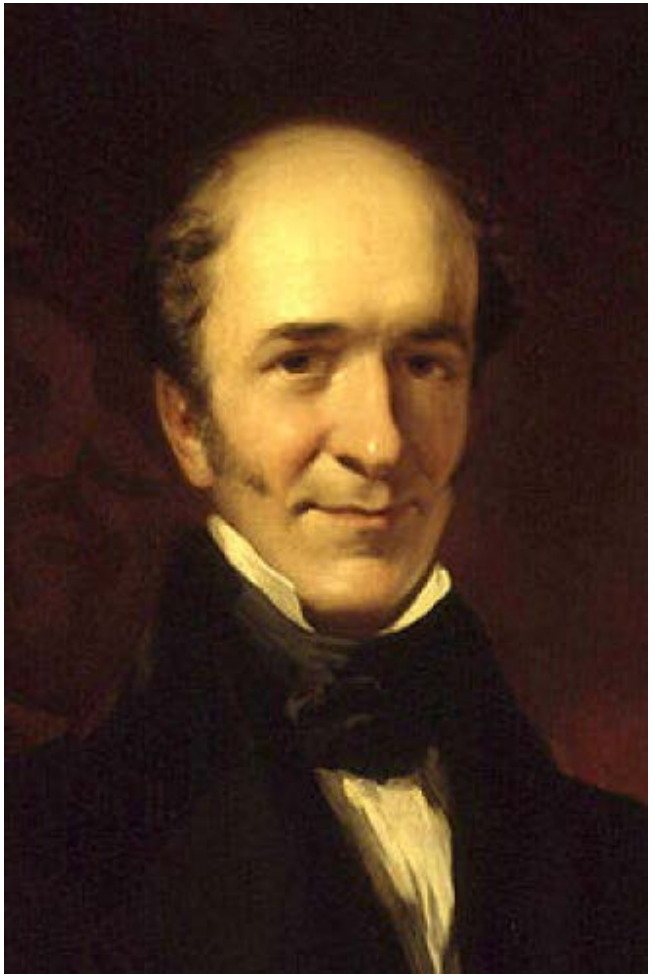

A TREATISE

ON THE

CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH DETERMINE

THE

RATE OF WAGES

AND THE

CONDITION OF THE LABOURING CLASSES.

BY

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NOTICE.

We have endeavoured, in the following Treatise, to resolve the most important of all economic problems —that is, to trace and exhibit the circumstances which determine the rate of wages and the condition of the labouring classes. We have tried to compress our solution within the narrowest limits, by stripping it of extraneous matter, and contenting ourselves with an elucidation of the leading principles on which it depends. Though of general application, our investigations have especial reference to the labouring classes of the United Kingdom. The wish, how vain soever it may prove to be, to contribute to their improvement, has alone led to the publication of this little work.

London, *November* 1851.

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WHICH DETERMINE

THE RATE OF WAGES.

WAGES constitute the reward or compensation paid to labourers by those who employ them, in return for their services.

Taken in its widest sense, the term labourers is very comprehensive. In addition to the myriads who are engaged in agricultural, commercial, and manufacturing pursuits, it comprises all sorts of public functionaries, from the prime minister downwards, with those who crowd the ranks of what are called the learned and liberal professions. These parties, how widely soever they may differ in everything else, agree in this, that they exchange their services for valuable considerations of one sort or other. Their entire subsistence, in so far at least as they depend on their employment, is derived from wages; and they are as evidently labourers as if they handled a shuttle or a spade, or held a plough. Even those to whom ample fortunes have descended, are not exempted from the necessity of exertion. The duties and obligations which property brings along with it, are not a little onerous. The judicious management of a large estate, or other property, requires much care and circumspection. Without this, it will probably be wasted or dissipated; and, at all

events, it cannot be applied to its legitimate ends, of advancing the interests and the honour of its possessors, and the well-being of their tenants, dependants, and neighbours. Though the contrary be sometimes affirmed, the rich have little in common with the gods of Epicurus. Idleness is hardly less injurious to them than to the poor. Notwithstanding the influence which justly belongs to rank and wealth, every one is aware that "It is the hand of the diligent which bears rule." We may therefore say with Paley, that "Every man has his work. The kind of work varies, and that is all the difference there is. A great deal of labour exists beside that of the hands; many species of industry beside bodily operation, requiring equal assiduity, more attention, more anxiety. It is not true, therefore, that men of elevated stations are exempted from work; it is only true that there is assigned to them work of a different kind: whether more easy or more pleasant may be questioned; but certainly not less wanted, not less essential to the common good."[1]

In the following treatise the term labourers is taken in its popular and more confined sense. Our investigations refer to the wages of those only who labour with the hand, as contradistinguished from those who labour with the head. Manual labourers form, however, by far the most numerous class in all nations, and though ranking lower in public estimation than the others, their functions are of paramount importance. Our fleets and armies depend on them for recruits; their expenditure furnishes the largest portion of the public revenue; and their industry and ingenuity supply most part of the conveniences and enjoyments which raise civilised man above the savage. An inquiry into the circumstances which determine the wages and condition of those to whom the other classes are so deeply indebted, and who at the same time form so large a portion of all societies, must possess a superior degree of interest. It has much

[1] Works, v. 98. Ed. 1819.

more of a practical than of a theoretical character. The vast majority of the labouring classes are very imperfectly informed with respect to the circumstances in question. And yet it will be seen that these are powerfully influenced by, and indeed in great measure depend on, themselves. A knowledge of their nature and operation is, therefore, of all things that which is most indispensable to their well-being, and to that of the communities of which they form so large a portion. Till it be acquired and acted upon, they cannot help forming unreasonable and unfounded conclusions in regard to many important points in the conduct of life; sometimes doing that from which they ought most carefully to abstain, and at other times leaving undone that which they ought resolutely to set about; neglecting the good that is dependent on themselves and within their command for what is dependent on others, contingent, and generally unattainable; suffering themselves to be deceived and misled by impostors pretending to be their friends; and ascribing those unfavourable results to defective laws and institutions, and the proceedings of hostile parties, for which they are themselves solely and certainly responsible.

The labour or service of man may, like everything else which is bought and sold, vary in its price. Those who at one time exchange a certain quantity of labour, for a certain quantity, or the value of a certain quantity, of necessaries and conveniences, may, at another time, exchange it for a different quantity or value. Our first object will therefore be, to appreciate the circumstances on which these fluctuations depend, and the limits within which they are confined.

CHAPTER I.

Wages depend, at any particular period, on the Magnitude of the Fund or Capital appropriated to the payment of Wages, compared with the number of Labourers.

The different articles or products belonging to a country that either are, or may be employed to support its inhabitants, or to facilitate production, have been termed its capital. It consequently comprises, in advanced countries like England, an all but infinite variety of articles, including buildings, ships and machinery of all sorts, the lower animals in a state of domestication, with food, clothes, &c. But it is unnecessary, in an inquiry of this sort, to refer to capital in general; for we have only to deal with that portion of it, which embraces the various articles intended for "the use and accommodation of the labouring class." This portion forms the fund, out of which their wages are wholly paid. We should err if we supposed that the capacity of a country to feed and employ labourers, is to be measured by the advantageousness of its situation, the richness of its soil, or the extent of its territory. These, undoubtedly, are circumstances of very great importance, and have a powerful influence in determining the rate at which a people advance, or may advance, in wealth and civilization. But it is obviously not on them, but on the amount of the capital devoted to the payment of wages, in the possession of a country at any given period, that its power of supporting and employing labourers entirely depends. Holland is less fertile than Poland or Hungary, and Lancashire is less fertile than Kent; but, owing to their greater command of capital, the population of the former is comparatively dense. A fertile soil may be made a means of rapidly increasing capital; but that is all. Before that soil can be cultivated, capital must be provided for the support of the labourers employed upon it, in like manner as it

must be provided for the support of those engaged in manufactures, or in any other branch of industry.

It is a necessary consequence of this principle, that the amount of subsistence falling to each labourer, or the rate of wages, depends on the proportion which the whole capital bears to the whole labouring population. If capital be increased, without a corresponding increase taking place in the population, a larger share of such capital will fall to each individual, or, which is the same thing, the rate of wages will be increased. And if, on the other hand, population be increased faster than capital, a less share will be apportioned to each individual, and the rate of wages will be reduced.

To illustrate this principle, let us suppose that the capital of a country, annually appropriated to the payment of wages, amounts to L.30,000,000 sterling. If there were *two* millions of labourers in that country, it is evident that the wages of each, reducing them all to the same common standard, would be L.15; and it is further evident that this rate could not be increased otherwise than by increasing the amount of capital in a greater proportion than the number of labourers, or by diminishing the number of labourers in a greater proportion than the amount of capital. So long as capital and population continue to march abreast, or to increase or diminish in the same proportion, so long will the rate of wages continue unaffected. It is only when the proportion of capital to population varies—when it is increased or diminished, that wages sustain a corresponding advance or diminution. The well-being and comfort of the labouring classes are therefore immediately dependent on the relation which their increase bears to the increase of the capital which is to feed and employ them. If they increase faster than capital, their wages will be reduced; and if they increase slower, they will be augmented. There are no means whatever by which wages can be raised, other than by accelerating the increase of capital as compared with population, or by retarding the increase of population as compared with capital. And every scheme for raising wages, which is not bottomed on this

principle, or which has not an increase of the ratio of capital to population for its ultimate object, must be nugatory and ineffectual.

