

**Observations on the management of the poor in Scotland, and its effects on the health of the great towns / by William Pulteney Alison.**

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OBSERVATIONS

AND

DEPARTMENTS OF THE FISH

IN SCOTLAND.





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OBSERVATIONS  
ON THE  
MANAGEMENT OF THE POOR  
IN SCOTLAND.



ON THE

OF THE

MANAGEMENT OF THE TOWN

IN SCOTLAND.

OBSERVATIONS  
ON  
THE MANAGEMENT  
OF  
THE POOR IN SCOTLAND,  
AND ITS EFFECTS ON  
THE HEALTH OF THE GREAT TOWNS.

BY  
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M.D., F.R.S.E.

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HONORARY FELLOW OF THE KING AND QUEEN'S COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS IN  
IRELAND; PROFESSOR OF THE INSTITUTES OF MEDICINE IN THE  
UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH; AND ONE OF THE PHYSICIANS  
IN ORDINARY TO HER MAJESTY FOR SCOTLAND.

"The poor shall never cease out of the land."—DEUT. xv. 11.

"Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."—ROM. xii. 21.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD & SONS, EDINBURGH;  
AND THOMAS CADELL, LONDON.

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## P R E F A C E.

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IN undertaking to give an opinion on a subject of such extent and importance as the nature of the provisions which it is right and expedient to make for the relief of poverty, in this or any other civilized country, I am quite aware that I may be thought to have entered on a discussion, which is both without my province and beyond my powers.

When it is stated, however, that in the two greatest cities of Scotland, where the science and civilization of the country may be supposed to have attained their highest development, and where medical schools exist, claiming as high a rank in point of practical usefulness as any in Europe, the annual proportion of deaths to the population is not only much beyond the average of Britain, but very con-



siderably greater than that of London, it surely cannot be thought beyond the province of one who is honoured with a situation of trust and responsibility in the greatest of these medical schools, to endeavour to investigate the causes of this mortality, and the means by which it may be diminished.\*

\* The annual mortality over England and Wales has been lately stated (by Mr Symonds, in his work on Arts and Artizans, &c.) at 1 in 51 of the population, and that of London at 1 in 41. It appears from the first Annual Report of the Registrar-general in England, published this year, that since the improved system of registration there has been adopted, both these estimates have appeared below the truth; the annual mortality in England and Wales would appear to be nearly 1 in 45 (First Report, &c. p. 13.), and the deaths in London from July 1837 till July 1838 (including, however, a very severe winter) were 53,597 in a population which, in 1831, amounted to almost exactly 1,595,000. Supposing this population to have increased since then at the rate of 1 per cent. per annum, it would have amounted in 1837 to 1,690,700; and the mortality in it in that year will be 1 in 31.5. In the city of Edinburgh, and West Church parish (excluding the Canongate), the population in 1831 was 136,100; and, considering the circumstances of the city since that time, I think we make a very fair allowance for subsequent increase, if we suppose 6000 inhabitants to have been added between 1831 and 1837. The number of deaths registered in the burial grounds belonging to the City and West Church were, from May 1837 to May 1838, 4856, giving, as compared with 142,000, a mortality of 1 in 29.2. But if we confine



Nor can it be thought presumptuous for one who has been for many years daily engaged as a Dispensary and Hospital Physician, in applying remedies to diseases which have obviously been the result of privations and sufferings in the poorest of his fellow-citizens,—and too often found them ineffectual, or known that they could be only temporarily useful, simply because he had no remedy for the privations from which they originated,—to extend his inquiries to the grand evil of Poverty itself, and endeavour to apply to it the same principles of investigation, by which physicians are guided in determining the immediate causes and remedies of disease.

ourselves to those belonging to the city of Edinburgh, we find that the burials were 2746, in a population, in 1831, of 55,200; and even if we suppose that population to have extended to 60,000 since that time (which I have no doubt, is beyond the truth), we find a mortality of 1 in 21.8. This is probably somewhat overstated, because a greater number of funerals from neighbouring parishes may take place in the city burying-grounds than from the city in neighbouring parishes; but there can be no doubt that the mortality in the city greatly exceeds that in the neighbouring parishes, and must, therefore, have been considerably more than 1 in 29 in that year; and this in a town where there are hardly any manufactures, and the ordinary business of which is liable to little fluctuation. In Glasgow, it is perfectly ascertained that the *average* mortality since 1830 has been as high as 1 in 30, and that in 1832 and 1837 it was 1 in 21, and 1 in 24.



It is generally admitted in all civilized countries, and indeed is the reason for constituting a separate department of medical instruction under the name of Medical Police,—that the prevention of Disease on a large scale may often be in the power of a community, although beyond the power of many of the inhabitants composing that community; and the present inquiry is an attempt to apply that principle to the great mass of disease and suffering which springs from poverty and destitution.

In following out this inquiry, I have long since formed, and do not scruple to express an opinion, which I cannot expect to be in the first instance either well received or generally credited in this country, viz. that the higher ranks in Scotland do much less (and what they do less systematically, and therefore less effectually) for the relief of poverty and of sufferings resulting from it, than those of any other country in Europe which is really well regulated; and much less than experience shews to be necessary, in any long inhabited and fully peopled country, in order that the lower ranks may be maintained in tolerable comfort, and a proper foundation laid for their religious and moral improvement. However unpopular this doctrine may be in the first instance, I am confident that those



who take the trouble of inquiry will find it to be strictly true ; and have no apprehension that I shall ultimately suffer in the estimation of my countrymen on account of having pointed out this truth, and drawn the inferences which I think naturally result from it.

When I say that I consider the amount of poverty and consequent suffering as the main cause of the great mortality in Edinburgh and Glasgow, I am aware that many will accuse me of overlooking what they regard as the most powerful of all causes of distress among the lower people, the use of intoxicating liquors. Several considerations, however, may be adduced to shew, that this view of the subject is superficial : and that however powerful as a secondary and more immediate cause of disease and mortality, this is neither the most fundamental nor the most remediable cause of the high mortality of these towns.

*First*, the greatest mortality, in these as in other great towns, is in young children, below the age at which this cause operates at all. *Secondly*, The same excess of mortality among the poorest people is seen in the great towns of milder climates, where the same habits of intoxication do not prevail. *Thirdly*,



Although the use of intoxicating liquors is more offensively exhibited, and is often more injurious, both morally and physically, among the poorest of the people than in any other class, yet I am satisfied from observation, that the quantity actually consumed by them in a given time, is much less than by equal numbers of individuals, who might be selected from almost every other rank of society,—among whom, nevertheless, the mortality is much smaller; the proportion of deaths in every great town being always greatest among the poorest of its inhabitants. There must therefore be some additional or accessory cause, which makes this practice much more dangerous and fatal, among the poorest of the inhabitants of every great town than among others; and no one who observes the habits of that class of society can doubt that this auxiliary cause is simply the want of sufficient nourishment and sufficient clothing. *Lastly*, Experience sufficiently demonstrates, that, among people in this climate, reduced to a certain point of depression or destitution, the temptation to drown care in intoxicating liquors, whenever these are within their reach, is nearly irresistible; so that in attempting the improvement of the lowest rank of the population, it is impossible, in most cases, to apply a remedy *directly* to this part of the evil. But I think experience



likewise shews, that it is possible to prevent any large portion of the population from sinking to that point of depression, at which drunkenness becomes almost inevitable; and its injurious effect upon health, for the reason already given, becomes greatest and surest.

A considerable part of the general reasonings, on the subject of the effect of Poor Rates on the population, and on the prosperity and happiness of a nation, contained in the following treatise, were published at my request a few years ago, in one of the most extensively circulated of the periodical publications of the day, at the time of the public discussions as to the introduction of a Poor Law into Ireland, in the view of contributing my humble mite towards the removal of the prejudices and errors (as I believe them) which had so long obstructed that great, but tardy and still imperfect, act of national justice.

I cannot allow this volume to go before the public, without expressing my cordial thanks to several friends who have kindly assisted me in the inquiries of which it contains the results; particularly to Dr Cowan, Professor of Medical Jurisprudence and Police in Glasgow, and author of the



well-known Treatise on Vital Statistics, Dr J. P. Kay, Assistant Poor-Law Commissioner in London, and author of a Treatise on the Condition of the Poor in Manchester, P. B. Duncan, Esq. of New College, Oxford, Dr Ainsworth of Manchester, Dr Elliot of Carlisle, and Dr Robert Elliot of Gateshead, and the correspondents of several of these gentlemen in other parts of England.

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ON THE

MANAGEMENT OF THE POOR

IN SCOTLAND.

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Having been, for many years past, a witness of great, and I am sorry to add, of increasing sufferings among the poor of this city—having satisfied myself that those sufferings here, and in Glasgow and other large towns in Scotland, are much greater and more general than in towns of equal size in the best regulated parts of Europe,—and being thoroughly convinced, that the opinions generally entertained in Scotland as to the best means of relieving them are very erroneous,—I feel it to be a duty to lay the result of my observations and inquiries before the public.

That I do not speak unadvisedly, when I use the word *increasing*, will appear from the following facts, which, being taken from the records of public institutions, are not liable to the fallacies which might be suspected in the statements of any individual.

1. The expenditure of the Society for the Relief



of the Destitute Sick, the members of which are uniformly men of experience in regard to the habits of the poor, and never grant relief without personal inspection, in their own houses, of families suffering at once under disease and destitution, has increased from L.736, the average of the years 1814, 1815, and 1816, to L.1816, the average of the years 1836, 1837, and 1838; and the number of individuals receiving relief from them has increased from 3223, the average number in the three former years, to 10,570, the average of the three latter years.

2. The Records of the Royal Infirmary shew, that there has been a similar increase both in the number of its inmates, and also in the severity of the diseases under which they have sought refuge there, as indicated by a progressively increasing mortality. This fact is sufficiently established by the following extract from the last Report of the Managers of the Infirmary.

“Above 4000 inhabitants of Edinburgh and Leith” (or about 1 in 40 of the whole population of these towns, and not less than 1 in 20 of the whole adult population) “have sought refuge in the Infirmary during the last year. And that they have not done so on account of slighter ailments than formerly (as some might have suspected), appears undeniably from this fact, that whereas, thirty years ago, the mortality in the Infirmary seldom exceeded 1 in 20 of the whole patients admitted,



it has gradually risen until, in the last year, it amounted to nearly 1 in 8." The whole number of patients admitted in 1838 was 4903, of whom 850 were from a distance. The average whole number for thirteen years preceding 1837 had been 2252. Before 1818 (a year of epidemic fever), the number had never reached 2200.

It is true, that of the 4900, 2200 were fever cases, but many ordinary cases were refused for want of room, the accommodation of the fever cases being of paramount importance.

It is unnecessary to quote numerical statements in order to shew that the numbers receiving medical relief at the Dispensaries during that time has increased in a much larger proportion. On this last fact I do not dwell, because the "test of destitution" in the case of Dispensary patients is certainly not so complete as in the case of the other charities I have mentioned. But as the expenditure of the Destitute Sick Society is guarded and checked in the way I have mentioned,\* and as

\* The members of this Society have been so careful to avoid imposition or misapplication of their bounty, that they have laid down a resolution, prohibiting their visitors from giving relief in some of the most destitute parts of the town, which are commonly inhabited by people of bad character; and although that rule is sometimes relaxed, I know that it has excluded from the benefits of the charity many persons in extreme want. The number of such wretched objects, refused relief by this Society, often having no ascertained parish claim, often unable to procure such clothing as they will present



few of the poor in this country resort to the Infirmary who can maintain themselves in any comfort at home, the experience of these two institutions may be held to be sufficient proof, that the amount of suffering from the combination of poverty and disease, has been nearly tripled in the city of Edinburgh within the last twenty-five years, while the population has not increased more than 50 per cent.

3. As the people admitted into the House of Refuge are there confined and subjected to a strict discipline, that institution may be said to offer a test of destitution, as complete as the charities for the relief of sickness. No such institution existed before 1832, when it was formed on account of the danger apprehended from begging and vagrancy during the time of the Cholera. It has been maintained since that time, and has on an average admitted annually (generally for a short sojourn only) above 1600 persons, about 100 of whom have been paupers paid for by their parishes, after proof of destitution; and at least 1200 more have been persons, of whose extreme indigence the Managers have satisfied themselves by strict scrutiny. The limited funds of the institution (those proceeding from subscriptions, having varied from L.850 to L.650 per annum) have obliged the Managers every year to reject many other applications from equally indigent persons.

themselves with at the Infirmary, or refused admittance there, as not being proper objects of the charity, has certainly increased very considerably of late years.



It is also to be remembered, that within a very few years before the year 1836, about 1200 of the population of Edinburgh had been carried off by the Cholera, and I believe a larger number by the Influenza, and that these epidemics had fallen especially on that part of the population which might be supposed to be most burdensome on the charities above mentioned, and might be expected therefore to have lessened the pressure on them.

It cannot be overlooked, that from various causes the expenditure of the higher ranks in Edinburgh, as proportioned to the increasing population, has considerably declined of late years. Almost all the noble families, and many of the gentlemen, of the class who formerly had large establishments here, now pass the winter in London. There has been a great reduction in the establishments both of the Courts of Law, and of the different Public Boards formerly existing here. The resort to the University has also somewhat declined; many building speculations have turned out unprofitable, the price of houses has fallen very much, and the employment of numerous labourers in the buildings lately carried on here has ceased. Thus, the number of persons who have been thrown out of employment, or whose employment has been rendered irregular and precarious, is very great; and although public begging in the streets is prohibited, great numbers are supported either by begging in the neighbourhood, or by various devices



for extorting private charity from persons to whom they are strangers. Many of them, and often the most clamorous, are impostors; but the great majority, as I can testify from ample experience, whatever their former character or conduct may have been (and in that respect there is much greater variety than many suppose), are really in extreme destitution. The gradually increasing number of women with families, whose husbands have left them in search of work, and often ultimately deserted them, must have struck all who have attended particularly to their condition.

It is also to be remembered, that this and all other assessed districts in Scotland, present a point of attraction to the poor of the numerous districts in Scotland (517 parishes) where there is no assessment for the poor, and often no hospital or other medical charity. The medical charities here are much burdened with cases, often incurable, from those districts; and as long as the relief given in those parts of the country is so small, while the law apportions some allowance (scanty although it be) to all infirm and destitute persons who have lived three years in Edinburgh, I apprehend it will act as a continued bounty on the importation of distressed and half employed families from those districts.\*

\* The following extract from a communication from Captain Thomson, the excellent treasurer of the House of Refuge, will at once shew the extent to which this evil has gone, and



Above all, this law has long acted as a bounty on the importation of such families from Ireland; which has gone to such an extremity as fully to justify the observation, "that if we are to cut off the sources of mendicity, we must first cut off Ireland."

It need hardly be added, after what has now will illustrate what I shall afterwards state, that the general diffusion through Scotland of the opinion that all poor rates are an evil, has rendered the law of the country in many instances practically inoperative. "I should say that fully *one-third* of the persons who apply for admission at the House of Refuge belong to country parishes, and are, from age, disability, or youth, *bona fide objects requiring parochial aid*;—and a great part of the funds of the House of Refuge is spent in the relief and maintenance of such persons. None of these ought to depend on voluntary charity." "I have frequent, almost daily, occasion to observe the apathy, indifference, and total disregard of the poor laws manifested on the part of parish functionaries towards persons having claims on them for relief." "The grand object kept in view by almost every parish is the possibility of *evading*, as far as their power admits of, the duty of relieving the poor. The point most earnestly sought after by them, is, *not* whether there is a certain amount of pauperism, calling for an equally definite amount of relief, but, *what is the smallest practicable amount* which they can possibly be obliged to give. No distinction is made between pauperism produced by improvidence and by inevitable misfortune. The managers of the poor of a parish will bury the father and mother of a young family, and never inquire after the orphans: I have seen melancholy instances of this, and there is at least one in the Refuge at present.



been stated, that the condition of great numbers of the poor in Edinburgh, particularly during the winter, is one of extreme destitution ; approaching in many respects very closely to that which has long been the subject of astonishment and compassion to those who have visited the worst parts of Dublin and other Irish towns, and of which I shall extract a few descriptions, almost at random, from the reports of the medical men who have seen most of the state of the poor of Ireland.

“ A population increasing but not improving, blending most of the evils of civilization with the ignorance, apathy, sloth, and dirty habits of complete barbarism : such is the melancholy picture presented by the lowest classes in this country.”

“ Nothing can be conceived more unpropitious to the human constitution than the state in which many of these families in Dublin live, *several confined in the same room*, in an atmosphere impregnated with all kinds of effluvia ; besides the houses, the lanes and alleys in which the poorest class reside being in such a miserable state of filth, as to be scarcely passable by any but their own squalid inhabitants.”\*

“ Many years’ continuance of misery has nearly extinguished all that hope and buoyancy of spirits, for which the poor people of this city were remark-

\* Medical Report of the Dublin “ Sick Poor Institution,” by Dr O’Brien, in Transactions of College of Physicians of Ireland, vol. ii. p. 477.



able in their better days. These have been succeeded by indifference to their situation, to the approach of disease or even of death, surprising and unaccountable to a casual observer, and the more to be deplored, as it leads many of them to neglect the means of preservation.”\*

“ With natural advantages not exceeded by those of any other country in the world, this kingdom now unfortunately exhibits not merely casual instances of wretchedness, but large masses of misery ;—intemperance and irregularity of every kind, desultory application to labour, alternated with intervals of total idleness, habitual dissatisfaction and despondency, poverty, and residence in crowded, filthy, and ill-ventilated dwellings.”†

The condition of the poorest part of Dublin was thus more minutely stated in a report made, in the winter of 1817, to the Governors of the House of Industry by their inspectors : “ In Barrack Street, 52 houses contain, in 390 apartments, 1318 persons, of which number 392 adults are unemployed, most of whom are in a state of extreme indigence.” “ In 71 houses in Church Street and adjoining courts, consisting of 393 apartments, 1997 persons dwell, of whom 628 are without employment. Foul lanes, courts, and yards are interposed between this and

\* Stoker, Medical Report of the Fever Hospital, in the same volume, p. 410.

† Grattan's Report of the Fever Hospital in Dublin, *id. lib.* vol. iii. p. 367, *et seq.*



the adjoining streets. There are many cellars which have no light but from the door ; in some of those cellars, the inhabitants sleep on the floors, which are earthen, but, in general, they have bedsteads. Nicholson's Court contains 151 persons in 28 small apartments, of whom 89 are unemployed : their state is very miserable, there being only two bedsteads and two blankets in the whole court.\*"

It is well known that, as a palliative of the evils resulting from this state of things in Dublin, the Mendicity Association was established, which at present admits daily, from all parts of the town, about 2500 miserable creatures (*i. e.* nearly 1 in 100 of the inhabitants of the city), keeps them all day under cover, and, after giving them two meals, dismisses them at night to their homes. I do not speak without some observation of both cities when I say, that, if a similar institution existed here, it would soon be tenanted by a proportion not much smaller, and hardly less wretched, of the inhabitants of the Old Town of Edinburgh.

That I am not singular in thinking that the condition of a large number of the lowest of the people in Edinburgh, whose employment is irregular and precarious, approaches very nearly to that which is thus described in Dublin, will appear distinctly from two short quotations. The first is from a pam-

\* Account of the Fever lately epidemical in Ireland, by Drs Barker and Cheyne, vol. ii. p. 161.



phlet by Mr Tait, surgeon, and Commissioner of Police, "On Foul Water Irrigation," written to shew, what is certainly strictly true, that the diffusion of fever in Edinburgh depends on causes acting within the city, much more than on such irrigation of meadows at some distance from it. "In many of the closes leading from the High Street to the Cowgate, every stair and every vacant apartment becomes the depository of everything that is filthy. One flat alone, situated in Foulis' Close, may give an idea of the extent to which dunghills within doors and in houses inhabited by poor families are sometimes carried. However dirty and confined this close is, it is, in many respects, superior to Blackfriars' Wynd. Every attempt at a description of the latter would come so far short of the truth, that we must abandon it for the present, in the hope that some curious visitor will, at a future day, contrast its former splendour with its present filthy and wretched condition, and give an idea to the world to what stage misery and wretchedness may be brought."

The next is from the evidence given by the Rev. Dr Lee, Minister of the Old Church, before the Commissioners of Religious Instruction, 18th Feb. 1836, on the state of another portion of the Old Town: "I have seen much wretchedness in my time, but never such a concentration of misery as in this parish. Some of the Irish in it are very wretched, but by far the most wretched are Scotch. I have seen a mother



and five daughters with another woman, in a house where there was neither chair nor table, stool, bed, or blanket, nor any kind of implement for cooking. She had the largest allowance given by the Charity Workhouse, 2s. 6d. a week." "I frequently see the same room occupied by two married couples, neither having a bed." "I have been in one day in seven houses where there was no bed, in some of them not even straw. I found people of eighty years of age lying on the boards." "Many sleep in the same clothes which they wear during the day. I may mention the case of two Scotch families living in a miserable kind of cellar, who had come from the country within a few months, in search of work. Since they came they had had two dead, and another apparently dying. In the place they inhabit, it is impossible at noonday to distinguish the features of the human face without artificial light. There was a little bundle of dirty straw in one corner, for one family, and in another for the other. An ass stood in one corner, which was as well accommodated as these human creatures. It would almost make a heart of adamant bleed to see such an accumulation of human misery in a country like this." A description in very similar terms, of a third portion of the Old Town, the neighbourhood of the Grassmarket, is given by the late Dr Hennen in an early volume of the Edinburgh Medical and Surgical Journal. My friend and former assistant Dr Kay, one of the assistant Poor-



Law Commissioners, and author of a very instructive work on the state of the poor at Manchester, states, in a letter with which he lately favoured me, that the only parallels he has seen to the wretchedness of the Irish and low Scotch population of Edinburgh, are in the Irish of Manchester and the weavers of Spitalfields.

That there has been a still more rapid increase of destitution, and that similar "scenes of wholesale human degradation and misery" exist to a still greater extent in Glasgow, is sufficiently shewn, *first*, by a few of the facts recorded by the Committee appointed there last year, to inquire into the cause of the increased assessment. "The aid to casual poor exhibits more than a three-fold increase between 1829 and 1837," and "the expenditure for coffins, for paupers and their children, is nearly *four* times as great now as in 1829-30."\* *Secondly*, the same is shewn by some sentences recording observations made by one of the Assistant Commissioners on the Handloom Inquiry:—"The wynds in Glasgow comprise a fluctuating population of from 15,000 to 30,000 persons. This quarter consists of a labyrinth of lanes, out of which numberless entrances lead into small square courts, each with a dunghill reeking in the centre. Revolting as was the outward appearance of these places, I was little prepared for the filth and destitution within. In some of these lodging-rooms (visited at night) we

\* Report, &c. p. 4.



found a whole lair of human beings littered along the floor, sometimes fifteen and twenty, some clothed and some naked; men, women, and children huddled promiscuously together. Their bed consisted of a layer of musty straw, intermixed with rags. There was generally little or no furniture in these places; the sole article of comfort was a good fire. Thieving and prostitution constitute the main sources of the revenue of this population. No pains seem to be taken to purge this Augean pandemonium, this nucleus of crime, filth, and pestilence, existing in the centre of the second city of the empire. These wynds constitute the St Giles' of Glasgow, but I owe an apology to the metropolitan pandemonium for the comparison. *A very extensive inspection of the lowest districts of other places, both here and on the Continent, never presented any thing one-half so bad, either in intensity of pestilence, physical and moral, or in extent, proportioned to the population.*"\* It is from the extent to which this mode of life here prevails, that Glasgow exhibits, as Dr Cowan states, "a frightful rate of mortality, unequalled, probably, in any city in Britain." Since 1830, the average annual mortality there has been 1 in 30; in 1832, it was 1 in 21.67, and in 1837, 1 in 24.63,—the average annual mortality in London being 1 in 41, and over England 1 in 51.

\* Arts and Artisans at Home and Abroad, by J. C. Symons, Esq. P. 116, *et seq.*



I have next to observe, that, for many years past, contagious fever has never been absent from Edinburgh, and there have been three great epidemics of that disease in the last twenty-two years, beginning in 1817, 1826, and 1836 (the last of which has now nearly subsided), each lasting nearly three years, and each of the two last affecting, I believe, nearly ten thousand persons. The number of fever patients admitted into the Infirmary, and Auxiliary Fever Hospital, from November 1817 to November 1820, was 3090;—from November 1826 to November 1829, it was 4318,—and from October 1836 to October 1839, it was 4850.

When we remember the number of young children affected with fever on all these occasions, the number of the poor who refused to go to the Infirmary, or were too far advanced in the disease, when seen by the medical men attending them, to be removed, and the number of fever patients in the middle or higher ranks, we can hardly suppose the number admitted into the Infirmary during any of these epidemics, to have been more than one-half of the whole. The abatement of the disease between the two last epidemics was less complete than between the two first, and the mortality, as well as the extent of the last of these, has been greater than of either of the former, having amounted in 1838 to no less than one in six of all the fever patients admitted into the Infirmary. The prevalence of epidemic fever in Edinburgh becomes



more important as an indication of the tendency to the disease in the population, when we remember that, ever since 1817, the arrangements for removing fever patients to hospital, immediately on the disease being recognised,—for fumigating and cleaning their houses, and for supporting their families during their absence,—have, by the combined exertions of the Dispensaries, Fever Board, and Destitute Sick Society, been superior, I believe, to those in any other town in Britain; and that, with the exception of two or three weeks of last winter, the Infirmary and Auxiliary Hospitals have always been able to accommodate all the patients sent thither. But for these advantages, the numbers of fever cases here would probably have equalled those at Glasgow.

It is farther to be remembered, that the effect of the mortality of fever on the happiness of the community cannot be estimated merely from knowing its amount; for (unlike some other epidemic diseases) it always falls most heavily on the most valuable lives, particularly among the poor. An observation made by one of the Irish physicians who reported to Government on the great epidemic of 1817, is perfectly applicable to all that we have seen of the disease since that time in Edinburgh. “*The heads of families, almost without exception, became the victims, while the rest escaped. The widows and orphans, who are so numerous in every*



quarter, can bear a sad testimony to the truth of this well-known observation.”\*

“A fever which consigns thousands to the grave,” says Dr Harty, “consigns tens of thousands to a worse fate, to hopeless poverty; for fever spares the children, and cuts off the parents, leaving the wretched offspring to fill the future ranks of prostitution, mendicancy, and crime.” “The mortality of fever,” says Dr Barker, “is most frequent where it is most injurious, viz., in men advanced in life, the heads and supports of families. The increase of poverty and mendicity, and the agonizing mental distress to which it must give rise, are consequences which must occur to every reflecting mind.” There is no exaggeration in the simple and impressive statement of Dr Cowan, that “the prevalence of fever presents obstacles to the promotion of social improvement among the lower classes, and is productive of an amount of human misery, credible only to those who have witnessed it.”†

The mortality occasioned by contagious fever in the medical profession, is of itself an item of no small amount in the general estimate of the sufferings, bodily and mental, resulting from it, and has been much felt in Edinburgh. When I mention the names (among my own friends and contempo-

\* Letter of Dr Bracken, in the “Account of the Rise, Progress, and Decline of the Fever lately Epidemical in Ireland,” by Drs Barker and Cheyne.—Dublin, 1821, vol. i. p. 198.

† “Statistics of Fever and Small-Pox in Glasgow.” P. 14.



raries) of Dr John Gordon, Dr James Gregory, Dr Mackintosh, and Dr John Home, all of whom fell victims to contagious fever, caught in the performance of their duty, I shall make myself sufficiently understood. It has fallen to my lot, within the last two years, to witness the premature death of no less than sixteen promising young men, connected with the University, from this cause ; and it is well known how often fever, caught by contagion from the poor, has cut off some of the most respected clergymen and others who interest themselves in the work of charity, here and elsewhere.

These repeated and severe visitations of fever, demand special consideration on this account, that they are not merely the *occasion* of much and widely spread suffering and destitution, but they “ argue a foregone conclusion ;” they are, as I shall endeavour to shew, in a great measure the result, and the *indication and test*, of much previous misery and destitution,—and I believe never occur, in peaceful times and in wealthy communities, where the condition of the lower orders is so generally comfortable, as it certainly is in some parts of Europe, and as every man of benevolent and Christian feeling must wish and hope that it may be made in all.

