experienced to be practicable, and the salutary effects of which she had long enjoyed.

From a review of the state of society in former periods, compared with the present, I should certainly say, that the evils resulting from the principle of population have rather diminished than increased, even under the disadvantage of an almost total ignorance of their real cause. And if we can indulge the hope that this ignorance will be gradually dissipated, it does not seem unreasonable to expect that they will be still further diminished. The increase of absolute population which will of course take place, will evidently tend but little to weaken this expectation, as every thing depends

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of discontent against constituted authorities would render the people torpid and indifferent to advantages which are really attainable. The blessings of civil liberty are so great, that they surely cannot need the aid of false coloring to make them desirable. I should be sorry to think that the lower classes of people could never be animated to assert their rights but by means of such illusory promises, as will generally make the remedy of resistance much worse than the disease that it was intended to cure.



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upon the relative proportions between population and food, and not on the absolute number of people. In the former part of this work it appeared that the countries which possessed the fewest people, often suffered the most from the effects of the principle of population: and it can scarcely be doubted, that taking Europe throughout, fewer famines and fewer diseases arising from want have prevailed in the last century, than those which preceded it.

On the whole therefore, though our future prospects respecting the mitigation of the evils arising from the principle of population, may not be so bright as we could wish, yet they are far from being entirely disheartening, and by no means preclude that gradual and progressive improvement in human society, which before the late wild speculations on the subject, was the object of rational expectation. To the laws of property and marriage, and to the apparently narrow principle of self-love which prompts each individual to exert himself in bettering his condition, we are indebted for all the noblest exertions of human genius, for every thing that distinguishes the civilized from the savage state. A strict inquiry into the prin-



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Of our rational expectations

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ciple of population obliges us to conclude, that we shall never be able to throw down the ladder by which we have risen to this eminence ; but it by no means proves that we may not rise higher by the same means. The structure of society, in its great features, will probably always remain unchanged. We have every reason to believe, that it will always consist of a class of proprietors, and a class of laborers ; but the condition of each, and the proportion which they bear to each other, may be so altered as greatly to improve the harmony and beauty of the whole. It would indeed be a melancholy reflection, that while the views of physical science are daily enlarging, so as scarcely to be bounded by the most distant horizon, the science of moral and political philosophy should be confined within such narrow limits, or at best be so feeble in its influence, as to be unable to counteract the obstacles to human happiness arising from a single cause. But however formidable these obstacles may have appeared in some parts of this work, it is hoped that the general result of the inquiry is such, as not to make us give up the improvement of human society in despair. The partial good which seems to be attainable is wor-



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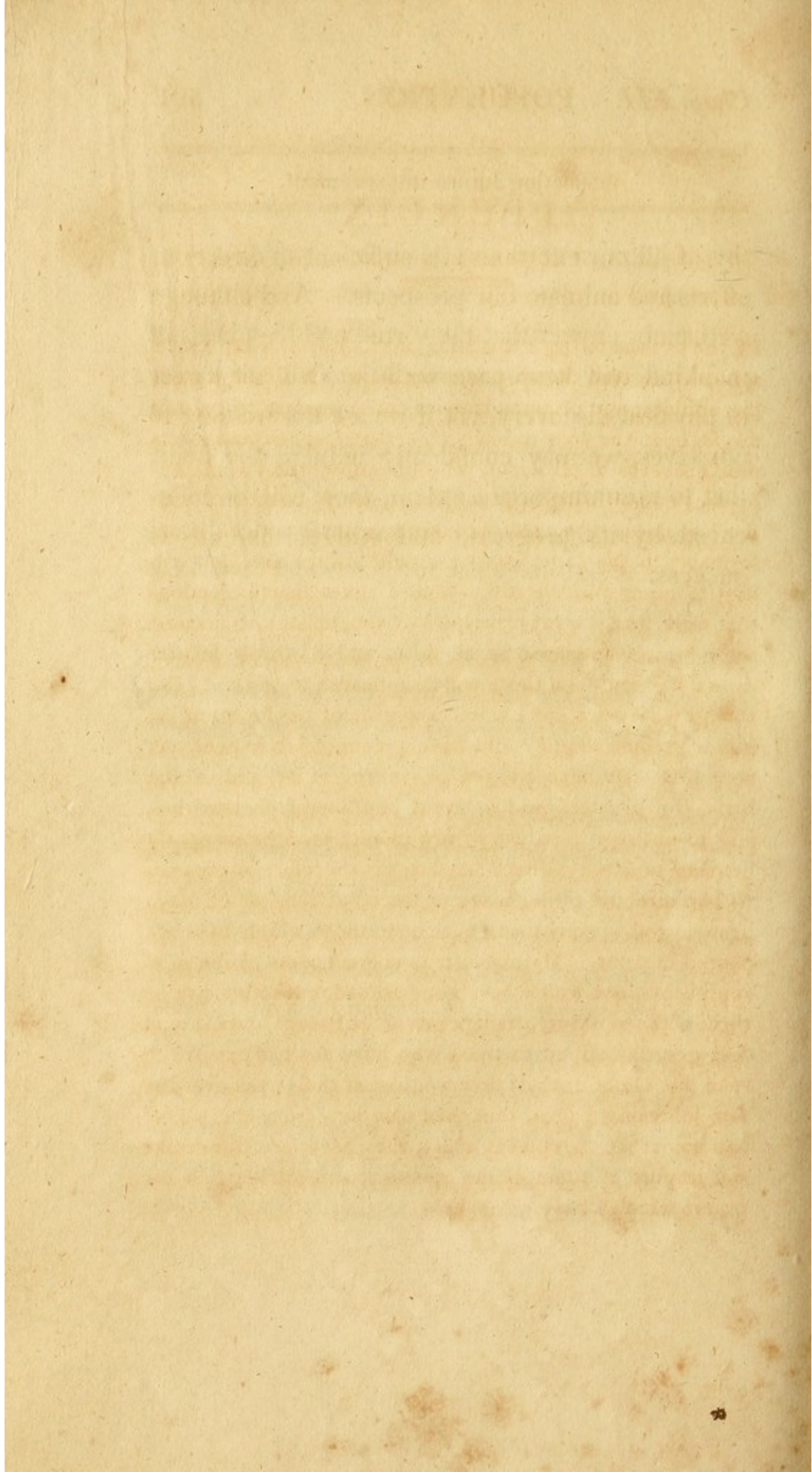
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thy of all our exertions ; is sufficient to direct our efforts and animate our prospects. And although we cannot expect that the virtue and happiness of mankind will keep pace with the brilliant career of physical discovery, yet if we are not wanting to ourselves, we may confidently indulge the hope, that to no unimportant extent, they will be influenced by its progress, and will partake in its success.







## APPENDIX.

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IN the preface to the last edition of this Essay, I expressed a hope, that the detailed manner in which I had treated the subject, and pursued it to its consequences, though it might open the door to many objections, and expose me to much severity of criticism, might be subservient to the important end of bringing a subject so nearly connected with the happiness of society into more general notice. Conformably to the same views I should always have felt willing to enter into the discussion of any serious objections that were made to my principles or conclusions, to abandon those which appeared to be false, and to throw further lights, if I could, on those which appeared to be true. But though the work has excited a degree of public attention much greater than I could have presumed to expect, yet very little has been written to controvert it; and of that little, the greatest part is so full of illiberal declamation, and so entirely destitute of argument, as to be evidently beneath notice. What I have to say therefore at present, will be directed rather more to the objections which have been urged in conversation, than to those which have appeared in print. My object is to correct some of the misrepresentations which have gone abroad respecting two or three of the most important points of the Essay; and I should feel greatly obliged to those who have not had leisure to read the whole work, if they would cast their eyes over the few following pages, that they may not, from the partial and incorrect statements which they have heard, mistake the import of some of my opinions, and attribute to me others which I have never held.



The first grand objection that has been made to my principles is, that they contradict the original command of the Creator, to increase and multiply and replenish the earth. But those who have urged this objection have certainly either not read the work, or have directed their attention solely to a few detached passages, and have been unable to seize the bent and spirit of the whole. I am fully of opinion, that it is the duty of man to obey this command of his Creator, nor is there in my recollection a single passage in the work, which, taken with the context, can, to any reader of intelligence, warrant the contrary inference.

Every express command given to man by his Creator is given in subordination to those great and uniform laws of nature which he had previously established; and we are forbidden both by reason and religion to expect that these laws will be changed in order to enable us to execute more readily any particular precept. It is undoubtedly true, that if man were enabled miraculously to live without food, the earth would be very rapidly replenished; but as we have not the slightest ground of hope that such a miracle will be worked for this purpose, it becomes our positive duty as reasonable creatures, and with a view of executing the commands of our Creator, to inquire into the laws which he has established for the multiplication of the species. And when we find not only from the speculative contemplation of these laws, but from the far more powerful and imperious suggestions of our senses, that man cannot live without food, it is a folly exactly of the same *kind* to attempt to obey the will of our Creator by increasing population without reference to the means of its support, as to attempt to obtain an abundant crop of corn by sowing it on the way side and in hedges, where it cannot receive its proper nourishment. Which is it, I would ask, that best seconds the benevolent intentions of the Creator in covering the earth with esculent vegetables, he who with care and foresight duly ploughs and prepares a piece of ground,



and sows no more seed than he expects will grow up to maturity, or he who scatters a profusion of seed indifferently over the land, without reference to the soil on which it falls, or any previous preparation for its reception?

It is an utter misconception of my argument to infer that I am an enemy to population. I am only an enemy to vice and misery, and consequently to that unfavourable proportion between population and food which produces these evils. But this unfavourable proportion has no necessary connection with the quantity of absolute population which a country may contain. On the contrary, it is more frequently found in countries which are very thinly peopled, than in those which are populous.

The bent of my argument on the subject of population may be illustrated by the instance of a pasture farm. If a young grazier were told to stock his land well, as on his stock would depend his profits, and the ultimate success of his undertaking, he would certainly have been told nothing but what was strictly true. And he would have to accuse himself, not his advisers, if in pursuance of these instructions he were to push the breeding of his cattle till they became lean and half-starved. His instructor, when he talked of the advantages of a large stock, meant undoubtedly stock in proper condition, and not such a stock, as though it might be numerically greater was in value much less. The expression of stocking a farm well does not refer to particular numbers, but merely to that proportion which is best adapted to the farm, whether it be a poor or a rich one, whether it will carry fifty head of cattle or five hundred. It is undoubtedly extremely desirable that it should carry the greater number, and every effort should be made to effect this object; but surely that farmer could not be considered as an enemy to a large quantity of stock, who should insist upon the folly and impropriety of attempting to breed such a quantity, before the land was put into a condition to bear it.



The arguments which I have used respecting the increase of population are exactly of the same nature as these just mentioned. I believe that it is the intention of the Creator that the earth should be replenished\* ; but certainly with a healthy, virtuous, and happy population, not an unhealthy, vicious, and miserable one. And if in endeavouring to obey the command to increase and multiply, we people it only with beings of this latter description, and suffer accordingly, we have no right to impeach the justice of the command, but our irrational mode of executing it.