Wages being most commonly either paid or estimated in money, it may perhaps be thought that their amount will, in consequence, depend more on the supply of money in circulation in a country, than on the magnitude of its capital. It is, however, all but indifferent whether the amount of money received by labourers as wages be great or small. They will always receive such a sum as will suffice to put them in possession of the portion of the national capital falling to their share. And as men cannot subsist on coin or paper, where wages are paid in money, the labourers exchange it for necessaries and conveniences; and it is the quantity of these which the money paid them will buy, rather than the money itself, that is to be considered as really forming their wages. If the money of Great Britain were reduced a half, the rate of wages, estimated in money, would decline to the same extent. But unless some change took place at the same time in the magnitude of that portion of the national capital, which consists of the food, clothes, and other articles used by the labourers, they would continue in about the same situation. They would carry fewer pieces of gold and silver to market than formerly; but these would serve to buy the same quantity of commodities.

Whatever, therefore, may be the state of money wages in a country—whether they are 1s., 2s., or 5s. a-day—if the capital applicable to the payment of wages and the population continue the same, or increase or diminish in the same proportion, no real variation will take place in the rate of wages. Wages do not really rise, except when the proportion of capital to population is enlarged; and they do not really fall, except when that proportion is diminished.

But, though the principle now stated be sufficiently obvious, several unfounded inferences have been deduced from it. And, to prevent misconception, it may be right to state at the

outset, that the condition or well-being of the labouring classes cannot in any case be correctly measured by, or inferred from, the wages they receive. It depends to a great extent on the conduct and habits of the labourers, more especially on the description and cost of the articles used by them, and on their frugality and forethought. The same amount of wages that would suffice to maintain a workman who lived principally on corn and butcher's-meat, would probably maintain two or more if they lived principally on potatoes. And, whatever may be the articles of subsistence used by a people, they will, it is obvious, be powerfully affected by variations in their supply and price,[1] by the skill with which they are applied to their respective purposes, and the economy with which they are used or saved for future occasions. The expenditure even of the poorest individuals is spread, in a country like this, over a great variety of articles, some of which conduce but little, while others are not unfrequently adverse, to their comfort and respectability. And hence, though the rate of wages, whether estimated in money or in commodities, depends wholly on the proportion between capital and labour, the condition of the labourers is not determined by that rate only, but partly by it, and partly also, and perhaps principally, by the mode in which they expend their wages, that is, by their peculiar tastes and habits in regard to necessaries, conveniences, and amusements. Every one, indeed, is aware that work-people with 18s., 20s., and 24s. a-week, are frequently much better off than others with 28s., 30s., and 36s., per do., though the families of the former be quite as large as those of the latter.

The wages and the habits of the labouring classes are intimately connected with, and powerfully influence, each other. Generally speaking, a rise of wages, however occasioned, tends, as will afterwards be fully shown, to improve the habits of the population; and improved habits tend

[1] A rise in their price being in most cases nearly equivalent to a corresponding fall of wages, and a fall in their price to a corresponding rise of wages.

equally to raise wages; whereas a fall of wages, and the deterioration of habits which it occasions, have precisely opposite effects.

Without further insisting at present on considerations which will hereafter be resumed, it is plain that the rate of wages in any given country, at any specified period, depends on the ratio between the portion of its capital appropriated to the payment of wages, and the number of its labourers. The next object, in the natural order of inquiry, is to discover whether capital and population usually increase or diminish in the same or in different proportions. This is obviously a very important inquiry. If capital have a tendency to advance faster than population, then it is plain that wages must have an equal tendency to increase, and the condition of the labouring classes must, speaking generally, become more and more prosperous. But, on the other hand, if population have a tendency to increase faster than capital, it is equally plain, unless this tendency be checked by the prudence and forethought of the labourers, that wages will have a constant tendency to fall; and that consequently, the condition of the lower classes may be expected to become gradually more and more wretched, until their wages are reduced to the smallest pittance that will suffice for their support. It is indispensable that principles, pregnant with such important results, should be carefully investigated.

CHAPTER II.

Comparative Increase of Capital and Population.

It is not possible to obtain any accurate estimates of the quantities of capital in countries at different periods; but the capacity of that capital to feed and employ labourers, and the rate of its increase, may, notwithstanding, be learned with

sufficient accuracy for our purpose, by referring to the progress of population, and the habits of the bulk of the people. It is plain, from the statements already made, that the inhabitants of a country, supposing them to have the same, or about the same, continuous command over necessaries and conveniences, cannot increase without a corresponding increase of capital. Whenever, therefore, we find the people of a country increasing, without any, or with but little variation taking place in their condition, we may conclude that the capital of the country is increasing in the same, or nearly the same, proportion. Now, it has been established beyond all question, that the population of several of the States of North America has, after making due allowance for immigrants, continued to double, for a century past, in so short a period as twenty or at most five-and-twenty years. And as neither the kinds nor the supply of necessaries and conveniences falling to the share of the inhabitants of the United States is supposed to have been materially affected during the last century, the increase of population shows that the capital of the country has advanced in a nearly corresponding ratio. But in old-settled countries, the increase of capital, and consequently of population, is much slower. The population of Scotland, for example, is supposed to have amounted to 1,265,000 in 1755; and as it amounted to 2,870,784 in 1851, it would follow, on the principle already stated, that the capital of the country had required nearly 76 years to double.[1] In like manner, the population of England and Wales amounted to 6,039,000 in 1750, and to 17,905,831 in 1851, showing that the population, and therefore the capital, of that country, applicable to the support of man, or the supply of food, clothes, and other articles necessary for the support of human life, had about trebled in a century.

The cause of this discrepancy in the rates at which capital and population advance in different countries, is to be found in the circumstance of industry being more productive in

[1] It has more than doubled; for the condition of all classes has been greatly improved.

some than in others. Capital consists of the accumulated produce of industry; and wherever, therefore, industry is most productive, there will also, it may be presumed, be the greatest power to increase capital. This presumption may no doubt be, and frequently is, defeated by the greater weight of the public burdens in the more productive country, by defective institutions, a feeling of insecurity, or some such modifying principle. But where these do not occur, or where their influence is not sufficient to countervail the superior productiveness of industry, the means of accumulation will be comparatively extensive. It is obvious, too, that the increase of that portion of capital, which consists of the food and other raw products required for the subsistence and accommodation of the labourer, will especially depend on the productiveness of the soils that are under tillage. Were agriculture in the same state of advancement in any two countries, and the soils under cultivation twice as fertile in the one as in the other, it is evident that the power of adding to its stock of food and other raw materials would also be twice as great in the more fertile country as in the other. It is on this principle partly, but more on the facility of getting land, that we are able to account for the extraordinarily rapid increase of capital and population in the United States, and generally in all colonies planted in fertile and thinly-peopled countries. America possesses a vast extent of fertile and unoccupied territory, which is sold in convenient portions at very low prices. It is not good land, but labour, that is there the desideratum; and the larger a man's family, that is, the greater the amount of labour at his command, the more prosperous does he become. Hence, in America, while farming is low, profits are high. But in Great Britain, and other long-settled and densely-peopled countries, the state of society is widely different. Here farming is high and profits low. All our land has been appropriated for ages; large sums have been expended upon its improvement; and it cannot be obtained except at a high price. Additional supplies of food are in consequence

raised with much greater difficulty in old than in newly settled countries. And, *cæteris paribus*, their advance in wealth and population is comparatively slow. The rate of wages in such countries may not, all things taken into account, differ very materially. But the situation of the labourers in new countries will, notwithstanding, be generally preferable, inasmuch as they afford greater facilities to industrious individuals of acquiring land, and raising themselves to a superior station.

It was stated by various witnesses before a committee of the House of Commons on the state of agriculture, in 1822, that the produce obtained from the best lands under wheat in England and Wales varied from thirty-six to forty bushels an acre;[1] while that obtained from the inferior lands did not exceed eight or ten bushels. But in past times, when the population was scanty, and tillage was confined to the superior lands, agriculture was at a very low ebb; and it may be doubted whether the lands that now yield from forty to fifty bushels an acre did then yield more than from a fourth to a third part of that quantity. The power to increase supplies of food is not, therefore, dependent only on the quality of the soils in cultivation, but partly on that and partly also on the state of agriculture. In this country, improvements in the latter have more than countervailed for a lengthened period the decreasing fertility of the soils to which we have had to resort for additional supplies of food. This has been most strikingly verified, as every one knows, in the interval that has elapsed since the conclusion of the American, and more especially of the late French, war. We now raise much larger supplies of corn, beef, &c., than we did at the last-mentioned period, notwithstanding prices have fallen heavily in the interval.