When I say, that I consider the repeated recurrence of extensive epidemic fever, as a clear indication of great previous suffering among the poor, I am perfectly aware that the assertion may be open



to some objection. We all know that contagious fever may exist, and spread to a certain extent, where there is no destitution; and we know also, that destitution may exist (although I believe never for a length of time, and in a large town) without fever shewing itself. I believe also, that fever extends much more rapidly, or possesses a stronger contagious property, in some seasons than others, in all ranks of the community. It is not asserted that destitution is a cause adequate to the *production* of fever (although in some circumstances I believe it may become such); nor that it is the *sole* cause of its extension. What we are sure of is, that it is a cause of the *rapid diffusion* of contagious fever, and one of such peculiar power and efficacy, that its existence may always be presumed, when we see fever prevailing in a large community to an unusual extent. The manner in which deficient nourishment, want of employment, and privations of all kinds, and the consequent mental depression, favour the diffusion of fever, may be matter of dispute; but that they have that effect in a much greater degree than any cause external to the human body itself, is a fact confirmed by the experience of all physicians who have seen much of the disease.\*

\* In the Appendix to the fourth Report of the Poor-Law Commissioners, it is stated by Drs Arnott, Kay, and Southwood Smith, that the malaria arising from putrefying animal and vegetable matters produces typhoid fevers. Although I highly respect all these gentlemen, and approve of the practical inference which they draw from that opinion, so far as it goes,



“Next to contagion,” says Dr Grattan, “I consider a *distressed state* of the general population of because I have no doubt that vitiated air, like all other causes which weaken the human constitution, favours the diffusion of fever—yet I cannot subscribe to their opinion, that this cause is of itself adequate to the production of contagious fever. And if, trusting to that opinion, the public authorities should think it sufficient, in any situation where contagious fever is prevalent, to remove all *dead* animal and vegetable matter, without attempting to improve the condition of the *living* inhabitants, I am confident that their labour will be in vain. The true specific cause of the contagious fever, at least of Edinburgh, certainly does not spring from any thing external to the living human body. I have stated much evidence on this point in a paper in the Edinburgh Medical Journal for 1828, and could easily adduce much more. A case in point is given in a letter contained in the Appendix in question, from Mr Evans, surgeon in the Borough. “I have attended, in nine months, above 500 pauper cases of fever, but cannot trace it to any local cause, for we have in the parish of St George very good drainage, and very little accumulated filth, with the exception of certain courts and lanes, *and there the disease does not exist more severely than over the parish in general.*” Another occurs to me in the letters of Dr Barry of Cork, published by Drs Barker and Cheyne. “More than once, on visiting the neighbourhood of deposits of manure, I have witnessed much misery in the inhabitants, shewn by general emaciation, &c. and yet they have been exposed to the continued agency of these exhalations, without shewing any symptoms of fever. Sooner or later the disease found entrance, and *then* swept away the inhabitants in great numbers.” He gives instances where fever spread in the upper rooms of houses in such situations, while the lower, “in the most abominable state of filth,” were free from it; all shewing, as our experience in Edinburgh does, that this is a cause of the *extension*, not of the *generation*, of fever. See Barker and Cheyne, vol. i. p. 295.



any particular district, the most common and most extensive source of typhoid fever ; whether this has been the result of war, or been produced by the more gradual progress of domestic misfortune.” “The present epidemic (that of Ireland in 1818) is principally to be referred to the miserable condition of the poorer classes in this kingdom ; and so long as their state shall continue unimproved, so long will fever prevail, probably not to its present extent, but certainly to an extent sufficient to render it at all times a national affliction.” “In crowded cities, especially when much poverty prevails, the inhabitants, listless and desponding, become inattentive to cleanliness in their persons and habitations, their contracted means compel numbers to reside in the same dwelling, and their apartments are in general filthy and ill ventilated. In winter, in consequence of the want of fuel and of sufficient clothing, any aperture is closed through which the air might procure admission. In these circumstances, the contagion of fever is often developed, and then almost every individual within the sphere of its operation, and predisposed by the debilitating effects of mental anxiety, is attacked by the disease.”\*

That it is always in persons suffering, or who have lately suffered, similar privations and sufferings, and the mental depression and despondency

\* Trans. of Coll. of Phys. of Ireland, vol. iii. p. 66.



which naturally attend them, that continued fever becomes extensively prevalent, is fully established by the history of all considerable epidemics. The elaborate work of Drs Cheyne and Barker, shews that this has been strictly true of all the great epidemics which have appeared in Ireland since 1700, each of them lasting fully two years, viz. in 1708, 1720, and 1731, in 1740-41 (after the great frost of 1740), in 1800-1801, after the rebellion, the transference of the seat of government to London, and the scarcity of 1799 and 1800; and, again, in 1817, after the "transition from the state of war to that of peace," and the scarcity of 1816 and 1817. That work contains reports from the most eminent physicians in all parts of Ireland on that great epidemic, all agreeing in the statement, that "the poor were the greatest sufferers, and *the fever seemed to rage among them in a degree proportionate to the privations they had endured.*" In Ireland, accordingly, at least during the present century, as the general condition of the poor has been decidedly worse than either in England or Scotland, so contagious fever has never ceased to be more generally prevalent. The same observation applies to the epidemic fever in London after the scarcity of 1800 (the last great epidemic which has occurred there),—to the great epidemic continental fever of 1813-14, which followed the track of the French army retreating from Russia, but never made much progress in the victorious allied



army,—to the epidemic fever of 1817 in Italy, consequent on the scarce year 1816,—to the epidemic which affected the British army in Holland after the disastrous retreat from Flanders in 1794,—in Portugal after that from Burgos in 1812,—and to that which nearly decimated the British Legion at Vittoria in 1836.

That the same cause has acted very powerfully in producing the recent epidemics, both in Edinburgh and Glasgow, appears distinctly from two considerations.

*First*, It appears from observing the times of these epidemics, the first in Edinburgh beginning in 1817, after two bad harvests, and at the same time as the Irish one; the next in 1826, after the great failures in 1825, and the sudden cessation, particularly of building speculations, in Edinburgh; and the last in 1836, after the great depression of trade both in Glasgow and Dundee, with which towns the lower orders here are much connected, and under the combination of other circumstances already mentioned, which have depressed the condition of the poor in Edinburgh of late years. In Glasgow, the evidence of the operation of this cause is still stronger; fever seems to have increased and diminished for forty years past, nearly as it did in Edinburgh, until the year 1836, when, after the great stagnation of trade, it became much more formidable. For twenty years before 1815, when the town was rapidly increasing in wealth, the



number of fever patients in the Infirmary never exceeded 130 in the year. In the three years, 1817, 1818, and 1819, it amounted to 2715, or 905 in the year. It then diminished considerably, but rose after the failures in 1825, and in 1826, 1827, and 1828, amounted to 3520 or 1173 in the year. There was another increase of the disease in 1832; and after the great failures in 1835, it spread so extensively, that the numbers taken into hospitals in 1836, 1837, and 1838, amounted to 9740, or 3270 in the year, and of these 5387 were in the year 1837 alone. The hospital accommodation in Glasgow has long been much less adequate to such extension of fever than that in Edinburgh, so that I believe in all the epidemics "numerous applicants for admission have been thrown back on their own resources, and left to spread the contagion of typhus around their miserable dwellings;" and in the last three years the whole number of cases of fever in Glasgow is computed at nearly 40,000; and the deaths from it are stated in the mortality bills to have been 3835, of which 2180 were in the year 1837 alone.\*

*Secondly*, The same thing appears from the observation which I have myself made many hundreds of times in the Old Town of Edinburgh, that

\* In the summer of 1837, the number of unemployed male operatives in Glasgow, who applied for work from a public charity, was 3072, of whom 2273 were married men. (See Cowan's Vital Statistics, and Glasgow Mortality Bill for 1837, by Henry Paul.)



it is among those of the poor who suffer the greatest privations,—whose employment is precarious, often suspended, or little profitable,—and among disabled men, “lone women,” widows and orphans, especially among the poor Irish, or other strangers of this description,—that fever most frequently appears, and always spreads most rapidly and extensively.

These facts point to so intimate a connection between contagious fever and destitution, that I have no doubt we shall very constantly find, in regard to all large towns, where the structure of society is complex, that, if the condition of the poor is very bad, fever will be prevalent; and, if that be tolerably comfortable, it will be comparatively rare. This contrast is remarkably observed on comparing the great towns of England with those either of Scotland or Ireland. Thus, the London Fever Hospital, which admits patients from all parts of the town on the certificate of any medical man, had only, as we learn from Dr Bateman, 600 inmates in the whole ten years preceding 1817.\* The num-

\* I am aware that fever has prevailed more extensively in London of late years, chiefly since the commercial distresses of 1835; and that, in a population of 850,000 in twenty Metropolitan Unions, there were, in the year ending March 1838, 12,700 cases (including those called synochus and typhus) attended by the medical officers of the parishes; certainly the largest number in any one year since 1800 (when Dr Willan computed the number at 40,000), and still hardly implying the affection of more than 1 in 60 of the population; whereas I believe the number affected last year in Edinburgh must have



ber of fevers annually treated in the Manchester Fever Hospital, for seven years ending 1836, was 497, hardly one-fourth of those treated in Glasgow in the same years, although the population sending patients there, is nearly equal, and comprises many Irish. In 1836 and 1837, the numbers treated in

been nearly 1 in 30 of the population, and in Glasgow, the year before, it must have been nearly 1 in 10. The number of fever cases treated (in hospital or at home) by the medical officers of the St George the Martyr, Bethnal-Green, and Whitechapel Unions, in the year ending March 1838, was 4676, in a population of 165,928; but these were the districts in London most severely affected, and inhabited by those portions of the population who, according to the principles stated, will always be most liable to fever,—the poor of the Bethnal-Green Union, for example, being “almost universally hand-loom weavers,” “in wretched circumstances,” and parts of other districts most liable to fever being “chiefly inhabited by the *humblest classes of the Irish*, and the most abandoned of both sexes.” It is well worth notice too, that, in these Unions (as will afterwards appear), the usual expenditure on the poor—probably from so many of them being strangers—is much below the usual average in England, having been 4s. and 5s. on the population, when the average over England was above 7s. 6d. It is also to be observed as great part of the cause of the diffusion of fever in these parts of London, that the hospital accommodation, and means of removal of the patients out of their own houses (probably in consequence of the evil having long been slight), appear to be much inferior to those in Edinburgh. In others of the Middlesex districts, as in the Brentford and Edmonton Unions, except in very confined localities, it appears that even at that time there was “little if any cause of complaint on the score of fever.”—(See 4th Report of Commissioners, Appendix A, and 5th Report, Appendix C.)



hospitals in Glasgow were 8512, and in Manchester 1391. The number of hospital patients in fever at Leeds, a manufacturing town with 123,000 inhabitants, was 274 in the year, on an average of seven years before 1836,—when the average at Glasgow was 1842. In Newcastle and Gateshead, the population of which is nearly 58,000, the number of fever patients taken into the institution appropriated to them was only 8 in the year for some years before 1817, and only 39 in the year for seven years preceding 1836.\* In Carlisle and its neighbourhood, a population of above 32,000 yielded 63 fever patients in the year to the house of recovery, on an average of seventeen years before 1838, but in that year there was an epidemic affecting about 600 persons, of whom 265 came into the hospital. In some other English towns, particularly those which are not manufacturing, the exemption from fever for many years together has been still more complete. I have been favoured with statements from Oxford and Bath. In the former, a population of 16,000 does not afford to the Infirmary five fever patients in the year, and very few to the workhouse. In the latter, where the population is 55,000, it is merely said that “few cases of fever occur either at the hospital or workhouse.” This exemption, in the case of these towns, is certainly of many years standing.

As a contrast, let us look for a moment at the ra-

\* Cowan's Vital Statistics, p. 11.



vages of fever in some of the Irish towns ; as in Dublin, where the number of fever cases admitted into one hospital (in Cork Street) was 24,000 in ten years *preceding* 1817, and the whole numbers admitted into the different hospitals, in 21 months of 1817-18, was 39,000 ; or in Cork, where “ one-seventh of the population *passed through the different fever hospitals* of the city in the two years 1817-18 ;” or in Limerick, where it was estimated, “ and I believe with good reason, that one-fourth of the inhabitants sickened of the fever” in the same year ; or in Waterford, where “ the sufferers from fever in those years cannot be reckoned at less than one-ninth of the whole population ; while, in the part of the city named the Carrigeen, inhabited by the poorest and most miserable classes, there are good grounds for believing, that at least nineteen out of twenty persons suffered from the fever ; and in Murphy’s Lane, containing sixty houses, every inhabitant had an attack of fever within two months ;” or in Strabane, where “ it appears, from very accurate returns, that nearly one-fourth of the inhabitants were affected with the disease, of whom somewhat more than the average died ;”<sup>\*</sup> and let us remember the observation everywhere made, that “ the poor were uniformly the greatest sufferers, and fever seemed to rage among them in proportion to the sufferings they had endured ;” that “ the disease was most destructive in those parts of

<sup>\*</sup> Barker and Cheyne, vol. ii. pp. 16, 26, 40, 122, 166.



the country, where the poor had least intercourse with the rich ;” and that, in several districts, even in those times, where “ great exertions were made to relieve the poor, and a large sum of money expended in procuring them the necessaries of life, there the epidemic never raged to any great extent.”

When we shall see similar statements in regard to the general extension of fever among the English poor, and the circumstances of those among whom it spreads, as I have quoted from the Irish records, then, and not till then, I shall believe that the system of legal relief, which has been in force there for 250 years, tends ultimately to an increase of their destitution and suffering.

Thus, the existence of epidemic fever in any great community, particularly if there be neither war nor famine to explain it, becomes a most important test to the legislator of the destitute condition of the poor, and, as I shall endeavour to shew, of the deficiency of the funds which, in a better regulated state, are applied to their support.

I presume it will not be denied that the ordinary diet, and all the comforts of the lowest orders of society, in those English towns which are so little liable to fever, are much better than in Scotland ; and that in Ireland, where the disposition to fever is strongest and most constant, the diet and comforts of the lowest class of people are habitually the worst. The simple fact of the habitual *cleanliness* of the English poor, as compared either with the



Scotch or Irish, is sufficient evidence on this point. That there are differences in nations, as in individuals, in this last respect, independently of their differences in other comforts, is admitted ; but that the lower ranks of a whole people should be habitually cleanly, and yet much impoverished,—or should be habitually destitute, and preserve any habits of cleanliness, may be fairly asserted to be moral impossibilities. The Chief Secretary of Ireland, in describing to Parliament the great epidemic fever of Ireland, in 1819, expressed a hope “ that the lower Irish would be better prepared in future, to guard against such a calamity ; that they would be more cleanly in their persons and domestic habits, fumigate their houses, and change their bedding and clothes.” This really recalls the remark of the French princess, who expressed her astonishment that any of her father’s subjects should not have lived on bread and cheese, rather than have died of famine. A medical observer of the disease, more practically acquainted with the poor Irish, observes with perfect justice :—“ It may be asked, ‘ How can those wretched beings, scarcely able to procure a ‘ meal’s meat,’ be expected to be more cleanly in their domestic habits ; or how can they, who have scarcely a rag to cover them, and who are obliged, for want of bed-clothes, to sleep under the raiment they wear by day, ‘ change their bedding and clothes ?’ Before we can be justified in using such language towards the poor of Ireland,



we must remove the causes of their poverty, and then allow half a century to eradicate the bad habits of ages.”\*

Even independently of the disposition which is given to fever by the destitute condition of the poor in our large towns, it is generally admitted that the want of sufficient nourishment, and sufficient clothing, their irregular and precarious subsistence, and their occasional intemperate habits (which I believe to be the natural result of such a mode of life), are the fruitful sources of many other diseases which continually afflict them, and embitter and shorten their existence. And even independently of disease, the comfortless state of a great part of the population, especially of those who are unable for active employment, and are farthest removed from intercourse with the higher orders, is, in many instances, such as to make it incumbent, as I think, on those who deprecate any improvement in it, to point out distinctly what benefit is conferred on the community by its being kept in its present state. The following is a true picture: “The female field labourers (very numerous here, as in every town in Scotland), when employed, earn only eightpence a-day, and are unable to provide anything for the future. Accordingly, ceasing to be fit for work about the age of fifty, they inevitably become destitute, and depend for the remainder of their lives on the charity of their neigh-

\* Harty's Sketch of the Contagious Fever, &c. p. 219.



bours or parochial allowance. The number of such poor women, in almost every small town in Scotland, is distressing to think upon. Though unfit for active exertions, they have a tenacity of life which usually carries them through many years of extreme penury. Habitual piety gives them resignation, sometimes even cheerfulness, but this ought not to blind any enlightened or humane inquirer to the real nature of their situation. *The fact is, they live in a condition to which that of most domestic animals is a luxury.* The parish rarely offers to such persons more than a shilling a-week. Individuals occasionally give them some scraps, but this succour is very trifling. Their mode of life is often altogether a mystery, nothing like the usually understood means of maintaining life being found as within their reach. The only chance of such persons seems to be an acute illness, for then some little attention is paid them. But generally this is not the nature of their ailments. They have lingering complaints, the consequence of poorness of living, generally quite incurable; and thus they linger on from year to year, in a state very nearly parallel to that of the worn-out male labourers, till death puts an end to their sufferings.”\*

I think such facts must induce every man of reflection who witnesses them, to ask himself two questions:—1. Is it a part of the general plan of Providence, against which it is in vain to contend,

\* Chambers's Edinburgh Journal, February 16. 1839.



that so large a portion of our fellow-creatures should habitually undergo such an amount of suffering ; and, 2. Is it reasonable to expect that any religious or moral instruction can permanently engage the attention, or influence the conduct of people who, especially during youth, are so situated ? To both these questions I humbly apprehend that the answer should be in the negative.

That it is a part of the dispensations of Providence, that much poverty should exist in every human community, is indeed as obvious as that a seed of evil has been implanted in every human breast ; and no one who has been accustomed to observe the comparative enjoyments of the different ranks of society, will ever regard a man as an object of compassion merely because he is poor. The inquiries and reflections of modern philosophers have enabled us to understand distinctly the natural principles which uniformly and continually work out the accomplishment of the Divine Word, that “the poor shall never cease out of the land.” But the same Scripture which tells us of the continued existence of poverty, tells us also of the duty of charity ; and if we find that not only poverty, but sufferings resulting from poverty, are regularly increasing in any place, or at any time,— if we find that what is done by the rich is less effectual in relieving the sufferings of the poor there than elsewhere, and that many social evils exist which are elsewhere comparatively unknown, it is obvious that that great duty is not



performed, unless the causes of the difference are carefully investigated, and the proper remedies applied. "If the intellectual powers," says an amiable writer, "be worth the pains of cultivation, if one object of man's study be preferable to another, it must be with the view of diminishing general misery, and extending general happiness."

It appears from what has been said, that, as the number of destitute poor in Edinburgh has increased, the exertions of the institutions for the relief of poverty, *combined with sickness*, have been proportionally and greatly augmented. The funds for several of these institutions, however, viz. the Infirmary and Dispensaries, are, in a great measure, supplied by the students of Medicine who come from a distance. The institutions for the relief of *indigence alone*, of persons out of employment, of widows and orphans, of the aged or permanently disabled poor, have certainly not extended their operations in nearly the same proportion. The House of Refuge is the only recently established institution which holds out relief to such persons; and in so far as it does not act merely as an auxiliary workhouse to the parishes, its funds have very considerably declined.\* The only other institution which holds out the prospect of relief to such persons, is

\* Between 1836 and 1839 (*i. e.* just during the continuance of the epidemic fever) its income from subscriptions and donations fell from L.859 to L.657, and its "miscellaneous receipts" from L.342 to L.78.



the Benevolent and Strangers' Friend Society, which commenced in 1815. This society, however, is chiefly intended for the benefit of strangers from a considerable distance. It raises annually, with considerable difficulty, about L.360, of which about L.280 are expended on the poor.\*

On the other hand, the Society for the Suppression of Beggars, which, twenty-five years ago, had subscriptions to the amount of above L.600 a-year, after contracting its operations very considerably, has discontinued them entirely within the last few years, on the understanding, that the objects of its bounty (whose number had become trifling) would receive assistance from the two other institutions last mentioned.

Neither have the sums raised and expended in the way of legal relief to the poor undergone any increase, in proportion to the increase of destitution of which I have given evidence. The assessment in the city parishes was indeed raised from 5 to 6 per cent. on the rental in 1831, but part of this increase was required for the payment of debt; and the expenditure on the poor, which was above L.9000 in 1825,† is stated at L.9010 : 10 : 3, on an average of the years 1835-36-37.‡ An increased

\* See its Report for 1838.

† See Abstract of Receipt and Expenditure of the Edinburgh Charity Workhouse for that year, by George Spankie, Treasurer.

‡ See Report of the Committee of the General Assembly on the Poor in Scotland, p. 2.



assessment for these parishes was proposed in the beginning of the year by the Managers of the Charity Workhouse, as, in their opinion, quite necessary for the relief of the poor, but refused by the Town-Council, who are the legal guardians of the poor in this as in other royal burghs in Scotland.

In like manner, when it was proposed very lately at one of the meetings of the managers of the poor in the West Church parish (which, although suburban, comprises 70,000 of the inhabitants of Edinburgh) to raise the assessment in that parish, which is 11d. in the pound, or a little more than  $4\frac{1}{2}$  per cent., to 1s., and to appropriate the additional amount exclusively to widows and orphans, the proposal was rejected by a large majority.

Soup-kitchens have been repeatedly opened during the most inclement winters, for the assistance of the most distressed part of the population (generally when there was much apprehension of contagious diseases extending from them to the higher ranks), but have always excited much dissatisfaction among many influential persons, and the assistance given by them has been discontinued whenever the weather improved.

Thus it appears, that in Edinburgh (and I believe the same holds of other large towns in Scotland), while there has been much disposition to relieve the *sick poor*, there has been a very general discouragement of institutions for the relief of *mere poverty*,—of the unemployed poor, the aged or per-



manently disabled poor, and the widows and orphans of the poor. The whole sum applied to these purposes is much smaller than in all the English towns. The kind of assistance to the poor, which all medical men know to be of the utmost importance for the *prevention* of many of their most formidable diseases, has been as much as possible withheld.

The reason is, that, during the whole time to which I have been alluding, the general impression and belief among the most influential persons who have presided over the public charities in Scotland has been, that all legal provision for the poor is a great evil; and it has even been a very prevalent opinion (and, as it appears to me, a perfectly just opinion, if the arguments against the legal provision be really well-founded), that all private charity, intended merely for the relief of indigence, independently of disease, is of very doubtful public advantage; very easily carried to excess, probably carried to excess in Edinburgh itself, and when so, "breaking down the spirit of independence among the poor," and rapidly multiplying the objects of charity. It cannot be denied, that this has been the prevailing impression, on which it has been thought wise to act as rigidly as possible, during the time that the deterioration of the condition of the poor in Edinburgh, of which I have given evidence, has been going on.

The general belief has been, that the religious and



moral education of the poor should be the main object of the assistance given them by the higher ranks, and that if that object be duly accomplished, the poor are most benefited by being left to themselves; when their own prudence and foresight, strengthened by the religious and moral feelings which have been inculcated in them, will form the best security against the evils of poverty. The fear of weakening the prudence and foresight of the poor by teaching them to rely on legal relief, has been, probably not the sole motive, but certainly the ostensible plea, of the "characteristic distinction of the system established in Scotland for the maintenance of the poor, viz. that it places its main reliance on the voluntary contributions of the public, and never imposes a compulsory assessment, so long as hopes can be reasonably entertained of procuring without it the needful assistance."\* "The old system" of church collections and voluntary contributions to raise the only funds for the legal relief of the poor, "still prevails over the greater part of Scotland. The people in general are persuaded of its expediency, and, with very few exceptions, are anxious to preserve it." The wisdom of this plan of raising the funds even for the legal or parochial relief of the poor, in preference to assessment, was asserted by the late Mr Stewart, although not confidently, in his Lectures on Political Economy. I have heard two of

\* Report by a Committee of the General Assembly on the Management of the Poor in Scotland, 1839, p. 4. &c.



his most illustrious colleagues in the University of Edinburgh, men of undoubted and active benevolence, express themselves more strongly to the same effect,—one saying, that he thought no greater curse could befall a country than the establishment of a legal provision for its poor; and the other, that if he could dispose of the charitable institutions in Scotland, he would abolish them all, except Hospitals and Dispensaries, and leave the poor, unless when afflicted with disease, entirely to their own resources. I need hardly say that nearly the same doctrine has been zealously espoused by our present illustrious Professor of Divinity.\* When such sentiments are expressed by men of great and deserved moral influence, we cannot be surprised to find that they are habitually acted on by practical men,—that the members of the College of Justice should have steadily refused to waive the privilege which exempts them from assessment for the relief of the poor, and thereby reduced the rental liable to assessment in the city parishes, for that purpose, by about

\* So strongly has the opinion of the injurious effects of relieving poverty, and of the importance of teaching the poor to depend on their own resources, taken hold of the “public mind” in Edinburgh, that those who appear to feel much anxiety about their sufferings, seem to be usually regarded as well-meaning, weak-minded men, who are incapable of comprehending the “principle of population,” and do not understand that the sufferings of one part of the community are the proper corrective to restrain the tendency to undue increase of numbers in the rest.



one-fifth, viz. from L.205,000 to L.165,000 per annum;\* that many who subscribe to Hospitals and Dispensaries, and to the building of churches and the support of schools, should decline, even although not assessed, to subscribe to any other institutions for the relief of the poor; and even that many respectable citizens should never appear among the subscribers to any public charity, at the same time that they steadily withstand all solicitations for private alms, and thus reduce the practice of this Christian duty to the utmost possible simplicity.

In like manner, it is not surprising, when such sentiments are generally prevalent, that the Town-Council of Edinburgh, and the Managers of the West Church Charity-Workhouse, should have refused, even last winter, at the time when epidemic fever was alarmingly prevalent, to order the increased assessments which were proposed. In both instances, these guardians of the poor must have been perfectly aware, that the boon, if granted, would have very materially relieved the sufferings of many helpless women and children. I make no charge against the humanity of those gentlemen, and have no doubt, in both cases, if they had anticipated no bad consequences, they would have willingly consented; but they were impressed with the belief, founded on the strong assertions of so many influential men, that they would

\* See Report of Committee of General Assembly, &c. Appendix, No. 8.



thereby ultimately extend and perpetuate the kind of suffering which they would temporarily relieve. And I believe that their fellow-citizens, acting on the same impressions, have generally approved their conduct.\*

It may readily be supposed that I do not set myself in opposition to an opinion which has been maintained by so many of those to whom I have always looked with feelings of the highest respect, without reluctance, without repeated reflection on the grounds of my own opinion, and diffi-

\* The argument chiefly urged in the Town-Council was, that wherever poor laws had been introduced they had been found ultimately to lead to an increase of poverty and suffering; a statement which I shall afterwards endeavour to shew to be almost exactly the reverse of the truth. At present I shall only state as a commentary on it, that in the *non-assessed* parish in Scotland, where the proportion of the poors' funds to the population is probably the smallest (£.3 per annum to 2275 persons), the minister states, that were the funds of greater amount, *it would be necessary to admit on the roll three times as many paupers* as are actually on it. See Report by Committee of General Assembly, p. 15. At the meeting of the West Church Managers, Mr Gifford argued, that an increased allowance to widows and orphans "would introduce the *worst principles* of the old English Poor Law, which had risen to such a height that the Legislature had been obliged to put it down;"—apparently not being aware that one of the objects, and, according to the Reports of the Commissioners, one of the results of the English Poor-Law Amendment Act was to *increase* the comforts allowed to the truly impotent poor. See Report of Commissioners for 1838, p. 73.



dence as to my power of convincing others. Even independently of the authority of such men, I am aware that almost every Scotchman who has "made up his faggot of opinions," has included in it a general belief (in many instances, I believe, perfectly well founded), that the civil institutions of his own country are superior to those of England, and on that account will be unwilling to relinquish the idea, that the Scotch principle is the right system of national charity, and the English the wrong one.

But "*Magna est veritas et prævalebit.*" I should be an unworthy disciple of those men to whom I have alluded, if I could hesitate to avow my conviction of what, after deliberate inquiry, I believe to be the truth, out of deference to their authority; or if I could doubt for a moment that truth and reason will gradually make their way, even when opposed by high authority, by general prejudice, and by a natural (although, I believe, mistaken) idea of individual pecuniary interest.