In the desirableness of a great and efficient population, I do not differ from the warmest advocates of increase. I am perfectly ready to acknowledge with the writers of old, that it is not extent of territory but extent of population that measures the power of states. It is only as to the mode of obtaining a vigorous and efficient population that I differ from them ; and in thus differing I conceive myself entirely borne out by experience, that great test of all human speculations.

It appears from the undoubted testimony of registers, that a large proportion of marriages and births is by no means necessarily connected with a rapid increase of population, but is often found in countries where it is either stationary or increasing very slowly. The population of such countries is not only comparatively inefficient from the general poverty and misery of the inhabitants, but invariably contains a much larger proportion of persons in those stages of life in which they are unable to contribute their share to the resources, or the defence of the state.

This is most strikingly illustrated in an instance which I have quoted from M. Muret, in a chapter on Switzerland, where it appeared that in proportion to the same population, the Lyonois produced 16 births, the Pays de Vaud 11,

\* This opinion I have expressed, p. 491 of the 4to. edit. and p. 315, vol. ii. 8vo. edit.



and a particular parish in the Alps only 8 ; but that at the age of 20 these three very different numbers were all reduced to the same\*. In the Lyonois nearly half of the population was under the age of puberty, in the Pays de Vaud one third, and in the parish of the Alps only one fourth. The inference from such facts is unavoidable, and of the highest importance to society.

The power of a country to increase its resources, or defend its possessions, must depend principally upon its efficient population, upon that part of the population which is of an age to be employed effectually in agriculture, commerce, or war ; but it appears with an evidence little short of demonstration, that in a country the resources of which do not naturally call for a larger proportion of births, such an increase, so far from tending to increase this efficient population, would tend materially to diminish it. It would undoubtedly at first increase the number of souls in proportion to the means of subsistence, and consequently cruelly increase the pressure of want ; but the number of persons rising annually to the age of puberty might not be so great as before, a larger part of the produce would be distributed without return to children who would never reach manhood ; and the additional population instead of giving additional strength to the country would essentially lessen this strength, and operate as a constant obstacle to the creation of new resources.

We are a little dazzled at present by the population and power of France, and it is known that she has always had a large proportion of births : but if any reliance can be placed on what are considered as the best authorities on this subject, it is quite certain, that the advantages which she enjoys do not arise from any thing peculiar in the structure of her population ; but solely from the great absolute quantity of it, derived from her immense extent of fertile territory.

\* Page 271, 4to. edit. and p. 399, vol. i. 8vo. edit.



The effective population in this country, compared with the whole, is considerably greater than in France; and England not only can, but does employ a larger proportion of her population in augmenting and defending her resources, than her great rival. According to the *Statistique générale et particulière de la France* lately published, the proportion of the population under twenty is almost  $\frac{9}{20}$ ; in England it is probably not much more than  $\frac{7}{20}$ . Consequently out of a population of ten millions, England would have a million more of persons above twenty than France, and would at least have three or four hundred thousand more males of a military age. If our population were of the same description as that of France, it must be increased numerically by more than a million and a half in order to enable us to produce from England and Wales the same number of persons above the age of twenty as at present; and if we had only an increase of a million, our efficient strength in agriculture, commerce, and war, would be in the most decided manner diminished, while at the same time the distresses of the lower classes would be dreadfully increased. Can any rational man say that an additional population of this description would be desirable either in a moral or political view? And yet this is the kind of population which invariably results from direct encouragements to marriage, or from that want of personal respectability which is occasioned by ignorance and despotism.

It may perhaps be true that France fills her armies with greater facility and less interruption to the usual labours of her inhabitants than England; and it must be acknowledged that poverty and want of employment are powerful aids to a recruiting serjeant; but it would not be a very humane project, to keep our people always in want, for the sake of enlisting them cheaper, nor would it be a very politic project, to diminish our wealth and strength with the same economical view. We cannot attain incompatible objects; if we possess the advantage



of being able to keep nearly all our people constantly employed either in agriculture or commerce, we cannot expect to retain the opposite advantage of their being always at leisure, and willing to enlist for a very small sum\*. But we may rest perfectly assured, that while we have the efficient population, we shall never want men to fill our armies if we propose to them adequate motives.

In many parts of the Essay I have dwelt much on the advantage of rearing the requisite population of any country from the smallest number of births. I have stated expressly, that a decrease of mortality at all ages is what we ought chiefly to aim at; and as the best criterion of happiness and good government, instead of the largeness of the proportion of births, which was the usual mode of judging, I have proposed the smallness of the proportion dying under the age of puberty. Conscious that I had never intentionally deviated from these principles, I might well be rather surprised to hear that I had been considered by some as an enemy to the introduction of the vaccine inoculation, which is calculated to attain the very end which I have uniformly considered as so desirable. I have indeed intimated what I still continue most firmly to believe, that if the resources of the country would not permanently admit of a greatly accelerated rate of increase in the population (and whether they would or not, must certainly depend upon other causes besides the number of lives saved by the vaccine inoculation†), one of two things would happen,

\* This subject is strikingly illustrated in Lord Selkirk's lucid and masterly observations on the present state of the Highlands, and on the causes and probable consequences of emigration, to which I can with confidence refer the reader.

† It should be remarked however, that a young person saved from death is more likely to contribute to the creation of fresh resources than another birth. It is a great loss of labour and food to begin over again. And universally it is true, that under similar circumstances, that article will come the cheapest to market which is accompanied by fewest failures.



either an increased mortality of some other diseases, or a diminution in the proportion of births. But I have expressed my conviction that the latter effect would take place ; and therefore consistently with the opinions which I have always maintained, I ought to be, and am, one of the warmest friends to the introduction of the cow-pox. In making every exertion, which I think likely to be effectual, to increase the comforts and diminish the mortality among the poor, I act in the most exact conformity to my principles. Whether those are equally consistent, who profess to have the same object in view, and yet measure the happiness of nations by the large proportion of marriages and births, is a point which they would do well to consider.

It has been said by some, that the natural checks to population will always be sufficient to keep it within bounds, without resorting to any other aids ; and one ingenious writer has remarked that I have not deduced a single original fact from real observations to prove the inefficiency of the checks which already prevail\*. These remarks are correctly true, and are truisms exactly of the same kind as the assertion that man cannot live without food. For undoubtedly as long as this continues to be a law of his nature, what are here called the natural checks cannot possibly fail of being effectual. Besides the curious truism that these assertions involve, they proceed upon the very strange supposition that the *ultimate* object of my work is to check population, as if any thing could be more desirable than the most rapid increase of population unaccompanied by vice and misery. But of course my ultimate object is to diminish vice and misery, and any checks to population which may have been suggested, are solely as

\* I should like much to know what description of facts this gentleman had in view when he made this observation. If I could have found one of the kind which seems here to be alluded to, it would indeed have been truly original.



means to accomplish this end. To a rational being, the prudential check to population ought to be considered as equally natural with the check from poverty and premature mortality, which these gentlemen seem to think so entirely sufficient and satisfactory ; and it will readily occur to the intelligent reader, that one class of checks may be substituted for another, not only without essentially diminishing the population of a country, but even under a constantly progressive increase of it\*.

On the possibility of increasing very considerably the effective population of this country, I have expressed myself in some parts of my work more sanguinely, perhaps, than experience would warrant. I have said that in the course of some centuries it might contain two or three times as many inhabitants as at present, and yet every person be both better fed and better clothed†. And in the comparison of the increase of population and food at the beginning of the Essay, that the argument might not seem to depend upon a difference of opinion respecting facts, I have allowed the produce of the earth to be unlimited, which is certainly going too far. It is not a little curious therefore, that it should still continue to be urged against me as an argument, that this country might contain two or three times as many inhabitants ; and it is still more curious, that some persons who have allowed the different ratios of increase on which all my principal conclusions are founded, have still asserted that no difficulty or distress could arise from population, till the productions of the earth could not be further increased. I doubt whether a stronger instance could readily be produced of the total absence of the power of reasoning, than this assertion, after

\* Both Norway, and Switzerland, where the preventive check prevails the most, are increasing with some rapidity in their population ; and in proportion to their means of subsistence, they can produce more males of a military age than any other country of Europe.

† Page 512. 4to. edit. p. 350, vol. ii. 8vo. edit.



such a concession, affords. It involves a greater absurdity than the saying, that because a farm can by proper management be made to carry an additional stock of four head of cattle every year, that therefore no difficulty or inconvenience would arise if an additional forty were placed in it yearly.

The power of the earth to produce subsistence is certainly not unlimited, but it is strictly speaking indefinite, that is, its limits are not defined, and the time will probably never arrive when we shall be able to say, that no farther labour or ingenuity of man could make further additions to it. But the power of obtaining an additional quantity of food from the earth by proper management, and in a certain time, has the most remote relation imaginable to the power of keeping pace with an unrestricted increase of population. The knowledge and industry which would enable the natives of New Holland to make the best use of the natural resources of their country, must, without an absolute miracle, come to them gradually and slowly ; and even then, as it has amply appeared, would be perfectly ineffectual as to the grand object ; but the passions which prompt to the increase of population are always in full vigour, and are ready to produce their full effect even in a state of the most helpless ignorance and barbarism. It will be readily allowed, that the reason why New Holland, in proportion to its natural powers, is not so populous as China, is the want of those human institutions which protect property and encourage industry ; but the misery and vice which prevail almost equally in both countries from the tendency of population to increase faster than the means of subsistence, form a distinct consideration, and arise from a distinct cause. They arise from the incomplete discipline of the human passions ; and no person with the slightest knowledge of mankind has ever had the hardihood to affirm, that human institutions could completely discipline all the







of charity by the richer members of the society to the others, while they were learning to make a better use of the lessons of nature, would be quite a distinct consideration, and without doubt most properly applied ; but nothing like a claim of *right* to support can possibly be maintained till we deny the premises ; till we affirm that the American increase of population is a miracle, and does not arise from the greater facility of obtaining the means of subsistence\*.

In fact, whatever we may say in our declamations on this subject, almost the whole of our *conduct* is founded on the non-existence of this right. If the poor had really a claim of *right* to support, I do not think that any man could justify his wearing broad cloth, or eating as much meat as he likes for dinner, and those who assert this right, and yet are rolling in their carriages, living every day luxuriously, and keeping even their horses on food of which their fellow creatures are in want, must be allowed to act with the greatest inconsistency. Taking an individual instance without reference to consequences, it appears to me that Mr. Godwin's argument is irresistible. Can it be pretended for a moment that a part of the mutton which I expect to eat to day would not be much more beneficially employed

\* It has been said that I have written a quarto volume to prove that population increases in a geometrical, and food in an arithmetical ratio ; but this is not quite true. The first of these propositions I considered as proved the moment that the American increase was related, and the second proposition as soon as it was enunciated. The chief object of my work was to inquire what effects these laws, which I considered as established in the first six pages had produced, and were likely to produce on society ; a subject not very readily exhausted. The principal fault of my details is, that they are not sufficiently particular ; but this was a fault which it was not in my power to remedy. It would be a most curious, and to every philosophical mind a most interesting piece of information, to know the exact share of the full power of increase which each existing check prevents ; but at present I see no mode of obtaining such information.



on some hard-working labourer who has not perhaps tasted animal food for the last week, or on some poor family who cannot command sufficient food of any kind fully to satisfy the cravings of appetite? If these instances were not of a nature to multiply in proportion as such wants were indiscriminately gratified, the gratification of them, as it would be practicable, would be highly beneficial; and in this case I should not have the smallest hesitation in most fully allowing the right. But as it appears clearly both from theory and experience, that if the claim were allowed it would soon increase beyond the *possibility* of satisfying it, and that the practical attempt to do so, would involve the human race in the most wretched and universal poverty, it follows necessarily that our conduct, which denies the right, is more suited to the present state of our being, than our declamations which allow it.