In England and the United States, whose inhabitants speak the same language, and have a very extensive intercourse with each other, the arts and sciences cultivated in them both may

[1] From forty to fifty bushels an acre would now be nearer the mark.

be expected to approach near to an equality. And therefore, if the inferior lands, or those last taken into cultivation in America, possessed twice the productive power of those last taken into cultivation in England, it might be supposed that agricultural industry in the former would be about twice as productive as in the latter, and that the power which each country possesses of increasing that portion of its capital which consists of food, and other farm produce, would be in about that proportion.

It is found, however, that theoretical conclusions of this sort are much modified in practice. Agricultural science may be equal, or nearly equal, in two countries, and yet their agriculture may be widely different. Scientific knowledge, which is generally confined to a few, and the application of that knowledge by the parties engaged in any great department of industry, are totally different things. The former may be in a very advanced state, while the latter is in its infancy. And such is the case with agricultural science and practice in the United States. The theory of agriculture is there highly advanced, while, speaking generally, the art is imperfect in the extreme. This is a consequence of the facility enjoyed by the Americans of acquiring new land, and of its being more advantageous to cultivate it in the cheapest manner, than to apply improved processes to the old lands. Hence it is that extensive tracts of the latter, after having been cultivated for a while, have been abandoned; and that, except in a few peculiarly favoured districts, the crops are not nearly so heavy as might have been anticipated. This state of things will, of course, change with the changing circumstances of the country. As it becomes more difficult to obtain supplies of new land, a better and more careful system of tillage will be applied to the old land.

Still, however, there can be no doubt that, partly from the farmers being the owners of the land which they cultivate, partly from their not being obliged to resort to inferior soils, and partly from their exemption from tithes, and the smaller amount of their burdens, industry is decidedly more productive in countries like the United States, and generally in those that are newly settled, than in those that have been long occupied by a comparatively dense population. But in America, as elsewhere, the best lands will, in the long run, be exhausted; and whenever this is the case, increased supplies of food can only be had by resorting to such as are less fertile. This decreasing fertility of the soil may, as we have just seen, be countervailed, or more than countervailed, by improvements in agriculture and the arts. But whether this be so or not, were population as dense, and tillage as far extended over secondary lands, in the United States as in England, the probability is, that industry would be no better rewarded there than here, and that the progress of both countries in wealth and population would not be very different.

The free importation of corn and other articles of food does not materially affect the previous statements. Prices in a country which habitually imports a portion of its supplies, must be higher than in those from which she imports; and she is thus laid under the same sort of disadvantage, compared with them, as if she cultivated soils of a less degree of fertility. But the freedom of the corn trade gives a security against this disadvantage ever becoming very considerable; while it, at the same time, affords the best attainable security against the recurrence of those periods of scarcity and high prices which are always productive of great public inconvenience and distress.

But while the power of all countries to feed additional inhabitants is thus progressively diminished, through the diminished fertility of the soils which they must successively bring under cultivation, the power possessed by their inhabitants of adding to their numbers, undergoes no sensible change. The principle, or instinct, which impels man to propagate his species, has appeared in all ages and countries so nearly the same, that it may, in the language of mathematicians, be considered as a *constant quantity*. However

rapidly the means of subsistence have occasionally been increasing, population has seldom failed to keep pace with them. Those who inquire into the past and present state of the world, will find that the population of all countries is generally accommodated to their means of subsistence. Whenever these have been increased, population has also been increased, or been better provided for; and when they have been diminished, the population has either been worse provided for, or has sustained a diminution of numbers, or both effects have followed.

We have seen that the population of the United States of America doubles itself in so short a period as twenty or five-and-twenty years. And if the supplies of food and other articles required for the support of the people were to continue to increase as fast as they have done, population would most likely continue to advance in the same proportion for a lengthened period; or, it might be, until the space required to carry on the operations of industry had become deficient. But the principle of increase is quite as strong in Yorkshire or Normandy as it is in Kentucky or Illinois, and yet it is plainly impossible that the population of England or France can be doubled in so short a period. Owing to the greater outlay upon the soils we are now cultivating, and the greater weight of our tithes, poor-rates, and other taxes, the quantity of produce to be divided between the undertakers of work in Great Britain and their labourers is less, compared with their numbers, than in America, and both parties have in consequence a less power of providing for the wants of a family. A number of children is not here, as in the United States or Australia, a source of wealth. On the contrary, their maintenance occasions an expense, which the poor man, unless he be at once frugal and industrious, can with difficulty meet. The habits of the people have been moulded accordingly. There is a general feeling that it would be imprudent to enter into matrimonial connections without having something like a reasonable prospect of being able to maintain the children that may be expected to spring from them. And marriages are,

in consequence, very generally deferred to a later period than in America, and a greater proportion of the population find it expedient to pass their lives in a state of celibacy. And it is fortunate that this is the case; that the good sense of the people, and their laudable desire to preserve their place in society, make them control their passions, and subject them to prudential considerations. Man cannot possibly increase beyond the means provided for his support. And were the tendency of population to increase in countries advanced in the career of civilization, and where there is, consequently, a considerably increased difficulty of providing supplies of food, not checked by the prevalence of moral restraint, or the forethought of the people, it would be checked by the prevalence of want, misery, and famine. There is no alternative. The population of every country has the power, supposing food to be adequately supplied, to go on doubling every five-and-twenty years. But as the limited extent, and limited fertility of the soil, render it impossible to go on producing food in this ratio, it necessarily follows, unless the passions are moderated, and a proportional check given to the increase of population, that the standard of human subsistence will be reduced to the lowest assignable limit, and that famine and pestilence will be perpetually at work to relieve the population of wretches born only to be starved.

Mr Malthus was probably the first who conclusively showed that, speaking generally, the tendency of population is not merely to keep abreast with the increase of the means of subsistence, but to exceed it; and the grand object of his "Essay on the Principle of Population," is to point out the bad effects of a redundant population, the importance of moral restraint, and the pernicious consequences resulting from the bringing of human beings into the world without being able to provide for their subsistence and education. Now, instead of this doctrine being, as has been often stated, unfavourable to human happiness, it would appear that a material change for the better

would be effected in the condition of society, were its justice generally felt and acknowledged, and a vigorous effort made to give it a practical bearing and real influence. It is evident, on the least reflection, that poverty is the source of the greater portion of the ills which afflict humanity; and there can be no reasonable doubt, that a too rapid increase of population, by occasioning a redundant supply of labour, an excessive competition for employment, and low wages, is the most efficient cause of poverty. It is now too late to contend that a crowded population is a sure symptom of national prosperity. The population of the United States is much less dense than that of Ireland; but will any one say that they are less flourishing and happy? The truth is, that the prosperity of a nation depends much less on the number of its inhabitants than on their industry and intelligence, and their command over necessaries and conveniences. The earth affords room only, with the existing means of production, for a certain number of human beings to be trained to any degree of perfection. And it has been truly said, that "every real philanthropist would rather witness the existence of a thousand such beings, than that of a million of millions of creatures, pressing against the limits of subsistence, burdensome to themselves, and contemptible to each other." Wherever the number of labourers continues to increase more rapidly than the fund which has to support and employ them, their wages are gradually reduced till they reach the lowest possible limit. When placed under such unfortunate circumstances, they are entirely cut off from all expectation of rising in the world, or of improving their condition. Their exertions are neither inspired by hope nor by ambition. Unable to save, or to acquire a stake in society, they have no inducement to make any unusual exertions. In consequence, they become indolent and dispirited; and, if not pressed by hunger, would be always idle.

It is thus apparent that the ratio which the progress of capital bears to the progress of population, is the pivot on which the comfort and well-being of the great bulk of society

must always turn. If the proportion of capital to population be increased, the population will be better provided for; if it continue the same, the condition of the population will undergo no change; and if it be diminished, that condition will be changed for the worse.

The principles we have thus briefly endeavoured to elucidate render it apparent, on a little reflection, that the condition of the bulk of every people must usually depend more on their own conduct than on that of their rulers. Not that we mean by this to insinuate, that the influence of governments over their subjects is not great and powerful, or that the latter should not be governed in the best possible manner. A people who have the misfortune to be subjected to arbitrary and intolerant rulers, though otherwise possessed of all the powers and capacities necessary for the production of wealth, will, from the want of security and freedom, be most probably sunk in poverty and wretchedness. But in countries where property is secure, industry free, and the public burdens moderate, the happiness or misery of the labouring classes depends almost wholly on themselves. Government has there done for them all that it should, and all in truth that it can, do. It has given them security and freedom. But the use or abuse of these inestimable advantages is their own affair. They may be either provident or improvident, industrious or idle; and being free to choose, they are alone responsible for the consequences of their choice.