I do not hesitate, therefore, to express my firm conviction, in which I am so far supported by the opinion, not only of most recent English authors, but of the late Dr Andrew Thomson, of Dr Stevenson M'Gill, and of Mr M'Culloch, that the objections which are so strongly felt in this country against a compulsory provision for the poor, are found, by extensive experience, to be absolutely and fundamentally erroneous; that, in a complex state of society, such as exists in this and all other great



towns, there is no other way in which the lower ranks can be permanently preserved from an extremity of suffering which no Christian can contemplate without horror, and which I cannot but think it was one great object of the Christian dispensation to avert; and that there is no reasonable prospect of permanent improvement in the condition of the poor in this country, without an absolute and final rejection of the dogma, that the duty of the rich to the poor is performed by giving them a religious and moral education, and supporting medical charities for them, when they are afflicted with disease. If the system of discouraging and repressing the claims on charity of *indigence, independently of disease*, is much longer acted on, I have no doubt that the condition of the poor in our great towns in Scotland will soon become as miserable as it has long been in Ireland; and, as a natural consequence, that we may expect to have, as they have had in Dublin, frequently-recurring epidemic fevers, each extending, as it has done there, to a fourth of the population, or as in Glasgow to a sixth, instead of a twentieth, or at most a fifteenth part as heretofore with us. I am farther of opinion, that the principles on which the relief of the poor is now administered in England, are infinitely preferable to those which are generally followed in Scotland; and I have no doubt that the English people receive a temporal reward for their more humane and merciful management of the poor, in the comparative exemp-



tion of most of their great towns from the curse of contagious fever.

I do not, however, suppose it to be necessary, in order that the provision for the poor in Scotland should be made such as I think it ought to be, that the English law should be introduced here. Probably the law of Scotland, *if administered in the same spirit*, would answer the same purposes; but in order that this may be, it seems to me to be quite essential that all who are charged with the administration of the poor laws, in all parts of Scotland, should cease to regard them as an evil; and should look on them rather as an eloquent English author has done, who says, "The humanity which it was designed by the original text of the main statute on this subject, to infuse into the law of the land, is the page of mercy in a book which has to deal much of necessity in severer things; and there is a spirit of kindness in it, particularly fitted to recommend the whole authority of law, as a system framed for the well-being of its subjects. I would as soon see the best clause of Magna Charta erased from the volume of our liberties, as this primary authentic text of humane legislation from our statute-book."

There are two fallacies, pervading much of what is usually said in this country as to the English system of Poor Laws, which it is of great importance to explain, more especially as it is very generally assumed in this country (as I humbly ap-



prehend very erroneously), not only that the English Poor Laws have become infected with abuses, but that their general and ultimate effect has been, to increase the destitution and sufferings of the people.

1. When it is stated that, under the English system of Poor Rates, *pauperism* has increased, until the paupers amounted, some time since, to nearly 10 per cent. on the whole population, even if that assertion were strictly correct (as it is not), it would conceal the fact, that certain abuses of the system, which have been within the last half century engrafted on the original plan, are mixed up with the system itself. It had become the practice, before the introduction of the Poor-Law Amendment Bill, not only to grant relief to able-bodied men, without any adequate test of their destitution, but to pay out of the Poor Rates, part of the wages of a great proportion of the regularly employed labourers in many parts of England,—the employers of labourers having dexterously shifted on the rate payers a great part of the burden which they only were bound to bear. In both these particulars, it is quite obvious, that there had been a departure from the original intention of Poor Laws, which never were intended either to maintain persons not really unable to procure employment, or to relieve the employers of workmen of any part of the payment due to their labourers. No one can doubt, that there is a real and positive tendency to



maintain a redundant population in such an administration of Poor Laws, as maintains in idleness able-bodied men who can procure work if they please. But when we strike off from the list of paupers (as in fact has now been done in most parts of England) all those who have regular employment in their power, we shall find the assertion, that Poor Laws necessarily lead to a continual increase of pauperism, quite destitute of foundation. We cannot have better evidence on this subject than that of Mr Revans, who was Secretary to the Poor-Law Inquiry in England and Wales, which led to the Amendment Act in 1834, and who tells us, that if we deduct the payment of wages through the poor rates since 1796, and allow for the difference of population, and of the price of corn, and for the better provision, “ which it became safe to give to the destitute as the condition of the labouring classes improved, and for the many extraneous expenses which have during the last century been charged on the poor rates (such as the costs of prosecutions and population returns), we shall find that they had pretty well reached their greatest height *in 1680.*” “ I am strongly of opinion,” he adds, “ that *the proportion of the population receiving parish relief had not increased during the century ending in 1790.*”

To the same purpose Mr Sadler has shewn, by reference to the best authorities, that the Parliamentary returns on which Malthus and others had



relied were very erroneous, and that the expressions of Sir Frederick Eden, written at the end of last century, were perfectly justified by fact, "that the rise of the poor rates in England has *not* kept pace with other branches of the national expenditure, nor even with our increased ability to pay them." So far is this from being the case, that, in 1680, according to the statement of Mr Sadler, the poor rates in England were to the exports as 10 to 61, in 1780 as 10 to 58, in 1825 (before the Poor-Law Amendment Bill was introduced) as 10 to 100; in 1700, the paupers were to the population as 10 to 45; in 1760 as 10 to 96; in 1825 as 10 to 120.\* And a very well informed writer in the Quarterly Review, writing *before* the Poor-Law Amendment Bill was passed, after much inquiry, gave a decided opinion, that "the whole of the funds now actually expended on the poor (even including the very large proportion paid to able-bodied labourers, and constituting part of the wages of labour), *bears a much smaller proportion to the present resources of the country, than the total amount of contributions raised for the sustenance of the poor, bore to the whole of its wealth in the time of Elizabeth.*"† If these statements were true at the time when they were written, *a fortiori* they must be true now, because, since that time, no less

\* See Sadler's Ireland, p. 233, *et seq.* and Table at p. 245.

† Quarterly Review, No. 65.



than L.2,300,000 per annum have been withdrawn from the amount of the poor rate in England, by the operation of the new act.

Now, when it thus appears that the present amount of the poor rate and of pauperism in England bears a *less* proportion to the wealth of the country than it did 150 years ago, or even in the reign of Elizabeth, it is quite plain that its excess over that of Scotland cannot be ascribed to an increase of poverty resulting from the operation of the law. Nor am I aware of any cause to which we are to ascribe the higher amount of the English rate, excepting only this simple one, that the standard of comforts which the English people, during the whole operation of the law, have been willing to grant to their poor, has been much higher than that adopted in Scotland.

2. When it is said that under the system of the Poor Rate in England, *pauperism* has increased, many of those who have not attended carefully to the subject are apt to suppose, that the sufferings and destitution of the poor have increased ; but nothing can be farther from the truth. In the great towns, which are continually crowded with importations of the poor Irish, and often of foreigners, and in the great seats of manufactures, where the employment of the poor is liable to so great fluctuations, there is no doubt much destitution which the poor rates have only partially mitigated ; but no one who has attended to the subject can doubt, that



the general condition of the English poor, whether paupers or not, is very generally better than that of the poor in any country where an adequate legal relief does not exist; and infinitely better than it was before the Poor Rates were introduced into England. At that time, as we know from authentic documents, the peasantry throughout England were in general in a state of nearly as abject poverty as is now seen in Ireland. But at present, the description which Mr Revans gives of the English paupers is not over-coloured, when he speaks of them, in most parts of the country, as “well fed, well clothed, well housed, happy and *independent* ;” *i. e.* dependent on the law, but not on the bounty of individuals. “I was asked one day,” he continues, “by an Irishman (talking about poor laws), whether I would reduce the Irish labourer to the level of the English pauper? I need hardly say that he had never been in England. When I had explained to him the food, clothing, habitation, &c. of an English pauper, he soon perceived that no English pauper in his senses would change places with a farmer holding twenty acres of land in Ireland. I had just then returned from a visit to the *most pauperized* county in England, Kent, and been delighted with the comfortable, substantial, neat, well furnished cottages, with the good clothing, and healthy, cheerful, *independent* countenances of the inmates.”\* “The comfort of the cottages in England” (great numbers of them inhabited

\* Evils of the State of Ireland, &c. p. 137.



by paupers), says Mr Symons, "is not equalled abroad, Switzerland excepted.†"

It must be distinctly understood, therefore, that the term pauper in England applies indeed to a person who is supported, at least partly or occasionally, from the poor rate, but by no means necessarily or generally to one who undergoes any of the sufferings of destitution. Till lately, the term was applicable to great numbers of able-bodied men and their families, in full employment, and it is still applicable to great numbers of persons who support themselves in comfort by their own industry during the greater part of the year. The examples of England and Ireland are more than enough to shew that extensive pauperism is compatible with a high degree of comfort, and the absence of pauperism with the most abject misery, in the great body of the poor. That pauperism in England does by no means imply suffering or destitution (as it too surely does in Scotland), is amply proved by the fact, that, since the Poor-Law Amendment Act came into force, L.2,300,000 per annum have been withdrawn from the funds destined for its support, without any extensive suffering having been produced,—nay, while the reports from most parts of the country describe a decided improvement in the comforts of the widows and orphans, the aged, sick, and disabled poor.

The amount of relief granted to the poor in England is now entrusted to the guardians of the poor

\* Arts and Artizans, &c. p. 86.



in each union, acting at present under the directions of the Poor-Law Commissioners ; and in their practical administration of the law it is easy to observe, from the Reports they have published, that there are the following essential distinctions from the system which prevails in Scotland.

1. The amount of funds raised by assessment, and expended on the relief of the poor, is very much greater in proportion to the population, than the funds, however raised, applied in that way in Scotland.

2. The system of relief is made, as nearly as possible, uniform in all parts of the country.

3. Relief is regularly given to able-bodied men and women, and their families, when it is satisfactorily shewn that they cannot procure employment.

4. Well regulated workhouses are considered an essential part of the system, and the relief to the able-bodied is confined to them, unless in peculiar circumstances of distress, when other "tests of destitution" are employed.

5. The giving of relief to all persons found absolutely destitute is *enforced by law*, the relieving officers of every union being amenable to the Commissioners if they do not grant it, on complaint from any quarter, and Magistrates having the power, in the case of destitute strangers, to enforce it ; and in the case of all persons wholly unable for work, to enforce it in the shape of out-door relief.\*

\* See Letter to Commissioners of Police in London from the Poor-Law Commissioners, Appendix to their 4th Report,



In all these particulars, it seems to me, that the administration of the Poor Laws in England is so greatly more favourable to the comforts of the poor, and to the health and happiness of all classes of the community, that I can hardly doubt of the disposition of many persons in Scotland to wish them to be placed on a similar footing here, if it can only be shewn that no ulterior ill consequences are to be expected.

The proportion in which the legal relief given in England exceeds that given in Scotland varies considerably. The whole population of 662 unions and parishes in England, to which the new law has been applied, is, in round numbers, 11,166,000, and the sums applied in them to relief of the poor under the new law, in 1838, were L.4,254,000.† The population of Scotland is stated by the Committee of the General Assembly at 2,315,000, and the whole sums applied to the relief of the poor, about one-half of which are raised by assessment, are L.140,496.‡

The whole funds thus applied are nearly six times as great, in proportion to the population, in England as in Scotland. The average expenditure per head on the population in England is stated in

p. 97, and Circular issued to the Unions in Lancashire, &c. Ib. p. 115.

† See 4th Report of Commissioners, &c. pp. 41 and 50.

‡ See Report by Committee of Assembly, p. 20.



the last Report of the Commissioners to be now reduced to 5s. 10d., and in Wales to be 6s. In Scotland it is less than 1s. 4d. It is more especially important, however, with a view to the object of this paper, to attend to the comparative expenditure in some of the towns, in which the difference is not quite so great. The following table, calculated from the Fourth and Fifth Reports of the English Poor-Law Commissioners, and from the Report to the General Assembly in Scotland, gives sufficient data for the present discussion.

District.	Population.	No. of Paupers.	Proportion.	Expenditure on Poor.	Burden on each of the Population, nearly
662 Unions, &c. } in England, }	11,166,000	...	...	£ 4,254,000	s. D. 7 7 (a-year)
Eight Counties } in England, }	1,897,099	{ 169,818 including 35,323 able-bodied }	8.9 per cent.	...	...
Strand Union,	42,720	1692	3.9	14,494	6 9
Holborn, ditto,	42,649	2339	5.4	11,527	5 3
White Chapel, } ditto, . . }	64,141	5856	9.1	16,426	5 0
Bethnal Green, } ditto, . . }	62,018	3632	5.8	12,451	4 0
Greenwich, .	62,009	6607	10.6	15,593	5 0
Nottingham, (1838.)	50,680	...	...	18,556	7 4
Cambridge, .	20,917	...	...	5,359	5 0
Bath, . . .	64,230	...	...	12,244	3 9
Worcester, .	26,542	...	...	5,883	4 6
Kendal, . .	32,740	...	...	12,738	7 10
Leicester, .	39,135	...	...	14,359	7 3
Northampton,	21,761	...	...	7,350	6 8
Lyne Regis,	13,370	...	...	6,683	10 0
Midhurst, .	12,239	...	...	6,041	9 10
Gateshead, .	31,017	...	...	9,011	5 9
Manchester,*	142,026	...	...	46,543	6 6

\* This information I have from my friend Dr Ainsworth.



Districts.	Population.	No. of Paupers.	Proportion per cent.	Expenditure on Poor.	Burden on each Inhabitant	
				£	s.	d.
Scotland, (all the assessed part), . . . }	1,137,000	39,356	3.44	91,726	1	4
City of Edinburgh, . . . }	55,218	3,437	6.2	9,010	3	3
St Cuthbert's, . . .	70,889	1,409	2.	6,905	1	11
Canongate, . . .	10,175	349	3.4	1,016	2	0
All Edinburgh, . . .	136,270	5,195	3.8	16,931	2	6
Leith, . . .	25,869	1,457	5.6	3,234	2	6
Glasgow,* . . .	253,000	4,500	2.6	20,094	1	7
Dundee, . . .	45,355	3,536	7.7	4,243	1	10
Aberdeen, . . .	32,900	1,407	4.2	4,006	2	5
Paisley, . . .	31,700	829	2.6	1,872	1	2
Dumfries, . . .	11,600	1,126	9.7	1,279	2	2
Hawick, . . .	5,366	458	8.6	907	3	6
Selkirk, . . .	2,064	93	4.5	272	2	7
Falkirk, . . .	13,037	400	3.	624	0	11
Stirling, . . .	8,581	184	2.1	501	1	2
Alloa, . . .	7,000	364	5.2	544	1	6
Dunfermline, . . .	17,286	679	3.9	951	1	1
Perth, . . .	20,016	888	4.4	2,203	2	2
Coldstream, . . .	2,897	140	4.8	575	3	11

From this it appears, that the expenditure on the poor under the law of Scotland is extremely irregular and capricious. In the royalty of Edinburgh it is greater than in any more northern part of Scotland, although considerably lower than the lowest which I have observed in England, viz. in Bath, where there are no manufactures, and where the poor are in less proportion to the rich than probably in any other city in the empire.

The greater number of poor in the royalty of Edinburgh is easily explained, because in that division of the town is comprised by far the largest

\* For this statement I am indebted to Dr Cowan; the numbers for Glasgow are not quite accurately ascertained.



portion of the Old Town (the High Street, Cowgate, Grassmarket, and adjoining closes), which is almost entirely inhabited by the lower orders, who obtain a settlement there by three years' residence, but many of whom are employed (often occasionally only) in the adjoining parishes. It is likewise in this portion of the town especially, that the causes already mentioned as leading to a decline of the demand for labour in Edinburgh, have taken effect; it is here that the partially employed and disabled poor from country parishes struggle to obtain a settlement; and it is here that there has been the great mortality from fever. It is a striking proof of the general prevalence in Edinburgh of the very mistaken opinion (as I conceive) of the necessarily injurious operation of a poor rate, that a large portion of the best informed of the inhabitants of this most heavily burdened portion of the city, should think that they do a service to the country by maintaining the privilege which exempts them from any assessment for the poor.

The only fair way to judge of the amount of legal provision for the poor in Edinburgh, is to include St Cuthbert's parish and the Canongate in the calculation; and the amount of the expenditure on the poor then appears to be 2s. 6d. a-head on the population, certainly not half the average expenditure of the English towns on their poor. In most of the other Scotch towns,—including Glasgow, Dundee, and Paisley, it will be seen that the expenditure on the poor is less than 2s. a-head on



the population, *i. e.* not a third of the usual expenditure in England under the New Poor Law. In Perth and Aberdeen the expenditure is higher than this, and in the Border districts, as at Hawick and Coldstream, it is higher than in the Royalty of Edinburgh.

Again, the allowances granted in the way of outdoor relief to aged and disabled persons, widows, and orphans, are in general hardly more than half what are usually granted to the same description of persons in England. Thus, the highest provision granted to a pauper in the city of Edinburgh or in Glasgow (even to a widow with a family) is L.4, 16s. and L.5 a-year,\* less than 2s. in the week, and the usual pension to a single disabled man or woman is about 1s. a-week; whereas in England (as I find by answers to queries from London, Oxford, Bath, Manchester, Leeds, Birmingham, Newcastle, and Carlisle) a widow with four children has from 4s. to 7s. a-week, (reckoning a quartern loaf at 8d.) and an aged or disabled man or woman has from 2s. to 4s.

Again, in all Scotland there are *only four workhouses*, three in Edinburgh and its suburbs, and one at Paisley; whereas in England 587 unions had been formed in May 1839, each provided with its workhouse.

That the sums applied to the relief of indigence in Scotland are also much less than has been practically found necessary in other countries, where

\* Report of Committee of General Assembly, pp. 2 and 45.



there are equally large towns, in order to preserve the poor in tolerable comfort, and repress mendicity, appears from the following statement of the amount of legal provision for them in a few places from which we have accurate statements, to be afterwards more particularly noticed.

In Hamburgh, the amount of regular *out-door* relief granted to the poor, amounts to nearly 4s. a-head on the population.

Throughout Holland, the annual expenditure on the poor, virtually enforced by the law, is about L.500,000 a-year, in a population less than that of Scotland, or 4s. 4d. a-head on the entire population, while the value of money there is higher than here; and the proportion of the population so assisted is often more than 10 per cent.

In those towns of France, where the public provision for the poor is well organized, it amounts to L.1,800,000 per annum, on a population of 3,500,000, *i. e.* nearly 10s. a-head on the population.

In Venice, a town which has suffered much from decline of trade, the sums expended on the poor, under the beneficent rule of Austria, have been lately about L.100,000 on a population of 112,000, of whom from 47,000 to 50,000 have been thus supported; *i. e.* the paupers have been 45 per cent. of the people, and the sum expended on them fully 18s. a-head on the population.

In Philadelphia, as early as 1803, the poor rate amounted to L.15,000 on a population of



67,000, *i. e.* nearly 4s. 6d. a-head; and in 1829 it amounted to L.28,000 in a population of 113,000, or very nearly 5s. per head.

It is true, that in several of these cases (although not in England) the legal provision for the poor covers the expenses of the hospitals; but in most of them there exist various voluntary charitable establishments, besides the legal provision. And we cannot reckon the hospitals in Scotland a heavy burden on the community, a large proportion of their expense (in Edinburgh by far the largest proportion) being defrayed either by endowments or by the students of medicine.

It would be presumption in me to offer an opinion with confidence on the details of the Amended Poor Law of England, as compared with the old law; and in different writings on the subject, the expression, principle of the new poor law, seems to be very variously used. There are three principles, however, which are obviously involved in its provisions, *first*, that the payment of part of the wages of able-bodied labourers out of the poor's rate be abandoned; *secondly*, that workhouses be provided in all the unions and parishes, and the relief of the able-bodied, when out of work, be in general given in them only; and, *thirdly*, that, for a time, the administration of the whole relief to the poor throughout the country shall be under the control of a central board, so as to render the system everywhere as uniform as possible. All these provisions



seem to me to be perfectly reasonable and judicious; and the clamour which has been raised against some of them I would regard only as one of the best proofs that can be given of a fact to which I shall afterwards advert, viz. that the existence of a legal provision for the poor,—fixing at a proper standard the ideas of the higher orders as to what ought to be their condition and comforts,—strengthens rather than weakens the feeling of benevolence and sympathy with which they are regarded by their superiors. It is right to add, that, so far as can be judged from the Reports of the Commissioners, and papers accompanying them, the changes introduced by the new law seem to have been carried into effect with much judgment, temper, and humanity.

On the other hand, I have no difficulty in saying, that the prospects which were held out by some of the advocates of the Poor-Law Amendment Bill at the time of its introduction, that by means of it the poor might gradually be brought to such a state of wisdom and prudence, as to adapt their numbers exactly to the demand for their services, and to the means of their subsistence, and ultimately require no assistance from the higher ranks excepting in sickness,—are quite Utopian and visionary; and that any attempt to reduce them to practice, while human nature remains as it is, will be found to lead only to misery and disorder.

I will take the liberty of observing farther, that I think the prospect which is held out of ultimate-



ly confining nearly *all* the legal relief to that given in workhouses, is not likely to be realized without serious injury to the lower classes, particularly to two great classes of the poor, widows with orphans, and partially disabled men with families ; who, when of good character, seem to me to be the fittest objects of out-door relief. I venture to prophesy, that if that rule were to be generally acted on in such cases, its evil effects would soon appear in a gradually increasing liability in the great towns to epidemic and contagious fever.

I am quite aware, that there are many persons who consider this question as merely one of pounds, shillings, and pence ; and think *that* the best system for the relief of the poor, which draws the smallest sums from the pockets of the rich, and gives the least disturbance to the tranquillity of their enjoyments, and most expeditiously removes from their sight the “ nuisance of street-begging.” That such persons are grievously mistaken as to the ultimate result of such a system on the happiness and prosperity of all ranks of a nation, will, I think, appear distinctly from facts to be afterwards stated. But at present I do not address myself to such men. They will find their tastes consulted by many other authors. I address myself to those who have been accustomed to look upon the poor, not as objects of disgust or aversion, but as brothers and sisters in affliction, who are born to the same hopes as themselves, look up to the same Father in heaven, and



trust to the mediation of the same Redeemer ; to those who remember that charity is the highest of Christian duties, and that “ our Saviour himself chose to be a beggar, that we, for his sake, might not despise the poor.” Such men will not be content, in comparing the laws and customs of different nations, with inquiring what is the *cost* of the poor ; but will first inquire, what is the *condition* of the poor ? and if they find that it is decidedly and *permanently* better in other countries than in their own, they will feel it to be their duty to do what they can to secure, for the humblest classes of their own fellow-citizens, the same benefits which they see conferred upon others.

When it is proposed to raise the assessments for the poor in Scotland, so as to put them more nearly on a footing with the present system in England, the question which such men will naturally put, and to which they have a perfect right to demand a satisfactory answer, is simply this : Is it, or is it not, reasonable to expect, as we have been confidently assured by many, that the benefits immediately conferred on the poor by such a step will be followed by an increase of poverty and misery, and demand an increased provision in future, which will be beyond our power ? The immediate benefit is certain, and the duty imposed by it obvious and undeniable ; the ultimate injury is matter of opinion : if it can be clearly established, it is a sufficient ground for withholding the relief that is in our



power ; but the *onus probandi* rests with those who assert it.

When we find it so confidently stated, as we often do in this country, as an established principle, that a public provision for the poor extends the evils it is intended to relieve ; and when, therefore, magistrates and managers of the poor think themselves entitled to credit just in proportion as they can economize the allowances to the poor, we should always ask ourselves, *what are the evils* which such provision is intended to relieve ? I apprehend they are simply, the sufferings of destitution, and the necessity of mendicity ; and if it be asserted, that these evils are greatest where a public and legal provision for the poor exists, I will undertake to prove that the very reverse is the fact ; and that these evils, in a long inhabited country, are never effectually controlled otherwise than by a systematic provision for the poor, carried to a much greater extent than it is in Scotland.

I shall first endeavour, however, to state, as distinctly as I can, what I understand to be the arguments against an increased legal provision for the poor, and what seem to me to be satisfactory answers to them.

I believe I shall use no arguments on this subject which are not to be found, more or less distinctly stated, in some other authors ; but, as I differ from the reasonings of several authors who come



to nearly the same practical conclusions, and as I know no author whose statements and reasonings seem to me quite satisfactory, I shall not think it necessary to refer to any.

I. The first, and by far the most formidable, of all arguments against Poor Laws, is that drawn from their alleged effect on the principle of population. Mr Malthus and the economists maintain, that the natural tendency of the human species is to increase and multiply in a geometrical progression, while the food of man, in any country, can only be made to increase in an arithmetical progression; that, therefore, in every country which has been long inhabited, the population must necessarily press on the means of subsistence, and that it is prevented from increasing beyond these limits only by the *positive* checks of vice and misery, or by the *preventive* check of moral restraint. So far, his reasoning seems to me to be perfectly sound and irrefragable; and for the satisfactory illustrations which he has given of the natural tendency of population to outstrip the means of subsistence,—of its rapid progress in new and improving countries,—of the checks imposed on it, more or less directly, by the gradually increasing difficulty of procuring subsistence as society advances,—and of the latent power, in all long inhabited countries, of quickly repairing the injury done by any cause of unusual mortality, he deserves immortal honour. It seems to me, not only that these principles are perfectly just, but



that they must form the basis of all legitimate speculation and reasoning on the subject of poverty, its evils and remedies. In particular, we may learn from them how little is to be trusted to occasional increase of employment in a long peopled country, or to an increased supply of food, whether by the corn trade or any other means, as a remedy for the evils of poverty. Any increased power which may thus be given to such a country to support the human race will be very speedily satiated, and then the population, somewhat more *numerous*, will, *cæteris paribus*, be just as *redundant* as before. It is from improvement of the *habits* of the people only, that we can look for any permanent alleviation of the evils which the principle of population, as explained by Malthus, necessarily involves; and it is by experience only that we can learn, with certainty, in what circumstances this improvement is to be expected.

We must always keep in mind, that, in every long established country, there exists a power, continually urging the population beyond the limits of comfortable subsistence, and capable, at any time, of carrying it far beyond those limits. We must consider it as inevitable, that, in any such country, the population must be more or less *excessive*; there must be more labourers than are absolutely required in every line of industry; and the mode in which these will generally be arranged will naturally be, that, in every line, there will be some fully em-



ployed, and others, whose employment is only occasional. Farther, we must always remember, that only a portion of the human race are fitted by nature to be productive labourers in any department; that, dependent on every such labourer, there are necessarily other individuals,—women, children, aged and disabled persons,—fitted for little or no productive labour; that the capacities, physical and moral, even of the productive labourers, are very various; and that many of them become prematurely disabled or perish, before their offspring are fitted for occupying their places. Thus, widows and orphans, aged and impotent persons, become a burden on human industry, even from the earliest periods of society. It is further to be remembered, that, as any country advances in civilization, great towns are uniformly formed in it, which as uniformly become the “graves of the human race;” in which all the efforts of human science have been unable to prevent a great increase of mortality in the early and middle periods of life, and, therefore, of an unproductive and burdensome population.

We must consider it as a part of the general dispensations of Providence, and a natural effect of the procreative power which has been granted to our species, as compared with the conditions on which human life is supported, that, in every long inhabited and civilized country, there exists a *surplus population*, consisting partly of persons whose services are not required at all for any lines of pro-



fitable industry, there existing, partly of persons whose services are only occasionally required, and partly of persons who are unable, from age or infirmity, to render any service, and the labour of whose relatives is also insufficient for their support. In the great towns of every such country, this surplus population, and particularly this last portion of it, will always be the greatest. This portion of the population, for whom there is inadequate employment, constitutes the poor, whom "we have with us always," and who must be left to perish, or be supported in one way or another, without making an adequate return for their support. Those who suppose that all the poor, in such a country as this, can find sufficient employment if they search for it, misunderstand the principle of population; and those who murmur at the burden imposed by the existence of a large body of unemployed or impotent poor, murmur at one of two things,—either at the general law of Providence, by which the human species can multiply in a more rapid ratio than the means of their subsistence; or else at the particular dispensation of Providence, which has placed their lot in a long inhabited and fully civilized country. They may find countries in which this burden is light in comparison with ours, but in those countries, there are comparatively few comforts, and little civilization or refinement.

The only practical questions are, in what circumstances, or under what institutions, is this bur-



den, whether taking the form of pauperism or mendicity, the heaviest, and the sufferings of that part of the population which forms it, the greatest?