The great author of nature, indeed, with that wisdom which is apparent in all his works, has not left this conclusion to the cold and speculative consideration of general consequences. By making the passion of self-love beyond comparison stronger than the passion of benevolence, he has at once impelled us to that line of conduct which is essential to the preservation of the human race. If all that might be born could be adequately supplied, we cannot doubt that he would have made the desire of giving to others as ardent as that of supplying ourselves. But as under the present constitution of things this is not so, he has enjoined every man to pursue, as his primary object, his own safety and happiness, and the safety and happiness of those immediately connected with him; and it is highly instructive to observe, that in proportion as the sphere contracts, and the power of giving effectual assistance increases, the desire increases at the same time. In the case of children who have certainly a claim of *right* to the support and protection of their parents, we generally find



parental affection nearly as strong as self-love; and except in a few anomalous cases, the last morsel will be divided into equal shares.

By this wise provision the most ignorant are led to promote the general happiness, an end which they would have totally failed to attain if the moving principle of their conduct had been benevolence\*. Benevolence indeed, as the great and constant source of action, would require the most perfect knowledge of causes and effects, and therefore can only be the attribute of the Deity. In a being so shortsighted as man, it would lead into the grossest errors, and soon transform the fair and cultivated soil of civilized society into a dreary scene of want and confusion.

But though benevolence cannot in the present state of our being be the great moving principle of human actions, yet as the kind corrector of the evils arising from the other stronger passion, it is essential to human happiness, it is the balm and consolation and grace of human life, the source of our noblest efforts in the cause of virtue, and of our purest and most refined pleasures. Conformably to that system of general laws, according to which the Supreme Being appears with very few exceptions to act, a passion so strong and general as self-love could not prevail without producing much partial evil; and to prevent this passion from degenerating into the odious vice of selfishness†, to make us sympathise in the pains and pleasures of our

\* In saying this let me not be supposed to give the slightest sanction to the system of morals inculcated in the *Fable of the Bees*, a system which I consider as absolutely false, and directly contrary to the just definition of virtue. The great art of Dr. Mandeville consisted in misnomers,

† It seems proper to make a decided distinction between self-love and selfishness, between that passion which under proper regulations is the source of all honourable industry, and of all the necessaries and conveniences of life, and the same passion pushed to excess, when it becomes useless and disgusting, and consequently vicious.



fellow-creatures, and feel the same *kind* of interest in their happiness and misery as in our own, though diminished in degree, to prompt us often to put ourselves in their place, that we may understand their wants, acknowledge their rights, and do them good as we have opportunity ; and to remind us continually, that even the passion which urges us to procure plenty for ourselves was not implanted in us for our own exclusive advantage, but as the means of procuring the greatest plenty for all ; these appear to be the objects and offices of benevolence. In every situation of life there is ample room for the exercise of this virtue ; and as each individual rises in society, as he advances in knowledge and excellence, as his power of benefiting others becomes greater, and the necessary attention to his own wants less, it will naturally come in for an increasing share among his constant motives of action. In situations of high trust and influence it ought to have a very large share, and in all public institutions be the great moving principle. Though we have often reason to fear that our benevolence may not take the most beneficial direction, we need never apprehend that there will be too much of it in society. The foundations of that passion on which our preservation depends, are fixed so deeply in our nature, that no reasonings or addresses to our feelings can essentially disturb it. It is just therefore, and proper, that all the positive precepts should be on the side of the weaker impulse ; and we may safely endeavor to increase and extend its influence as much as we are able, if at the same time we are constantly on the watch to prevent the evil which may arise from its misapplication.

The law which in this country entitles the poor to relief is undoubtedly different from a full acknowledgment of the natural right ; and from this difference and the many counteracting causes that arise from the mode of its execution, it will not of course be attended with the same consequences. But still it is an approximation to a full



acknowledgment, and as such appears to produce much evil, both with regard to the habits and the temper of the poor. I have in consequence ventured to suggest a plan of gradual abolition, which, as might be expected, has not met with universal approbation. I can readily understand any objections that may be made to it, on the plea that the right having been once acknowledged in this country, the revocation of it might at first excite discontents ; and should therefore most fully concur in the propriety of proceeding with the greatest caution, and of using all possible means of preventing any sudden shock to the opinions of the poor. But I have never been able to comprehend the grounds of the further assertion which I have sometimes heard made, that if the poor were really convinced that they had no claim of right to relief, they would in general be more inclined to be discontented and seditious. On these occasions the only way I have of judging is to put myself in imagination in the place of the poor man, and consider how I should feel in his situation. If I were told that the rich by the laws of nature and the laws of the land were bound to support me, I could not, in the first place, feel much obligation for such support ; and in the next place if I were given any food of an inferior kind, and could not see the absolute necessity of the change, which would probably be the case, I should think that I had good reason to complain. I should feel that the laws had been violated to my injury, and that I had been unjustly deprived of my right. Under these circumstances, though I might be deterred by the fear of an armed force from committing any overt acts of resistance, yet I should consider myself as perfectly justified in so doing, if this fear were removed, and the injury which I believed that I had suffered might produce the most unfavourable effects on my general dispositions towards the higher classes of society. I cannot indeed conceive any thing more irritating to the human feelings, than to experience that degree of distress which



in spite of all our poor laws and benevolence, is not unfrequently felt in this country; and yet to believe that these sufferings were not brought upon me either by my own faults, or by the operation of those general laws, which like the tempest, the blight, or the pestilence, are continually falling hard on particular individuals, while others entirely escape, but were occasioned solely by the avarice and injustice of the higher classes of society.

On the contrary, if I firmly believed that by the laws of nature, which are the laws of God, I had no claim of *right* to support, I should, in the first place, feel myself more strongly bound to a life of industry and frugality; but if want, notwithstanding came upon me, I should consider it in the light of sickness, as an evil incidental to my present state of being, and which, if I could not avoid, it was my duty to bear with fortitude and resignation. I should know from past experience, that the best title I could have to the assistance of the benevolent would be the not having brought myself into distress by my own idleness or extravagance. What I received would have the best effect on my feelings towards the higher classes. Even if it were much inferior to what I had been accustomed to, it would still, instead of an injury, be an obligation; and conscious that I had no claim of *right*, nothing but the fear of absolute famine, which would overcome all other considerations, could morally justify resistance.

I cannot help believing that if the poor in this country were convinced that they had no claim of *right* to support, and yet in scarcities and all cases of urgent distress, were liberally relieved, which I think they would be, the bond which unites the rich with the poor would be drawn much closer than at present, and the lower classes of society, as they would have less real reason for irritation and discontent, would be much less subject to these uneasy sensations.

Among those who have objected to my declaration that the poor have no claim of *right* to support is Mr. Young,



who, with a harshness not quite becoming a candid inquirer after truth, has called my proposal for the gradual abolition of the poor laws a horrible plan, and asserted that the execution of it would be a most iniquitous proceeding. Let this plan however be compared for a moment with that which he himself and others have proposed, of fixing the sum of the poor rates which on no account is to be increased. Under such a law, if the distresses of the poor were to be aggravated tenfold, either by the increase of numbers or the recurrence of a scarcity, the same sum would invariably be appropriated to their relief. If the statute which gives the poor a right to support were to remain unexpunged, we should add to the cruelty of starving them, the extreme injustice of still *professing* to relieve them. If this statute were expunged or altered we should virtually deny the right of the poor to support, and only retain the absurdity of saying that they had a right to a certain sum; an absurdity on which Mr. Young justly comments with much severity in the case of France\*. In both cases the hardships which they would suffer would be

\* The National Assembly of France, though they disapproved of the English poor laws, still adopted their principle, and declared that the poor had a right to pecuniary assistance; that the Assembly ought to consider such a provision as one of its first and most sacred duties; and that with this view, an expense ought to be incurred to the amount of 50 millions a year. Mr. Young justly observes, that he does not comprehend how it is possible to regard the expenditure of 50 millions a sacred duty, and not extend that 50 to 100 if necessity should demand it, the 100 to 200, the 200 to 300, and so on in the same miserable progression which has taken place in England. *Travels in France*, c. xv. p. 439.

I should be the last man to quote Mr. Young against himself, if I thought he had left the path of error for the path of truth, as such kind of inconsistency I hold to be highly praiseworthy. But thinking on the contrary that he has left truth for error, it is surely justifiable to remind him of his former opinions. We may recal to a vicious man his former virtuous conduct, though it would be useless and indelicate to remind a virtuous man of the vices which he had relinquished.



much more severe, and would come upon them in a much more unprepared state, than upon the plan proposed in the Essay.

According to this plan, all that are already married, and even all that are engaged to marry during the course of the year, and all their children would be relieved as usual ; and only those who marry subsequently, and who of course may be supposed to have made better provision for contingencies would be out of the pale of relief.

Any plan for the abolition of the poor laws must presuppose a general acknowledgment that they are essentially wrong, and that it is necessary to tread back our steps. With this acknowledgment, whatever objections may be made to my plan, in the too frequently short-sighted views of policy, I have no fear of comparing it with any other that has yet been advanced, in point of justice and humanity ; and of course the terms iniquitous and horrible “ pass by me like the idle wind which I regard not.”

Mr. Young it would appear has now given up this plan. He has pleaded for the privilege of being inconsistent, and has given such reasons for it that I am disposed to acquiesce in them, provided he confines the exercise of this privilege to different publications, in the interval between which, he may have collected new facts ; but I still think it not quite allowable in the same publication ; and yet it appears that in the very paper in which he has so severely condemned my scheme, the same arguments which he has used to reprobate it are applicable with equal force against his own proposal, as he has there explained it.

He allows that his plan can only provide for a certain number of families, and has nothing to do with the increase from them\* ; but in allowing this, he allows that it does not reach the grand difficulty attending a provision for the

\* Annals of Agriculture, No. 239, p. 219.



poor. In this most essential point, after reprobating me for saying that the poor have no claim of *right* to support, he is compelled to adopt the very same conclusion, and to own that "it might be prudent to consider the misery to which the progressive population might be subject, when there was not a sufficient demand for them in towns and manufactures, as an evil which it was absolutely and physically impossible to prevent." Now the sole reason why I say that the poor have no claim of *right* to support, is the physical impossibility of relieving this progressive population. Mr. Young expressly acknowledges this physical impossibility; yet with an inconsistency scarcely credible, still declaims against my declaration.