It is, we admit, visionary to expect, as some theorists have done, that the progress of population should ever be exactly adjusted to the increase or diminution of the national capital, or that the conduct of the mass of the people should be perceptibly influenced by public considerations, or by a regard to its effects on society at large. The theories of philosophers, and the measures of statesmen and legislators, have reference to the interests and well-being of nations; but those of ordinary men embrace a comparatively narrow range. Their views seldom, indeed, extend even to the class to which they

belong. They include only themselves, their families, and near connections; and they are satisfied if they succeed in promoting their interests, without thinking or caring about those of the public. Luckily, however, the two coincide. The industry, the frugality, and the forethought, without which no individual can either hope to improve his condition, if he have little or nothing, or to keep his own, and avoid falling a sacrifice to poverty, if he have anything, are virtues indispensable to the well-being of individuals, and consequently of the community. And it is so ordered, that no sort of combination or co-operation is required to secure these advantages. They are realised to the fullest extent by every one by whom they are practised; and they can be realised by none else.

It is fortunate that those principles, a knowledge of which is of most importance to the interests of mankind, lie on the surface, and are easily understood, and may be practised by all. Every man, if he have any reflection, who proposes entering into a matrimonial engagement, must feel that he is about to undertake a serious responsibility. The wages or resources which may be able to support himself comfortably, may be insufficient for the support of two, or three, or four individuals. And if he have no provision made beforehand, and cannot increase his means by greater economy or greater exertion, what can he expect from his marriage but that he should be reduced to comparative poverty, and be forced, perhaps, to take refuge in a workhouse? There is no denying this conclusion; and a conviction of its truth will not tend to obstruct any really desirable union. It will only tend to lessen the number of those that are improvidently made, and which seldom fail to be ruinous alike to the parties and to the public.

It is not unusual, indeed, for those who have brought themselves into difficulties by their improvidence or misconduct, to throw the blame on the government or the institutions of the country in which they live. But a pretence of this sort cannot impose on any person possessed of the smallest discernment. It is the merest delusion to imagine that it is in the power of any administration to protect

those from suffering and degradation who do not exercise a reasonable degree of industry and forethought. And though it were in its power, its interference in their behalf would be inconsistent with the most obvious dictates of justice and common sense. The lazy, the unskilful, and the improvident workman, whether he belong to Australia or China, England or Russia, will always be poor and miserable. No man can devolve on government, or on others, any portion of that self-responsibility which at once dignifies and constitutes an essential part of human nature. They are not the friends, but the worst enemies of the poor, who seek to conceal or disguise this great truth; and who endeavour to make it be believed that it is possible, by dint of legislation, to provide for the welfare of those who will not use the means which Providence has given them of maintaining themselves in their present position, or of rising to a higher. Such persons are to the poor what a treacherous guide is to a traveller in a strange country. They lead them from the only path that can conduct to comfort and respectability, to one which is sure to terminate in disappointment and disgrace.

It will, we presume, be universally admitted, that practically it is impossible to increase the supplies of food and other articles necessary for the support of a family, so rapidly in Great Britain and France as they may be, and in fact are, increased in the United States and Australia. But how can those who admit this proposition deny its inevitable consequence, that were our people to marry as early and universally as the Americans and Australians, we should have, first a great increase of poverty, and then of mortality? It is true that capital, or the means of supporting and employing labour, will, supposing other things equal, increase most under a just and liberal government. But experience sufficiently proves, that the power which men possess of increasing their numbers, is sufficiently strong to make population keep pace with the progress of capital, in nations possessed of boundless tracts of fertile and unoccupied land, and

of the most liberal institutions. And as this power does not fluctuate with the fluctuating circumstances of society, but remains constant, it evidently follows, that if it be not controlled by the good sense and prudence of individuals, it must necessarily in the end sink the inhabitants of densely-peopled countries into the most helpless and abject poverty.

The influence of the different rates at which capital and population increase in different countries over the condition of their inhabitants, may be set in a striking light by referring to the instances of Ireland and Great Britain. No one doubts that the capital of the former has increased considerably during the last fifty or a hundred years, though, when we compare the slow growth of the towns and manufactures, the fewness of the public works, and the scanty improvements effected on the land in Ireland, during that period, with the comparatively rapid growth of the towns and manufactures, and the prodigious extension of all sorts of improvements, in Great Britain, it is apparent that the increase of capital must have been, at least, four or five times as great in the interval in this as in the sister kingdom. But the increase of population in the two countries, previously to 1840, was nearly in the inverse ratio of the increase of their capital, or of their means of supporting and employing labour. Thus, it appears that the population of Great Britain, which amounted to about 7,000,000 in 1740, had increased to above 18,000,000 in 1840, being an increase in the interval of rather more than 255 per cent.; whereas the population of Ireland, which amounted to about 2,000,000 in 1740, had increased to above 8,000,000 in 1840,—being an increase of no less than 400 per cent., or of 145 per cent. more than in Britain, notwithstanding the vastly greater increase of capital in the latter!

We shall not at present stop to inquire into the causes [1] which led to this extraordinary disparity in the increase of population in the two great divisions of the empire, compared with the increase of their capitals. But it is obvious

[1] See these causes specified in the Statistical Account of the British Empire, Vol. I., pp. 438-445.

that its excessive augmentation in Ireland has been the immediate cause of the want of demand for the labour of the Irish people, and of their abject poverty. Had population increased less rapidly, fewer individuals would have been seeking for employment, their wages would consequently have been higher, and their situation so far improved. And such being the cause of the evil, it is plain that, without its being obviated or mitigated, and without the numbers of the Irish people becoming more commensurate with the funds for their support, nothing could be more futile than to expect that their wages should be increased, or their condition be sensibly changed for the better. It is obvious, too, that any people whose numbers continue for any very considerable period to increase faster than the means of providing for their comfortable subsistence, must eventually sink to the same low condition as the people of Ireland. And this increase cannot fail to take place in all old settled countries in which the standard of living is not sufficiently elevated, or in which the principle of augmentation is not powerfully countervailed by the operation of moral restraint, or of a proper degree of prudence and forethought in the formation of matrimonial engagements.

During the last half-dozen years, Ireland has been subjected to a terrible ordeal. The ravages of famine and disease, occasioned by the potato rot of 1845-46 and 1846-47, combined with the efforts of the landlords to clear their estates, and the greatly increased emigrations to this country and the United States, have had an astonishing effect upon the population, which fell off between 1841, or rather 1845, and 1851, from 8,175,124 to 6,515,794. It would be idle to indulge in conjectures in regard to the consequences of this sudden and unprecedented decline of population, but we would fain hope that they may be beneficial; and that, like the fire of London in 1666, the French Revolution of 1789, and other dreadful catastrophes and convulsions, it may, though distressing in the meantime, be productive of great ultimate good. The establishment of a compulsory provision

for the support of the poor, is a formidable obstacle to population again increasing as rapidly as it did from 1770 down to 1840. But, on the other hand, the continued dependence of the population on the potato, and the confidence placed by them on it for support, notwithstanding its many recent failures, are very unfavourable symptoms. Whatever may be their situation in other respects, a people depending upon so uncertain and worthless a resource, cannot be otherwise than poor and miserable.

The paramount importance of the increase of population being subordinate to that of capital, being thus evident, it may be inquired whether government may not assist in bringing about this result? But how desirable soever, this is a matter in which legislation can do but little. Where government has secured the property and the rights of individuals, and has given that freedom to industry which is essential, it has done nearly all it can do to promote the increase of capital. If it interfere in industrious undertakings, its proceedings will be productive only of injury. The reliance of individuals on their own efforts, and their desire to advance themselves, are the only principles on which any dependence can be safely placed. When government engages in any department of industry, it is obliged, inasmuch as it has no means of its own, to obtain the necessary funds from its subjects, either by loans or taxes. It is plain, therefore, that its interference adds nothing whatever to the capital of the country. At best, it merely substitutes one sort of superintendence for another, a salaried officer with but little, if any, interest in the success of the undertaking, for the unwearied vigilance of an individual trading on his own account, and dependent, perhaps, for his subsistence on the issue of his labours. To suppose that undertakings carried on by such different agencies should be equally prosperous, is to suppose what is evidently contradictory and absurd. This is a matter in regard to which there is no longer any difference of opinion. It is now universally

acknowledged, that every branch of industry that may be carried on by private parties, will be more successfully and economically prosecuted by them than by the servants of government; and that any advantage that may seem to arise in any particular case, from employing the latter, will be found on examination to be altogether illusory. By interfering in production, government is sure, in so far as the influence of its measures extends, to weaken the industry and enterprise of its subjects, occasioning at one and the same time a misapplication and waste of capital, and a diminution of its produce.