We must consider it, I believe, as equally certain, that all the checks which Nature has provided for the natural tendency of the population to outstrip the increase of the means of comfortable subsistence, are included under the three heads of vice, suffering, and moral restraint\*; that the ob-

\* I am quite aware of the elaborate attempt of Mr Sadler to counteract this position, and to establish a different law of population, viz. that "the prolificness of human beings, otherwise similarly circumstanced, varies inversely as their numbers," and of the mass of curious and instructive statistical information which he has collected in proof of that position. But it appears to me, that the difference between his principles and those of Malthus is rather verbal than real. The great cause of the diminished fecundity of the human race in densely peopled and long cultivated countries lies in the formation of great towns, which, as is well known, cannot maintain their own population. But why is this? Simply because, in them, marriages are less prolific, as Mr Sadler has very satisfactorily shewn, and the mortality among children much greater than in the country. And if we inquire into the physical causes of these two peculiarities of the large towns, we shall find them, I apprehend, to be all resolvable into circumstances in the habits or in the constitution of the people, whether adult or children, and in the diseases to which they are liable, which come fairly under the categories enumerated by Malthus. All that can be granted to Mr Sadler is, that the evils which, coming under the heads of vice and misery, restrain the increase of population in large towns, do not necessarily afflict human nature so intensely as, from the



ject of all wise legislation must be to encourage the latter, which is the *preventive* check, as much as possible, in order that the two former, which are the *positive* checks, may come as little as possible into operation; that the main question for consideration, in all inquiries regarding the management of the poor, must always be this, In what circumstances does the principle of moral restraint act on them the most powerfully? and that any mode of relieving indigence, which can be shewn to weaken that principle of moral restraint among the poor, will necessarily lead to such an increase of their numbers, as will bring them under the operation of the positive checks of vice and suffering, *i. e.* will ultimately injure, instead of alleviating, their condition.

So far, the principles of Malthus appear to me to be established facts, and just and legitimate inferences from them. But then, he goes on to state farther an *opinion*, that a system of poor laws, by assuring every individual in a community of subsistence, whatever may be his conduct, will naturally weaken the preventive check of moral restraint; that no prudential motives can be expected to operate to prevent early marriages in a country where such security for existence, independently

choice of the words used to express them, might have been supposed. The term misery is certainly not generally, although frequently, applicable, and I have employed therefore the more general word suffering.



of prudent conduct, is provided by law ; that poor laws, therefore, will necessarily act as a bounty on population, and their operation, gradually extending throughout the population wherever they are introduced, will ultimately generate more indigence than it will relieve ; whereas, when no such provision exists, every man must see clearly before him the consequence of rearing a family without having procured for them the means of subsistence ; and the moral restraint consequent on this prospect, especially if aided by general education and by special instruction on this point, is the security to which a legislature ought to look for restraining the population within the proper limits, and so preventing the evils and miseries of destitution.

Now, this *opinion* or *conjecture* (for it is in fact nothing more) as to the effect of poor laws on population, however plausible it may appear, I maintain to be absolutely and entirely erroneous. In order to establish it, no speculations in the closet are of any avail ; neither can we take the *opinions*, even of practical men, as a ground of our judgment. It must be shewn statistically, and by actual observation of human life, that the preventive check acts efficiently in the absence of poor laws, and that it does not act efficiently or beneficially where they exist. Until this inquiry is satisfactorily made, the principles of Malthus have no practical application in regard to poor laws ; and this inquiry he and his



followers have either neglected, or wholly misapprehended its results.

I maintain, on the other hand, that poor laws, such as exist in England, do not interfere with moral restraint; that, on the contrary, they support and strengthen it; and that moral restraint is nowhere so feeble, and population (in a long inhabited country) nowhere makes so rapid progress as where there is no regular provision for the destitute, and where, therefore, the prospect of destitution is always clear, obvious, and immediate.

Before joining issue, however, on this fundamental question, I take the liberty of observing, that the argument of Malthus and his followers against poor laws, as being a bounty on population, applies equally against private charity, which may be, and continually is, anticipated by the poor as a resource in time of need, in like manner as a legal provision. This is admitted by Malthus himself. After inveighing against poor laws, as giving "direct, constant, and systematic encouragement to marriage, by removing from each individual the heavy responsibility which he would incur by the laws of nature for bringing beings into the world which he could not support," he adds, "*Our private benevolence has the same direction as the Poor Laws, and almost invariably tends to encourage marriage,*" *i. e.* to weaken the preventive check. If so, it must be liable to the same objection, that it will engender more destitution and misery than it re-



lieves. Nay, I would ask, what is there in *medical charities* to entitle them to the exclusive patronage of the economists? Mr Malthus considers the quantity of subsistence in a country as always so nicely adjusted to the population, that "the quantity of provisions consumed in workhouses must necessarily diminish the shares which would otherwise belong to more industrious and worthy members of society." But if this be true of the workhouse, what are we to say of the hospitals? Must not the provisions consumed there by that large portion of the sick, whose lives may be prolonged but cannot be saved, or by those who, but for its protection, would have died, necessarily "diminish the shares which would otherwise have gone to more profitable members of society?"

The true and consistent economist, therefore, cannot stop short at the poor laws, but will denounce every kind of relief to the poor as ultimately injurious to the public; and must recommend, in all cases, leaving the poor to their fate, in order to secure that "each individual may feel the heavy responsibility which he incurs by the laws of nature, for bringing beings into the world which he cannot support."

This seems to me to be the legitimate and inevitable conclusion from the principle of Malthus and his followers, that any provision for the poor, to which they can look forward in time of destitution, will necessarily weaken the preventive check



on population. How it can be reconciled with the natural feelings of humanity (certainly as much a part of the laws of Providence for the regulation of human affairs, as any preventive checks on population), or with the positive and often repeated injunctions of the Gospel, or whether it can be practically carried into effect in any country, are questions into which I do not enter, because I think there is no great difficulty in proving, that the idea of either Poor Laws, or other provisions for the relief of indigence (if administered with common prudence), having any such injurious effect on the principle of moral restraint, is not only a mere delusion, but the very reverse of the truth.

I appeal to *experience*; and the first witness to whom I shall appeal in support of this assertion, is Mr Malthus himself; who, in the appendix to one of the late editions of his work, expressed himself with great candour, and a hesitation very different from his original confidence, as to the practical operation of poor rates on population. "It is certain, that the proportion of births in this country (*i. e.* in England) compared with others in similar circumstances, is VERY SMALL. Undoubtedly, the returns of the Population Act seem to warrant the assertion, that the poor rates do not much encourage marriage. Should this be true, some of the objections which have been urged in this Essay against the Poor Laws will be removed."\* On

\* On Population, sixth edition, Appendix, p. 468.



this passage I would only observe, that if the proportion of births in England in comparison with other countries is *very small* (and no one can doubt that it is very small in comparison with Ireland), what proof can we have that they encourage marriage at all? And if not, does not this dispose of *all* the arguments which have been urged against the poor laws, so far as their effects on population is concerned?

Again, Mr Malthus tells us, that “the labourers in 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 Scottish peasants. 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 support a greater population.*”<sup>\*</sup> Now, if these men, “highly pauperized” as we know them to be, are so attached to wheaten bread (and no doubt to other comforts), that they are content to be in smaller numbers than they would have been, if they had put up with coarser fare, I maintain that they live under the influence of a very efficient preventive check on population; and the best wish we can form for the poor Irish, who are not pauperized at all, is, that they would take the trouble of submitting themselves to the same kind of “moral restraint.”

<sup>\*</sup> Essay on Population, sixth edition, vol. i. p. 531.



To the same purpose, we have the distinct statement of Mr Senior, who had carefully compared the returns as to the wages, the subsistence, and comforts of the English labourers as compared with those in other parts of Europe, that “as to wages, subsistence, and mortality,” and, as he shews afterwards, generally, although less uniformly, as to diet, “England stands in the *most favourable*, or nearly the most favourable, position. With respect to money wages, the *superiority* of the English agricultural labourer is *very marked*.”\* How is this to be reconciled with the belief, that the English Poor Laws are a “constant, direct, and systematic encouragement,” acting for 250 years, to excessive population?

In the next place, it has always appeared to me, that on the question, whether poor rates weaken the preventive check, and whether the sure prospect of destitution strengthens it, we have a complete *experimentum crucis* in the experience of England and of Ireland. In England, a poor rate has been generally enforced for 250 years, and in some respects been carried to an injudicious height during at least fifty years. We know that the population of a country may be doubled in twenty years. There has, therefore, been abundance of time for the English poor laws, if they really afford the “direct, constant, and systematic encouragement to marriage,” which

\* Appendix F, to Report of Poor-Law Commissioners for 1834. Pref. p. 102.



has been supposed, to cause such an increase of the population there, and such an amount, *not only of pauperism, but of misery*, consequent on redundant population, as would have put beyond all doubt the truth of the theory. But how stands the fact? We are told, that England has been cursed, for 250 years, with a pernicious bounty on her population, which is actually, at this moment, *la plaie devorante*, the bane of her social condition; and that Ireland has been blessed, during a much longer time, with an exemption from this evil. But at the end of this time, we find that the population of England has kept strictly within her proper limits, while that of Ireland has so completely outrun them, that “famines in Ireland are of nearly “periodical recurrence,” the lives of the people are continually shortened by cold and hunger, and the overflow of her population has pauperized both England and Scotland, besides extending to America. For I presume it will not be denied, that the whole pressure of the population on the means of subsistence in England comes from Ireland, and that if we could expel from the great towns in England all the adult Irish who have settled there, even within the last twenty years, there would be full employment for all the native English who are able to work; and no signs of that redundant population, which, we are told, is the necessary result of the laws that have been in operation there for more than two centuries. In these circumstances, I say, that an experiment



on the effect of poor laws on population has been fairly tried, for centuries, and upon millions, and that the result has been directly the reverse of what would have followed, had the theory in question been true.

If the English population had been rendered truly redundant by the poor rates, it has had abundance of time, during their operation, to overflow into other countries, and we should have seen the effects of it in Scotland. But the English poor form no burden on the Scottish charities. Even in Glasgow, where the manufactures naturally, at times, attract skilled workmen from all countries, the English form only about 2 per cent. of the patients admitted to the Fever Hospital,\* and in Edinburgh, the proportion of English patients in hospital or other charities, is at least as small,—while the Irish poor form 31 per cent. of the fever patients in Glasgow, and sometimes amount to 50 per cent. of the applicants to the Destitute Sick Society here.

Of 3072 unemployed male operatives at Glasgow in 1837, there were “two Irish for every three Scotch applicants, and the English formed only 1 in 78 of the whole.”

Again, Mr Malthus himself states, quite truly, that he considers “pestilential diseases the inevi-

\* See Cowan's Statistics of Fever and Smallpox at Glasgow.



table attendants on a population too great for its means of subsistence." This being so, when we find that the cases of contagious fever admitted into the London Fever Hospital (which receives patients on the mere order of any medical man, and from all parts of London) was 600 in ten years preceding 1817, and that in one hospital in Dublin it was 24,000 within these ten years, and in all the hospitals of Dublin 39,000 in twenty-one months thereafter, what evidence do we see of the "direct, constant, and systematic encouragement to population" which he alleged to exist in the former city, and not in the latter?

That the English population is, on the whole, not truly redundant (I mean, in comparison with that of other countries equally long civilized), is established as completely as could have been desired by some of the facts stated in the last Reports of the Commissioners under the Poor-Law Amendment Act. After 250 years of poor laws, the sum of L.2,300,000 is suddenly withdrawn from the fund annually raised for the support of the poor; and immediately after this, there is a long continued frost, necessarily and greatly diminishing the demand for labour in many parts of the country. It is impossible to conceive a combination of circumstances better fitted for exhibiting the evils of a redundant population. It will be observed, that the sum thus *withdrawn* from the legal provision for the poor in England amounts to nearly three times



as much (in proportion to the population) as the whole legal provision for the poor in Scotland, including assessments and voluntary contributions. In these circumstances the Poor-Law Commissioners wisely gave a discretionary power to the Guardians of many of the unions, to relax their general (and I have no doubt salutary) rule, of relieving able-bodied applicants only by taking them into the workhouses; but they state that “the total amount of out-relief, given in pursuance of the relaxation, has been so *limited as to justify us in believing, that unless in a very few instances the usual regulation might have been safely enforced.*” Thus in the Sheppey Union in Kent, “the most pauperized county in England,” containing the town of Queenborough, “many able-bodied applied for relief during the frost, but the workhouse not being full, they were ordered in; when *every one* refused to accept the relief so offered. The guardians, thinking the reason of the non-acceptance of the offer might be the too great rigidness of the test, determined to apply for a relaxation of the rule, and to give out relief; but took care at the same time to provide work for those who were relieved, which their situation enabled them to do, since employment was readily attainable in wheeling ballast from the sea-shore. The board, however, to their surprise found that the offer of work was unanimously refused; *i. e.* where a test, which no one could call harsh, was applied, *not a single*



*able-bodied labourer found it necessary to accept relief.*" Again, "the Bridge Union (also in Kent) unanimously passed a resolution, that they would strictly adhere to workhouse relief for able-bodied, but augment the pay of permanent paupers who might want increased comforts during the inclement weather. Only seven able-bodied applied for relief, the whole of whom refused to enter the workhouse. At the conclusion of the severe weather, the chairman addressed a letter to the overseers of every one of the 22 parishes in the union, requesting to be informed if they knew of any instances of real distress within their parishes. *All denied the existence of any*, except the overseer of one parish, who thought that, on investigation, some might be found, though he did not know of any one instance."\*

Again, in the Fifth Report, after the high prices and severe weather of winter 1838-39, they state that "the instances in which the Commissioners have been requested to sanction exceptions from the rule as to able-bodied men have been very few."†

As we have this decisive evidence, on a large scale, (and therefore free from many sources of fallacy which affect individual observation), that the population of England, under the poor laws, shews no signs of such redundancy as Ireland, without

\* Fourth Report of Commissioners, &c. pp. 17, 18. Other similar instances are given.

† Fifth Report, p. 2.



poor laws, universally exhibits, and observing its coincidence with Mr Malthus's admission that the proportion of births in England is "*very small*," we may safely set aside the plausible argument against the principle of a poor rate, drawn from the gradual extension of the numbers claiming and receiving relief; and the tables, elaborately constructed, in proof of this extension in the countries into which this system has been introduced.

Mr Senior admits, as I shall afterwards state, that the Canton of Berne is the only country he knows, in which poor rates, levied by law, have become such a burden as they have in England; and even there, as in England, it is not the proportion of the really destitute that has increased, but the employers of labourers have had the address to shift the burden of the wages of labour, in a great measure, from themselves to the rate-payers; and to convert regularly employed labourers, against their will, into paupers. Of this there will always be a risk, and it is the business of legislation to provide against it, as I believe is now effectually done in England, and to protect the interests of the rate-payers against the encroachments of the farmers and manufacturers, and other capitalists who employ the labourers, as well as against imposture and idleness among the paupers themselves.\* But

\* In Scotland, where no payment of wages out of poor rates has ever been introduced, it appears from the Report of the Commission of the General Assembly, that the proportion of



the question, in judging of the effect of the provision for the poor, on the principle of population in

paupers in the assessed districts of the country is somewhat *smaller* than in the non-assessed. The proportions are in the non-assessed parishes 3.53 per cent., in those totally assessed 3.44. (Report to the General Assembly, p. 22.) It is true, that in some of the districts that have been longest assessed, the proportion rises as high as 4.83 per cent., but this *apparent* advantage on the side of the non-assessed parishes is heavily counterbalanced by the admission, that in some of these last districts "the poverty of the people is such as to preclude the possibility of their contributing at the church doors more than will afford to the poor a miserable and uncertain pittance, in some cases scarcely appreciable as a means of the paupers' maintenance." Thus, "at Kilmuir in the Isle of Skye, the average funds distributable among the poor *are about L.3 annually in a population of 2275*, and a distribution is made only once in two years." "It has been found necessary to restrict the number of paupers to 60 or 70 at each distribution; but *were the funds of larger amount it would be necessary to admit 200 paupers on the roll.*" After this statement, we cannot be surprised to find, that the gentlemen who reported on the application of the subscriptions raised over Britain for the distressed islanders some years ago, should have stated the "non-enforcement of poor's rates," as one of the causes of the misery which they relieved. If 200 paupers (excluding the able-bodied, as has always been done in Scotland) were admitted in a population of 2275, we should have at once a pauper population in a country district, in extreme destitution, amounting nearly to 9 per cent. on the whole, *i. e.* an amount considerably greater than that which is maintained in comfort, after 250 years of poor rates in England; the proportion there, excluding the able-bodied, being almost exactly 7 per cent., in eight counties comprising several (necessarily unhealthy) large towns. (See Fifth Report of Commissioners, Table at p. 14.)



any country, is, not what proportion do the paupers bear to the population, but what proportion does the population bear to the demand for labour, and the means of subsistence, in the country? Does it become redundant? Is *destitution* continually on the increase? Are the lives of the poor continually shortened by cold and hunger? Are the lower orders in the great towns periodically decimated by fever? Is the property of the rich endangered by vagrancy and lawless combinations? Is a military force required to coerce an excessive population rendered desperate by misery? Are the energies of the country crippled, and its resources withered, by this continually increasing wretchedness and disorder; and by the efforts necessary to repress it? These are the evils of a truly redundant population. They exist in full perfection in Ireland, and do not exist in England. Unless it has produced these, a poor rate has not made the population redundant; and unless it has done that, it may indeed have been partially imposed, or injudiciously distributed, but the idea of its having been *nationally* injurious is a mere chimera.

The state of the fact, then, is this. In England, after two centuries and a half of poor laws, certainly administered with injudicious profusion, we find nearly a tenth of the population paupers,\* most of whom live in comfort. In Ireland, where,

\* Somewhat less than 9 per cent. in eight of the southern and central counties (See Fifth Report of Commissioners, Table at p. 14). This includes the able-bodied paupers.



during all that time, there have been no poor laws, we find nearly one-third of the population beggars, all of whom live in misery. The number of persons in Ireland who subsist on charity during a part at least of the year, has been stated at 2,300,000; and I believe never, of late years, at less than 2,000,000.

I beg it may not be supposed, that I attribute the prosperity of England merely to the poor laws, nor the misery of Ireland merely to the want of them. I am not engaging in any political discussion as to the causes of the different condition of the two countries; but only inquiring, how far the experience of the two countries justifies the assertion so confidently made, that a legal provision for the poor makes them improvident, and hurtfully encourages population, and thereby “increases the evils it professes to relieve,” and that the absence of such provision naturally makes them prudent, and restrains their increase, and checks those evils; and this I will confidently assert, that the English poor could not have been so comparatively comfortable, and the Irish poor could not have been so numerous and miserable, as they now are, if poor laws had been such a bounty on population, and if the prospect of destitution had been such a preventive check on population, as Mr Malthus and many others have supposed.

It is plain that no Irishman can be at a loss for examples, pointing out more clearly than precepts,



the misery of families whose parents have married without securing the means of subsistence. But experience shews, on a scale of such extent as to be free from all individual sources of fallacy, that the continued sight of this misery is no moral restraint upon him, and that he is much more reckless in his conduct than the English poor, who are so much better fed, lodged, and clothed, and who live under the protection of a law, giving, according to the theory in question, "a direct, constant, and systematic encouragement to marriage." Both in England and Ireland the population is, no doubt, restrained by the difficulty of obtaining subsistence, considerably within its capability of increase; but in Ireland it advances to the very verge of the limits which is set by absolute starvation,—the preventive check of moral restraint being nearly ineffectual; whereas, in England, this check is so strong, that no considerable portion of the population ever approaches that limit, and, but for the influx of the Irish, none would ever touch it.

It is true that the lower Irish are a rude and imperfectly civilized people; but they are not so illiterate as many of the English poor, in whom the principle of moral restraint is much more powerful; and the law of nature, by which the improvidence of parents leads to the destitution of children is, as Mr Malthus himself observes, "intelligible to the humblest capacity." Even if the advocates of the theory resort to the extravagant supposition,



that there is something in the Irish character specifically different from all others in this respect, and making them reckless and improvident where others would be prudent, this will not avail them, for any one who chooses to make the observation will see, that among the educated poor of Scotland the same union of reckless improvidence, with extreme destitution, is uniformly found; and we shall see afterwards that the same holds of other countries.

The truth is, that below a certain grade of poverty, the preventive check of moral restraint has no power. Twenty-five years of observation of the habits of the poor have shewn me, that there are none among whom population makes so rapid progress as those who see continually around them examples of utter destitution and misery. In such circumstances, men hardly look forward to the future more than animals. It is easy for us to say, that by cutting off from a poor family any prospect of relief, in case of destitution, we can make them careful and prudent. The practical result is widely different. Another alternative is uniformly embraced. *They lower their habits*; and those who have not been accustomed to observe them, are not aware how much reduction of comfort the family of a labouring man, disabled or deprived of employment, may undergo, and not only life be preserved, but the capacity for occasional irregular and precarious employment continue. Their better clothes may be pawned, their furniture and bed-clothes may



be sold, they can lie on straw or shavings of wood, sometimes on "bare boards" and never undress; two or more families, may be crowded into a single room, and struggle to pay the rent among them. Such associations of "lone women," who have only occasional employment, and of unemployed and disabled men, widows and orphans, are continually formed. They gather cinders on the streets late at night and early in the morning, they beg for bread, wherever they are permitted, among the rich, and if repelled from them, they seek for sympathy among the poor. Three meals in the week will support life for many weeks. I have known instances, where I had satisfactory moral evidence, that the mothers of such families have submitted, for the sake of their children, to such privations, for months together. If they fall sick, as after a time they infallibly do,—the medical charities come to their relief. Thus, almost without visible means of subsistence, many of the poorest families in this and other great towns, manage to pass the winter, while in summer they find precarious and desultory employment in fields and gardens. Now, if you mark the conduct of people who have fallen thus low, or watch the future progress of children brought up in this state of misery and degradation, you look in vain for the principle of moral restraint, or for indications of prudential motives, counteracting the natural tendency of human passions. Many of the children die miserably in early youth, and those who survive are uniformly



reckless and improvident. The daughters of families thus circumstanced receive no education which fits them even for service ; and if they do not become prostitutes (which does not happen so often as might be supposed), they are almost uniformly mothers at the age of twenty ; and the progress of population is thus rendered most rapid in that portion of society which lies nearest the verge of absolute starvation.\*

On the other hand, when men are preserved from this state of hopeless and abject destitution, they all (or with few and trifling exceptions) gra-

\* It is well observed by Mr MacCulloch, that persons belonging to the higher ranks continually deceive themselves, if they attempt to conjecture, from their own feelings, how those in the lowest rank will conduct themselves in any particular circumstances ; and, therefore, that we can trust only to experience and observation in any speculations involving anticipations of that conduct. One simple illustration of this is in the regard paid to cleanliness among the lowest of the poor. As pure water costs nothing, we do not see why even extreme poverty should necessarily indispose mankind to the use of an article so essential to the comfort of the higher ranks ; but experience shews that it *uniformly* does so. Again, in the higher ranks, on a sudden change of fortune, and near prospect of destitution, we know that suicide is not uncommon ; but in the lowest rank, I believe, from that cause, it is almost absolutely unknown. At least, although I have seen as much as most men of the distress and anguish of mind resulting from extreme destitution among the poor, I have met only with a single case in which this remedy for the evils of life was even talked of ; and in that case the proposal excited a strong expression of horror in those who heard it.



dually fall, more or less, under the dominion of *artificial wants*, and form to themselves a *standard of comfort*, from which they will never willingly descend, and to maintain which they will keep themselves under a degree of restraint, unknown to those of the poor, who are continually struggling to obtain the first necessities of life. Such observations have been very frequently made on a small scale by many others as well as myself, and they seem to me amply to confirm and easily to explain the result of the grand experiment in which Ireland and England have been engaged during the last two centuries. Indeed, the simple fact, already mentioned, of the habitual *cleanliness* of most of the English poor, even in the most pauperized counties, as compared with those either of Ireland or Scotland, is of itself sufficient to shew where the preventive check is in fullest operation.

Mr Revans, who was Secretary to the Poor-Law Commission, both in England and Ireland, gives a comparative statement of the average annual expenditure of the family of an agricultural labourer in England and in Ireland, drawn up from reports furnished to the Commissioners. The former amounts to L.33, 2s.,—the latter to L.5, 8s. In the latter, indeed, there is no item for clothing, which is L.8, 16s. in the former, but, as he says, “it would be idle to attempt to estimate the expenditure of an Irish peasant’s family on clothing. “An English labourer expends on tea, sugar, treacle,



and beer alone, about L.5, which is about the value of the total earnings of an Irish labourer.”\*

Now, I have already stated the evidence we have, that the English labourers, even in Kent, whether paupers or not, living in this state of comparative comfort, do not become perniciously redundant in numbers; but in Ireland, according to the Reports of the Poor-Law Commission, from almost all the counties, it appears, that, among the poorest of the labourers, *early marriages are universal*. Thus, it is stated in Reports quoted in Mr Revan’s pamphlet:—From Kerry, “It was remarked, that the poorer the individuals were, the more anxious were they to marry.” From Donegal, “the poorer classes are invariably found more anxious to marry early than the more comfortable classes.” The farmers, and “those who are better off, do not marry until they have some little subsistence.” From Londonderry, “the poorest marry the earliest,”—“the farmer’s sons always marry later than the labourers, and are more cautious.” From Clare, “they almost all marry here, as soon as they can command money enough to pay the priest. *Those who have been accustomed to comparative comforts are generally more cautious and provident concerning marriage.*”† I need not say that all this is in exact conformity with my own

\* Evils of the State of Ireland, &c. p. 81.

† Of 1920 unemployed Scotchmen at Glasgow in 1837, 632, or nearly one-third, were single men; of 1103 unemployed



observations of the habits of the poor in Edinburgh;—both of the Irish and of the most destitute of the Scottish families.

The answers given to the Queries of the Poor-Law Commissioners, from those parts of Europe where there is little or no legal provision for the poor, or to the habits of the people regarding marriage, are precisely to the same purpose. Thus, in the Azores, where “there are no laws for granting relief to the poor of any description, excepting the sick,” and where, therefore, the aged and disabled have no resource but mendicity, it is stated that “poverty does not appear to check matrimony. In general, the poor people marry at an early age, according to the physical temperament of the parties.”\* In like manner, the Report from the Sardinian States, after mentioning the charitable institutions as “ne fesant que soulager un petit nombre des infortunés les plus graves,” goes on to observe very truly, that “c’est en point aux encouragemens que donne la charité publique, qu’il faut imputer *le grand nombre des mariages precoces et imprevoyans qui se contractent.*†” On the other hand, in those countries where there is uniform and legal

Irish, only 155, or 1 in 7, were single. (See Bill of Mortality by Henry Paul, Table 25.)

\* Appendix F to Report of Poor-Law Commissioners for 1834, p. 645.

† Ib. p. 657.



relief for the poor, it is not indeed uniformly but generally distinctly stated, that there is no peculiar disposition to early marriages. Thus, in Denmark, Mr Macgregor, British Consul, says, "Relief, or the expectation of it, has not hitherto been found to produce any sensible effect on the industry or frugality of the labourers; nor are the poor laws instrumental in promoting early marriages among the peasants."\* In Hamburgh, "among the lower classes, marriages before twenty-five or thirty years are rare."† In Bremen, where "relief is regularly afforded to the poor by their respective parishes, but if they are detected begging, they are sent to the workhouse, and there maintained," "early marriages are not generally complained of; the poor seldom marry under twenty-five years of age."‡ In Holland, where the amount of relief is fully as great as in England, "such degradation attaches to the idea of obtaining relief, as is sufficient to stimulate a labourer to the greatest exertion and frugality to avoid it; and the same cause operates in preventing premature marriages."§ In Prussia, where "the law prescribes that every town and village must support its own members when in distress," and speedy and sufficient means of relief are "always afforded when necessary," "these regulations operate beneficially on industry, and the

\* Appendix F to Report of Poor-Law Commissioners for 1834, p. 292.

† Ibid. p. 393.

‡ Ibid. p. 413.

§ Ibid. p. 584.



inducements to marriage are uninfluenced by the receipt or expectation of relief.”\* In Norway, “it is still considered disgraceful to have recourse to parish relief, and the expectation of such relief has no perceptible influence on the age at which they marry.”†

What has now been stated seems to me to be enough to entitle us to conclude with perfect confidence, not only that we may follow the dictates of humanity in affording a permanent relief to the miseries of the poor in a complex state of society, without incurring the danger of ultimately increasing the numbers of the destitute poor, which the economists have so loudly proclaimed,—but even that the English poor law, faulty as in some respects it has been, has been a most powerful and effective agent in *strengthening* the preventive check, and keeping the population at some distance from the limit which the actual want of sustenance would have imposed.

The whole secret of the preventive check appears to me to consist in the growth and support of *artificial wants* among the poor. Now, in order to understand how these are fostered by the practical application of the poor laws, it is necessary to look chiefly to their effect on the *rising generation*. Take the common case of a labourer dying in middle life, and leaving a family of young children ; or disabled by injury or disease, and unable

\* Ibid. p. 426 and 463.