The power which the society may possess of relieving a certain portion of the poor is a consideration perfectly distinct from the general question; and I am quite sure I have never said that it is not our duty to do all the good that is practicable. But this limited power of assisting individuals cannot possibly establish a general right. If the poor have really a natural right to support, and if our present laws be only a confirmation of this right, it ought certainly to extend unimpaired to all who are in distress, to the increase from the cottagers as well as to the cottagers themselves; and it would be a palpable injustice in the society to adopt Mr. Young's plan, and purchase from the present generation the disfranchisement of their posterity.

Mr. Young objects very strongly to that passage of the *Essay*\*, in which I observe, that a man who plunges himself into poverty and dependence by marrying without any prospect of being able to maintain his family, has more reason to accuse himself, than the price of labour, the parish, the avarice of the rich, the institutions of society, and the dispensations of Providence; except in as far as he has been deceived by those who ought to have instructed

\* Book iv. c. iii. p. 506, 4to. edit. Vol. ii. p. 339, 8vo.



him. In answer to this, Mr. Young says, that the poor fellow is justified in every one of these complaints, that of Providence alone excepted ; and that seeing other cottagers living comfortably with three or four acres of land, he has cause to accuse institutions which deny him that which the rich could well spare, and which would give him all he wants\*. I would beg Mr. Young for a moment to consider how the matter would stand, if his own plan were completely executed. After all the commons had been divided as he has proposed, if a labourer had more than one son, in what respect would this son be in a different situation from the man that I have supposed ? Mr. Young cannot possibly mean to say, that if he had the very natural desire of marrying at twenty, he would still have a right to complain that the society did not give him a house and three or four acres of land. He has indeed expressly denied this absurd consequence, though in so doing he has directly contradicted the declaration just quoted†. The progressive population, he says, would, according to his system, be cut off from the influence of the poor laws, and the encouragement to marry would remain exactly in that proportion less than at present. Under these circumstances, without land, without the prospect of parish relief, and with the price of labour only sufficient to maintain two children, can Mr. Young seriously think that the poor man, if he be really aware of his situation, does not do wrong in marrying, and ought not to accuse himself for following what Mr. Young calls the dictates of God, of nature, and of revelation ? Mr. Young cannot be unaware of the wretchedness that must inevitably follow a marriage under such circumstances. His plan makes no provision whatever for altering these circumstances. He must therefore totally disregard all the misery arising from excessive

\* *Annals of Agriculture*, No. 239, p. 226.

† *Idem*, p. 214.



poverty, or if he allows that these supernumerary members must necessarily wait, either till a cottage with land becomes vacant in the country, or that by emigrating to towns they can find the means of providing for a family, all the declamation which he has urged with such pomp against deferring marriage in my system, would be equally applicable in his own system. In fact, if Mr. Young's plan really attained the object which it professes to have in view, that of bettering the condition of the poor, and did not defeat its intent by encouraging a too rapid multiplication, and consequently lowering the price of labour, it cannot be doubted that not only the supernumerary members just mentioned, but all the labouring poor must wait longer before they could marry, than they do at present.

The following proposition may be said to be capable of mathematical demonstration. In a country whose resources will not permanently admit of an increase of population more rapid than the existing rate, no improvement in the condition of the people which would tend to diminish mortality could *possibly* take place without being accompanied by a smaller proportion of births, supposing of course no particular increase of emigration\*. To a person who has considered the subject, there is no proposition in Euclid

\* With regard to the resource of emigration, I refer the reader to the 4th chapter, Book iii. of the Essay. Nothing is more easy than to say, that three fourths of the habitable globe are yet unpeopled, but it is by no means so easy to fill these parts with flourishing colonies. The peculiar circumstances which have caused the spirit of emigration in the Highlands, so clearly explained in the able work of Lord Selkirk before referred to, are not of constant recurrence; nor is it by any means to be wished that they should be so. And yet without some such circumstances, people are by no means very ready to leave their native soil, and will bear much distress at home, rather than venture on these distant regions. I am of opinion that it is both the duty and interest of governments to facilitate emigration, but it would surely be unjust to oblige people to leave their country and kindred against their inclinations.



which brings home to the mind a stronger conviction than this, and there is no truth so invariably confirmed by all the registers of births, deaths, and marriages that have ever been collected. In this country it has appeared that according to the returns of the population act, the proportion of births to deaths is about 4 to 3. This proportion with a mortality of 1 in 40\*, would double the population in 83 years and a half; and as we cannot suppose that the country could admit of more than a quadrupled population in the next hundred and sixty-six years, we may safely say that its resources will not allow of a permanent rate of increase greater than that which is taking place at present. But if this be granted, it follows as a direct conclusion, that if Mr. Young's plan, or any other, really succeeded in bettering the condition of the poor, and enabling them to rear more of their children, the vacancies in cottages in proportion to the number of expectants would happen slower than at present, and the age of marriage must inevitably be later. Those therefore, who propose plans for bettering the condition of the poor, and yet at the same time reprobate later or fewer marriages, are guilty of the most puerile inconsistency; and I cannot but be perfectly astonished that Mr. Young, who once understood the subject, should have indulged himself in such a poor declamation about passions, profligacy, burning, and ravens. It is in fact a silly, not to say impious, declamation against the laws of nature and the dispensations of Providence.

With regard to the expression of later marriages, it should always be recollected that it refers to no particular age, but is entirely comparative. The marriages in England are later than in France, the natural consequence of that prudence and respectability generated by a better government; and can we doubt that good has been the result? The marriages in this country now are later than

\* Table iii. p. 238, 4to. edit. and Table ii. p. 30 vol. ii. 8vo. edit.



they were before the revolution, and I feel firmly persuaded that the increased healthiness observed of late years could not possibly have taken place without this accompanying circumstance. Two or three years in the average age of marriage, by lengthening each generation, and tending, in a small degree, both to diminish the prolificness of marriages, and the number of born living to be married, may make a considerable difference in the rate of increase, and be adequate to allow for a considerably diminished mortality. But I would on no account talk of any limits whatever. The only plain and intelligible measure with regard to marriage, is the having a fair prospect of being able to maintain a family. If the possession of one of Mr. Young's cottages would give the labourer this prospect, he would be quite right to marry; but if it did not, or if he could only obtain a rented house without land, and the wages of labour were only sufficient to maintain two children, does Mr. Young, who cuts him off from the influence of the poor laws, presume to say that he would still be right in marrying\*?

Mr. Young has asserted that I have made perfect chastity in the single state absolutely necessary to the success of my plan; but this surely is a misrepresentation. Perfect virtue is indeed absolutely necessary to enable man to avoid *all* the moral and physical evils which depend upon his own conduct; but who ever expected perfect virtue upon earth? I have said what I conceive to be strictly true, that it is our duty to defer marriage till we can feed our children, and that it is also our duty not to indulge ourselves in vicious gratifications; but I have never said that I expected either, much less both of these duties to be completely fulfilled. In this and a number of other cases,

\* The lowest prospect with which a man can be justified in marrying seems to be, the power, when in health, of earning such wages, as at the average price of corn will maintain the average number of living children to a marriage.



it may happen, that the violation of one of two duties will enable a man to perform the other with greater facility ; but if they be really both duties, and both practicable, no power *on earth* can absolve a man from the guilt of violating either. This can only be done by that God who can weigh the crime against the temptation, and will temper justice with mercy. The moralist is still bound to inculcate the practice of both duties, and each individual must be left to act under the temptations to which he is exposed as his conscience shall dictate. Whatever I may have said in drawing a picture *professedly* visionary, for the sake of illustration, in the practical application of my principles I have taken man as he is, with all his imperfections on his head. And thus viewing him, and knowing that some checks to population must exist, I have not the slightest hesitation in saying, that the prudential check to marriage is better than premature mortality. And in this decision I feel myself completely justified by experience.

In every instance that can be traced in which an improved government has given to its subjects a greater degree of foresight, industry, and personal dignity, these effects, under similar circumstances of increase, have invariably been accompanied by a diminished proportion of marriages. This is a proof that an increase of moral worth in the general character is not at least *incompatible* with an increase of temptations with respect to one particular vice ; and the instances of Norway, Switzerland, England, and Scotland, adduced in the last chapter of this Essay, show, that in comparing different countries together, a smaller proportion of marriages and births does not necessarily imply the greater prevalence even of this particular vice. This is surely quite enough for the legislator. He cannot estimate with tolerable accuracy the degree in which chastity in the single state prevails. His general conclusions must be founded on general results, and these are clearly in his favour.



To much of Mr. Young's plan, as he has at present explained it, I should by no means object. The peculiar evil which I apprehended from it, that of taking the poor from the consumption of wheat, and feeding them on milk and potatoes, might certainly be avoided by a limitation of the number of cottages; and I entirely agree with him in thinking, that we should not be deterred from making 500,000 families more comfortable, because we cannot extend the same relief to all the rest. I have indeed myself ventured to recommend a general improvement of cottages, and even the cow system on a limited scale; and perhaps with proper precautions a certain portion of land might be given to a considerable body of the labouring classes.

If the law which entitles the poor to support were to be repealed, any plan, which would tend to render such repeal more palatable on its first promulgation, I should most highly approve; and in this view, some kind of compact with the poor might be very desirable. A plan of letting land to labourers under certain conditions has lately been tried in the parish of Long Newnton in Gloucestershire, and the result with a general proposal founded on it, has been submitted to the public by Mr. Estcourt. The present success has been very striking; but in this, and every other case of the kind, we should always bear in mind that no experiment respecting a provision for the poor can be said to be complete till succeeding generations have arisen\*. I doubt if there ever has been an instance of any

\* In any plan, particularly of a distribution of land, as a compensation for the relief given by the poor laws, the succeeding generations would form the grand difficulty. All others would be perfectly trivial in comparison. For a time every thing might go on very smoothly, and the rates be much diminished; but afterwards, they would either increase again as rapidly as before, or the scheme would be exposed to all the same objections which have been made to mine, without the same justice and consistency to palliate them.







generally, that in almost all the countries which are particularly subject to scarcities and famines, either the farms are very small, or the labourers are paid principally in land. China, Indostan, and the former state of the Highlands of Scotland furnish some proofs among many others of the truth of this observation ; and in reference to the small properties of France, Mr. Young himself in his tour particularly notices the distress arising from the least failure of the crops ; and observes that such a deficiency as in England passes almost without notice, in France is attended with dreadful calamities\*.

Should any plan therefore of assisting the poor by land be adopted in this country, it would be absolutely essential to its ultimate success to prevent them from making it their principal dependance. And this might probably be done by attending strictly to the two following rules. Not to let the divisions of land be so great as to interrupt the cottager essentially in his usual labours ; and always to stop in the further distribution of land and cottages, when the price of labour, independent of any assistance from land, would not at the average price of corn maintain three, or at least two children. Could the matter be so ordered, that the labourer in working for others should still continue to earn the same real command over the necessaries of life that he did before, a very great accession of comfort and happiness might accrue to the poor from the possession of land, without any evil that I can foresee at present. But if these points were not attended to, I should certainly fear an approximation to the state of the poor in France, Sweden, and Ireland, nor do I think that any of the partial experiments that have yet taken place afford the slightest presumption to the contrary. The result of these experiments is indeed exactly such as one should have expected.