It is nugatory, therefore, to expect any advantageous results from the efforts of government directly to increase capital or the demand for labour. It may, however, exercise a considerable indirect influence over its increase, by relieving industry from oppressive burdens and shackles, by negotiating with foreign powers for the removal of impediments to trade, and by endeavouring, in short, to give greater facilities to production. But beyond this, its interference will be productive of mischief rather than of good. And, if it attempt to set up national workshops for the employment of the poor, it will increase the poverty it seeks to relieve, disturb all the usual channels of industry, and become a potent instrument of evil.

It may, perhaps, be asked, though government be thus incapable of contributing to increase wages by increasing capital, may it not effect the same end by promoting emigration, and relieving the market of the surplus hands thrown upon it? This question should, we think, be answered in the affirmative. A very extensive voluntary emigration has been going on for a lengthened period from Great Britain, with great advantage to the emigrants themselves, though, we incline to think, with comparatively little advantage to this country. Voluntary emigrants do not often consist of the parties who might be most advantageously spared; and their emigration rather tends to facilitate the introduction into their place of an inferior race, than to improve the con-

dition of the class. But were government to assist landlords and parishes in relieving their estates, or the funds at their disposal, of the burden of paupers, taking security that the vacuum made by their removal should not be again filled up, the country would be permanently benefited by the measure. And we would fain hope that something of this sort may be done. It might not, perhaps, have so great an effect as many anticipate; but it could hardly fail to improve in some considerable degree, the condition of the poor.

The extraordinary, and indeed unparalleled, emigration that has been going on for the last three or four years from Ireland, and which still continues, has given rise in some quarters to an apprehension of its being carried to an excess, and of the country being deprived of an adequate supply of labour. But we are disposed to regard this apprehension as being in a great degree visionary. Previously to 1846, labour in Ireland was a mere drug. Low as wages were, the peasantry were not half employed. Even at this moment (October 1851), the towns are swarming with people driven from the country for whom there is no demand; and till they have pretty generally disappeared, there can be nothing like an excess of emigration. Ireland is not, in fact, a country which, were its social economy in a sound state, would have a large population. The want of coal renders her unsuitable to most descriptions of manufactures. And the humidity of her climate, while it makes her ill suited for the growth of most varieties of corn, renders her admirably well fitted for pastoral purposes. Her herbage is, perhaps, the finest and most luxuriant in Europe. And under the free commercial system which is now being established, the presumption is, that the land of Ireland will be found to be much more productively employed in grazing than in tillage. This, at all events, is the conviction of some of those best acquainted with the circumstances, and best qualified to form a sound opinion upon them. And supposing it to be realised, population may yet be greatly reduced, not only without any injury, but with great advantage to her future well-being.

But without farther speculating on such contingent and uncertain events, it is true, and should never be forgotten, that legislation, when most successful, merely improves, to a greater or less extent, the condition of the labourers generally. It does nothing peculiar for individuals. It leaves them where they should and must always be left, to depend on their own conduct and exertions: to be comfortable, if they practise thrift and industry; and wretched, if they indulge in waste and idleness.

CHAPTER III.

Natural or Necessary Rate of Wages, different in different Countries and Periods. Depends on the Quantity and Species of the Articles required for the Support of the Labourers. Influence of Fluctuations in the Rate of Wages over the Condition of the Labourers.

It has been seen, in the preceding chapter, that the market or current rate of wages in any country, at any given period, depends on the magnitude of that portion of its capital which is appropriated to the payment of wages, compared with the number of its labourers. And it has also been seen, that in the event of the labouring population being increased more rapidly than capital, the rate of wages is inevitably reduced. But there are limits, however difficult it may be to specify them, to the extent to which a reduction of wages can be carried. The cost of producing labour, like that of producing other articles, must be paid by the purchasers. The race of labourers would become altogether extinct, did they not obtain a sufficient quantity of food, and of the other articles required for their support, and that of their families. This is the lowest amount to which the rate of wages can be permanently reduced; and it is for this reason that it has been called the *natural* or *ne-*

cessary rate of wages. The market or current rate of wages may sink to the level of this rate, but it is impossible it can continue below it. The labourer's ability to maintain himself, and to rear fresh labourers, does not, as already shown, depend on the money he receives as wages, but on the supply of food and other articles required for his support for which that money will exchange. The natural or necessary rate of wages must, therefore, be determined by the cost of the food, clothes, &c., which form the maintenance of the labourers.[1] It will be high where that food consists principally of expensive articles, such as butcher's-meat and wheaten bread; lower, where less animal food is consumed, and an inferior species of grain, such as oats, is used in making bread; and lower still, where animal food is wholly, or all but wholly, disused, and the place of bread is supplied with potatoes, turnips, and such like vegetables. The rate of necessary wages will also, it is evident, depend a good deal on other circumstances, on the superior and inferior lodging and clothing, and generally on the habits and customs of the poor. But, how high soever the price of necessary articles may rise, the labourers must always receive a supply of these equivalent for their support. If they did not obtain this much, they would be left destitute; and disease and death would continue to thin the population, until the reduced numbers bore such a proportion to the national capital as enabled them to obtain the means of subsistence.

The opinion of those who contend, that the rate of wages is in no degree influenced by the cost of the articles consumed by the labourers, has obviously originated in their confounding the principles which determine the current or market rate of wages, with those which determine their natural or necessary rate. Nothing can be more true, than

[1] Humboldt states, that miners in Saxony are paid at the rate of 18 sols a day; whereas those who are employed at the same sort of work in the mines of Choco, in Peru, are paid six or seven times as much. Inasmuch, however, as the food and other articles consumed by the latter, exceed the price of those consumed by the former, in about the same proportion as their money wages, they are not really in any better condition.

that the market rate of wages, at any given moment, is exclusively determined by the proportion between capital and population. But in every inquiry of this nature, we should not only refer to particular points of time, but also to periods of *average* duration; and if we do this, we shall immediately perceive that the *average* rate of wages does not depend wholly on this proportion. The present price of shoes, to take a parallel case, is plainly dependent on the extent of their supply, compared with the demand of those who have the means of purchasing them. But were this price less than the sum required to produce them, and bring them to market, they would cease to be supplied. And such is the case with labourers. They neither will, nor in fact can, be brought to market, unless the rate of wages be such as may suffice to bring them up and maintain them. From whatever point of the political compass we may set out, the cost of production is the grand principle to which we must always come at last. This cost determines the natural or necessary rate of wages, just as it determines the average price of shoes, hats, or anything else. However low the demand for labour may be reduced, still, if the price of the articles required for the maintenance of the labourer be increased, the natural or necessary rate of wages must be increased also. Let us suppose, in illustration of this principle, that owing to a scarcity, the price of the quartern loaf rises to 5s. In this case it is plain, inasmuch as the same number of labourers would be seeking for employment after the rise as before, and as a rise in the price of bread, occasioned by a scarcity, could not increase the demand for labour, that wages would not be increased. The labourers would, in consequence, be forced to economise, and the rise of price would have the beneficial effect of lessening the consumption of food, and of distributing the pressure equally throughout the year. But suppose that, instead of being occasioned by the accidental occurrence of a scarcity, the rise has been occasioned by an increased difficulty of production, and that it will be permanent, the question is, will the money wages of labour

continue at their former elevation, or will they rise? Now, in this case it may be easily shown, that they must rise. For it is abundantly obvious, that the comforts of all classes of labourers would be greatly impaired by the rise in the price of bread; and those who previously to its taking place had only enough to subsist upon, would now be reduced to a state of destitution, or rather of all but absolute famine. Under such circumstances, an increase of mortality could hardly fail to take place; while the greater difficulty of providing subsistence, would check the formation of matrimonial connections, and the increase of population. By these means, therefore, either the amount of the population, or the ratio of its increase, or both, would be diminished. And this diminution, by lessening the number of labourers, and increasing the proportion of capital to population, would enable them to obtain higher wages.

The statements now made are not advanced on any arbitrary or supposed grounds, but have been deduced from, and are consistent with, the most comprehensive experience. Those who examine the registers of births, marriages, and deaths, kept in all large and populous cities, will find that there is invariably a diminution of the former, and an increase of the latter, whenever the price of corn or of the principal necessaries of life, sustains any material advance. "It will be observed," says Mr Milne, in his valuable "Treatise on Annuities," in reference to the prices of wheat in England, "that any material reduction in the price of wheat is almost always accompanied by an increase both of the marriages and births, and by a decrease in the number of burials; consequently by an increase in the excess of the births above the deaths. Also, that any material rise in the price is generally attended by a corresponding decrease in the marriages and births, and by an increase in the burials; therefore, by a decrease in the excess of the births above the deaths. Thus it appears, that an increase in the quantity of food, or in the facility with which the labouring classes can obtain it, accelerates the progress of the population, both by augmenting

the number of births, and diminishing the rate of mortality; and that a scarcity of food retards the increase of the people, by producing in both ways opposite effects." And in proof of the correctness of this statement, Mr Milne gives, among many others to the same effect, the following account of the number of births and deaths within the London bills of mortality in 1798, 1800, and 1802.