† Ibid. p. 697.



to provide for his family. If this happens in Ireland, his widow or family has no resource but in vagrancy and casual charity; and in Scotland, the legal relief granted is often a mere pittance: the children are brought up in misery, they cannot possibly acquire any artificial wants, or look forward to the enjoyment of any comforts, and all experience (if on so large a scale as to be freed from accidental fallacies) teaches that, in these circumstances, there is no moral or prudential check on their powers of procreation. Such of them as survive the hardships of their early years, become fathers and mothers almost as soon as nature will permit, and contribute to overspread the land with another generation of sufferers. But in England they fall under the protection of the law; they are fixed to their parishes, and brought up under the eye of persons more or less interested in their welfare; their habits are prevented from degenerating; they grow up under the influence of artificial wants, and would feel themselves degraded if they were voluntarily to part with such of the comforts of life as they have hitherto enjoyed, and descend to the filth and penury of the Irish cabin. They live on wheaten bread, as Mr Malthus himself tells us, and are practically content to remain in smaller numbers than they might have been, had they been satisfied with coarser fare. Experience proves that their numbers do not become redundant, and that their standard of comfort in after life does not degenerate from that of their fathers.



That the artificial wants, which nature never fails to awaken in the minds of all young persons who are brought up in tolerable comfort, are in reality an infinitely more effectual check on early marriages and excessive population, than the mere prospect of want of food is in the minds of persons brought up in utter destitution, must, I think, appear obvious to any one who reflects on the difference in this respect between the higher and lower ranks of society in all countries. How many men are there, in the different ranks which intervene between the lowest and the highest, who purposely defer the period of marriage until they shall be able—not merely to maintain a family, but to maintain it on that precise level on which they are themselves moving, and who die childless before they can accomplish their design? How many women of these ranks pass their lives in single blessedness, not because they are afraid of starvation for themselves or their offspring, but because taste, or vanity, or sundry other considerations forbid their forming unions with men whom they consider their inferiors? How many motives of filial affection, of duty, of self-respect, of hope, of pride, of avarice, of ambition—combine to determine the question of marriage or celibacy, in the ranks of which we now speak? These ranks, in reality, never become redundant; many die without offspring, but few of them descend into the lowest rank, and none have their lives shortened by mere privations. The



lower in society that these complex motives operate, the more effectual is the preventive check. That some of them are in full operation in the English paupers, and restrain their increase, the facts already stated sufficiently prove; but which of them finds place in the Irish cabin?

I maintain, then, that it is quite reasonable, and in strict accordance with the result of observations which every one who pleases may make on the habits and history of poor families, to believe, that the English Poor Law, particularly in its influence on children, by cherishing the feeling of artificial wants, and maintaining the standard of comfort in numbers who would otherwise have been reduced to the level of Irish vagrants, continually represses the tendency to excessive population; and that nothing short of a legal enactment can be relied on for uniformly and permanently securing such comforts during youth, as are essential to sustain these habits, and counteract that real *bounty on population* which accidents and misfortunes, and consequent destitution and degradation, would otherwise continually and inevitably bring on numerous families in every season and in every district of the country.

And being satisfied, from individual observation, and from the facts already stated, that this is a reasonable expectation as to the effect of the poor's rate, I hold it to be a strong confirmation of the soundness of these views, that the growth of artificial wants, and the elevation of the standard of



comfort, and the absence of indications of redundancy, are not only observed to be compatible with the existence of poor laws at this day, but are historically known *to have grown up in England under the operation of that system* of legal provision for the poor. For it is certain that the miserable condition and habits of the lower orders of the English peasantry before the introduction of poor laws, according to the statement of contemporary authors, were hardly superior to those of the Irish at this moment. In consequence of changes in the system of agriculture at that time in England, as more lately in Ireland and in the Highlands, great numbers of the poor country people were thrown out of employment, and as a contemporary writer expresses it, "old fathers, poor widows, and young children lie begging in the miry streets." The landlords "turned them out of their sheds like mice, and thousands in England, through such, beg now from door to door, who had kept honest houses."

"The similarity in the state of society," says Mr Revans, "in the rural districts of England, immediately preceding the passing of the 43d of Elizabeth, to the state of society in the rural districts of Ireland at the present time, is very remarkable.

"The peasantry of England at that period appear to have possessed the same extreme desire to obtain land, and consequently the same willingness



to submit to exorbitant rents which now characterize the Irish peasantry. The practice of ejecting the peasantry from their dwellings, and of destroying them and joining the small tillage farms, and laying them down in grass, seems then to have been as common in England as it is now in Ireland.

“ Many thousands of the lower people in Norfolk and Suffolk, rose in 1549, and did infinite damage to the city of Norwich. Outrages of this description seem to have been, in fact, the immediate occasion of the enactment of the English poor laws.

“ When reading the foregoing statements, it is difficult to prevent the impression that they refer to the outrages committed a few years since by the Terry Alts in the county Clare, the nature of the outrages, and the causes of them, are so very similar.

“ The preambles to the acts of Elizabeth, which were passed a few years later, for the relief of the poor, shew that England was at that period, as Ireland is now, infested by hordes of wandering beggars.

“ *After the passing of the 43d of Elizabeth, which gave to the destitute able-bodied a right to relief, I find no farther mention of agrarian outrages, of extensive misery among the peasantry, or of the nuisance caused by large bodies of vagrants.*”\*

\* Evils of the State of Ireland, p. 108.



I assert, then, with confidence, that all experience teaches, not only that unrelieved suffering is quite ineffectual to teach prudence or moral restraint to the poor, but that it has uniformly the very opposite effect; and, on the other hand, that the natural effect of well-timed and well-directed public charity is not only to relieve suffering, but to *prevent degradation*, and so to support and strengthen the only check on excessive population which either policy or humanity will allow us to contemplate. It is not the fear of lowering, but the hope of maintaining or bettering their condition, which really constitutes that preventive check, and that hope is continually maintained among the poor, by the certainty of assistance in distress, in circumstances where it would otherwise have been extinguished in despair. The English poor have become cautious, just as they have become cleanly, not in consequence of positive laws or direct exhortations, but by the silent operation of those feelings of human nature which always raise the standard of comfort among those who are steadily preserved from the degradation of hopeless poverty.

But, as it is well observed by Mr Revans, “ We have long lost sight of the *advantages* which have been derived by England from her poor laws; and lately stood aghast at the evils which the maladministration of them during thirty years had produced. The late inquiry in Ireland has shewn us the evils which they have remedied; compared with



which those of the late maladministration shrink into insignificance.”\*

The ideas of the late Duc de la Rochefoucauld on the subject of public provision for the poor, published at the time of the French Revolution, have always appeared to me perfectly sound and consonant to all experience. How much misery, both in his country and in ours, might have been prevented, if they had been uniformly acted on, even since that time, in both !

“ In assisting those who are without resource in sickness, age, or infirmity, and in relieving the families of such persons of the ruinous expenses which the care of them involves, you not only relieve misery in some, but *prevent it in others*. So also, in providing for orphans, and aiding those who are burdened with unusual numbers of children, you not only diminish present suffering, but *dry up the source of further misfortunes*, and of many vices consequent on misfortunes, in which they or their relations would otherwise be involved. By giving those succours which helpless indigence requires, and refusing those which are demanded by men capable of making themselves useful by their own industry, a wise constitution will strengthen and improve the morals of a country ; it will dignify the relief it gives, and preserve to those who receive it the feeling of self-respect and independence.

“ When the relief given to the unfortunate was, as heretofore, from pious legacies or private chari-

\* P. 122.



ties, diffused irregularly over the kingdom, it was insufficient in some places, excessive in others, quite wanting in others. The relief given by private charity is always partial and uncertain, depending on the accidental residence and disposition of the rich. It should be the business of the French Constitution to replace the incomplete system of charitable foundations and private charities by an *enlightened and prospective system of legislation, extending to all the departments, carrying to the most obscure parts of the country the assistance which misfortunes demand, and guided by no consideration in the distribution of that assistance, but the degree of the misfortunes by which it is demanded.*"\*

II. This quotation leads me to say a few words on certain other delusions (as they seem to me), which have been industriously propagated on the subject of the poor laws, in reference to their effect, not on the numbers of the poor, but on the feelings of the rich towards them, and on their own character.

Thus, it is often said, that a poor law interferes with voluntary charity; that it takes the relief which the poor would otherwise have received as a boon, and invests it with the ungracious character of a tax, thus deadening the sensibility of the rich, and intercepting the gratitude of the poor. I answer, that a poor rate is not preferred to voluntary charity, if this could be made equally uniform and efficacious,

\* See *Rapport du Comité de Mendicité*, 1792.



but that it becomes necessary as a *substitute* for it in an advanced and complex state of society, where it is practically and utterly impossible that voluntary charity should be collected with the same uniformity, administered to the same extent, and adapted with equal precision to the circumstances of individual cases, and *thereby rendered equally effectual towards the main object—the maintenance of artificial wants*, and of a certain standard of comfort among all classes of the poor. In a perfectly simple, and, at the same time, educated and civilized state of society, as in many small country parishes in Scotland, where all the higher orders who are to give, and all the lower orders who are to receive, are aware of their duties, and are known to one another, and where the proprietors are resident, of charitable disposition, and attentive to their duties, the burden may be sufficiently equalized among the former, and the benefits sufficiently secured to the latter, without the intervention of the law. In fact, in such a state of society, if peace be preserved, property protected, and industry encouraged, how seldom is the intervention of the law for any purpose required! But, does any man of common sense suppose, that because, in such a community, the poor may be safely left to the care of their neighbours and immediate superiors, and will thus be secured from destitution and degradation, therefore the same results can be depended on in the heart of a populous city, or on the wide-spread lands of the Irish



absentees, where the circumstances of not one family in a thousand of those which require relief are known to, or will ever be studied by, one person in a thousand of those who have the means of giving it.

The idea, that the sensibility of the rich to the miseries of the poor is weakened by a system of poor laws, is a mere speculative delusion, the very reverse of the fact. The truth is, that when the poor are left, in a complex state of society, to voluntary charity, they are miserably neglected; great numbers of them sink into abject destitution; the rich have continually before their eyes examples of poverty and wretchedness, such as are almost unknown in a country where the poor are really under the protection of the law. This sight gradually becomes habitual to them; they comfort themselves with the reflection that many beggars are impostors, and too often "indulge in unhallowed pleasantries in the sacred presence of misery." It is *thus* that sensibility is deadened. Where such spectacles are rare, they produce a very different effect: if the beggars of a small town in Ireland could be suddenly transported to one of the same population in England, they would excite the commiseration of hundreds, for one who is in the slightest degree moved by the spectacle where it actually exists. Where the standard of comfort is raised among the lower orders, the ideas of the higher orders as to what ought to be the condition of the poor, and what are the proper objects of charitable assistance, na-



turally rise along with it; and human life is estimated at something like its just value ; as is abundantly obvious on a comparison of many parts of England with Ireland, or even with Scotland. The following is not the statement of a speculative philanthropist, but of a practical man of business, whose opportunities of observation and inquiry have been perhaps more extensive than those of any other man in this country.

“ The grand argument of the advocates of the voluntary system is, that compulsory assessment diminishes private charity. How they arrive at this conclusion, I am at a loss to conceive. I have heard the assertion, *usque ad nauseam*, but I have never heard the grounds upon which it is based. Is it based upon the absence of private charity in England ? Is it based upon the boundless private charity in Ireland ? Those who make the assertion must surely have forgotten, that the largest compulsory assessment in the world is in England, or must have overlooked the endless number of institutions supported by voluntary contributions in this country. Have they never heard of soup kitchens, of distributions of coals, of blankets, &c. &c. ? If not, let them read Mr Chadwick’s ‘ Report on the Charities of Spitalfields.’ They must have forgotten, too, that England’s charity has not staid at home ; that her charity has reached the sufferings of every other nation ; and that, hardened as the heart of England is said to be by assessment, it has even felt for



those whom Ireland, not hardened by assessment, was unable to relieve. Has any one forgotten the great subscription in London some years since, when more than L.100,000 were subscribed for the starving population on the west coast of Ireland? \* One-seventh of the whole of the poor rates of England, viz. of L.8,000,000, was expended in London and its immediate neighbourhood, and yet there is scarcely a principal street in that city, in which there is not a palace dedicated to charity, and supported by voluntary contributions. I only wish that those who talk of compulsory payments destroying private charity could witness the *energetic pleading for the poor*, which, as an assistant Poor-Law Commissioner, I constantly witness in those *rate-payers* who have not been disabused of erroneous reports which have been spread relative to the objects of the new system. Where the deserving poor are concerned, I *never met with a man willing to curtail their comforts*, though I frequently meet with those whose benevolent feelings would lead them to give charity where it is not required, and, consequently, where it will do mischief." †

To the same purpose, Mr Highmore, author of "A View of the Charitable Institutions in London,"

\* The author might have added, as a contrast, the amount of subscription of the absentee proprietors of one of the most distressed Irish counties, which fell considerably short of L.100.

† Revans.—This is surely a sufficient answer to the state-



states, "with exulting satisfaction, that the municipal law, which enforces an annual rate for the support of the poor in every parish, *presents no obstacle* to the exercise of charity in every department, public or private." "I am not aware of an instance where any one, being desirous of declining his contribution at the anniversaries of any of our charitable institutions of London or Westminster, adverted for one instant to the poor rates, as a ground for withholding that contribution."\*

"I am convinced, that to leave the destitute to voluntary charities, so far from encouraging, tends to destroy, the finer feelings. When I first arrived in Dublin, I suffered the greatest pain from the constant sight of half-naked and squalid human beings. I at first attempted to relieve them, but soon found that it was quite beyond my individual means to make the slightest impression on the mass of misery, and gave up the attempt as hopeless. Each person is actuated by the same feeling, and thus charity ceases."†

III. Again, one of the arguments which is stated against a system of poor laws is, that it breaks down

ment of Dr Chalmers,—I have no doubt, founded on individual observation,—but certainly not on so copious an induction of facts,—that the higher and lower ranks in England "look to each other with all the fierceness and suspicion of natural enemies, and stand in the grim array of mutual hostility."

\* Preface, p. 18.

† Revans.



the spirit of independence in the poor, and reduces them to the level of retainers on the higher orders.

Now, in considering how far this objection is well-founded, I speak of the poor's rate only as applicable to those who cannot find work, or cannot maintain themselves in a state of tolerable comfort by work, the unemployed poor, the aged and disabled poor, and the widows and orphans of the poor.

The Scriptures tell us, that we shall "have the poor with us always;" and experience shews, and science explains, that, in a long inhabited and highly civilized country, where there are great towns and unhealthy employments, and where great numbers of the lower orders die at early periods of life, and leave families or relations who had depended on their industry, the classes of which we now speak are always very numerous. Now, let us ask ourselves, how these unemployed and helpless poor are to be provided for? That they cannot be provided for, nor their numbers repressed, by leaving them to their fate, is, I think, abundantly proved by what has been already said, and by the lamentable experience of Ireland. All experience shews, that that plan is impracticable; and, if practicable, would have the very opposite effect from what is intended. And, if any one supposes, that, by encouraging Savings Banks and Benefit Societies, we shall secure that all labourers, occasionally thrown out of employment, all aged and disabled persons, and all widows and orphans, shall be provided for by a "surplus fund"



resulting from the wages of labour, I can only say, that he indulges in a Utopian scheme, to which no real approximation has yet been made in any rich and populous country, certainly not in ours.

Farther, in every rich, and populous, and luxurious country, where there are great towns, and where the distinction of ranks, and the division of labour, and the habitual separation of the higher and lower members of society, have long existed, not only will there necessarily be many unemployed and helpless poor, but the great majority of these will necessarily and permanently be *personally unknown to the great body of the higher ranks*, and known only to a few, who are wholly unable to supply their wants.

I apprehend it, therefore, to be quite certain, that in the order of things now established in this and all other civilized countries, the productive labourers and the higher ranks must be content, not only to bear the burden of the maintenance of a large number of the lower ranks, unemployed, or partially employed, or incapable of employment, but to contribute in one way or another to the maintenance of numbers of such persons, of whom, individually, they know as little as of the workmen whose hands have prepared for them the various luxuries which they daily consume. This burden they ought to regard as the price which they pay for all the advantages and enjoyments which they derive from the complex and artificial, but to them



highly favourable, state of society in which they live.

Now, this being so, the question is, Whether that large body of the poor, who *must* thus be mainly dependent on the bounty of persons higher in society than themselves, and *to whom they are individually unknown*, will have their feelings of independence more injured by *claiming that bounty as a right*, secured to them by a provident and benevolent law, the application of which to themselves they can prove—or by *supplicating it as a boon*, to which they must recommend themselves as they best can, by ingenious contrivances to fix the attention, and by touching representations to move the feelings of their superiors? In which case is the greater encouragement given to deceit and imposture, or to cringing, fawning, and flattering their superiors? In which case may it reasonably be expected that the relief given will be most regular, most permanent, best proportioned to the circumstances and wants of the applicants, most compatible with exertions of industry in aid of it, and therefore most likely to maintain the self respect and respectability, and to preserve the feeling of artificial wants, in those who receive it? In point of fact, where do we meet with the greater feeling of self-respect and independence, or the higher standard of comfort—in the English pauper, who demands the protection of the law, or in the Irish beggar, who implores the compassion of the chari-



table? The answers to these questions appear to me so clear, I have watched the progress of so many families receiving assistance in both these ways, and am so confident of the usual results, that I have long considered the notion now in question as one of the most singular delusions which has ever prevailed on this subject. The assertion of the Duc de la Rochefoucauld, already quoted, appears to me almost like an axiom,—that an enlightened “prospective system of legislation, extending equally to all the departments, carrying to all the parts of the country the assistance which misfortunes demand, and guided by no consideration in its distribution, but the degree of misfortunes which demand it,” is that which “dignifies the relief it gives, and preserves to those who receive it, the feeling of self-respect and independence.”

It is practically so well known that private charity, in a complex state of society, where the poor and rich live much asunder, is always irregular;—that it is insufficient in some places, excessive in others, and gives encouragement to deceit and imposture in all;—that public institutions are constantly formed, for its collection and distribution, that is, it *takes the form of a public and regulated provision for the poor before it reaches them*; and in very many cases, as I can testify, the poor confound what they receive in this way with that to which they are entitled by law, under the general



name of the "town's money," *and do not know which is which*. Now, in this case, it is easy to perceive that the money given under both these forms is distributed with more discrimination, gives less encouragement to deceit and imposture, and is less injurious to the feelings of self-respect and independence in those receiving it, than that which is given in the boasted way of private charity, that is, by persons among the rich who do not know the poor, nor understand their characters and habits. But I should like to understand distinctly, how the money given in the one of these modes should be fatal to the spirit of independence in the poor, and in the other not,—the poor themselves having no perception of any difference between the two.

Again, an argument against the Poor Laws as affecting the character of the poor, which finds much favour with the administrators of legal relief in Scotland, is thus stated: "When attention is paid to the causes of the high and increasing rates in England, and to the circumstances which have kept down the allowances to paupers in this country, it will at once appear, that *from the smallness of the sums paid in Scotland, results the great superiority of the system*. The cause of poor rates being high, and constantly increasing in any country, is the idleness and improvidence of the poorer classes of society. This is followed by the extinction of mutual kindness and benevolence among them; and when the parish lends its aid, the as-



sistance bestowed by it is received with discontent.\* Now, with all deference to the high character and benevolent intentions of this author, I must say that there are here three assumptions implied, if not actually asserted, relative to the English poor as compared with the Scotch, which are quite gratuitous. *First*, it is assumed that the rates for their support are not only high (which is true), but that they are continually increasing; which, from the statements already made, appears distinctly to be the reverse of the truth, whether we compare their amount with the wealth or the population of the country. *Secondly*, it is assumed, as the cause of this erroneously supposed increase, that the English poor are idle and improvident as compared with the Scotch. Now, that idleness and improvidence were, to a certain degree, favoured among the English poor, by the now extinct system of paying wages out of poor rates, is admitted. But that system has no connection with any poor law which has ever existed, or which any one wishes to exist, in Scotland; and that the English poor (notwithstanding that injudicious but now obsolete practice) are habitually idle or improvident or intemperate in comparison with the Scotch, in a degree which justifies the difference of the law in regard to the poor in the two countries, seem to me to be a mere delusion. If they had been habitually improvident, how could their increase have

\* Observations on the Poor Laws, by David Monypenny, Esq. of Pitmilley.



been kept within bounds as we have seen that it has? If they had been habitually idle, how could the English people have acquired the character, which they have, of being the most industrious nation on earth? If they had been habitually and comparatively intemperate, how could it have happened, that the examinations before the Committees of the House of Commons, tended to shew that drunkenness is more prevalent in Glasgow and other great towns in Scotland, than any where in England.\* Before we in Scotland bring these charges against the management of the poor in England, let us look to the closes of Edinburgh, and the wynds of Glasgow, and thoroughly understand the character and habits, the diseases and mortality, of the unemployed poor, unprotected by the law, who gather there from all parts of the country;† let us study the condition of the aged and

\* See particularly the evidence of the Sheriff of Lanarkshire before the Committee on Combinations among Workmen.

† It is a general fact, which ought always to be kept in view in all speculations regarding the poor, that whatever reduces men to a state of hopeless destitution and degradation, renders them uniformly intemperate as well as improvident. There are hardly any (whatever their former character may have been) who, in these circumstances, can resist the temptation of intoxicating liquors when in their power. Whatever raises or maintains them above that state of degradation, will fortify them against that temptation. If it were true that protection against destitution generally and naturally leads to intemperance, the English, Dutch, and German poor (all of whom live under the protection of efficient poor laws) must



disabled poor in all the smaller towns in Scotland ; let us listen to the tales of misery which come to us from the remote parts of the Highlands and Islands, where so many thousands have been thrown out of employment by sudden changes in the value of the produce they can raise, and where L.3 a-year are distributed among a distressed population of above 2000 persons, less than a halfpenny a-head on the population ; let us compare these things with the provision for the poor, and *with the condition of the poor*, not only in England, but in many other Christian countries ; and so far from priding ourselves on the *smallness of the sums* which are applied to this purpose in Scotland, I humbly apprehend we must honestly and candidly confess, that our parsimony in this particular is equally injurious to the poor and discreditable to the rich in Scotland.

*Thirdly*, it is assumed, in the passage above quoted, that the parochial assistance bestowed in England is “ received with discontent, and the claims brought forward in a spirit of rapacity and extortion.” But, although there may be individual cases of this kind, I think no one who reads the statements in the Reports of the Commissioners, of the generally cheerful and contented spirit with which, in all parts of the country, after the opera-

long before this time have acquired that character in a far greater degree than the Scotch ; but I fear there can be no doubt of the truth being directly the reverse of this.



tion of the new Poor Law was understood, the poor have submitted to the change,—can suppose these charges, even if we were to admit them to be a sufficient ground for legislation, to be generally well founded. The following, for example, is the statement of a practical man, “twenty years in parochial office uninterruptedly,” and Vice-Chairman of one of the Unions, and he gives it as the opinion also of all his colleagues in office. “The labourers are more industrious, contented, and happy; the aged and the infirm, the widow and orphan, never apply to us in vain, but in the fulness of their hearts return us their thanks with blessings.”\*

If I had wished to argue this question by reference to the feelings engendered among the poor, by the mode in which they see the Christian duty of charity obeyed by the regulations in force in this country for their relief, I could have produced many an instance of the “sore hearts of widows and orphans,” of the “prayers for death and judgment,” and other indications of intense mental suffering among the lowest of the poor, which might well weigh in the balance against the alleged discontent and rapacity of the English poor; but I am anxious to address myself to the understanding, not to the feelings of the reader; and trust only to the evidence of reason and experience, as to the circumstances, and the institutions, under which all the evils of poverty are most effectually and permanently controlled.



What has often been said of the poor, accustomed to depend on charity, losing the habit and the love of industry, has been most grossly exaggerated. It is contradicted by the almost uniform tenor of the Reports made to the Poor-Law Commissioners, since the out-door allowances to the able-bodied have been gradually stopped in England. I have watched the progress of hundreds, whom I knew to be dependent for a time, during youth, or sickness, or adversity, partly on parochial assistance, and partly (what has always appeared to me much more demoralizing) on precarious private charity. I have assisted some of these after they had been cast off (in consequence of imputations on their character) by those on whom they chiefly depended; and have had the satisfaction of seeing them, as they grew up, or regained employment, or recovered strength, take and maintain their places as industrious and *independent* members of society.

Another class of reasoners on this subject are very apprehensive, that the existence of a legal provision for the poor must weaken the ties of domestic attachment, and make the poor less careful of the comforts of their relations; and it has even been stated by legislators as an argument against introducing Poor Laws into Ireland, that by leaving the poor unprotected in old age, and thereby "exposing them to vicissitude and suffering," you call forth the feelings of their children, which will generally prompt them to do something for their



support ;\*—the true practical application of which doctrine is, that those aged persons among the poor who have no children, or none who choose to support them (and the same applies to orphan children), ought to be left to perish, and thought a useful sacrifice to the interests of the community.

But can any man of ordinary observation of the world suppose, that destitution, or the want of the ordinary comforts of life, is either necessary or favourable to the growth of domestic affections? “Are the people of England,” asks Mr Revans, “worse parents, children, friends, or neighbours, than the people of any other country? Are they more brutal in their habits? Do they exhibit a general carelessness about the sufferings of others? Perhaps a very fair test is the comparative extent and atrocity of crimes of violence on the person; if so, I think the moral statistics of England will bear comparison with those of any country in the world.” It may be added, are the higher ranks of any country, who are exempt from those “vicissitudes and suffering,” which are thought so necessary to develop the domestic affections of the poor, devoid of these affections?

The truth is, that these affections are, fortunately for human happiness, limited to no rank or condition of society; but it is most important in all speculations regarding poverty and its effects, to

\* See Examination of Dr Doyle, before the Committee of the House of Commons on Irish Poor Laws.



remember, that the effect of extreme destitution on the general conduct of man is *brutalising* ; it is to deaden, more or less, the sensibility to all feelings of a higher order than the sensual appetites. Instances of heartless indifference to parents and other relatives are, I am sorry to say, very frequent among the poorest of the natives of Scotland, even although tolerably well educated, and of regular habits ; and the desertion of their wives and families in circumstances of destitution by Irishmen of the lowest rank, so far as I can judge from pretty extensive observation of their habits in this country, instead of being less frequent, is *much more frequent* than by the native Scotch or English.

But, even if it were true that the virtue of domestic affection is brought more prominently into action by refusing assistance to the poor, should we be justified in excusing ourselves from acts of charity on that account ? I apprehend that this argument, if it proves any thing, proves a great deal too much, inasmuch as it is fairly applicable against all descriptions of charity. And I apprehend farther, that if we are to excuse ourselves from relieving misery, because good effects may result from it, we may as well at once proclaim ourselves at liberty to “ do evil, that good may come of it.”

IV. But there is another argument against the poor laws, on which some of the economists place



their chief reliance, viz. That they interfere with the profitable application of capital.

“The Poor Laws,” says Mr Malthus, “raise the price of provisions, and lower the price of labour.” “The farmer pays to the poor rates, for the encouragement of a bad and unprofitable manufacture” (in the case of the poor being set to work) “what he would otherwise have employed on his own land with infinitely more advantage to his country. In the one case, the funds for the maintenance of labour are daily diminished, in the other, daily increased.” “The obvious tendency of assessments for the employment” (it might be added, for the relief) “of the poor, is to decrease the real funds for the maintenance of labour in any country.”\* And on these texts there have been many commentaries, in and out of Parliament.

But, without pretending to much acquaintance with this science, I think it easy to shew, that the question of the influence of the poor rates on the funds available for the maintenance of profitable labour, must hinge on that regarding their connexion with population, which has been already discussed.

I can conceive a country, in which there should be no application of capital, except to profitable industry, or to the pleasures of those possessing it; no money laid out in any form on persons unable

\* On Population, book, iii. chap. 6.



to work, or whose labour affords no return to those expending it. Without stopping to inquire whether such a country can actually exist, peopled by human beings, I suppose its existence. Tracing it from its commencement, it is plain that such a country would, for a time, make rapid progress in wealth and population. But it is also plain, that all the inhabitants could not be profitable servants of the capitalists ; those administering to their pleasures only would not always be wanted ; nor could any of the inhabitants continue profitable to them during their whole lives. There being no provision for those who were occasionally out of employment, nor for those disabled by age, injury, or disease, nor for the widows and orphans of those who died in early or middle life, there would necessarily be, as the population came to press on the means of subsistence, according to the principles already stated, a growth of misery and poverty contemporaneous with the increase of wealth and population. This is a burden which will always attach itself, in one form or another, to any labour that is done by human beings. This misery and poverty, being allowed no claim on the capital of the country, would soon make inroads on the wages of labour ; it would soon appropriate to itself much of the price paid for labour to the most virtuous and best disposed of the labourers ; and still the relief afforded would be very uncertain, irregular, and inadequate. The misery and destitution of one



part of the population (particularly as towns grew and employments became unhealthy) would at least keep pace with the increase of wealth in the rest; and if the great object of political science is, not merely that there should be many citizens, nor that there should be rich citizens, but "*ut cives feliciter vivant*," the state of the nation would soon reflect no credit on the science of its governors. But the main question is, How would the "principle of population" act in such a country? If it be true, as has been stated, and I think proved, that the preventive check never does operate effectually where there is much unrelieved misery, the progress of the unproductive or partially productive, and destitute part of the population, would be much more rapid than that of the productive part, and the nation would be ultimately burdened with a mass of indigence and wretchedness sufficient to cripple all its energies.\*

Farther, in such a country, there would not only be much unrelieved misery, but, after a time, discontent, turbulence, and agitation; and capital and credit, "the most timid of created things," would soon disappear from it.