\* Travels in France, vol. i. c. xii. p. 409. That country will probably be the least liable to scarcities, in which agriculture is carried on as the most flourishing *manufacture* of the state.



Who could ever have doubted that if without lowering the price of labour, or taking the labourer off from his usual occupations, you could give him the produce of one or two acres of land and the benefit of a cow, you would decidedly raise his condition? But it by no means follows that he would retain this advantage if the system were so extended as to make the land his principal dependence, to lower the price of labour, and in the language of Mr. Young, to take the poor from the consumption of wheat, and feed them on milk and potatoes. It does not appear to me so marvellous as it does to Mr. Young, that the very same system which in Lincolnshire and Rutlandshire may produce now the most comfortable peasantry in the British dominions, should in the end, if extended without proper precautions, assimilate the condition of the labourers of this country to that of the lower classes of the Irish.

It is generally dangerous and impolitic in a government to take upon itself to regulate the supply of any commodity in request, and probably the supply of labourers form no exception to the general rule. I would on no account therefore propose a positive law to regulate their increase, but as any assistance which the society might give them cannot in the nature of things be unlimited, the line may fairly be drawn where we please; and with regard to the increase from this point, every thing would be left as before to individual exertion and individual speculation.

If any plan of this kind were adopted by the government, I cannot help thinking that it might be made the means of giving the best kind of encouragement and reward, to those who are employed in our defence. If the period of enlisting were only for a limited time, and at the expiration of that time, every person who had conducted himself well was entitled to a house and a small portion of land, if a country labourer, and to a tenement in a town and a small pension, if an artificer, all inalienable, a very strong motive would be held out to young men, not



only to enter into the service of their country, but to behave well in that service ; and in a short time there would be such a martial population at home, as the unfortunate state of Europe seems in a most peculiar manner to require. As it is only limited assistance that the society can possibly give, it seems in every respect fair and proper, that in regulating this limit some important end should be attained.

If the poor laws be allowed to remain exactly in their present state, we ought at least to be aware, to what cause it is owing that their effects have not been more pernicious than they are observed to be, that we may not complain of, or alter those parts, without which we should really not have the power of continuing them. The law which obliges each parish to maintain its own poor is open to many objections. It keeps the overseers and churchwardens continually on the watch to prevent new comers, and constantly in a state of dispute with other parishes. It thus prevents the free circulation of labour from place to place, and renders its price very unequal in different parts of the kingdom. It disposes all landlords rather to pull down than to build cottages on their estates ; and this scarcity of habitations in the country, by driving more to the towns than would otherwise have gone, gives a relative discouragement to agriculture and a relative encouragement to manufactures. These it must be allowed, are no inconsiderable evils ; but if the cause which occasions them were removed, evils of much greater magnitude would follow. I agree with Mr. Young in thinking that there is scarcely a parish in the kingdom, where, if more cottages were built, and let at any tolerably moderate rents, they would not be immediately filled with new couples. I even agree with him in thinking that in some places this want of habitations operates too strongly in preventing marriage. But I have not the least doubt that, considered generally, its operation in the present state of things is most beneficial ;



and that it is almost exclusively owing to this cause, that we have been able so long to continue the poor laws. If any man could build a hovel by the road side, or on the neighbouring waste, without molestation, and yet were secure that he and his family would always be supplied with work and food by the parish, if they were not readily to be obtained elsewhere, I do not believe that it would be long before the physical impossibility of executing the letter of the poor laws would appear. It is of importance therefore to be aware, that it is not because this or any other society has really the power of employing and supporting all that might be born, that we have been able to continue the present system ; but because by the indirect operation of this system, not adverted to at the time of its establishment, and frequently reprobated since, the number of births is always very greatly limited, and thus reduced within the pale of possible support.

The obvious tendency of the poor laws is certainly to encourage marriage, but a closer attention to all their indirect as well as direct effects, may make it a matter of doubt how far they really do this. They clearly tend, in their general operation, to discourage sobriety and economy, to encourage idleness and the desertion of children, and to put virtue and vice more on a level than they otherwise would be ; but I will not presume to say positively that they tend to encourage population. It is certain that the proportion of births in this country compared with others in similar circumstances is very small ; but this was to be expected from the superiority of the government, the more respectable state of the people, and the more general spread of a taste for cleanliness and conveniences. And it will readily occur to the reader, that owing to these causes, combined with the twofold operation of the poor laws, it must be extremely difficult to ascertain, with any degree of precision, what has been their effect on population.



The only argument of a general nature against the Essay which strikes me as having any considerable force is the following. It is against the application of its principles, not the principles themselves, and has not, that I know of, been yet advanced in its present form. It may be said that according to my own reasonings and the facts stated in my work, it appears that the diminished proportion of births, which I consider as absolutely necessary to the permanent improvement of the condition of the poor, invariably follows an improved government, and the greater degree of personal respectability which it gives to the lower classes of society. Consequently allowing the desirableness of the end, it is not necessary, in order to obtain it, to risk the promulgation of any new opinions, which may alarm the prejudices of the poor, and the effect of which we cannot with certainty foresee ; but we have only to proceed in improving our civil polity, conferring the benefits of education upon all, and removing every obstacle to the general extension of all those privileges and advantages which may be enjoyed in common, and we may be quite sure that the effect which I look forward to, and which can alone render these advantages permanent, will follow.

I acknowledge the truth and force of this argument, and have only to observe in answer to it, that it is difficult to conceive that we should not proceed with more celerity and certainty towards the end in view, if the principal causes which tend to promote or retard it were generally known. In particular, I cannot help looking forward to a very decided improvement in the habits and temper of the lower classes, when their real situation has been clearly explained to them ; and if this were done gradually and cautiously, and accompanied with proper moral and religious instructions, I should not expect any danger from it. I am always unwilling to believe that the general dissemination of truth is prejudicial. Cases of the kind are un-



doubtedly conceivable, but they should be admitted with very great caution. If the general presumption in favour of the advantage of truth were once essentially shaken, all ardour in its cause would share the same fate, and the interests of knowledge and virtue most decidedly suffer. It is besides a species of arrogance not lightly to be encouraged, for any man to suppose that he has penetrated further into the laws of nature than the great Author of them intended, further than is consistent with the good of mankind.

Under these impressions I have freely given my opinions to the public. In the truth of the general principles of the Essay, I confess that I feel such a confidence, that till something has been advanced against them very different indeed from any thing that has hitherto appeared, I cannot help considering them as incontrovertible. With regard to the application of these principles the case is certainly different; and as dangers of opposite kinds are to be guarded against, the subject will of course admit of much latitude of opinion. At all events, however, it must be allowed, that whatever may be our determination respecting the advantages or disadvantages of endeavouring to circulate the truths on this subject among the poor, it must be highly advantageous that they should be known to all those who have it in their power to influence the laws and institutions of society. That the body of an army should not in all cases know the particulars of their situation may possibly be desirable; but that the leaders should be in the same state of ignorance, will hardly I think, be contended.

If it be really true, that without a diminished proportion of births\* we cannot attain any *permanent* improve-

\* It should always be recollected that a diminished *proportion* of births may take place under a constant annual increase of the absolute number. This is in fact, exactly what has happened in England and Scotland during the last forty years.



ment in the health and happiness of the mass of the people, and secure that description of population, which, by containing a larger share of adults, is best calculated to create fresh resources, and consequently to encourage a continued increase of efficient population, it is surely of the highest importance that this should be known, that if we take no steps directly to promote this effect, we should not at least, under the influence of the former prejudices on this subject, endeavour to counteract it\*. And if it be thought unadvisable to abolish the poor laws, it cannot be

\* We should be aware, that a scarcity of men owing either to great losses, or to some particular and unusual demand, is liable to happen in every country; and in no respect invalidates the general principle that has been advanced. Whatever may be the tendency to increase, it is quite clear that an extraordinary supply of men cannot be produced either in six months, or six years; but even with a view to a more than usual supply, causes which tend to diminish mortality are not only more certain but more rapid in their effects, than direct encouragements to marriage. An increase of births may, and often does, take place, without the ultimate accomplishment of our object; but, supposing the births to remain the same, it is impossible for a diminished mortality not to be accompanied by an increase of effective population.

We are very apt to be deceived on this subject by the almost constant demand for labour which prevails in every prosperous country; but we should consider that in countries which can but just keep up their population, as the price of labour must be sufficient to rear a family of a certain number, a single man would have a superfluity, and labour would be in constant demand at the price of the subsistence of an individual. It cannot be doubted that in this country we could soon employ double the number of labourers if we could have them at our own price; because supply will produce demand as well as demand supply. The present great extension of the cotton trade did not originate in an extraordinary increase of demand, at the former prices, but in an increased supply at a much cheaper rate, which of course immediately produced an extended demand. As we cannot however obtain men at sixpence a day by improvements in machinery, we must submit to the necessary conditions of their rearing; and there is no man who has the slightest feeling for the happiness of the most numerous class of society, or has even just views of policy on the subject, who would not rather choose that the requisite population should be obtained by such a



doubted that a knowledge of those general principles, which render them inefficient in their humane intentions, might be applied so far to modify them and regulate their execution, as to remove many of the evils with which they are accompanied, and make them less objectionable.

There is only one subject more which I shall notice, and that is rather a matter of feeling than of argument. Many persons, whose understandings are not of that description that they can regulate their belief or disbelief by their likes or dislikes, have professed their perfect conviction of the truth of the general principles contained in the Essay ; but at the same time have lamented this conviction, as throwing a darker shade over our views of human nature, and tending particularly to narrow our prospects of future improvement. In these feelings I cannot agree with them. If from a review of the past, I could not only believe that a fundamental and very extraordinary improvement in human society was possible, but feel a firm confidence that it would take place, I should undoubtedly be grieved to find that I had overlooked some cause, the operation of which would at once blast my hopes. But if the contemplation of the past history of mankind, from which alone we can judge of the future, renders it almost impossible to feel such a confidence, I confess that I had much rather believe that some real and deeply-seated difficulty existed, the constant struggle with which was calculated to rouse the natural inactivity of man, to call forth his faculties, and invigorate and improve his mind ; a species of difficulty which it must be allowed is most eminently and peculiarly suited to a state of probation, than that nearly all the evils

price of labour, combined with such habits, as would occasion a very small mortality, than from a great proportion of births, of which comparatively few would reach manhood.

*vol. ii.*

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of life might with the most perfect facility be removed, but for the perverseness and wickedness of those who influence human institutions\*.

A person who held this latter opinion must necessarily live in a constant state of irritation and disappointment. The ardent expectations with which he might begin life would soon receive the most cruel check. The regular progress of society, under the most favourable circumstances, would to him appear slow and unsatisfactory ; but instead even of this regular progress, his eye would be more frequently presented with retrograde movements, and the most disheartening reverses. The changes to which he had looked forward with delight, would be found big with new and unlooked-for evils, and the characters on which he had reposed the most confidence, would be seen frequently deserting his favourite cause, either from the lessons of experience or the temptation of power. In this state of constant disappointment, he would be but too apt to attribute every thing to the worst motives ; he would be inclined to give up the cause of improvement in despair ; and judging of the whole from a part, nothing but a peculiar goodness of heart and amiableness of disposition could preserve him from that sickly and disgusting misanthropy which is but too frequently the end of such characters.