	Births.	Deaths.	Price of Wheat.
1798	19,581	20,755	£2 10 3 per qr.
1802	21,308	20,260	3 7 5 "
Medium of these two years, ...	20,445	20,508	2 18 10 per qr.
1800	18,275	25,670	5 13 7 "
Differences ...	2,170 Decrease.	5,162 Increase.	2 14 9 per qr. Increase.[1]

M. Messance, the author of a valuable work on the population of France ("Recherches sur la Population,") has collected a great deal of information on the same subject. He shows that those years in which corn has sold at the highest price, have also been those in which mortality was greatest and disease most prevalent; and that those, on the contrary, in which corn has been cheapest, have been the healthiest and least mortal. In 1744, for example, when the price of wheat at Paris was 11 livres 15 sols the septier, the number of deaths amounted to 16,205; and in 1753, when the price of wheat was 20 livres 3 sols, the deaths amounted to 21,716. In the *four* years of the *greatest* mortality at Paris—in the interval between 1743 and 1763—the average price of the septier of wheat was 19 livres 1 sol, and the average annual number of deaths 20,895; and in the *four* years of the *least* mortality during the same interval, the average price of the septier was 14 livres 18 sols, and the average annual number of deaths 16,859.

[1] Treatise on Annuities, vol. ii., pp. 390-402.

But it is needless to travel for evidence of what has now been stated, beyond the valuable reports of the present Registrar-General, George Graham, Esq. Owing to the different circumstances under which the population was placed in 1842 and 1845, in consequence of the fall in the price of corn, and the greater demand for labour, the marriages in the latter exceeded those in the former year by no fewer than 50,000.[1]

It may here, perhaps, be proper to mention, that it has been long observed that the tendency of wages is not to rise, but rather to fall, in unusually dear years. Several of the witnesses examined before Committees of the Houses of Lords and Commons, on the state of agriculture in 1814, endeavoured to prove, by comparing wages with the prices of corn and other necessaries, that there was really no such connection between the two as has been supposed; and that, instead of varying in the same way, wages were generally lowest in years when the price of corn was highest. But it is not difficult to explain the causes of this apparent anomaly. The truth is, that the number of labourers, which is never immediately reduced, is, in most cases, immediately increased by a rise of prices. In dear years, a greater number of females, and of poor children of both sexes, are obliged to engage in some species of employment; while the labourers hired by the piece endeavour, by increasing the quantity of their work, to obtain the means of purchasing their usual supply of food. It is natural, therefore, that the immediate effect of a rise of prices should be to lower, not to raise, wages. But we should fall into the greatest imaginable error if we supposed that, because this is the immediate, it is also the permanent effect of such rise. It is obvious, indeed, that the fall of wages which is thus occasioned, and the greater exertions which the rise of prices forces labourers to make, must tend, as well by lessening their supplies of food as by adding to the severity of their labour, to increase the rate of mortality, and consequently, by diminishing their

[1] Eighth Report of Registrar-General.

numbers, to hasten that rise of wages which will certainly take place if prices continue high.

In endeavouring to show that the market rate of wages cannot be permanently reduced below the amount required to supply the labourers with necessaries, it is not meant to represent the latter as fixed and unvarying. If a given quantity of certain articles were absolutely necessary to enable labourers to subsist and continue their race, then it is clear no lasting deduction could be made from that quantity. But such is not the case. By the natural or necessary rate of wages, is meant only, in the words of Dr Smith, such a rate as will enable the labourer to obtain, "not only the commodities that are indispensably necessary for the support of life, but whatever the custom of the country renders it indecent for creditable people, even of the lowest order, to be without." It is plain, as well from this definition as from the previous statements, that there neither is nor can be any absolute standard of natural or necessary wages. It is impossible to say what articles are indispensable for the support of the lower orders; for they depend essentially on the physical circumstances under which every people is placed, and on custom and habit. Differences of climate, for example, by giving rise to very different physical wants in the inhabitants of different countries, necessarily occasion corresponding variations in the necessary rate of wages. Labourers in cold climates, who must be warmly clad, and whose cottages must be built of solid materials and heated with fires, could not subsist on the wages that suffice to supply all the wants of those who inhabit more genial climates, where clothing, lodging, and fire, are of inferior importance. Humboldt mentions, that there is a difference of nearly a *third* in the cost of his maintenance, and consequently in the necessary wages, of a labourer, in the hot and temperate districts of Mexico. The food, too, of labourers in different and distant countries varies extremely. In some it is both expensive and abundant, compared to what it is in others. In England, for

example, the lower classes principally live on wheaten bread and butcher's-meat, in Ireland on potatoes, and in China and Hindostan on rice. In many provinces of France and Spain an allowance of wine is considered indispensable. In England the labouring class entertain nearly the same opinion with respect to porter, beer, and cider; whereas the Chinese and Hindoos drink only water. The peasantry of Ireland live in miserable mud cabins, without either a window or a chimney, or anything that can be called furniture; while in England the cottages of the peasantry have glass windows and chimneys, are well furnished, and are as much distinguished for their neatness, cleanliness, and comfort, as those of the Irish for their filth and misery. These differences in their manner of living occasion equal differences in their wages; so that, while the average price of a day's labour in England may be taken at from 20d. to 2s., it cannot be taken at more than 7d. in Ireland, and 3d. in Hindostan. The habits of the people of the same countries, and the standard by which the natural rate of wages in them has been regulated at different periods have not been less fluctuating and various. The customary mode of living of the English and Scottish labourers of the present day is as widely different from that of their ancestors in the reigns of Elizabeth, James I., and Charles I., as it is from the mode of living of the labourers of France or Spain. The standard by which the necessary rate of wages was formerly regulated has been raised; there has been a greater prevalence of moral restraint; the proportion of capital to population has been increased; and the poor have learned to form more elevated opinions respecting the amount of necessaries and conveniences required for their subsistence.

But it is not necessary to travel beyond the confines of England to be satisfied of the great extent to which the rate of wages is dependent on the food and condition of the labourers. At present (1851) the wages of common field labour in Yorkshire and most parts of the north and east of England may be reckoned at about 14s. a week, whereas in Dorset, Somerset, and other south-western counties,

it is little, if anything, more than half that amount. This comparative lowness of their wages is at once a consequence and a cause of the depressed condition of the peasantry in the counties referred to. Their greater dependence on the potato, by enabling them to subsist and increase their numbers on a less expensive food, has reduced their wages; and this reduction, by encroaching on their other comforts, has depressed their condition still lower.

The natural or necessary rate of wages is not, therefore, fixed and unvarying. And though it be true that the market rate of wages can never sink permanently below its contemporary natural rate, it is no less true that this natural rate has a tendency to rise when the market rate rises, and to fall when it falls. The reason is, that the supply of labourers in the market can neither be speedily increased when wages rise, nor speedily diminished when they fall. When wages rise, a period of eighteen or twenty years must plainly elapse before the increased stimulus which the rise gives to the principle of population can be felt in the market. During all this period, therefore, the labourers have an increased command over necessaries and conveniences. Their habits are in consequence improved. And as they learn to form more exalted notions of what is required for their comfortable and decent support, the natural or necessary rate of wages is gradually augmented. But, on the other hand, when wages fall, either in consequence of a diminution of capital, or of a disproportionate increase of population, no corresponding diminution can immediately take place in the number of labourers, unless they have previously been subsisting on the smallest quantity of the cheapest species of food required to support mere animal existence. If the labourers have not been placed so very near the extreme limit of subsistence, their numbers will not be immediately reduced when wages fall by an increase of mortality; but they will be gradually reduced, partly, as already shown, in that way, and partly by a diminished number of marriages and births. And in most countries, unless the fall were both sudden and ex-

tensive, it would require some years to make the effects of increased mortality, in diminishing the supply of labour in the market, be very sensibly felt; while the force of habit, and the universal ignorance of the people with respect to the circumstances which determine the rate of wages, might prevent any effectual check being given to matrimonial connections, and consequently to the rate at which fresh labourers had been coming into market, until the misery occasioned by the restricted demand for labour on the one hand, and the undiminished supply on the other, had been generally and widely felt.