What avails it to Ireland at this moment, that she has millions of hands able and willing to labour,

\* I would beg the reader seriously to consider whether some of the statements already made, and those to be found in the sequel, as to the state of the poor in Glasgow, do not in a great measure realize this description.



and large tracts of rich uncultivated land, and every facility for manufactures and commerce,—when the moral condition of her people is such, that no capitalist will trust his money among them? Her condition is just that which, in my humble judgment, would soon be the lot, and the deserved punishment, of any nation which would resolve, that its “funds for the maintenance of labour” should never be applied except directly to the profit or pleasure of their possessors.

On the other hand, if it be true, as I firmly believe, that a legal provision for the disabled and destitute poor—simply because it is a certain, and uniform, and permanent provision, and because, therefore, it prevents the degeneration of habits which destitution would otherwise produce,—is an effectual preventive check on population, then a nation which regularly devotes a portion of its capital to the relief of misery and destitution, although its progress in wealth may seem to be retarded for a time, may always expect to have its population not only more comfortable, happier, and more contented, but more nearly adjusted to the demand for labour; and thus to escape, first the burden, and then the agitation and dangers, of redundancy, such as were witnessed in England two centuries and a half ago, and such as we now witness in Ireland.

In this way, I see no difficulty in explaining, what unquestionably is the fact, that while the want of a poor rate in Ireland has certainly proved



no effectual assistance to the capitalist, the presence even of the excessive and injudiciously administered poor rate has not prevented England from attaining her present position, not merely as the richest nation of the world, but as that in which the labouring part of the population bears the *smallest* proportion to that part of it which is exempt from the necessity of labour.

The wealth of a nation is not the result of a mere process of arithmetic. It is the work of human hands, and is guided by the impulse of human feelings; and it is in vain to attempt to separate the questions which regard its growth and progress, from those which concern the numbers, and habits, and comforts, and moral condition of those by whom it is produced; and therefore, it appears to me, that the question as to the effect of poor laws upon the wealth of a country turns on that which we have already considered, concerning the influence of the mode of provision for the destitute on the principle of population.

Connected with this argument is the assertion, that poor laws always lower, and that their absence raises, the wages of labour. To this, it may be thought sufficient to reply, that if the presence of poor rates is a cause of low wages, Ireland can testify that their absence is no security for high wages; or to refer to the statement of Mr Senior, that, "with respect to money wages, the



*superiority* of the English agricultural labourer over the labourers of almost all the rest of Europe, is very marked." But this point may be elucidated a little farther.

That, in countries otherwise well regulated, wages will be somewhat higher on account of the absence of poor rates, is easily understood ; because there is no other fund, to be depended on for the payment of those burdens, which I have already stated as naturally attaching themselves to all human labour ; those which age, sickness or infirmity, and premature death, necessarily entail on some at least of the labourers and their families, in every community. In so far as the wages of labour are kept down by poor rates, the effect of these may be said to be, to reserve a part of the payment which the labourer would otherwise receive, in order to meet demands which the uncertainty of all human affairs may probably impose on him ; in short, to act as a national benefit society for the advantage of labourers, equalizing a burden which may, indeed, prove slight to any one, but which may fall with such weight as to crush him entirely, and for which it is, therefore, his interest and that of his country that he should compound. In the case of those labourers, whose services are required for necessities of life, and therefore always in demand, and whose employment is healthy, if they are instructed in their moral duties, such provision for these contingencies is of less importance and less required ;



and, therefore, in the agricultural districts of Scotland, if assessments were general, it is not to be expected that they would rise so high as materially to depress the wages. But on occasion of changes throwing many labourers out of employment, and more constantly in manufactures and in great towns, where the services of labourers are required for luxuries, and subject to the variations of caprice and fashion, and to commercial embarrassments, and where employments are unhealthy and life precarious, these contingencies become much more formidable; and unless some such permanent security against them exists, great numbers of labourers, and the women and children dependent on great numbers of them, will be necessarily often reduced to a precarious and destitute mode of life. And if the natural effect of such a mode of life is found by *experience* to be, to give an unhealthy stimulus to population (as we see in Ireland), then the number of labourers in all lines of industry becomes excessive, and wages are permanently depressed, as we see them to be there, without any counterbalancing advantage. Thus we find that the ultimate effect of a poor rate on the wages of labour, turns likewise on its effect on the principle of population, which has been already considered.

I would only add here, that, if the depressing effect of the English poor rate on the wages of labour had been really injurious, the natural effect would have been, that many English labourers would by



this time have sought employment in the neighbouring countries, and we in Scotland would have been overrun by them, instead of the Irish, the reverse of which is the fact.

V. There is yet another class of reasoners on this subject, who distrust the efficacy of any measures for the benefit of the poor, which go merely to the relief of physical suffering; and trust to "Religious and moral Education" as the only effectual remedy for this and all other evils of the social condition of our species. I should sincerely lament if any thing that I have said should be construed into disregard or contempt of their opinions. But I beg to say, that, in order that religious instruction may produce its due effect, the seed must fall on soil so far prepared for its reception. The philanthropist and the legislator can aspire to no higher object, in this department of their duties, than to perform this preliminary duty. Occasional religious feelings exist in all ranks of society, and perhaps their most striking manifestations are in the lowest; it is easy to excite the sense of human dependence and of human unworthiness in the very outcasts of society; but all experience teaches us, that we are not to expect them to regulate the character, and permanently influence the conduct, of those who are incessantly struggling for existence, and are unable to command any of the comforts, and enjoyments, and decencies of life. A certain degree of physical



comfort is essential to the permanent development, and habitual influence over human conduct, of any feelings higher than our sensual appetites. The exclamation of the Irish murderer, on seeing the gallows at which he was to suffer, expresses, I verily believe, the only feelings with which many of his brave countrymen, simply by reason of their destitution, habitually regard the approach of death,—“She ’ll save me many a wet foot and hungry belly.”

When it is said, therefore, that all our efforts to improve the condition of the poor will be ineffectual without the aid of religion, I willingly assent to the statement; but add, that religion itself will fail to influence permanently the conduct of the most destitute of our species, without the preliminary assistance of human charity. It was not without reason, nor without a provident regard for the infirmities of human nature, that Charity was assigned so high a place among the Christian virtues.

At this moment, if there were ample church accommodation in all parts of Edinburgh, I am satisfied that there is a large, although fluctuating, body of the most destitute of the inhabitants, whose mode of life has been already described, who never would avail themselves of it; not for want of disposition, but simply because they have not clothes with which they could make their appearance there.

In regard to education independent of religion, whatever effect it may have on the habits, or on the



enjoyments, of those of the lower orders, who are in no want of the necessities of life (and to many of them I believe it is a great blessing), I should say, from any thing I have seen of the poor, that its importance, either for good or evil, to that class who are likely to require parochial aid, has been very much exaggerated. The wish of George III., that every man in his dominions might be able to read his Bible, was a noble and patriotic sentiment; and I believe it expresses the only kind of education which can ever be expected to take effect on the minds and conduct of those, whose mental and bodily energies must be continually occupied in the means of procuring the first necessities of life. A more extended education may be given to such persons in youth, but it does not influence their conduct in after life. “*L’Education est peu de chose,*” says an intelligent French author (Michaux), “*quand les hommes sont toujours aux prises avec les premiers besoins de la vie.*” “When a man’s whole faculties are strained to the utmost from sunrise to sunset, to procure subsistence, he has neither leisure, aptitude, nor desire for information.”\* I know that this doctrine is not popular with many benevolent men in this country, but I have had too much experience of its truth to doubt of its being strictly applicable to a great majority of mankind.

Again, even supposing that we could give to the

\* Symon’s Arts and Artizans, &c.



poor as complete religious and moral education as the higher ranks enjoy, is it reasonable to expect, from what we know of the corruption of human nature, and from what we see of the conduct of those higher ranks, that their vice and folly would be so eradicated or subdued, and their conduct so regulated by wisdom and foresight, as to relieve them of their dependence on the charity of their more fortunate brethren? And if we could reasonably entertain that expectation in future, would it be wise, or prudent, or even just, to act on it immediately; and when we are surrounded by every description of human suffering, to think ourselves relieved from the simple and obvious duty of charity? To me it seems obvious, that there is no panacea for human poverty and suffering, any more than for human maladies; and that, looking to the workings of the mighty principle of population, to the dominion of time and chance over this world, and to the seeds of moral evil which are implanted in all our breasts, we never can anticipate the time when our duty to our fellow-men will consist only in such cultivation of their minds as may furnish them with an *antidote* to suffering; that we must make preparation for the *relief* of much misery which we shall never be able to *prevent*; and that we sin against reason as well as religion, if we suppose, that any instruction which man can give to man, can ever absolve him from the simple and



practical duty, of "clothing the naked and feeding the hungry."

Having said so much in answer to the objections that have been stated to the principle of a Poor rate, I have next, much more briefly, to enumerate the manifest advantages which this plan of relieving the sufferings of poverty possesses over all others, and which, in my humble opinion, ought to be quite sufficient to reconcile the people of Scotland to an uniform system of assessment, adequate to the purpose of giving such relief to those sufferings, as undoubtedly is given in England and in other countries in Europe.

I. A legal system of relief, which the poor are entitled to claim, is the only one which, in a complex state of society, where great numbers of the rich and poor live widely separate, is truly effectual in preserving a large portion of the poor from misery and degradation. Experience unequivocally demonstrates, that, in that state of society, many of the rich will always, under one excuse or another, neglect the duty of voluntary charity altogether. Those who do not, have always so great difficulty, particularly in great towns, in ascertaining the real character and wants of those whom they relieve, that they must necessarily run a risk of frequent misapplication of their charity; and, meeting with many instances of this, they have seldom perseve-



rance to continue their exertions. The subscribers to voluntary public charities in large towns see little or nothing of the sufferings which they contribute to relieve, and their charity is not stimulated by the emotion of sympathy, nor cheered by the accents of gratitude. They are allured to works of charity, as an interesting amusement, rather than prompted to them by a sense of obligation; and their bounty is liable to vicissitudes, more like the caprices of fashion than the steady operations of duty. Whether this be the true explanation or not, we have ample evidence of the tried inefficacy of the voluntary system of charity in large towns, even where there is no want of benevolent feeling among the higher ranks. There is no nation more generous than the Irish, but we have seen that the poor of Dublin, unprotected by a legal provision, have fallen into a state of destitution and misery which it is painful to contemplate; and the funds of the mendicity association are often so deficient, that it is only by periodical exhibitions of large bodies of these wretched creatures in the streets, and by exciting the fear of overwhelming mendicity, that the managers are enabled to carry on their system. What has voluntary charity done, or what can any reasonable man expect that it ever can do, for the rapidly increasing, and still more rapidly degenerating population of the wynds of Glasgow? In Paris, I have heard it stated by the Secretary to the Conseil des Hospitaux (who have all the legal



charities under their control), as a principle universally admitted, that nothing but the funds raised by taxation (now amounting to 12,000,000 francs, or about half a million Sterling annually) could preserve the city in a condition habitable for the higher ranks of society. If the voluntary system of charity were acting efficiently in Edinburgh, we should have clergymen and elders making themselves acquainted, as in country parishes, with the character and wants of all their parishioners; but although such duty is done by some of the clergy with zeal and assiduity, it is manifestly impossible that it can be done constantly; and by the greater number of the elders it is never done at all. But it is unnecessary to dwell on this point, because I hold it to be quite certain, that if the voluntary system of charity, either in Edinburgh or Glasgow, had been effectual in maintaining the poor of these cities in tolerable comfort, we never should have seen epidemic fever affecting probably one-sixteenth of the population as in Edinburgh, or one-sixth as in Glasgow, in little more than two years.

II. While the legal system of relief is the only one that is effectual in regard to the lower orders, it is likewise the only one that is just in regard to the higher. The voluntary system has been justly characterized as an effectual expedient for "relieving the uncharitable at the expense of the charitable." In every large town, it is found that a large



proportion of the higher ranks resolutely abstain from every description of charity ; and in Edinburgh, in particular, it is observed, that the individuals who support all the charitable institutions are a very limited number, in comparison with those who are reached by an assessment.

This becomes more nationally important, when it is remembered, that the effect of this inadequacy of voluntary charity among the rich is to throw an excessive burden on the industrious, and even on the poorer, classes. Wherever the voluntary system exists, the earnings of these classes are habitually divided, to a very great extent, with the unemployed and impotent poor, and thus the whole body of the lower orders is depressed. This takes place to a degree that is little known in Scotland ; but in Ireland, as the evidence of Dr Doyle abundantly shews, this is an evil of the first magnitude. "Of the L.1,500,000 or L.2,000,000," says he, now supporting the Irish poor, nearly the entire falls on the farmers and other industrious classes." "I could not, were I to speak till the sun went down, convey a just picture of the benevolence prevailing in the hearts of the middling class in Ireland. The poor are now supported almost entirely by them, although they form a class not over numerous, and subject to great pressure." Again, speaking of the charity even of the poorest classes to one another, he says, "you cannot be among them for a day without witnessing the existence of



it in the most touching manner. But, when you ascend to the higher ranks, you find many *individuals* of great goodness, and of singular beneficence and charity ; but you find a much greater number who seem to be very anxious to throw the whole burden on the industrious people, and who seem to be indifferent to all the wants of the poor.”

III. The legal system of relief is the only one which may always be expected (under such regulations as may be easily enforced) to act uniformly in proportion to the wants, and in adaptation to the character, of the sufferers. It is only by giving the poor the right to claim relief, and then employing *paid* inspectors (checked by higher authorities) to investigate their cases, that these objects can be accomplished. The irregularity, as well as general deficiency, of voluntary relief, must always render it both more degrading and demoralizing to the poor themselves, and less beneficial to the public.

The advantages of the legal provision in this respect are very satisfactorily stated in the Report on the Danish Poor Law, furnished by that Government, and published by the Poor-Law Commissioners. “ At the introduction of the new system, it was natural to direct attention to the possible injurious effects of a public arrangement, which made it a compulsory duty for each citizen to contribute (according to the judgment of authorities appointed for the purpose) all that the needy members of the state



seemed to require ; inasmuch as the sluggard, the spendthrift, and the profligate, might thereby find opportunity to support themselves at the expense of the industrious and frugal. But, on the other hand, we must recollect, that we do not get rid of these evils by leaving the needy to depend on the charity of their fellow-citizens. On the contrary, he who would rather live at the cost of others than support himself by his own industry and economy, will often find more encouragement to this from the irregular help he expects to obtain from his fellow-citizens, without accurate scrutiny into the nature of his want or his behaviour, and without being compelled to work,—than from the help given by a public authority, which narrowly investigates his want, has inspection over his conduct, and keeps him under a corresponding discipline. It was considered as good policy, besides, that the state, merely from motives of public safety, should secure to each individual the possibility of getting the first wants of nature supplied without having recourse to crime. But, in order to attain this object, the support of the poor must rest on a more certain basis than the funds belonging to each place's poor-chest,—or occasional revenues assigned without any fixed mode of determining what is really necessary,—or the charity of private individuals,—could afford. And as, moreover, begging (which, if the support of the poor is not secured by public arrangement, seems excusable, on the ground of the insufficiency



of other means of relief) is attended with so many inconveniences and burdens for the inhabitants, and is, besides, such a fruitful source of moral corruption, it was considered advantageous, even for that part of the community which did not stand in need of help, that, by means of a public establishment for charity, such evils should be got rid of.”\*

There is here a difference in the opinions acted on in the administration of the Poor Laws in Scotland and in England, which demands careful consideration. In Scotland, it is very generally maintained, that, if destitute persons are found to be of bad character, that is a sufficient ground for refusing them relief;† whereas, in England, it is laid down by the Poor-Law Commissioners, that, “in the administration of relief (*i. e.* in the question whether relief should be given or not), nothing of past demerit, nothing but the simple destitution of the party, and his necessity, ought to be regarded.”‡

\* Report of Commissioners for 1834, Appendix F, p. 307.

† Thus, in the Report of the Out-Pension Committee of the Managers of the West-Church Charity Workhouse (1837), it is recommended to subject the roll to a regular and periodical scrutiny, “for the purpose of *striking off all the dissipated and undeserving, without exception.*” If this were done by taking them into the workhouse, no objection could be made to the proposal; but this is certainly not the alternative generally approved in such cases.

‡ Report on certain complaints of the Vestry of St Nicholas, Deptford, by Charles Mott, assistant-Commissioner.



I have no difficulty in stating my opinion, not only that this last is the wiser principle on which to act, but that it is quite essential to the proper management of the affairs of the poor, that it be uniformly acted on. As this is not obvious at first sight, a little explanation is requisite.

1. As to the question of morality, we cannot constitute ourselves judges of the demerit of individuals. All human characters are mixed, and a very little observation of human life is enough to shew, that whether the better or the worse part of the dispositions of an individual, especially of the lower orders, shall determine his fate, or the character he is to bear in the world, is very often a question decided by contingencies altogether beyond his control. When the characters even of the most hardened criminals, or of the most abandoned sinners, are fairly investigated, it always appears that there are some redeeming qualities which, under other circumstances, might have been as productive of good as those which have become predominant have been of evil. There is no affectation of sentiment, but simple truth and good feeling in the reflection of one of Sir Walter Scott's most amiable characters, on the loss of female innocence, "Who could have expected such a flood of evil, from one grain of human leaven, in a mind that was kind and candid and generous?"—or, in the words of Miss Edgeworth, "Those who have been bred in the lap of affluence, whom the breath of Heaven has never



visited too roughly, whose minds have been guarded from their earliest years, even with more care than their persons, are not competent to judge of the temptations, to which the youth of the lower ranks of life may be exposed." On the other hand, it is a consideration which must occur to every reflecting mind, and which may well convince us of the justice and wisdom of the sacred rule, "Judge not that ye be not judged,"—that even in the highest and purest characters that we meet with in the world, we can not only detect failings, but we can often observe such evil propensities as, under certain circumstances, might have stamped them with infamy, and caused irretrievable degradation. It is wrong to dwell on the "fears of the brave, and follies of the wise," with the view of vilifying and degrading our notions of human nature; but it is right to remember them, with the view of strengthening and regulating our endeavours to perform the great duty of charity.

The truth is, that the distinction between good and evil lies in the different parts of the character and dispositions of every human being, not in different individuals of our species; and although we can easily see that in some the evil propensities greatly predominate, while in others they are effectually repressed, yet when we inquire carefully and candidly into the circumstances, moral or physical, which have led to the former result, in the case of any individual, we shall find it so exceed-



ingly difficult to judge how much depended on his own voluntary determination, and how much on circumstances beyond his control, that, except in the case of *crime* (*i. e.* of obvious and demonstrable injury done to others), our only safe rule of judgment is to acquiesce in the sacred principle, "Vengeance is not ours." If we reserve our charity until we meet with human beings exempt from sinful propensities or indulgences on whom to bestow it, we may reserve it for the next world, for we assuredly shall not find fit objects for it in this. The vices of the poor are generally more prominent and offensive than those of the rich, but they are very often balanced by qualities which may even excite our admiration. The very same persons, who disgust us by occasional, even by habitual intemperance, we shall often find, when called on for active exertion, to be faithful and brave; when merely deprived of their liberty, to be orderly, industrious, and religiously disposed; or when afflicted with disease, to be "grateful for sympathy, patient under privations and sufferings, candid in the admission of errors, and calm on the approach of death."

If we trace the origin of that course of life which fixes the character of profligacy on so many of the poor, we shall find that, most generally, it may be ascribed to one of two causes, self-indulgence, or want of temper; and if we examine our own conduct, or that of those whom we most love and re-



spect, how many of us can say that we have no such infirmity in these respects as might, in the circumstances of those we now condemn, have fixed on us the same reproach? If we have not been led into temptation, let us be thankful for the mercy; but let us not, therefore, think ourselves entitled to “denounce the vengeance of Heaven on those sins which our own rank and station in life remove us from all temptation of ever committing.” When any line of human conduct is proposed, or is defended, as a proper punishment of *sin*, we should remember who has told us, “Let him that is without sin among you cast the first stone.”

2. Again, if we think ourselves justified in refusing relief on account of the sins of those claiming it, or of what we consider to have been their previous misconduct, the punishment we thereby inflict is often out of all proportion to the offence. We must indeed expect, that, in the struggle for employment in all lines of industry in such a country as this, the least deserving will generally be excluded; we shall very often find, for example, that intoxication is the immediate cause of the destitution of many; and we must expect, that when they are reduced to extreme destitution, the disposition to intoxication, whenever an opportunity presents itself, will be nearly irresistible. But, looking to what we see of this vice, and habitually excuse in those practising it in the higher ranks of society, can we be justified in saying, that this is a sufficient ground



for withholding all assistance, and thereby reducing the miserable sufferer to the condition in which I have seen too many,—almost uniformly females (some formerly respectable, “none all evil”),—unable to procure such clothing as to enable them to go to hospital, or dismissed thence as incurable; refused aid from other charities, perishing of the effects of want and nakedness, and dependent only in their last moments on scanty assistance from companions a little more fortunate than themselves.

“ And if a death of lingering pain,  
“ To shrive my sin be penance vain,  
“ Vain are your masses too !”

Some may say, that instances of such extreme wretchedness have a good effect in the way of example, on the morality of those who witness them; but this is not the kind of morality which we are taught by the Gospel; and the truth is, that they are witnessed by none, whose circumstances admit of their deriving any such benefit from them.

3. If we take upon ourselves to punish sin, by thus excluding sinners from the assistance of public charities, we shall very generally find, that we punish the innocent along with the guilty; we punish children along with parents;\* we punish in

\* During the inclement weather of spring 1838, I saw three young women with natural children on the breast, who were out of work, in a miserable state of destitution, and who were refused admission into the workhouses, and were very scan-



many instances neighbours and acquaintances among the poor themselves, who supply, in a certain degree, from their own scanty resources, the deficiency of other charity ; and in many instances we punish a much larger number of the public, to whom such sufferers, rather than starve in silence, will make their wants known in some way or other, and who have not the means of granting relief with the same discrimination as public charities. At all events, proceeding on this principle, it is absolutely impossible for us to suppress one form or another of mendicity.

4. Even if all these considerations are set aside, we cannot overlook the fact, that those whom we may regard on account of their intemperance or immorality, as unfit objects for legal relief,—or the relief of whom we may regard as encouragement to vice,—are just of that description of persons among whom fever and other epidemics are most apt to break out and to extend ; and can only be prevented by some improvement of their condition and comforts. In my opinion, then, for the sake of the morals, but quite certainly for the sake of the health of the community, it is most important, that

tilly relieved by the other charities here. After some weeks of severe suffering, the children all died, certainly of the effects of cold and imperfect nourishment. If any one supposes, that the effect of this sacrifice of innocent life was to improve the morals of these women or their associates, I can only say, that he knows nothing of the effect of real destitution on human character and conduct.



the wants (well ascertained by inquiry) of the vicious poor should be promptly relieved, and that this should be done as much as possible out of the view of the public.

For all these reasons, it seems to me perfectly clear, that destitution ought to give the claim, and the moral demerits of applicants to public charities should always be regarded only as a *guide to the kind of relief, which it will be most advisable to grant*; and here lies one of the chief advantages of well managed legal relief, that when such persons are really reduced to destitution, you have always the workhouse at command, in which they can be relieved without the possibility of indulgence in their vicious habits, and without injury, physical or moral, to the rest of the community.

IV. Another very important advantage of the system of legal provision for the poor is, that it gives all ranks of the community a direct interest in their condition. We have seen that when the relief of the destitute, in large towns, is trusted chiefly to the voluntary system, it always happens, and on a fair estimate of human virtue, and of the time which persons of the higher ranks either can or will bestow on the affairs of the poor, we must expect that it always will happen, that there is a great deal of unrelieved suffering; and I think it appears distinctly from what has been said, that the evils, of which we hear so much, of *misapplied*



*charity*, are trifling in comparison of those which this *unrelieved misery* involves. When these evils come to a height, as when a formidable epidemic breaks out, they excite public attention, great efforts are made, large sums subscribed, and the assistance which, given a short time before, would have preserved many lives, and served as an antidote to great part of the misery, is now only in time to mitigate sufferings which can no longer be arrested. When the epidemic subsides, public attention is directed to some other object; and after a brief period of comparative comfort, the poor relapse into their former obscurity and destitution; with a feeling deeply impressed on their minds, that they have no permanent protection from the rich, but become objects of attention only when it is apprehended, that a portion of the evils which they endure may extend upwards to the more fortunate members of society.

On the other hand, when destitution and suffering of all kinds among the poor are admitted to have a legal claim to relief, no aggravation of the privations which they suffer can take place, without an immediate demand on the higher orders, and, to a certain degree, an abridgment of their luxuries; and the assistance which is given works uniformly, silently, and surely, as part of the ordinary business of the country, preventing disease, and saving from degradation, knitting together all parts of the vast structure of society, and making



it obvious to all ranks, that the whole must rise or fall together ; maintaining thus the sense of self-respect even among the lowest of the people, and keeping up that standard of comfort, and those artificial wants, which form the true security to society, that the next generation shall not degenerate from the present.

From all that I have observed, or have been able to learn of the condition of the poor, and of the provisions for their support, on the Continent of Europe, I am confident that we may draw the same conclusions there, as are suggested by a comparison of the different parts of the British Empire. The conclusion which Mr Sadler drew from a review of the practice of the different nations of Europe, as to this matter, is exactly what might have been expected, from the principles which have been stated ; viz. that wherever a legal provision does not exist for the poor, the only alternative is an extensive system of mendicity, under which there is uniformly much more misery, disorder, and vice. On the other hand, the countries in which there appears to be the least suffering, and the most comfortable general condition of the poor, are uniformly those in which an extensive legal provision for their support exists, and in general has long existed. The extensive collection of facts on this subject, published by the Poor-Law Commissioners,\* is by no means

\* Appendix F to Third Report for 1834.



free from the usual error of mixing matters of opinion with matters of fact; and it is particularly deficient in details as to the actual *condition* of the lowest orders in these countries; on which point, as I have already observed, the whole question, both as to the attainment of the immediate objects of Poor Laws, and as to the prospect of their giving a permanent security against destitution, necessarily hinges; but it is easy to extract from it sufficient evidence of the propositions I have stated, and for this purpose, I shall avail myself chiefly of the abstract given in the Quarterly Review, vol. 54; premising only, that the statements in favour of the practical operation of the Poor Laws are more valuable as coming from men, who knew they were addressing a Government which had made strong declarations against them, and who, in several instances, had themselves strong prepossessions of that kind.

“ The establishment of a legal provision for the destitute poor, as the only means of securing society from the curse of unlimited mendicancy and vagrancy, so far from being, as many persons we believe are still erroneously persuaded, peculiar to British legislation, and an experiment introduced for the first time in the reign of Elizabeth, has existed, in some shape or other, from the very earliest period as a fundamental principle in the codes of nearly all European nations. We find it directly recognised in the Capitularies of Charlemagne:—  
‘ Mendici per regionem non permittantur. *Suos*



*quæque civitas pauperes alito.*’——It is probable that, as the monastic establishments grew into opulence by multiplied endowments, the support of the poor fell almost wholly upon them, and relief from municipal or parochial funds came into desuetude, as well in other countries as in this.——After the suppression of these, the experience of the next half century proved that an adequate maintenance could only be afforded to the poor, and mendicancy be effectually extirpated, by a *compulsory* assessment, to which the legislature of England was obliged to resort in the 14th Eliz. c. 5; afterwards expanded, and remodelled in the celebrated 43d Eliz. The Scottish act of 1579—the ground-work of the present poor law in Scotland—proves that a similar necessity was felt about the same time, and a similar step taken, by the legislature of that country likewise,” although, since that time, it has been acted on in a very different spirit.