On the contrary, a person who held the other opinion, as he would set out with more moderate expectations, would of course be less liable to disappointment. A com-

\* The misery and vice arising from the pressure of the population too hard against the limits of subsistence, and the misery and vice arising from promiscuous intercourse, may be considered as the Scylla and Charybdis of human life. That it is possible for each individual to steer clear of both these rocks is certainly true, and a truth which I have endeavoured strongly to maintain ; but that these rocks do not form a difficulty independent of human institutions, no person with any knowledge of the subject can venture to assert.



parison of the best with the worst states of society, and the obvious inference from analogy that the best were capable of further improvement, would constantly present to his mind a prospect sufficiently animating to warrant his most persevering exertions. But aware of the difficulties with which the subject was surrounded, knowing how often in the attempt to attain one object some other had been lost, and that though society had made rapid advances in some directions, it had been comparatively stationary in others, he would be constantly prepared for failures. These failures, instead of creating despair, would only create knowledge; instead of checking his ardour, would only give it a wiser and more successful direction; and having founded his opinion of mankind on broad and general grounds, the disappointment of any particular views would not change this opinion; but even in declining age he would probably be found believing as firmly in the reality and general prevalence of virtue, as in the existence and frequency of vice; and to the last, looking forward with a just confidence to those improvements in society, which the history of the past, in spite of all the reverses with which it is accompanied, seems clearly to warrant.

It may be true that if ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise; but if ignorance be not bliss as in the present instance, if all false views of society must not only impede decidedly the progress of improvement, but necessarily terminate in the most bitter disappointments to the individuals who form them; I shall always think that the feelings and prospects of those who make the justest estimates of our future expectations, are the most consolatory; and that the characters of this description are happier themselves, at the same time that they are beyond comparison more likely to contribute to the improvement and happiness of society\*.

\* While the last sheet of this Appendix was printing, I heard with some surprise, that an argument had been drawn from the Principle of Population in favour of the slave trade. As the just conclusion from



that principle appears to me to be exactly the contrary, I cannot help saying a few words on the subject.

If the only argument against the slave trade had been, that from the mortality it occasioned, it was likely to unpeople Africa, or extinguish the human race, some comfort with regard to these fears might indeed, be drawn from the Principle of Population; but as the necessity of the abolition has never, that I know of, been urged on the ground of these apprehensions, a reference to the laws which regulate the increase of the human species was certainly most unwise in the friends of the slave trade.

The abolition of the slave trade is defended principally by the two following arguments:

1st. That the trade to the coast of Africa for slaves, together with their subsequent treatment in the West Indies, is productive of so much human misery, that its continuance is disgraceful to us as men and as Christians.

2d. That the culture of the West India islands could go on with equal advantage, and much greater security, if no farther importation of slaves were to take place.

With regard to the first argument, it appears, in the Essay on the Principle of Population, that so great is the tendency of mankind to increase, that nothing but some physical or moral check operating in an *excessive* and *unusual* degree, can permanently keep the population of a country below the average means of subsistence. In the West India islands a constant recruit of labouring negroes is necessary; and consequently the immediate checks to population must operate with *excessive* and *unusual* force. All the checks to population were found resolvable into moral restraint, vice, and misery. In a state of slavery moral restraint cannot have much influence; nor in any state will it ever continue permanently to diminish the population. The whole effect, therefore, is to be attributed to the *excessive* and *unusual* action of vice and misery; and a reference to the facts contained in the Essay incontrovertibly proves that the condition of the slaves in the West Indies, taken altogether, is most wretched, and that the representations of the friends of the abolition cannot easily be exaggerated.

It will be said, that the principal reason why the slaves in the West Indies constantly diminish, is, that the sexes are not in equal numbers, a considerable majority of males being always imported; but this very circumstance decides at once on the cruelty of their situation, and must necessarily be one powerful cause of their degraded moral condition.

It may be said also, that many towns do not keep up their numbers, and yet the same objection is not made to them on that account. But



the cases will admit of no comparison. If for the sake of better society or higher wages, people are willing to expose themselves to a less pure air, and greater temptations to vice, no hardship is suffered that can reasonably be complained of. The superior mortality of towns falls principally upon children, and is scarcely noticed by people of mature age. The sexes are in equal numbers, and every man after a few years of industry may look forward to the happiness of domestic life. If during the time that he is thus waiting, he acquires various habits which indispose him to marriage, he has nobody to blame except himself. But with the negroes the case is totally different. The unequal number of the sexes shuts out at once the majority of them from all chance of domestic happiness. They have no hope of this kind to sweeten their toils, and animate their exertions; but are necessarily condemned either to unceasing privation, or to the most vicious excesses; and thus shut out from every cheering prospect, we cannot be surprised that they are in general ready to welcome that death which so many meet with in the prime of life.

The second argument is no less powerfully supported by the Principle of Population than the first. It appears, from a very general survey of different countries, that under every form of government, however unjust and tyrannical, in every climate of the known world however apparently unfavourable to health, it has been found that population, with the sole exception above alluded to, has been able to keep itself up to the level of the means of subsistence. Consequently, if by the abolition of the trade to Africa, the slaves in the West Indies were placed only in a *tolerable* situation, if their civil condition and moral habits were only made to *approach* to those which prevail among the mass of the human race in the worst governed countries of the world, it is contrary to the general laws of nature to suppose, that they would not be able by procreation fully to supply the effective demand for labour; and it is difficult to conceive that a population so raised would not be in every point of view preferable to that which exists at present.

It is perfectly clear, therefore, that a consideration of the laws which govern the increase and decrease of the human species, tends to strengthen in the most powerful manner, all the arguments in favor of the abolition.

With regard to the state of society among the African nations, it will readily occur to the reader, that in describing it the question of the slave trade was foreign to my purpose; and I might naturally fear that if I entered upon it I should be led into too long a digression. But certainly all the facts which I have mentioned, and which are taken principally from Park, if they do not absolutely *prove* that the wars in Africa



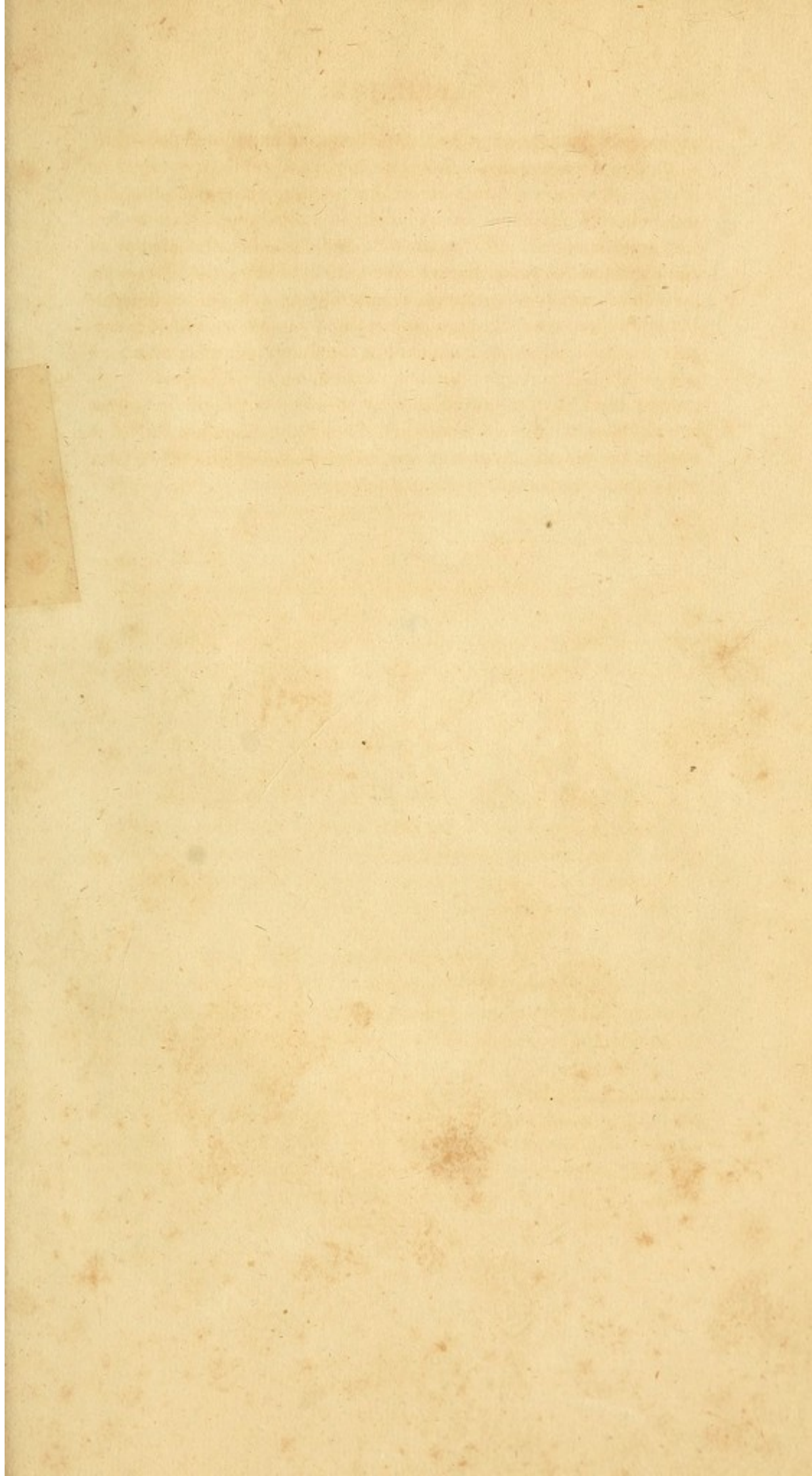
are excited and aggravated by the traffic on the coast, tend powerfully to confirm the *supposition*. The state of Africa, as I have described it, is exactly such as we should expect in a country, where the capture of men was considered as a more advantageous employment than agriculture or manufactures. Of the state of these nations some hundred years ago it must be confessed that we have little knowledge that we can depend upon: but allowing that the regular plundering excursions, which Park describes, are of the most ancient date; yet it is impossible to suppose that any circumstance which, like the European traffic, must give additional value to the plunder thus acquired, would not powerfully aggravate them, and effectually prevent all progress towards a happier order of things. As long as the nations of Europe continue barbarous enough to purchase slaves in Africa, we may be quite sure that Africa will continue barbarous enough to supply them.

THE END.