It is this circumstance—the impossibility which usually obtains of speedily adjusting the supply of labour proportionally to variations in the rate of wages—that gives to these variations the peculiar and powerful influence they exert over the condition of the labouring classes. If the supply of labour were suddenly increased when wages rise, that rise would be of no advantage to the existing labourers. It would increase their number; but it would not enable them to rise in the scale of society, or to acquire a greater command over necessaries and conveniences. And on the other hand, if the supply of labourers were suddenly diminished when wages fall, that fall would merely lessen their number without having any tendency to degrade the habits or the condition of those that survived. But, in the vast majority of instances, before a rise of wages can be countervailed by the increased number of labourers it may be supposed to be the means of bringing into the market, time is afforded for the formation of those new and improved tastes and habits, which are not the hasty product of a day, a month, or a year, but the late result of a long series of continuous impressions. After these tastes have been acquired, population will advance in a slower ratio, as compared with capital, than formerly; and the labourers will be disposed rather to defer the period of marriage, than by entering on it prematurely to depress their own condition and that of their children. But if the number of labourers cannot suddenly increase when wages

rise, neither can it suddenly diminish when they fall. A fall of wages has therefore a precisely opposite effect, and is, in most cases, as injurious to the labourer as their rise is beneficial. In whatever way wages may be restored to their former level after they have fallen, whether it be by a decrease in the number of marriages, or an increase in the number of deaths, or both, it is never, except in the rare cases already mentioned, suddenly effected. It must, generally speaking, require a considerable time before it can be brought about; and hence an extreme risk arises lest the tastes and habits of the labourers, and their opinion respecting what is necessary for their subsistence, should be lowered in the interval. When wages are considerably reduced, the poor are obliged to economise, or to submit to live on a smaller quantity of necessaries and conveniences, and those probably, too, of an inferior species than they had previously been accustomed to. And the danger is, that the coarse and scanty fare which has thus been, in the first instance, forced on them by necessity, should in time become congenial from habit. Should this unfortunately be the case, the condition of the poor would be permanently depressed; and no principle would be left in operation, that could elevate wages to their former level. Under the circumstances supposed, the cost of raising and supporting labourers would be reduced; and it is by this cost that the current rate of wages must in the end be determined. A people, for example, who have been accustomed to live chiefly on wheat, may, from a scarcity of that grain, or a fall in the rate of wages, be forced to have recourse to oats, or even potatoes, and in the event of their becoming satisfied with either, the standard of wages among them, will be permanently reduced; and instead of being, as formerly, mainly determined by the price of wheat, it will, in time to come, be mainly determined by the price of oats or potatoes. This lowering of the opinions of the labouring class with respect to the mode in which they ought to live, is perhaps the most serious of all the evils that can befall them. "If," says Mr Laing, "the English labourers, instead of considering wheaten bread and

meat necessary for their proper sustenance, were to be content with potatoes and salt herrings, the increase of pauperism amongst them would be in proportion to the diminished value of their food, and the ease of obtaining it. The man who now thinks himself ill-off without the finest bread, would then think himself entitled to marry if he could earn potatoes for himself and a family. Our pauper population would thus increase with frightful rapidity."[1] Let a population once become contented with a lower description of food, and an inferior standard of comfort, and they may bid a long adieu to anything better. And every reduction in the rate of wages, which is not of a transient description, contributes to bring about this undesirable result, unless its debasing influence be defeated by greater industry and economy, and an increased prevalence of moral restraint.

CHAPTER IV.

Disadvantage of low wages, and of having the labourers habitually fed on the cheapest species of food. Advantage of high wages.

THE opinion, that a low rate of wages is advantageous, has frequently been advocated; but we are firmly persuaded that there is none more completely destitute of foundation. If the condition of the labourers be depressed, the prosperity of the other classes can rest on no solid foundation. They always form the great bulk of every society; and wherever their wages are low, they must, of necessity, live on coarse and scanty fare. Men placed under such circumstances are without any sufficient motive to be industrious, and, instead of activity and enterprise, we have sloth, ignorance, and improvidence. The examples of such individuals,

[1] Travels in Norway, cap. 1.

or bodies of individuals, as submit quietly to have their wages reduced, and who are content if they get only mere necessaries, should never be held up for public imitation. On the contrary, everything should be done to make such apathy be esteemed discreditable. The best interests of society require that the rate of wages should be elevated as high as possible—that a taste for comforts and enjoyments should be widely diffused, and, if possible, engrafted into the national character. A low rate of wages, by rendering it impossible for increased exertions to obtain any considerable increase of comforts and enjoyments, effectually hinders such exertions from being made; and is of all others the most powerful cause of that idleness and apathy that contents itself with what can barely continue animal existence.

Ireland furnishes a striking example of the disastrous effects resulting from the depressed condition of the labouring classes. The natural or necessary rate of wages is there determined by the lowest standard. Having no taste for conveniences or luxuries, the Irish peasantry are satisfied if they have turf hovels for their habitations, rags for their raiment, and potatoes for their food. But as the potato is raised at less expense than any other variety of food hitherto cultivated in Europe, and as wages, where it forms nearly the sole subsistence of the labourers, are chiefly determined by its cost, it is evident that those who depend on it must be reduced to a state of almost irremediable distress, whenever it happens to be deficient. When the standard of wages is high—when wheat and beef, for example, form the principal food of the labourer, and porter and beer the principal part of his drink, he can bear to retrench. Such a man has room to fall. In a period of scarcity he can resort to cheaper varieties of food—to barley, oats, rice, maize, and potatoes. But he who is habitually and constantly fed on the cheapest species of food, has nothing to resort to when deprived of it. You may take from an Englishman, but you cannot take from an Irishman. The latter is already so low

that he can fall no lower. He is placed on the very verge of existence. His wages, being regulated by the cost of potatoes, will not buy him wheat, or barley, or oats. Whenever, therefore, potatoes fail, it is next to impossible he should escape falling a sacrifice to famine.

The history of the scarcities that so frequently occur in Ireland, affords many illustrations of the accuracy of the statements now made. Owing, for example, to the failure of the potato crop of 1821, the bulk of the peasantry of Clare, Limerick, and other counties bordering on the Shannon, were reduced to a state of almost absolute destitution, and had nothing but a miserable mixture consisting of a little oatmeal, nettles, and water-cresses, to subsist upon. In some instances, the potatoes, after being planted, were dug up and eaten; and, in consequence of the insufficiency and bad quality of food, disease became exceedingly prevalent, and typhus fever, in its most malignant form, carried its destructive ravages into every corner of the country. The price of potatoes rose in Limerick, in the course of a few weeks, from about 2d. to 5d. and 7d. per stone, while the price of corn sustained no material elevation, none, at least, to prevent its being sent to the then overloaded markets of England.

But it is unnecessary to go back to 1821 for an example of this sort. Notwithstanding the all but total failure of the potato crop of 1846 in all parts of Ireland, and the consequent destitution of the peasantry, there was no very considerable falling off in the exports of corn, and other articles of provision, to England, till the contributions of government and of the British public, were applied to purchase supplies for the people. And it is indeed obvious, that to whatever extremity the Irish peasantry may be reduced, they cannot relieve themselves by purchasing corn. Had wheat, barley, or oats formed the principal part of their food, corn would have been poured into Ireland, in the same way that it is poured into England, as soon as it was known that the crop was materially deficient. But a population which is habitually dependent the potato, having their wages regulated accordingly, can-

not buy corn, or any higher priced article. In periods of scarcity men cannot go from a low to a high level; they must always go from a higher to a lower. But to the Irish this is impossible. They have already reached the lowest point in the descending scale; and dearth is to them attended with all the horrors of famine.

It is, therefore, quite essential to the protection of the people from famine, in seasons when the crops happen to be deficient, that they should not subsist principally on the cheapest species of food. They may use it in limited quantities, and as a subsidiary and subordinate article; but if they once adopt it for the principal part of their diet, their wages will be proportionally reduced; and whenever a period of deficient supply occurs, they will be left without any resource.

Besides its influence in depressing wages, the potato, considered as an article of subsistence, has sundry defects peculiar to itself, which deserve the most careful attention.

In the first place, owing to the greater quantity of food raised on a given extent of land under potatoes than if it were under corn or in pasture, the population of potato-feeding countries is, *cæteris paribus*, comparatively dense, and they have, consequently, on a scarcity occurring, to deal with a proportionally greater amount of destitution. In the second place, it is a defect peculiar to the potato, or affecting it in a much greater degree than most other articles, that the surplus produce of plentiful years cannot be stored up, or kept as a reserve stock, to meet the deficiencies of bad years, but that practically the subsistence of each year is measured by the produce of that year. Probably, however, the uncertainty of its produce and its bulk, and the consequent cost and difficulty of its conveyance, are the principal drawbacks on the use of the potato. Its yield varies extremely in different years, being very large in some, while in others it is next to nothing; and owing to the bulkiness of the article, it is practically impossible materially to alleviate

the suffering occasioned by a failure of the crop in one country by importations from others. In 1846, for example, all the navy of England would have been incapable of importing potatoes, supposing they could have been got, sufficient to meet the falling off in the supply in Ireland. Hence it is, that those who principally depend on this precarious resource are almost entirely shut out from all participation in the benevolent arrangement made by Providence for equalising the variations in the harvests of particular countries by means of commerce. They have, as it were, isolated themselves, and being made to depend in a great degree on their own limited resources, are infinitely more liable to the chances of famine.