“ Mr Senior (in the Preface to the Report in question) divides the states of Europe into two classes :—1. Those in which the principle of the English system exists, namely an acknowledgment of the *right* of every person to be rescued from destitution by the public; and, 2. Those in which the applicant’s *legal right* does not appear to be so distinctly acknowledged, but in which provision is nevertheless largely, and in many cases amply, made from public funds for their relief. The former class, as enumerated by Mr Senior, comprehends Norway, Sweden, Russia, Denmark, Meck-



lenburg, Prussia, Wurtemberg, Bavaria, the Canton of Berne, and Saxony : the latter, Holland, the Hanseatic Towns, Belgium, France, Portugal, the Sardinian States, Frankfort, Austria, Venice, Greece, and Turkey." In several of the latter countries, however, the relief given is equally uniform, and carried to as great an extent as in the former, so that in these the distinction is truly nominal.

It appears from these papers, that it is in the countries inhabited by the great Gothic family of European nations, in the north of Europe and in Germany, that we must look for the true models in this department of civil policy ; in the nations of the Celtic family, in Spain and Portugal, in Italy and in France, the care of the poor has attracted much less of the attention of government, and their condition is in every respect much worse.

In the best managed states it appears, that there are generally large *endowments* for the benefit of the poor, which of course lessen the amount of tax required for this purpose ; and in most countries the sums raised are partially by indirect, partly by direct taxation. But these differences do not affect the principle of a poor law, because the effects, good or bad, of such a law on the people do not depend on the source from which the money comes (which is generally not known to those receiving it), but depend merely on the degree of confidence with which it can be anticipated as a resource in time of need.



“ A full statement of the Swedish law is given by M. de Hartmansdorff, the Secretary of State for Ecclesiastical Affairs, and it appears to be similar in most points to that of Norway. Its principle is declared to be a compulsory assessment on all property for the relief of the infirm and helpless poor, and the employment of all that are able to work. Every parish has its alm-house for the aged, sick, and infirm; and food, clothing, and money are distributed to out-door paupers. The incurable sick, and those afflicted with contagious diseases, are supported in public hospitals, at the cost of their parish. The parish overseers are elected by the rate-payers. The clergyman presides at the board or vestry which administers the fund. The poor have an appeal from the vestry to the governors of the province, and thence to the king. The statements as to the working of the system are various, but we learn from the dispatches of Mr Bloomfield, that the number of paupers is 1 in 42 of the population (not 3 per cent.) and that there is little appearance of abject poverty; and from the report by Mr Liddell, Consul at Gottenburg, that he could observe no bad effect to have been produced on the industry of the labourers, their frugality, on the age at which they marry, nor on their domestic affections; and that “ they exert themselves to remain independent.”\*

\* Appendix F to 1st Report, pp. 368 and 386.



“ The existing law in Denmark dates only from 1799, although a legal provision for the poor had existed at least since 1685. The kingdom is divided into poor districts, consisting of separate parishes in the country, in which relief is administered by a board consisting of the ministers, magistrates, and a few respectable inhabitants elected to the office. A general board of directors presides over all. The curate examines into the wants of paupers. An overseer, serving for three years, acts as the relieving officer and agent for the board. The infirm and helpless poor are supplied with food, clothing, lodging, fuel, and medical attendance. Such as are capable of work are made to perform it in or out of workhouses. The children are educated until they can be apprenticed or provided for. The funds are chiefly levied by assessment. A return in labour is required from all those who are capable of work.— The poor having been thus effectually provided for, and all excuse for mendicancy removed, begging is made punishable by confinement in the House of Correction.

“ This poor-law system of Denmark being of comparatively recent origin, it becomes interesting to ascertain its results after the lapse of about a third of a century. Mr Macgregor, British Consul, states the administration of the law to be defective, and to require amendment; and there has been there, as in this country, much discontent about the amount of the tax, and *opinions* given as



to its future evil tendency ; but, in spite of this, the system itself, he says,

“ “ Has answered an important object—that of checking the growth of pauperism. There is a slight improvement in the value of land ; idle persons are seldom found ; and there is sufficient work in which to employ the labouring population. Relief, or the expectation of it, has *not* been found to produce any sensible effect on the *industry* of the labourers generally,—nor upon their *frugality*. Nor are the poor laws instrumental in producing early marriages among the peasants.’ ” “ The *condition* of the poor,” he elsewhere states, “ has been materially improved through their agency, *a great deal of misery has been prevented or relieved* ; and their operation has been most beneficial on different occasions when great numbers of working people were suddenly thrown out of employment.”\*

Another witness, author of a very detailed account of the existing law, states that,

“ Before its introduction, the *distress was much greater*, and begging, of the most importunate and rapacious kind, was quite common ; the beggars, when their demands were not satisfied, had recourse to insolence and threats, nay, even to acts of criminal vengeance.” (How accurate a picture of the present state of Ireland ! ) “ *This is no longer the case*. It is a fact, that poverty now appears in less

\* Appendix F, &c. p. 290.



striking features than it did before the introduction of the poor-law system."

"The actual system, wherever it has been ably and duly managed, has undoubtedly strengthened the ties between the higher and lower orders; as the Danish nation in general has a high sense of the benevolent intentions of Government."\* In Copenhagen, the proportion of the population receiving support from the poor-funds is about 1 in 17 of the population, or nearly 6 per cent;—in the country, much less. The official report of the Danish Government states, that, since the compulsory provision has been introduced (and the benefits above stated been secured), "the burden of the poor tax has *not* been uniformly increasing."† It appears, also, that "there are funds accumulated in the general poor-chests for each bailiwick, which, in some of them, are considerable," and which are to be employed in the erection of workhouses,‡ and that the agricultural population of Denmark has not increased more than 26 per cent. since 1801, *i. e.* in 33 years, under this system.§

"In Russia proper, the peasants on each estate are the property of its lord, but he is under obligation to provide them with the means of support, and, in times of distress, to relieve them. On the estates belonging to the Crown, which are enormous, and every day increasing, a methodical sys-

\* Appendix F, &c. p. 275.

§ Ibid. p. 300.

† Ibid. p. 308.

‡ Ibid. p. 274.



tem of parochial relief is established, each parish being compelled to supply its destitute poor, in poor-houses, with fuel, food, and clothing. In Courland, Esthonia, and Livonia, a similar compulsory system is established.

“In Prussia, it is the duty of the police to see that every person in distress is supplied with needful assistance,—if a stranger, from the provincial poor-fund; if a native, by the commune, or lord of the estate to which he belongs. Repayment is required where it is possible, and work in all cases from those capable of it. In the towns, the expense is defrayed out of the municipal funds, and the administration confided to a board. In the country, the village authorities levy a contribution from the inhabitants, as well as the owner of the estate. The occasional sick are relieved on the same plan as the impotent through infirmity, children, and orphans. Settlement is acquired by residence, but unsettled poor are removable to their last place of settlement. The system is described as working well; universally succeeding in its effects on the comfort, condition, and character of the inhabitants; affording speedy and sufficient means of relief when necessary, and particularly as *securing the constant industry* of all the able-bodied inhabitants.\*

“The Report from Saxony is not very clear, but the system seems generally to coincide with that of Denmark.

\* Appendix F, &c. p. 425, *et seq.*



“The principle of the law in Wurtemberg is briefly summed up by Sir G. Disbrowe. ‘It is this; no man can starve. Every native indigent person, unable to procure the necessary subsistence, can require that he shall be maintained, even though there should be no hope for an indemnity for the expense thereby incurred;’\* but, if able to work, he must do so. He will be remunerated according to his work. If idle and dissolute, he finds his way to a poor-house, not to live there on clover, but where he is compelled to work, and from which he can be delivered by good conduct and industry alone. These laws are represented as being of considerable antiquity. ‘The kingdom of Wurtemberg,’ Mr Senior observes, ‘appears to have been, as yet, eminently successful in reconciling a recognition of the right to relief, with economy in its distribution.’”

Pauperism is stated here to be decidedly on the *decrease*, those receiving relief having been 64,000 in 1820, and 50,000, or 1 in 30 of the population, in 1833; and “there is a great aversion among common people to seeking relief from their parishes.”†

“The law of Bavaria requires each town, market-place, and village, to support its poor; but villages may form unions for the purpose. The ad-

\* Regulations relative to the Poor in Wurtemberg, &c. Appendix F, p. 521.

† Appendix F, &c. p. 510.



ministration is confided to elective officers. Work is found for such as are in want of it. Relief is afforded, in poor-houses, to the helpless ; in money, to those who are in need of occasional help. Voluntary contributions, endowments, fines, and collections on various occasions, go to the poor-fund, which is made up to the required amount by compulsory assessment.

The copy of the Bavarian laws, and statement of their effects, given by Lord Erskine, is particularly deserving of attention. His replies to the general queries as to the effects which the receipt or expectation of relief have on the industry of the labourers,—on their frugality,—on the mutual dependence and affection of parents, children, and other relations, are simple and satisfactory. He says, of the Bavarian labourers, that they are industrious, they are frugal, they marry at various ages ; and that parents, children, and relatives, are “generally affectionate towards each other.”\*

“ In all those states, a compulsory poor law exists, *precisely similar in character to that of England* ; embracing its three great principles, namely, the relief of the infirm, the employment of the able-bodied, and the suppression of mendicancy and vagrancy ; and in all these laws are *carefully and uniformly carried into effect*. It will be observed, that these states comprehend the far larger half of Europe. Now, what is the general result of the system, as

\* Appendix F, &c. p. 556.



practised throughout this extensive range of territory, and among nations varying much in their manners, habits, and institutions? Mr Senior observes, and we consider the admission a very valuable one, as coming from one who is averse to poor rates of every description, that—

“In no country, except, perhaps, the Canton de Berne, has compulsory relief produced evils resembling either in intensity or extent, those which we have experienced in England, and in the majority of the nations which have adopted it, the existing system appears to *work well*.”\* I already alluded to the deficiency of details in all these reports as to the actual *condition* of the poor. But in all these countries, it is to be observed, that mendicity is nearly suppressed, and we know also, that contagious fever makes little progress, for we see here, year after year, medical men from Germany, who come to Scotland and Ireland to study that form of fever, of which they have little experience at home. From these two facts we may conclude, with perfect confidence, that the general condition of the poor must be much better than in the great towns of Scotland or Ireland, in which, if mendicity were suppressed by the strong arm of the law, without very considerable improvement in the comforts of the people, we should soon see such an increase of fever as has always followed, in them, unusual scarcity of food. Indeed, “without a sys-

\* Quarterly Review (loc. cit.).



tematic and effectual plan for relief of the poor, the idea of discountenancing mendicity is infinitely too cruel, as observed by Lord Hale, to be practicable any where.\* That there is, in all the countries now mentioned, when compared with Italy, Spain, Ireland, or even Scotland, a general absence, not only of mendicity, but of abject poverty, all travellers attest.

“ The reports from many other states of Europe exhibit a variety of systems established by law for the relief of the poor, in which the claim of the pauper is not so directly recognised,—but where the poor are in fact always relieved in case of necessity, and the funds provided more or less by *compulsory assessments*.

“ In Hamburgh a general institution for the poor is supported by endowments, voluntary contributions, and considerable advances from the state, that is, from the municipal taxes.—The want of a workhouse for the employment of indolent paupers is severely felt. The regular out-door relief in money amounted, in 1832, to very nearly 4s. a-head, on a population of 130,000. The poor institutions of Bremen resemble those of Hamburgh, but appear to be better administered.

“ In Holland the charge of the relief of the pau-

\* Sadler on Ireland, p. 223. He must mean to be practicable *without cruelty*. I am afraid we should have no difficulty in shewing, in Scotland, that it is practicable, to some extent, *with cruelty*, particularly to women and children.



per rests with the parish overseer of his religious sect; but when their means are insufficient, the local administration supplies the deficiency from municipal funds. In fact, therefore, except in the existence of very large endowments, and voluntary contributions from the members of the different religious sects and charitable societies, the system differs little from the compulsory law of relief in Denmark and the German states." The annual expenditure on the poor for the last twelve years has amounted to above 6,200,000 guilders, *i. e.* above L.500,000, or about 4s. 4d. a-head of the entire population, and the annual number of persons relieved has amounted to above 240,000, *i. e.* above one in ten of the whole population (2,148,000). In this, however the expense of the hospitals is included.\*

"The results of the present poor-law system on the character and condition of the inhabitants, may be considered as on the whole satisfactory. No person, when distress is proved, suffers absolute want, and the improved instruction of the lower classes produces very salutary effects."†

In some of these countries where so much is done for the poor, Mr Senior and others argue, that this has been only of late years, and they appear to look forward to what they think a better time, when all these institutions will be abandoned, and the poor

\* Appendix F, p. 575.

† Ibid. p. 576.



left to themselves. But it is certain, that in several of them (*e. g.* Wirtemberg), and these now the best regulated,—the general system is of old standing, although there have been recent modifications. In the Canton of Berne, it appears that the practice of paying part of the wages of labour out of the poor rate had been introduced, as in England, and occasioned considerable embarrassment; but it is certain, that in all the German Cantons of Switzerland, where the generally comfortable condition of the poor cannot fail to attract the attention of travellers, there has long been in operation a system of poor laws, not only similar to the spirit, but actually borrowed from the letter of those in England.\* “The plan of Holland,” says Mr Sadler, “has *always* been, generous and unwearied attention to wretchedness and distress. Possessed of a narrow untractable territory, and an unpropitious climate, loaded with taxes, and with a declining trade, still she sets an example to every nation upon earth;” and the system thus pursued, and under which, even in adverse circumstances, the sufferings of the poor are (as we learn from a report made by two of the Assistant Poor-Law Commissioners) so effectually relieved,—is still the same as *nearly two centuries ago*, extorted the admiration even of the profligate Charles II. “I am of opinion,” said he, when Holland was threatened with invasion, “that God will preserve Amster-

\* See Kasthofer, *Voyages dans les Petits Cantons*.



dam from being destroyed, were it only for the great charity they have for their poor.”\*

Of the Austrian institutions for the relief of indigence, we have not so accurate information, but they appear to be very similar to those of the other parts of Germany ; and we know, from the testimony of all travellers, that they are administered with exemplary care and success,—assistance of one kind or other being open to all in distress, and there being no indications of abject poverty. A memorable instance of the beneficence of the Austrian Government is afforded by the city of Venice, containing 112,000 inhabitants, which lost its trade, and fell into great misery after the close of the last war ; but a commission of public charity was formed, the funds of which, as in the German States, are supplied, partly by bequests and endowments, partly by voluntary contributions, partly by taxes on the city and on the province, and all deficiencies which it requires are made up by the government. By this commission about L.100,000 annually have lately been disbursed ; and instead of this city being, as lately described by Mr Hallam, “ crowded with half-starved wretches, like other parts of Italy, among whom charity is hopeless,” Sir W. Money, British Consul at Venice, writing in 1834, says, “ there are not 20 beggars to be found in the whole city.” But in order to produce this result, that government did not, like the British Government

\* Ireland—Its Evils and their Remedies, p. 226.



in Dublin, acting on the system which now finds favour in Scotland, confine its assistance to the *sick* poor; they admitted, as constituting the claim to relief, "extreme poverty among the lower classes without the means of obtaining subsistence, or incapacity for labour whether from age or sickness," and allowed so much per head per day, as long as the parish priest certified the wants of the lower classes; and the extent of the destitution they relieved was nearly one-half the population of the town, from 47,000 to 50,000 in the year for ten years preceding 1834. The number relieved in that year was 42,700 at home, and 4600 in hospitals; the government contributing above L.15,000 (besides L.33,000 for the foundlings and insane of the Venetian provinces); and it is particularly worthy of notice, that, so far from this extensive public charity weakening domestic affection, Sir W. Money states, "that there is much family affection among all ranks of the Venetians; and in sickness, distress, and old age, among the poorer classes, they shew every disposition to assist and relieve each other."\*

I consider the case of Venice is peculiarly instructive, because we have there an opportunity of judging, how far the destitution which shews itself in the Italian and other towns of the south of Europe, where there is no efficient poor law, is found to be real, and to demand efficient aid, when subject to the same kind of scrutiny as is habitually exercised in Germany. It appears that when

\* Appendix F, p. 663.



the German system, virtually giving a legal claim for relief, was applied there for the first time, the number to whom it was found necessary to extend this relief amounted to nearly one-half the population. I should like to be distinctly informed of any town or district, where poor laws (*said* to augment the evil they profess to cure) have been long in force ; and where the amount of *destitution* amounts to any thing like this.

The contrast between the fallen city of Venice under the Austrian Government, and the similarly circumstanced city of Dublin under the British, is enough to shew, that whatever superiority our government may possess in many respects, there are others in which one great object of all governments, *ut cives feliciter vivant*, is more uniformly fulfilled.

It is true that in most of the countries now instanced, restraints are imposed on the poor, particularly as to marriage without visible means of supporting families, which may be thought by some to counteract a pernicious bounty on population, which would otherwise have resulted from these poor laws ; but I think it appears clearly from what has been stated, that in England the general diffusion of the feeling of artificial wants, fostered by the legal protection of the poor, has been at least as effectual in that way ; and it requires no great penetration to see, that no law restraining *marriage*, unless coinciding in the general feelings of the people, will ever materially restrain *population*.



It was very properly inquired in all these countries, by the British Government, whether the extensive and compulsory relief of the poor places those persons who are thus relieved in a more comfortable condition than the labouring men and their families, or makes the condition of a pauper preferable to that of a labourer? and the answer to this inquiry is almost uniformly and decidedly in the negative. Indeed, when it is remembered that in these countries (as now in England), an able-bodied pauper may be, and very generally is, *deprived of his liberty*, it is surely unnecessary to entertain any apprehensions on this point. The argument of Mr O'Connell, that poor laws cannot be applied to Ireland, because the condition of the labourers there is so bad, that that of the paupers cannot be made worse, implies a forgetfulness of the value of the great blessing of liberty, hardly to be expected in so zealous a patriot.

I beg it may be observed, however, that while one of the arguments against poor laws is, that they tend to lower the rate of wages, almost the only country in Europe, where the wages are so low, that it is practically found impossible to depress the pauper below the labourer in point of pecuniary profit, is that where no poor laws exist. There is another district, the French department of Brittany, from which the answer to this question is, that "the able-bodied self-supporting labourer in the towns is very little better off than the person subsist-



ing on charity. The difference in food is in favour of the latter." And again, that the "condition of the poorer farmers, daily labourers, and beggars, are so near akin, that the passage from one of these states to another is very frequent." And in this district, as in Ireland, "*no such thing is known as a legal claim for assistance* from public or private charities."\*

There are some countries in Europe, in which the relief of the poor is not administered in the same systematic manner, and although carried generally or occasionally to a great extent, is not so generally effectual, either in the relief of suffering, or the prevention of mendicity, as in those hitherto mentioned.

The practice in Belgium does not differ materially from that in Germany. "The Belgian poor law is chiefly founded on the system established throughout the French dominions by the Directory in 1796 and 1798. By this law, every commune is required to have at least one 'bureau de bien-faisance' for the relief of its poor. The funds arise from voluntary contributions and the receipts of public exhibitions, all deficiencies being made up by levies raised in the same manner as other local expenses. Relief is given in poor-houses (hospices) or *à domicile* (out-door relief). Settlement is acquired by birth, or residence for a year as a rated inhabitant, or two years in service. Mendicity or vagrancy are subjected to heavy punish-

\* Appendix F, p. 728.



ments in *depôts de mendicité*. These depots, which are simply workhouses, are *bound to admit all applicants*. It is, therefore, futile to assert, that a legal *right* to relief is not established in Belgium, as in the other northern states of Europe. Every town in Belgium has its hospital for the sick, which is likewise open to every applicant."

The French Comité de Mendicité after the Revolution, acting on the belief that the legal and systematic relief granted in England was "*la plaie politique de l'Angleterre la plus dévorante*," "very properly and judiciously" (in Mr Malthus's opinion), "rejected the establishment of such a system." The consequence was, however, that the French towns were inundated by mendicants, and it was found necessary to adopt a public system of relief, which, being partial, is overburdened; heavier in some places, and less effectual in all, than the English Poor Rate.

"The French establishments for the relief of the poor consist of *hospices* for the infirm, hospitals for the sick, *depôts de mendicité* for vagrants and beggars (constituting the in-door relief), and *bureaux de bienfaisance* for the *secours à domicile*, or out-door relief. The funds are partly provided by voluntary contributions and collections in the churches, and the deficiency is supplied from the *octroi*, or municipal funds of the *commune*. These institutions are, however, in full operation only in the town districts. In the country, the administration



of relief is imperfectly organized, and great distress is occasionally felt, which would be intolerable, were it not that, owing to the extreme dispersion and subdivision of landed property which has followed the sale of the church and emigré estates at the time of the Revolution, and the law of equal succession, there are few peasants in France who are not proprietors of land.

“According to M. Chateaubieux, the population of the towns in which a system of relief is thoroughly organized amounts to 3,500,000 persons, and the cost of the relief annually distributed to L.1,800,000 Sterling. This would bring the expenditure per head to nearly as much as in England, before the Amendment Act,—to very considerably more than the present expenditure. In Paris, the amount is 1,200,000 francs, above L.500,000 a-year. The number permanently supported in the hospices or workhouses of Paris is about 12,000, nearly 2 per cent. of the population; 70,000, or nearly 10 per cent. of it pass through the hospitals every year, and the fund is burdened also with 20,000 foundlings. The proportion of the population in the receipt of relief in these French towns is very considerably greater than in England. In Havre, with a population of 28,000, not less than 5000 receive occasional relief. In Caen, there are 6000 or 7000 paupers to a population of 40,000.”\*

On the other hand, several parts of France, and

\* Magendie, Appendix F, p. 42.



various other countries in Europe, present examples of extreme destitution and extensive mendicity and immorality, resembling, though I believe nowhere equalling, what we see in Ireland; resembling also but too closely, what we see in some parts of Scotland, and, as with us, *coinciding with a deficient or inadequate legal provision for the poor.*

“In the rural districts of France, the system of relief is, as has been said, very partial and irregular. In Brittany (as already stated), there appears to be none. Nantes and the other large towns have their regular establishments, but the rural communes neglect their poor, and are, consequently, infested with mendicants. Brittany is the poorest part of France; and the system of cultivation in very small farms, together with the number of beggars, produces a state of society somewhat resembling that of Ireland.

“Daily labourers and beggars may, in this country, be classed under the same head. The labourers generally work during two or three months in the year, and beg during the remainder.

“Mendicity is not considered disgraceful in Brittany. Farmers allow their children to beg along the roads. All attend religious festivals *to beg*. ‘Several attempts to suppress mendicity have been unsuccessful. District asylums were established. No sooner were they filled, than the vacancies in the beggar-stands were immediately replenished by fresh subjects from the country.’



“ The principal cause of their misery is *inebriety* ; *its frequency among the lower orders keeps them in poverty*. The ‘ cabaret’ (wine and brandy shop) absorbs a great portion of their earnings. This vice is not confined to men ; the women partake of it.

“ We have quoted this passage to shew the similarity of the state of things brought about by the absence of a public provision for the relief and employment of the poor in two countries, otherwise so unlike, as Brittany and Ireland.”\*

“ In proof that universal mendicancy is the alternative of having no poor laws (in a country in an advanced state of civilization), ‘ I may safely refer,’ says Mr Sadler, “ to any one who has travelled through those countries in the south of Europe, where there is *no regularly organized system* of public relief for the poor. No expense, however great, no establishments, however magnificent, seem to compensate for the want of this. I shall only quote one or two authors, and leave the reader to contrast the situation of such countries, in regard to poverty and wretchedness, with those where there is a regular system of national relief, as Switzerland, Sweden, Holland, and England. ‘ Let the travellers,” says one of them (Milford’s Observations during a Tour through France), ‘ start from the rock of Lisbon, and proceed through every part of Spain, Italy, and France, and the wretchedness and beggary which prevail in every town and vil-

\* Quarterly Review, *loc. cit.* and Appendix F, p. 72.



lage through these Christian Catholic countries can only be appreciated by those who have witnessed such scenes. In Spain and Portugal, human misery and mendicity are on a more extended scale than in France and Italy. These scenes of misery every day presenting themselves have been the subject of my reflections during many a solitary ramble through Europe." "Naples, says Kotzebue, is crowded with beggars, whose number defies all calculation. What I have seen, is as much as need be known of human misery."\*

The United States have been spoken of as a country free from the curse of pauperism; but their exemption from it is only partial and local. Their system for the relief of the poor was derived from that of England. "It is in fact the 43d of Elizabeth, modified in the different provinces by the exigencies of their local circumstances. The changes they have made consist principally in endeavouring to avoid giving relief out of the workhouse, and in making the workhouse an abode in which none but the destitute will remain. Compared with our own, the system is in general rigid. We need scarcely remark, that this severity is proper in a country whose boundless margin of unappropriated land, of the first quality, offers a sure resource for every able-bodied person who is willing to live by his industry—while the same degree of severity

\* Sadler's Ireland, &c. p. 220.



would be unjustifiable in an over-peopled country possessing no such resource.”\*

The administration of legal relief appears to be various in the different parts of America, and from the cause now mentioned, hardly admits of a comparison with this country. In the most advanced parts of the country, however, its necessity has been felt as with us, and it has been carried to a great length. In Philadelphia the poor rate amounted in 1803 to 75,000 dollars, or L.15,000, in a population of 67,000;—in 1820, to 140,000, or L.28,000 in a population of 113,000. In 1825 it had fallen to 120,000, but in 1832 had risen again to 139,000. In New York in 1811 it was 154,000 dollars, above L.30,000, and there were many voluntary charities besides. In 1833, the number of paupers in the State of New York was nearly 36,000, and the cost of the paupers in a portion only (for which the returns are given) of Massachusetts, was 164,000 dollars.† The Commissioners in Pennsylvania, who drew up the existing act, regulating the poor, say, “We cannot agree with those who would confine the aid of the overseers of the poor to the infirm and helpless. A well managed house of employment will seldom afford much attraction to the idle and profligate, and may be a refuge to the honest poor, and an example to all.” And the answers to the queries sent by the British Government from

\* Quarterly Review *ut supra*.

† Appendix F, pp. 156 and 137.



that state, contain the following statement. "If there be in the poor laws a tendency to increase or produce the evils they are intended to mitigate, *as has frequently been suggested by persons abroad*, there are counteracting circumstances in the rural districts in this country, which prevent such a tendency being developed. The same remarks may be made, with some qualifications, however, on the operation of the poor laws in the cities and principal towns. That there is a considerable number of persons in Philadelphia and its neighbourhood, who rely on the poor laws for relief, when disabled or out of employment, is probably true; and it *may be* true, that the tendency of the system is to produce improvidence and idleness in *some* of these persons; but such are in general the rewards of industry in almost every occupation, that the prospect of deriving any advantage from the poor laws does not, it is believed, affect any considerable portion of the population, even in the cities. The tables shew a considerable increase in the funds raised for the support of the poor within thirty years—but the population has more than doubled within that time; and other causes besides the provisions for relief, may have contributed to enlarge the number of paupers."\* It is true, that we have here, as in many other cases, an opposite *opinion* from her Majesty's Consul at New York, that "the receipt, in the expectation of relief, has a highly injurious

\* Appendix F, p. 137.



effect on the industry and frugality of labourers ;” but of the soundness of this gentleman’s judgment, most readers will, I believe, be much inclined to doubt, when they find that he further maintains that “ no region can be in a healthy state where such infectious establishments as *Dispensaries* exist.”\*

In most countries which have any pretension to good government, this necessity has been felt in a very early stage of society. “ Even Siberia has her poor law.” I am assured, on unquestionable authority, that, in most Mahometan countries, although the precept of the Koran, which orders one-tenth of every man’s goods to be given to the poor, is not strictly enforced, yet the right founded on it is universally admitted ; and the relief habitually given to destitution, in consequence of it, is such as almost uniformly and permanently to preserve those countries from that appearance of abject poverty, which disgraces several parts of Christendom.

We may draw, I think, two conclusions with perfect confidence, from this hasty review of the provisions touching pauperism and mendicity in those parts of the world which are in the most advanced state of civilization, and which exactly coincide with those drawn from a comparison of England and Ireland. *First*, that the idea of the poor, in any such country, supporting themselves, without much

\* Appendix F, p. 157.



and constant assistance from the higher ranks, is perfectly visionary and Utopian ; and, *secondly*, that the countries which have been most permanently successful in meeting those evils and maintaining the poor in comfort, are those in which indigence, independently of disease, has been long admitted as having a legal claim to relief, distributed according to a uniform system, and by local authorities, and to such an extent as to preserve all the inhabitants from the want of the first necessities of life.