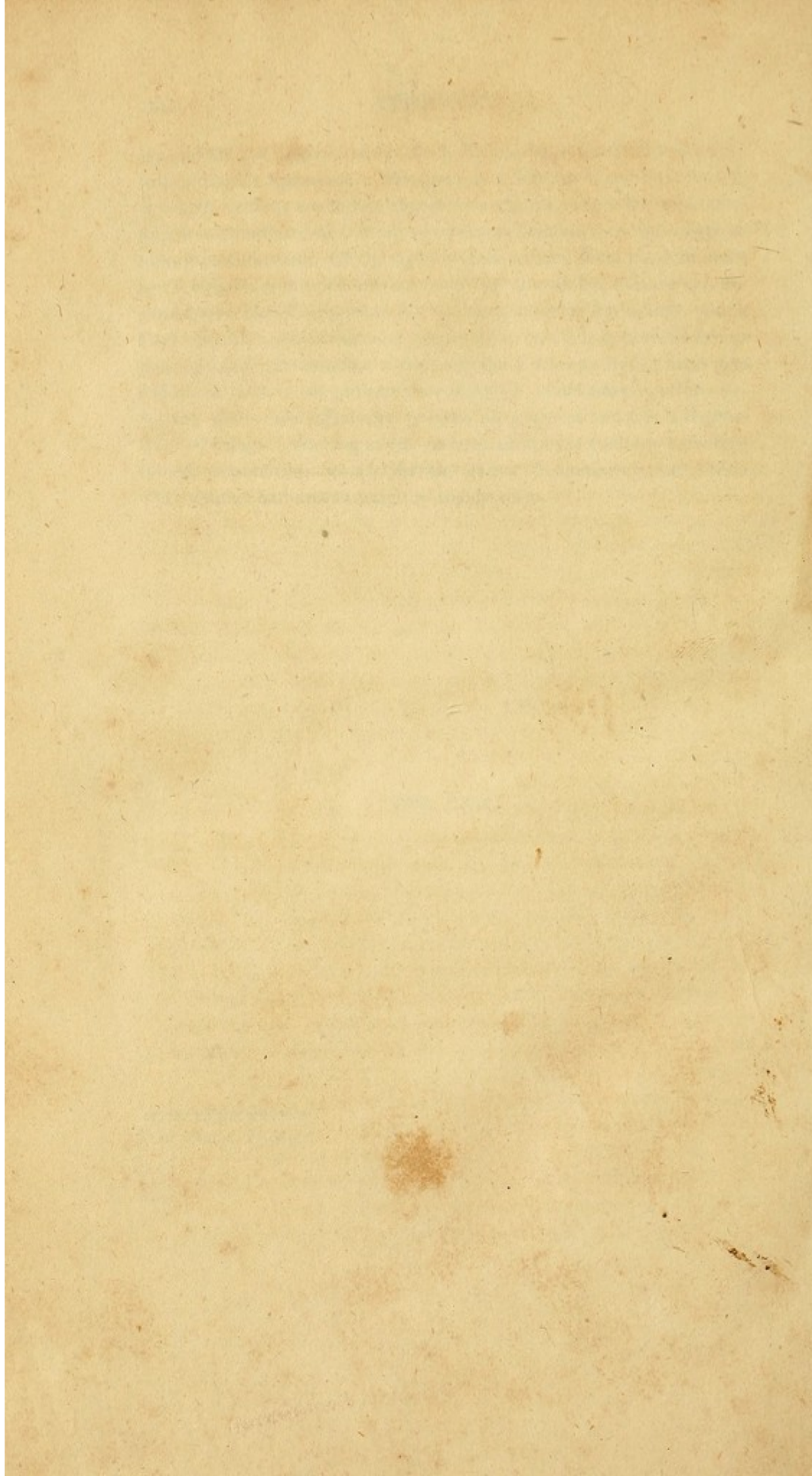
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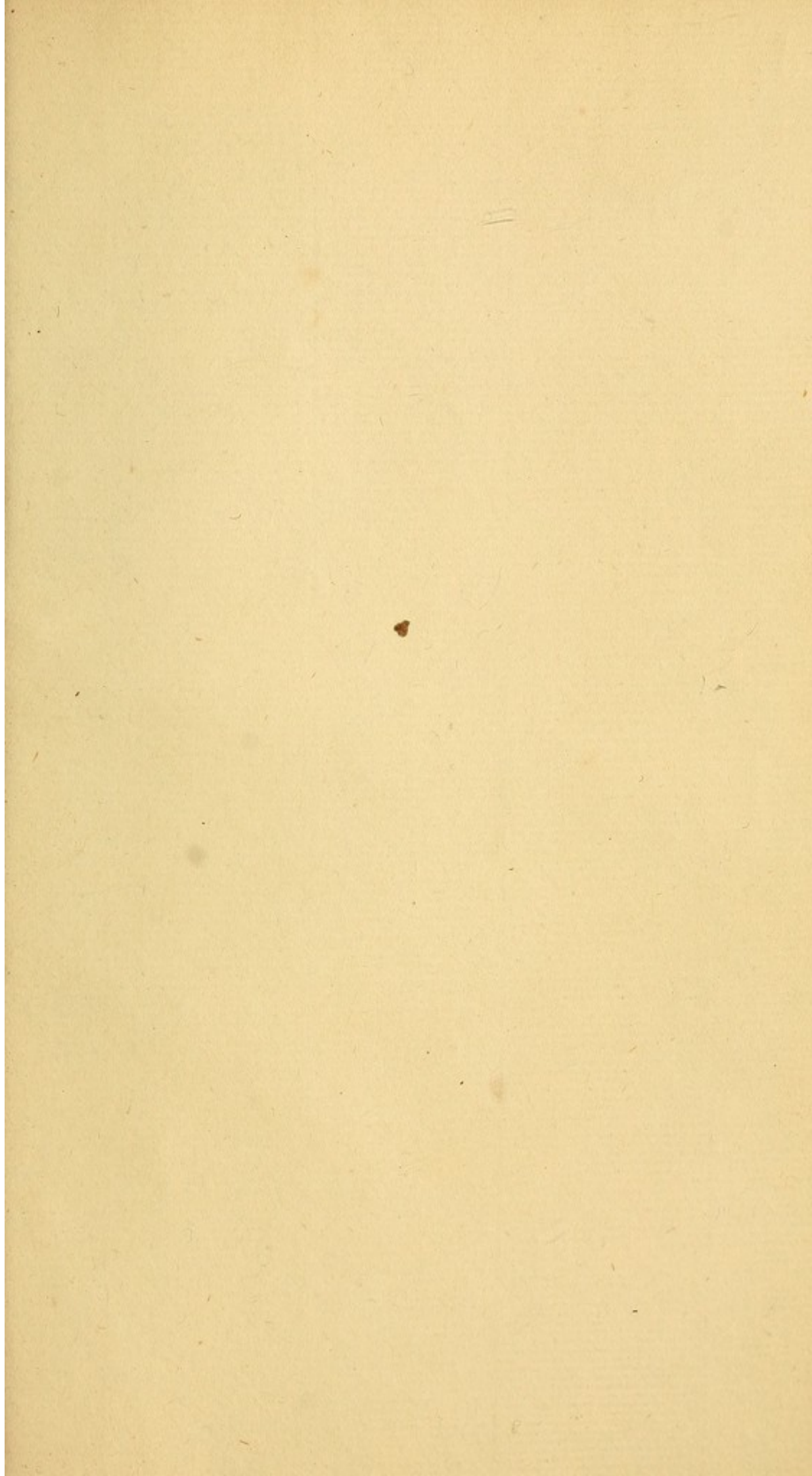




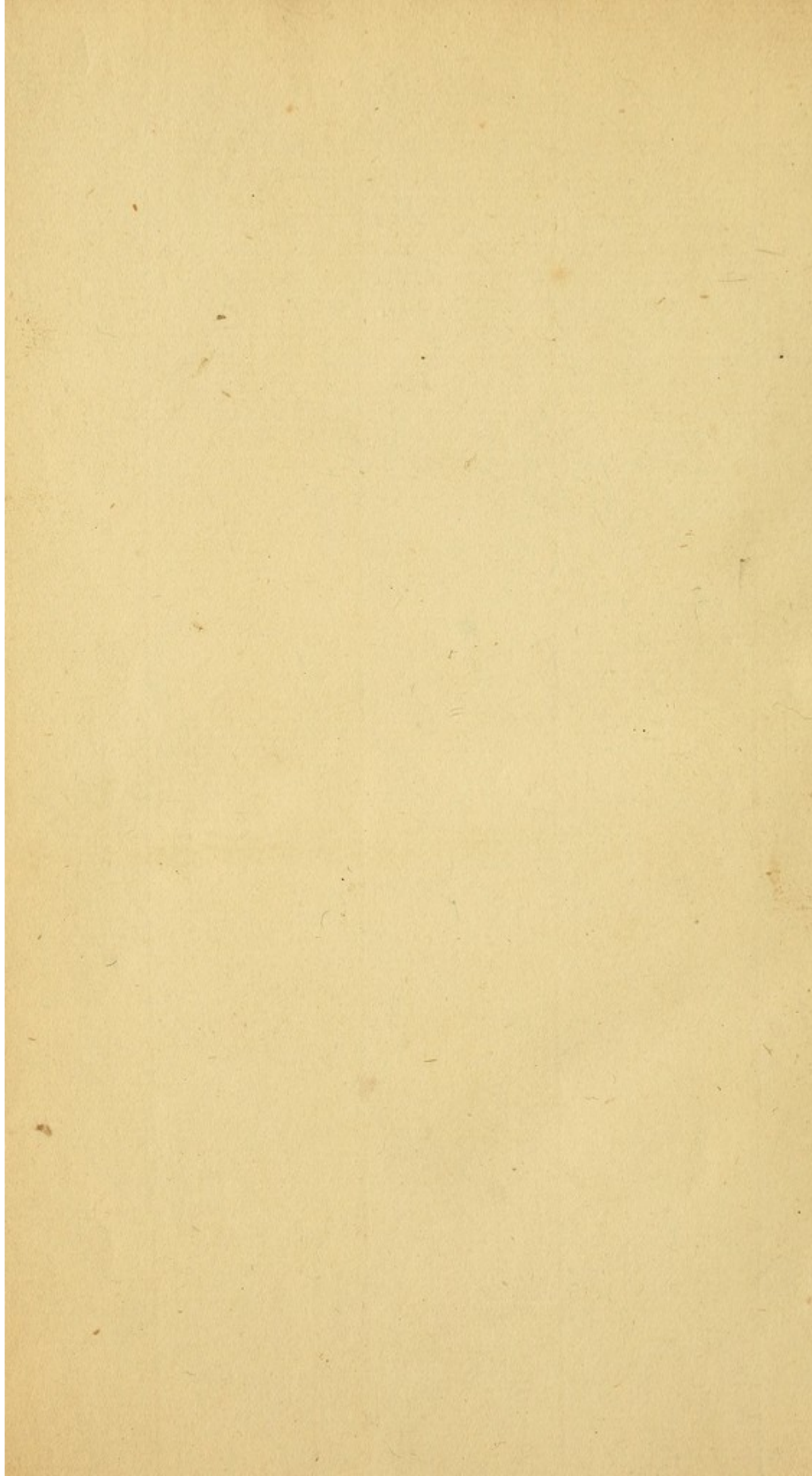




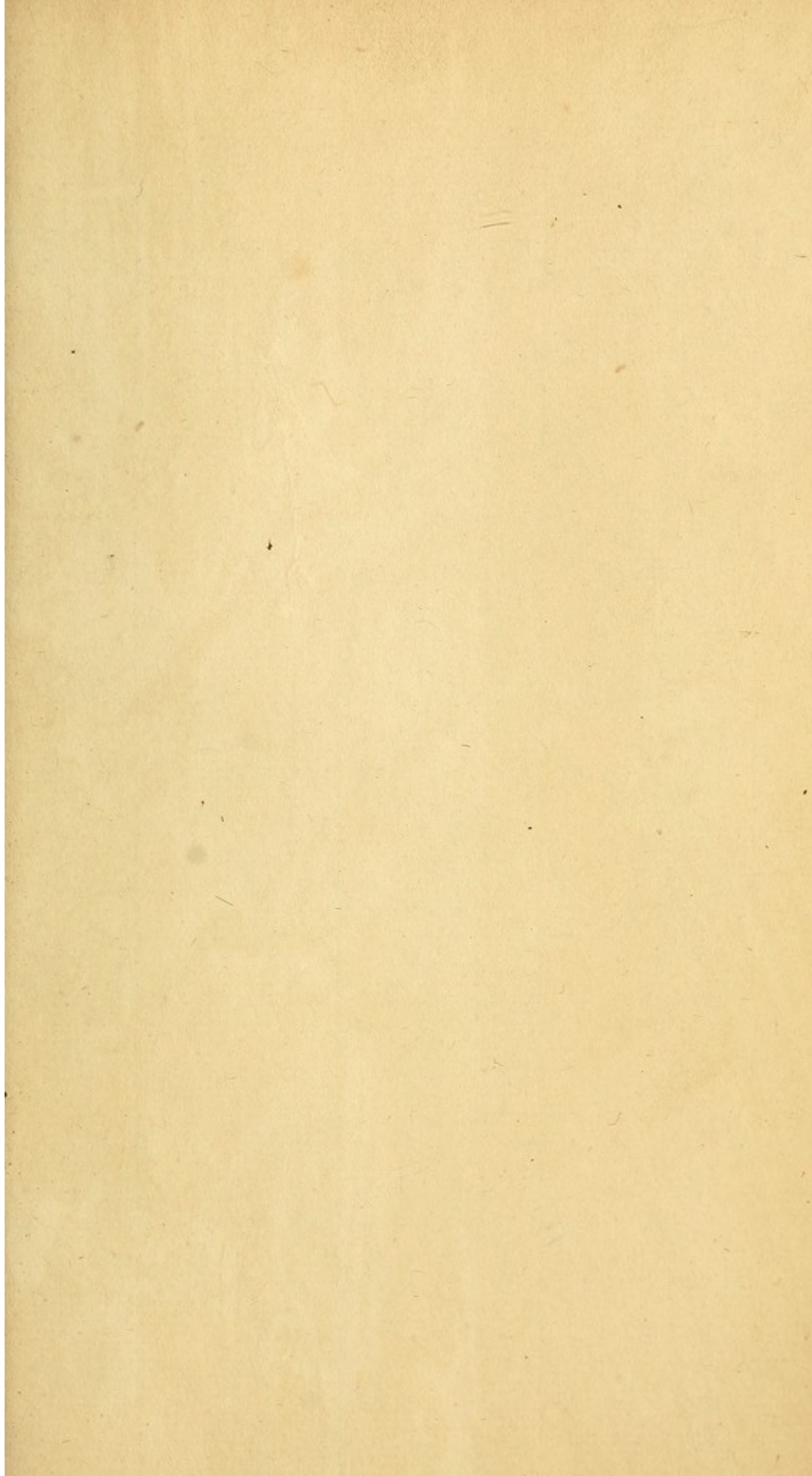




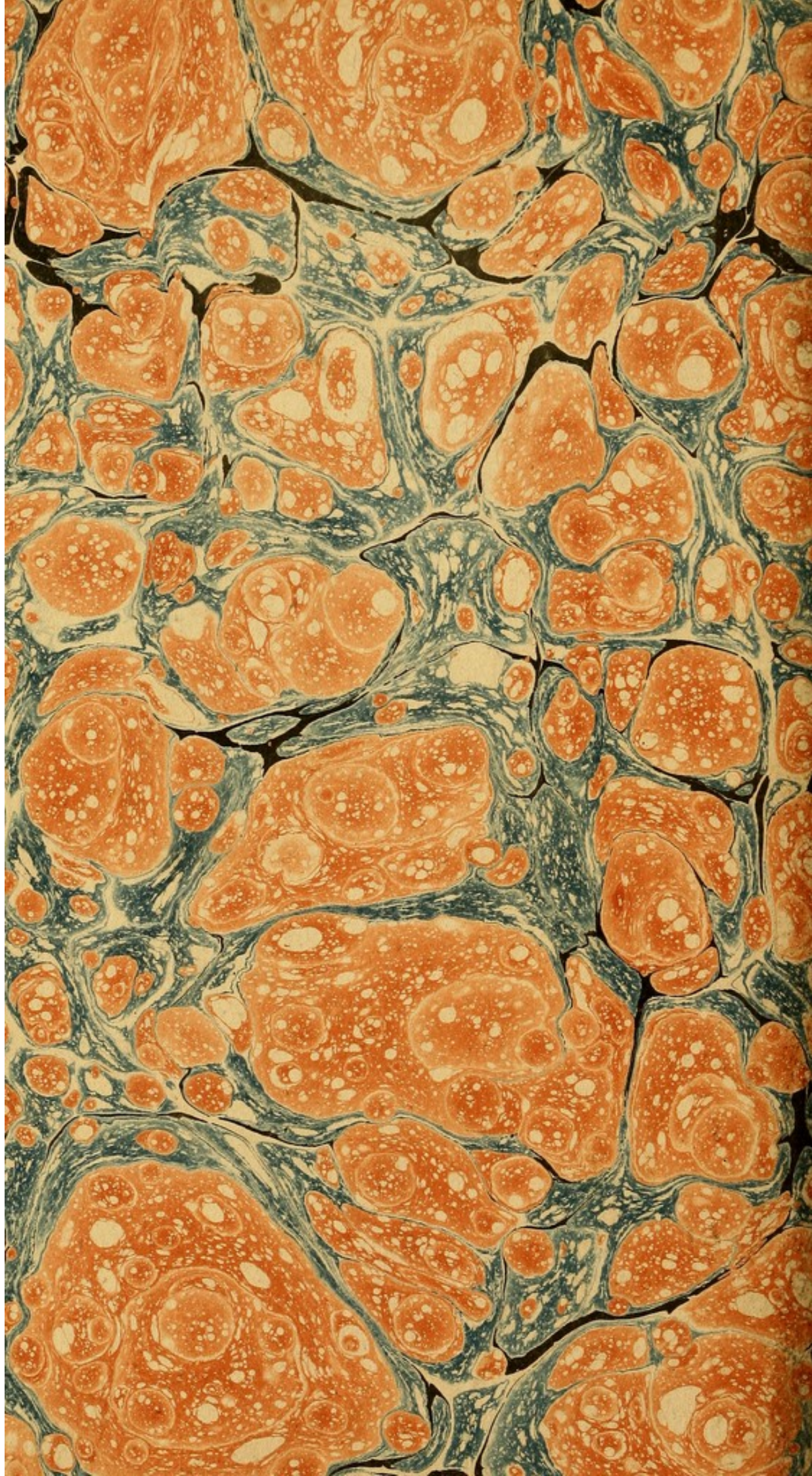




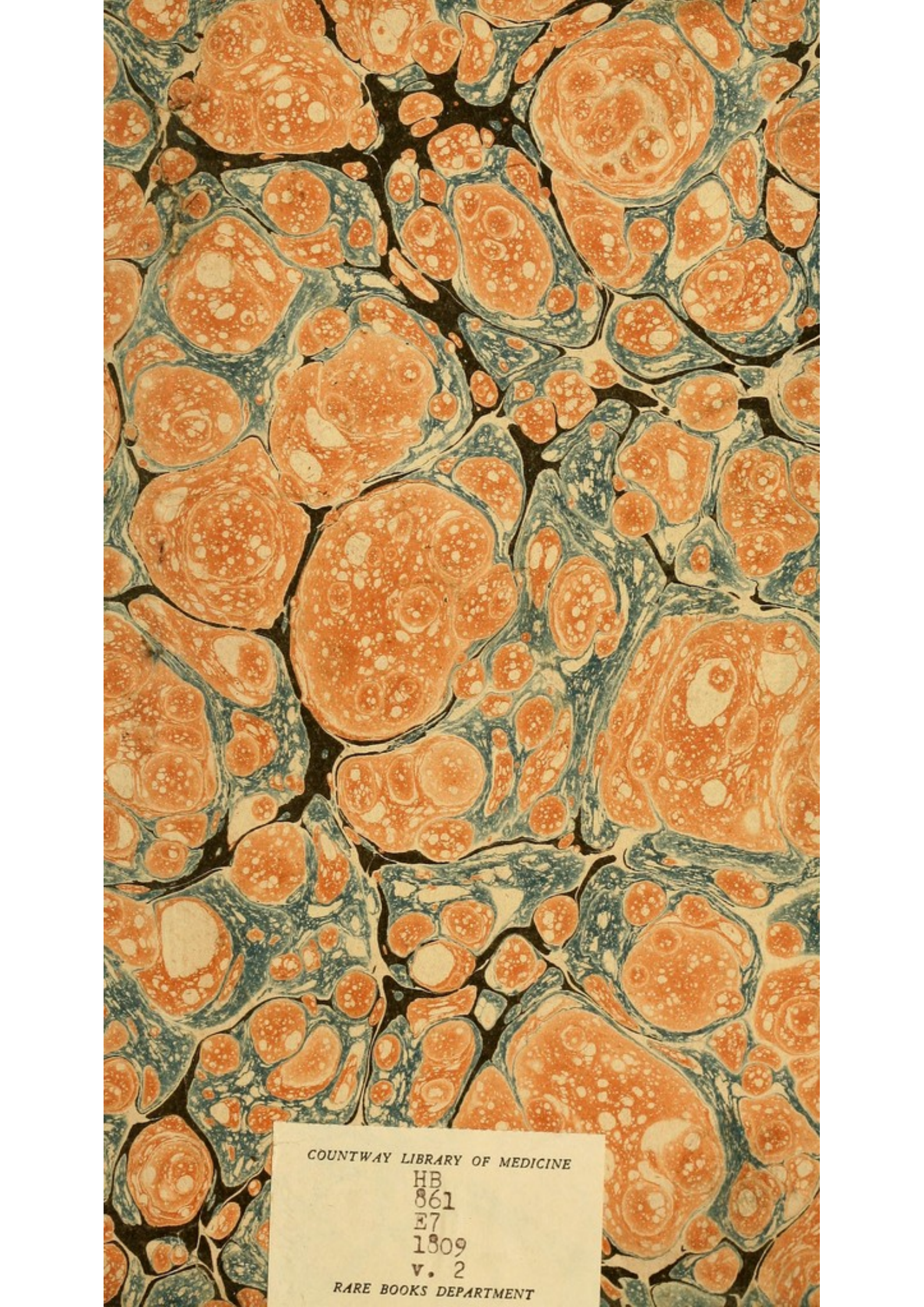












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