We may conclude, then, that it is a part of the dispensations of Providence, that the higher ranks of society in every country, in an advanced stage of civilization,—in return for the numerous advantages which they derive from having the services of so many of the lower ranks at their disposal,—must be content to bear the burden of the maintenance of many, for whose services they have no need, or who are incapable of rendering them any. That the assistance given to these lowest, but not least important members of society, may be effectual in maintaining them in tolerable comfort, and thereby preventing much vice and misery, and a *morbid increase of destitution*, it is essential that it should be liberal, but discriminating ; uniform, regular, and permanent, as the state of destitution which demands it. That it may fulfil these conditions for the benefit of the poor, and at the same time press justly and equally on the rich, it is essential that at least a great part of it should be



levied and distributed *by the law*. Nor does the law which performs this office deviate in the smallest degree from its proper province. The relief of human suffering is a sacred duty, written from the beginning on the hearts of men, enforced by the positive precepts of the Gospel, and which no nation can violate or neglect with impunity. The business of the legislator is to equalize the burden which it imposes, and regulate the benefits it confers, not to check the impulse from which it springs.

I shall now proceed, lastly, to state more explicitly, what are the improvements in the system of management of the poor in Scotland, which seem to me to be required, in order to put their condition, especially in the large towns, on a footing with that of the lower orders in the best regulated countries in Europe.

1. I am not a judge whether, for this purpose, any alteration of the law is requisite, but I can easily see that no alteration of the law would have the desired effect, without the removal of the apprehension which is so strongly impressed on the minds of almost all who are entrusted with the administration of the laws now existing in this country, viz. that the relief of poverty leads ultimately to its continual recurrence and increase, and to other injurious effects; and it is chiefly to dissipate that apprehension that I have written the foregoing pages.

Next to the removal of this great obstacle to any



improvement in the condition of the poor, is the importance of a power being lodged somewhere (probably in Sheriffs and Magistrates, certainly not in any body appointed by the rate-payers themselves), where it can be exercised without expense to the parties concerned,—of *enforcing* the law as to an adequate relief of all destitute persons, for whose benefit the existing statutes are designed. This power has been limited in England by the Poor-Law Amendment Act, probably too much; but still exists, as already observed, at least in regard to strangers, and *all persons unable to work*. One great defect in the practical administration of the law of Scotland seems to be, the want of any speedy and effectual means of compelling a husband, who is in employment, to make provision for his wife and family, or parents for children whom they choose to cast off. This seems to be frequently done, through the intervention of parochial authorities in England, and, as far as I can see, is hardly ever thought of here.

In illustration of the deficiency of any legal protection to destitution brought on in this way, I may mention, that, within the last few weeks, two instances have occurred of girls, aged 12 and 14, brought into the Infirmary half-naked and ill of fever, who had been turned out of doors by their parents, and lived actually on the streets, sleeping generally on the boards of the protection room at the Police Office, for many days. In one of these cases the Police officers as I am informed, humane-



ly interfered, and brought the mother and alleged father of the girl before a Magistrate, but the law was found insufficient for her protection, and the child was returned *to the street*, from whence she was some days after brought to the Infirmary. In a third case, occurring within the same time, a child, only eight years old, was reduced to the same predicament, and, as I am assured, hardly lay down in a house during thirty days, while her mother, an Irish widow with a child on the breast, was in Bridewell for begging. When there is no legal protection for such deserted or neglected children, can we wonder that we have many juvenile thieves?

That poor rates *may be* lavished with indiscriminate profusion, and produce more or less of the evil consequences which have been ascribed to them, it would be absurd to deny, but this has very seldom happened, so far as I can learn, to a hurtful extent, in any country; and I think no one who knows the Scottish character can entertain the smallest apprehension of their being too liberally or incautiously expended here. I have therefore no difficulty in expressing my opinion, founded on the facts which have been stated, that assessments should be imposed uniformly throughout the country,—that no parish, nor any body of men (such as the members of the College of Justice in Edinburgh) should consider that they are doing any service to the community,—but, on the contrary, that none should think they are doing their



duty to the rest of the nation, who, on any pretence, avoid assessment for the poor.

The following extract from a communication, with which I have been favoured by Mr Wigham (well known for his attention to many of the charities in Edinburgh), forcibly illustrates the effect of the system pursued towards the poor in the non-assessed parishes of Scotland, and confirms what I have stated as to one great cause of the heavy burden which falls on the poor-funds in Edinburgh. "Many poor are driven from the 517 parishes, in which nothing worth the name of provision is made for them, to other parts of the country, which afford them a better chance of procuring bread by begging or other means. The friends of a lame woman in a Highland parish applied to the minister to know, what amount of relief could be given? The answer was, '7s. 6d. per annum is the utmost.' The poor woman came to Edinburgh in search of needle-work. If she does not fall a victim to typhus fever, she will most probably, at the end of three years, become a charge on the city or on St Cuthbert's parish." "At Helensburgh, where I have now resided seven weeks, I have seen very few beggars. It is in the parish of Roe. At the three toll-bars, where the principal roads communicate with this burgh, there are notices put up by the Magistrates, that begging is prohibited. The inhabitants are warned not to encourage them, and such householders as shall harbour or lodge them



are threatened with prosecution. In this parish of Roe there is no assessment for the poor. It is thus clear, that the system of giving little or nothing to their own legitimate paupers, and rigidly keeping out those from other parishes, drives both off to the large towns."

2. I think the assessment which is imposed should be every where very considerably more than it now is, and that the allowances to widows and orphans, to aged, disabled, and impotent persons, should be much raised.\* If we were to act in the same way as the unions formed in England under the present administration of the Poor Laws, we should expend in Scotland nearly L.800,000 instead of L.140,000. Of course it would not be advisable to make so great a change suddenly, but this sum may be regarded as a limit to which, judging from the experience of England, I have not the smallest doubt that we might gradually approach, with great benefit, not only immediately but permanently to the poor, and no real injury to any class of the community. It should be remembered that L.500,000 per annum is less than the amount of the funds raised, chiefly by indirect taxation, by the city of Paris for the support of their poor, in a

\* As one precaution against misapplication of public charity, it would be right to have it granted in smaller sums, and more frequently than at present, *e. g.* in weekly instalments, instead of at intervals of six weeks as at present.



population hardly more than one-third of that of Scotland ; and that it is less than the sum expended annually in Holland on the poor of a population not equalling that of Scotland, and where the value of money is higher. I cannot think that there is any thing extravagant in the wish that the same sum were expended in Scotland, on the poor of a population greater than that of Holland, and three times as great as that of Paris ; and I very much doubt whether there is any country in Europe, where the management of the poor, and their condition, are really worthy of imitation, in which the cost of their maintenance, as proportioned to the population, is smaller than this.

3. I think that the workhouse system ought undoubtedly to be introduced into every considerable town in Scotland, and even that unions of parishes, where there are no large towns, should be formed as in England, to support workhouses, for the permanent reception at least of aged, disabled, or incurable persons, and of orphans, who have no relations with whom they can be comfortably settled ; for the reception of women and children left or deserted by their husbands and fathers ; and also for the reception and confinement of all destitute persons, entitled to legal relief, who are judged to be improper objects for out-door relief on account of intemperance or immorality.\*

\* One of the most important results obtained by the experience of the House of Refuge in Edinburgh is, that there



To shew that the opinion of the necessity of workhouses as a part of the system for the proper management of the poor in all parts of the country, has suggested itself to others as well as to myself, I shall take the liberty of quoting communications with which I have been favoured from two gentlemen who have had fully as much practical experience in the management of the charities now existing in Edinburgh, as any individuals who can be mentioned.

Mr Wigham, lately one of the managers of the West Church Charity-Workhouse, says, "an experience of seven years confirms me in the belief, that the poor cannot be well managed without workhouses. There must be a workhouse by which to test them. With it, there is no danger that any class of paupers will require large out-pensions."

Captain Thomson, the treasurer (and most efficient manager) of the House of Refuge, says, "The proclamation of the Scots Privy Council, 3d March 1698, would be a benefit. It is for providing workhouses ; and Scotland will never do right, nor put down vagrancy, till workhouses are provided, and made a test of destitution. Were that the case, I am persuaded much good would follow."

It seems to me equally clear, that one of the le-  
are many persons whose conduct, when at liberty, has been so profligate as to reduce them to beggary, who are orderly, industrious, and useful when merely kept under a strict discipline and restraint.



gitimate objects of the application of the poor's funds should be, in this country as in England, the building of fever hospitals in connection with the workhouses, and the payment of the expenses of fever patients, either there or in the general hospitals of the country, as well as of their families, during their confinement.\*

5. Although it has not yet been the practice in Scotland to give any parochial relief to able-bodied poor, yet I am equally confident that, in justice to the poor themselves, with a view to the maintenance of a desirable standard of comfort in them, with a view to the tranquillity, and more especially, with a view to the health, of the community, such relief ought to be regularly given to those of the poor who are proved to be destitute from want of employment; and that this should be given, as it now is in England, unless in very peculiar circumstances, in the workhouses only.

It will be observed that the system of excluding the able-bodied from the benefits of legal charity has not been acted on in any of the countries in

\* I understand, from my friend Dr Cowan, that a distinct legal opinion was obtained in Glasgow, that the public authorities are entitled, under the existing law, to "apply the current assessment, or impose an additional assessment, for the support and cure of such persons as are disabled from earning their subsistence by contagious diseases; and for such separation of such persons when suffering from the disease, or when in a state of convalescence, as may be necessary to prevent the farther spread of infection."



which the condition of the poor appears to be the most generally comfortable ; neither in any part of Germany, nor in Switzerland, nor Holland, nor Denmark, nor Sweden, nor even in America.

It appears that there is a decision of the Court of Session (case of Pollok against Darling, 17th January 1804), which found, that able-bodied persons, who were unable to subsist themselves from scarcity and high price of provisions, or total want of employment, might be relieved by an extraordinary assessment ; but that judgment has not since been followed as a precedent. That it would be expedient to follow it, however, the experience of the other countries I have mentioned seems to me to leave no doubt.

It may naturally be expected, that if great evils are to be apprehended from the want of any provision for the unemployed poor, these must be chiefly felt in Glasgow, where the employment of the people is liable to so great vicissitudes. Accordingly, that there has been there a very great and rapid increase not only of poverty and misery, but of intemperance and improvidence, appears from facts already stated. “ The younger generation of weavers,” says Mr Symons, “ those on whom this evil has chiefly fallen, are far less educated, and far more prone to vice, than the elder. *Poverty is a main instrument in the debasement of mankind.* It has dragged the handloom weavers of Scotland from the highest to among the lowest ranks in the civi-



lization of their class. The younger class are generally in the habit of spending their money as fast as they get it, and often before. They *seldom now accumulate anything worth naming before marriage*. Embezzlement of weft is the chief vice of the weavers ; the demoralization caused by this system is widely spread, and pernicious to a degree which it is not easy to exaggerate. The education of the children is so deficient, that the next generation will grow up in comparative ignorance.\* “ The prevalence of intemperance in this city,” according to the Report of a Committee lately appointed to investigate the causes of the increase of assessment, “ seems likely to undermine the whole fabric of society. It is rapidly extending among those in early years of both sexes. Health is destroyed, industry neglected ; *idleness and improvidence* cause every domestic claim to be disregarded. Aged parents are abandoned in their helplessness. Families are left to endure the miseries of nakedness and hunger. In the wretched parts of the closes and wynds (described at p. 12), the dense masses of human degradation are still becoming more closely packed.”†

It is evident from these statements, that while the higher ranks in Glasgow have been advancing in wealth and luxury, a large proportion of the lower

\* Arts and Artizans, &c. p. 151.

† Report of Committee on the increase of Assessment, &c. p. 5.



ranks have been, at least as rapidly, receding towards barbarism. I beg it may be observed, that this has taken place under a system of legal relief for the poor, purposely kept on as low a scale as possible. The "smallness of the allowances," regarded as the superior excellence of the Scotch system, has been strictly maintained; the whole annual amount of funds raised for the relief of a population so crowded and unhealthy, and afflicted very recently with such epidemics, being only at the rate of 1s. 7d. on each individual; this has been administered, according to the approved Scotch system, "simply to aid individual exertion and voluntary Christian benevolence;" and has been confined to the disabled or impotent poor, able-bodied men or women being excluded from all participation in it. The number admitted as paupers in a population, of which nearly one-eighth is in the state above described, is 2.6 per cent. of the whole.

Under these circumstances, and under this management, the physical condition of a large portion of the poor has become as bad as is compatible with human existence; their mortality probably greater than in any part of Britain; epidemic fever has made ravages among them unknown in other parts of Britain; and the *improvidence* and *intemperance* of the great body of the poor has become such as to "threaten to involve them in one universal sink of pauperism, misery, and crime."\* It is plain that this sys-

\* Report of Committee above quoted, p. 5.



tem has worked as ill as possible ; and that under it the population is restrained only by the positive checks of vice and misery, the preventive check of moral restraint being almost unknown.

But I need hardly say, that, according to the principles which I have here stated, and which, as appears to me, are fairly deduced from the experience of many other nations, the *system has worked exactly as might have been expected* ; and as I believe it always will, when acted on in a large town, where the system of society is complex, and the usual occupations of the poor unhealthy, and liable to vicissitude. At each stagnation of trade, many persons are thrown out of employment, for whom there is no provision, and who rapidly sink into the state of indigence and degradation formerly described ;—every year, and especially on the occurrence of epidemics, many widows and orphans, and disabled people, are similarly cast down, and receive no such allowance as can enable them to retrieve themselves. I ask whether it is not true, in Glasgow, as I have stated it to be in Edinburgh, that, in these circumstances, they all become reckless and improvident ; and that these examples, so far from teaching prudence to the families that are a step above them as to comforts, infect them with the same habits ? “ From their poverty and *improvidence*, such numbers are crowded into one apartment, and so huddled together, that there is no possibility of individualizing families, much less



persons, in the attempt at inspection ; so that instead of providing for real necessity, the relief so intended may only minister to the supply of habits of profligacy.”\* I ask, what can private charity do for such a state of matters? And I ask farther, if the relief of the poor is to be conducted on the same principles in future, what prospect is there that this state of matters will improve? How is this misery to be relieved, this intemperance to be cured, or the natural results on the prosperity, even of the higher ranks, to be arrested? When we compare the condition of these people, on the one hand, with that of the English poor, or of the German, or Dutch, or Danish poor, above described, among whom destitution is admitted to have a claim to legal relief,—or compare it, on the other, with the state of the poor in Ireland, in Brittany, in Spain or Italy, where no such legal claim is enforced,—it seems to me quite obvious, that, in adhering to the system now in operation, the citizens of Glasgow (if they really wish for the good of their fellow-creatures) are rejecting, not the theories of enthusiasts, but the *lessons of experience*.

Trusting to experience, I would say, that the proper remedies here are, first, to erect workhouses, into which able-bodied men and women, out of employment, and as many as possible of the most profligate, even of the widows and disabled poor, should be received. Judging by the examples of

\* Report of same Committee, p. 8.



London or Paris, we should say that accommodation for nearly 4000 people in these workhouses would be required. At the same time, the unemployed or disabled Irish, and other strangers, should be returned to their homes, in which workhouses should equally (and in Ireland soon will) be provided. In this way a considerable part of the pressure would be removed. Then the pensions to the disabled poor, and widows and orphans, should be at least doubled, always with the provision, that those whose conduct is found to be bad, shall be relieved in the workhouses only. In this way, that infallible mark of a disordered state of society, the union and amalgamation of families in the same rooms, will be gradually obviated; and when this separation and purification of society in its lowest ranks shall have been so far effected, experience entitles us to expect that artificial wants will be felt, that the standard of comfort will rise, and that religious and moral instruction will have a fair opportunity of taking effect on the character and conduct of the people. These remedies will require time, and will cost money; but their safety and efficacy, as I think many facts stated in this paper shew, are amply attested by experience; and when we consider that their proposed application is to a state of "wholesale human misery and degradation,"—in which vice is almost universal, and by which the duration of human life, in more than one-tenth of the population of Scotland, is lessened by fully one-third from the average of



this country,—and by one-fourth from the average of London,\* it is surely not going too far to say, not only that the trial ought to be made, but that we cannot hope for the blessing of Heaven on a nation which hesitates about making it. If the richer citizens of Glasgow say, that the evils of the English Poor Laws will thus be brought upon them, the answer is, that these evils (now that the principal error of those laws has been corrected) have been *proved* to be trifles, in comparison of those which their fellow-citizens are now enduring, and which, by the sure laws of Providence, will sooner or later react upon them.

I cannot help adverting here for a moment to the system of combinations among skilled workmen to raise the amount of wages, which aggravated so greatly the distress at Glasgow in 1837-38. Much surprise has been expressed at the tenacity with which educated and intelligent men cling to this unjust and irrational system of combination; but it is obvious that there must be some cause, which enlists the feelings of the labouring manufacturing population so strongly in its favour; and I think we can have little difficulty in understanding this, if we recollect the peculiarities of their situation. They live by an employment which they can only follow in certain places, and under the control of masters with

\* In 1837 the mortality in Glasgow was 1 in 24, in London nearly 1 in 32.—(See 1st Report of the Registrar-general in England, p. 18.)



whom they have often only a temporary connection, whose interest it is to lower their wages as as much as possible, and whose numbers are so small, that they can easily combine for that purpose. The demand for their labour they know to be precarious, and subject to sudden variations, and there is no fund, excepting that which this labour supplies, on which they can rely for the subsistence of themselves and their families. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that, as the Irish peasants cling with desperate tenacity to the land which is their only resource against starvation, so these manufacturers should array themselves against their masters, and resolve, at all hazards, to maintain the price of their labour; that, under the excitement of habitual agitation, and of the power of numbers, artfully presented to their imaginations, they should go to absurd extremities; and that to them, as to the poor Irish, all manner of crimes and atrocities should gradually seem justified, as the only means by which they can secure to themselves such a share in the profits of their work, as may protect them against ruin,—which they know to be imminent, and which, in many instances, they feel that they have done nothing to deserve, and everything in their power to avert.

It is very true, that, by prudence and frugality when their wages are high, they may often do much to protect themselves against the effects of sudden reverses of trade; but this is not always in their power.



If it were, experience shews, that, in all circumstances and ranks of life, many men will be imprudent; and the occupations and mode of life of manufacturers in large towns are peculiarly unfavourable to the growth of those virtues. In their case, as well as in that of the Irish peasants, it seems to me to be obviously the policy of a wise and beneficent government, by providing another fund, on which they, as well as others, may rely, in time of real necessity, for subsistence, to give them that security against ruin and starvation, which they vainly seek to obtain for themselves by violence and outrage; and the facts which I have stated as to the effects of legal provision for the poor in all countries give us good reason to hope, that the contentment and mental tranquillity which that security naturally produces, will favour the influence of religious and moral feelings, and the growth of artificial wants in their minds,—much more than the fear of destitution, which it is so much the fashion at present to hold out as the grand preservative against improvidence among the poor; but the supposed efficacy of which, so far as my observation goes, and, as I think, all experience teaches, is perfectly delusive.\*

\* Even in England the opinion seems to be gaining ground, that the best remedy for combinations among workmen will be found to be “a provision rendering the master-manufacturers more fully subject than they at present are, to the payment of poor-rates in proportion to their creation of paupers.”



We are told by Mr M'Gregor, that "the operation of the Danish Poor Law has been *most beneficial* at times, when great numbers of working people were suddenly thrown out of employ by the circumstances of the times;" and the Fourth Report of the English Commissioners records a striking example of the efficacy of the present system of relief to the able-bodied in England, in the town of Nottingham; where there was such a stagnation of trade in 1837, that, after a subscription of L.4000 to relieve the unemployed workmen had been expended, the numbers of able-bodied men and women, either employed or relieved in the workhouse by the Guardians of the Union gradually rose, until it reached 498 in December 1837, while, at the same time, 690 other inmates were in the workhouse; *i. e.* more than 2 per cent. of the population; above 300 more were fed twice daily in a shed; and the whole out-door relief reached L.160 in the week, in a population of 50,000. The opponents of poor laws would say, that all this was "breaking down the independence of the poor," and that they would never return to habits of industry. I maintain, on the other hand, that it was saving them from misery, starvation, and fever, in the mean time, and from degradation, idleness, and improvidence, in future. Observe the result. Gradually the pressure subsided; the work-people again found employment; by the middle of June,



the employment of able-bodied people, at the expense of the Union, was discontinued; only 71 able-bodied and 381 others remained in the work-house, and the out-door relief had fallen to L.78 in the week. And when we compare the subsequent Christmas quarter with the Christmas quarter of the previous year, as to the number of persons relieved and the expense of their relief, we find the numbers to have been thus reduced:—

Christmas Quarter.	Number relieved.	Expense of Relief.
1837	5264	L.4037
1838	2414	2390
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Decrease,	2850	L.1647

At this last date, the quarterly expenditure had fallen greatly below what it was in spring 1837, when the embarrassment was beginning; and, after all, the expenditure on the poor in the year ending March 1838 amounted to no more than L.18,556, in a population of 50,608; which, although an increase of above L.7000 on the previous year, did not amount to 7s. 4d. a-head on the population, no very unusual proportion in England. I have not yet obtained any returns as to the number of fever cases at Nottingham in 1837-38, but have reason to believe, that if there had been any formidable increase of it, I should have been informed of it.

Of the effect which regular and effectual assistance to the able-bodied poor, when out of employment (by taking them or their families into work-



houses),—or to the partially disabled poor,—would have on the diffusion of fever, any one may be satisfied, who attends to the cases of fever presenting themselves day after day during the epidemics ; beginning in the families of persons out of work or unable to maintain themselves in comfort, and extending through them, and from them to their neighbours.\* In fact, I cannot doubt that it is by the relief promptly and steadily given in such cases, that the comparative exemption of the English great towns (especially of those where there are few of the wandering Irish) is chiefly purchased.†

\* For example, an Irish widow with four young children, who have been four or five years in Edinburgh, was refused relief from the Charity-Workhouse ; and the managers, no doubt, thought they did a service to the city, by keeping this burden from the inhabitants. But mark the consequence. She and her children have lived for some time in extreme destitution, in a close cellar, in a small but crowded close. There one of the children took fever, the others soon sickened, the disease spread to the neighbours, fifteen cases occurred within a very limited space in a few weeks ; some of which became a heavy burden on the Infirmary ; one young woman who supported her aged mother died, and the mother becomes a burden on the city. How far further the evil may extend is yet doubtful. This is the last case of the kind of which I have traced the history, but such cases are of constant occurrence. I have witnessed hundreds of them, beginning, or chiefly extending, in similarly distressed families. If this family had been taken into the workhouse, or supported in comfort out of it, I firmly believe this little epidemic would never have occurred.

† The exemption of the town of Birmingham from fever (of



Of the effects which similar relief would have on the numbers, and on the morals of the poor in

which I have been favoured with a statement since the sheets containing the facts at pp. 24 and 54 were printed) is perhaps as striking as that of any other English town. The population was 118,000 in 1831, and is supposed now to be nearly 150,000. The number of cases of fever, including agues, treated in hospital in seven years ending 1839, was only 485, averaging 69 in the year. But the poor rate is L.40,000 a-year. An able-bodied man or woman out of work and destitute is taken into the workhouse; "destitute children are taken as far as possible into the asylum for infant poor, where they are maintained and educated;" and a widow or a disabled man receives from 1s. 6d. to 2s. 6d. a-week, with 1s. for each child under eight years of age, not so provided for. Again, in the town of Sunderland, where the population is nearly 50,000, only 53 cases of fever were taken into the hospital in the three years 1836-37-38, *i. e.* 17 in a year. The sums expended on the poor are L.11,200 in the year, and the allowances to widows, orphans, aged and disabled persons, nearly as in other parts of England.

On the other hand, the following extracts from a report which I have just received, of the House of Recovery and Fever Hospital, in Cork Street, Dublin, by Dr G. A. Kennedy, shew both how fever holds its ground in that city, and how generally the experience of medical men leads them to ascribe its prevalence to the destitution and sufferings of a population unprotected by the law.

Average annual number of applications to that Fever Hospital for five years, ending 1836, 5297.

Number in 1837, 9508, of which it appears that 8192 were admitted.

Total number of fever cases treated in the different Dublin hospitals in 1837, 12,634.



the worst parts of Edinburgh and Glasgow, we may judge from a short quotation from Mr Symon's work already mentioned. "A dozen sometimes in a day of young girls, chiefly from the country, said Captain Miller of the Glasgow Police, come to me to beg for honest employment; but what can I do? The factories are over-stocked; the benevolent institutions would not contain one-hundredth of them; they have no character; and if they had, there is no employment for them."\* In England, such poor creatures may be, and continually are, sent back to their parishes, and there confined in work-houses until they can find employment. There will be many lost members of society under any human institutions, but can any one doubt, that, by this benevolent law, many must be saved and placed

In the latter year, in reporting to the Government on the causes of the existing prevalence of fever, the physicians of the Fever Hospital in Cork Street, thus express themselves:—"These do not differ in any respect, so far as is known to them from the causes of former epidemics, already fully discussed, and set forth in various reports, presented to the Committee and to the public. The physicians have scarcely ever observed those *circumstances which favour the progress of epidemic disease*, more strikingly exhibited than at present. They have frequently seen from ten to twenty individuals crowded into a single apartment of small dimensions, ill ventilated, filthy, and offensive in the highest degree, the inmates in want of the necessaries of life, often without bed-covering, or even sufficient personal clothing."—Medical Report of the House of Recovery, &c., Dublin, 1839, p. 3, 5, and 41.

\* Op. cit. p. 118.



in honest employment, who would otherwise have “run the brief career of vice, drunkenness, disease, and death?”\* or can any one suppose, that, in the complex society of large towns, any other means than giving the unemployed poor a *right* to claim such relief, can be effectual for the purpose?

All the objects now stated are completely within the power of the people of this country, at an expense considerably less than that which the people of England now bear for the maintenance of their poor. The best practical proof that could possibly have been desired, that this burden has not been excessive in the case of the English people, is to be found in the great unwillingness which has been shewn by *great numbers of the rate-payers in England* to reduce it to its present amount, lest that reduction should trench on the comforts of the poor. Having this example before our eyes, I can see no obstacle to the adoption of these measures, of certain relief to much suffering, and prevention of more, excepting only, that many will be unwilling to abandon the theoretical idea, which all experience, on so large a scale as to be free from individual fallacies, shews to be untenable, that misery and starvation will teach prudence to the poor. We must learn to regard

\* The experience of the House of Refuge in Edinburgh, which has acted in this respect, partially and irregularly from its limited means, but exactly as a well regulated workhouse would do, leaves no room for doubt on this point.



pauperism, in so far as it is an evil at all, as a necessary evil in every country in an advanced state of civilization ; the only alternative, as all experience shews, being extreme suffering, with extensive mendicity ; both of which I think we ought to regard, after what we see of the example of other nations, as heinous national sins, surely to be followed by national punishments, and among others by this, that they are truly incompatible both with the maintenance of health, and with religious or moral improvement, in the lowest class of the people, who congregate in the great towns. We must learn to believe, that there is neither wisdom nor virtue in denying to our suffering fellow-creatures that assistance which is given to the poor in other countries ; and thereby virtually condemning them to a mode of life, in which the average duration of their existence is shortened, simply by the want of sufficient nourishment and of sufficient clothing, by one-fourth from that which is the lot of the inhabitants even of the larger towns of the southern division of the empire. And those who have leisure and inclination to devote themselves to the service of the poor, may be assured that here, as in England, they cannot employ themselves better, for this purpose, than in superintending and regulating the administration of the great national establishments for "Charity by Law."

It must be admitted, however, that there is one difficulty which up to this time would have in a



great measure frustrated any plan for the improvement of the condition of the poor in Scotland, viz. the continual importation of the poor Irish, who have hitherto had no provision for them at home, and have acquired settlement by three years' residence here, and who have therefore been always ready to take advantage of every benefit that would be conferred on the lower orders in Scotland. Now that some provision is made for their support in Ireland, we may reasonably expect that this burden on the charities of Scotland will not increase as it has hitherto done ; and, on this account, there never has been a time at which measures for the permanent improvement of the condition of the poor in Scotland, and of the health of our great towns, could have been brought forward with so fair a prospect of success. If advantage be taken of this opportunity, in the manner which I have ventured to recommend, it appears to me, from what has been stated, that we are fully authorized, by the experience of other countries, to expect, that much suffering will be permanently relieved, and much disease, with all its evil consequences, prevented ; that the habits of the lower class of the people will be improved ; the unwholesome stimulus to population, now existing among them in our great towns, be checked ; and the greatest of all obstacles to their religious and moral improvement be removed. At all events, unless I am strangely deceived in regard to facts which seem



to me indisputable, and inferences which seem inevitable,—we shall then, and not till then, be following the course which both reason and experience point out, as most effectual for the attainment of these objects.