It is of as much importance to the peace and good order of society, as to the comfort and happiness of individuals, that wages should be maintained at a high elevation. The higher the notions entertained by the labouring classes of what is necessary for their support, and the greater the number and the intensity of their artificial wants, the more secure is their position. When a revulsion takes place in any great department of industry, or when the crops fail, work-people who have been in the enjoyment of a considerable amount of luxuries, can, by parting with them, still obtain a sufficient supply of necessaries. But those who are divested of all artificial wants, who neither drink ale nor use tobacco, who care neither for comfortable clothes nor comfortable lodgings, and who are satisfied if they have as many potatoes as will suffice for their support and that of their families, can make no retrenchments. Such people cannot part with what is convenient to obtain what is necessary. Their subsistence having been reduced to a *minimum*, famine must unavoidably follow any reduction of its quantity.

We do not, however, mean by anything now stated, to say, or insinuate, that artificial wants, however different, are equally advantageous. Some of them, such as the prevalent ...te for gin and tobacco, especially the former, cannot be

too much regretted. Intemperance is the bane, the leading vice, of the lower classes of this country. They are impoverished by the loss of the immense sums lavished on this miserable gratification, at the same time that indulgence in it leads to idleness and crime, undermines the constitution, and brings on wretchedness and premature old age. Nothing, therefore, would be so likely to be advantageous to the labouring class as the substitution of some other and less exceptionable taste, such as the desire to have better houses and furniture, better clothes, or better food, for the taste for gin and tobacco. But, bad as the latter is, still it is better than none. Were the labouring class to relinquish the taste for gin and tobacco, without substituting some one else of equal potency in its stead, their wages would be reduced accordingly. And when a period of distress came they would be still less able than at present to retrench, to abandon superfluities or luxuries, that they might acquire necessaries. And if they had nothing on which to fall back when there was a want of employment, or the crop happened to be deficient, what would then be the fate of the richer class of citizens, if there were any such in the country? It is a just observation of Lord Bacon, that "*Of all rebellions those of the belly are the worst.*" Is it possible for human beings without food to be quiet, orderly, and to respect the rights of others? Is it to be supposed, that those who have nothing will submit to be starved without previously attempting to seize on the property of others? Whatever may be said to the contrary, famine and the virtues of patience and resignation are not on very companionable terms. Much, unquestionably, of the crime and bloodshed with which Ireland has been disgraced and deluged, must be traced to former oppression and the character of her people. But much also has been owing to the recklessness and despair occasioned by their abject poverty, and to their habitual dependence on the potato. The right of property will never be respected by those who are destitute of all property, and whose wages are totally incompetent to afford them the means of acquiring it. Such

persons are disposed to regard it rather as a bulwark thrown up to secure the interests of a few favourites of fortune, than as being essential to the public welfare. It is in those countries only where labour is well rewarded, and where the mass of the people are so situated that they may save some portion of their earnings, and acquire a *stake in the hedge*, that they become interested in the support of the great fundamental principles necessary to the existence of society. These they otherwise regard either with indifference or aversion, and attack them on the slightest provocation.

It has been contended by Arthur Young, Franklin, and many other philosophers, of whose benevolence and zeal in the cause of humanity no doubt can be entertained, and to whose opinions on most subjects great deference is due, that high wages, instead of encouraging industry, become a fruitful source of idleness and dissipation. It is indeed a common allegation, that if the poor can earn as much in three or four days as will support them during the week, they will absent themselves for the remainder of it from their employment, and indulge in all manner of excesses. Nothing, however, can be more incorrect than to apply such representations to the poor generally. In every country and situation of life, numbers of individuals will no doubt be always found who are careless of the future, and intent only on present enjoyment; and where wages are low, and employment is subject to much fluctuation, the improvident class becomes comparatively large. But unless the population be at once exceedingly poor, and their ideas of what is necessary for their proper support exceedingly degraded, the principle of accumulation always predominates in aggregate bodies over the passion for expense. Wherever wages are so low, as to render it impossible for an ordinary increase of exertion to make any material addition to the comforts and conveniences of the labourers, they invariably sink into a state of idleness, nd of sluggish and stupid indifference. But the desire to e in the world, and to improve our condition, is too deeply

seated in the human breast ever to be wholly eradicated. And as soon as labour is rendered more productive, as soon as an increase of industry brings along with it a proportional increase of comforts and enjoyments, indolence gives place to exertion; a taste for conveniences and enjoyments gradually diffuses itself; increased exertions are made to obtain them; and ultimately the workman considers it discreditable to be without them.

"The liberal reward of labour," says Adam Smith, "as it encourages the propagation, so it increases the industry, of the common people. The wages of labour are the encouragement of industry, which, like every other human quality, improves in proportion to the encouragement it receives. A plentiful subsistence increases the bodily strength of the labourer; and the comfortable hope of bettering his condition, and of ending his days perhaps in ease and plenty, animates him to exert that strength to the utmost. Where wages are high, accordingly, we shall always find the workmen more active, diligent, and expeditious, than where they are low; in England, for example, than in Scotland; in the neighbourhood of great towns than in remote country places. Some workmen, indeed, when they can earn in four days what will maintain them through the week, will lie idle the other three. This, however, is by no means the case with the greater part. Workmen, on the contrary, when they are liberally paid by the piece, are very apt to overwork themselves, and to ruin their health and constitution in a few years. A carpenter in London, and in some other places, is not supposed to last in his utmost vigour above eight years. Something of the same kind happens in many other trades, in which the workmen are paid by the piece; as they generally are in manufactures, and even in country labour, wherever wages are higher than ordinary. Almost every class of artificers is subject to some peculiar infirmity, occasioned by excessive application to their peculiar species of work. Ramazzini, an eminent Italian physician, has written a particular book concerning such diseases. We do not reckon our soldiers

the most industrious set of people among us: Yet when soldiers have been employed in some particular sorts of work, and liberally paid by the piece, their officers have frequently been obliged to stipulate with the undertaker, that they should not be allowed to earn above a certain sum every day, according to the rate at which they were paid. Till this stipulation was made, mutual emulation, and the desire of greater gain, frequently prompted them to overwork themselves, and to hurt their health by excessive labour. Excessive application during four days of the week, is frequently the real cause of the idleness of the other three, so much and so loudly complained of. Great labour, either of mind or body, continued for several days together, is in most men naturally followed by a great desire of relaxation, which, if not restrained by force, or by some strong necessity, is almost irresistible. It is the call of nature, which requires to be relieved by some indulgence, sometimes of ease only, but sometimes too of dissipation and diversion. If it is not complied with, the consequences are often dangerous and sometimes fatal, and such as almost always sooner or later bring on the peculiar infirmity of the trade. If masters would always listen to the dictates of reason and humanity, they have frequently occasion rather to moderate than to animate the application of many of their workmen. It will be found, I believe, in every sort of trade, that the man who works so moderately as to be able to work constantly, not only preserves his health the longest, but, in the course of the year, executes the greatest quantity of work."[1]

If an increase of wages ever discourages industry, it must be the industry of those who have previously been straining every nerve to obtain mere subsistence, or the forced industry of the indolent and the dissolute. And even to produce this effect on them, the increase must be sudden and transitory, not gradual and permanent. We are warranted in affirming, that a steadily high rate of wages never has had, and never

[1] Wealth of Nations, p. 37.

will have, any such effect. It is nugatory to pretend, that if labourers be capable of earning, by an ordinary degree of application, more than is sufficient for their decent support, they alone, of all the various ranks and orders of the community, will waste the surplus in riot and debauchery. They have the same common sense, they are actuated by the same passions, feelings, and principles as other men. And being so, it is clear they will not generally be guilty of such inconsiderate conduct. But, to lay aside reasoning, and appeal to facts, does not the state of industry in countries where wages are low, compared with its state in those where they are high, prove all that has now been said? Have the *low* wages of the Irish, the Poles, and the Hindoos, made them industrious? or the *high* wages of the Americans, the English, and the Hollanders, made them lazy, riotous, and profligate? Just the contrary. The former are notoriously and proverbially indolent, whereas the latter are laborious, active, and enterprising. The experience of all ages and nations, proves that liberal wages are the keenest spur to assiduous exertion. Wherever they are high, workmen have not only a considerable command over necessaries and conveniences, but also a considerable power of accumulation. And though the number of those who culpably neglect, partly from one cause and partly from another, to avail themselves of the means in their power to acquire something like a security against want, may in a populous country like this, be very large, still it would be most inaccurate to say that such is generally the case with the poor, or that they are insensible to, or incapable of appreciating, the blessings of independence. This, we admit, is the case with far too many; but it is not the case with the majority. And we would fain hope, that as sounder opinions on such subjects become more and more diffused, and vicious habits bring along with them a greater share of the public contempt, this majority will increase. The most inconsiderate, however, as well as the most considerate individuals, are alive to the advantage of high wages. Though they spend them differently, they are

equally acceptable to them both. Wherever they obtain, every man feels that he derives a tangible advantage from the right of private property, and that otherwise he should not be able peaceably to enjoy the fruits of his industry; and he consequently becomes interested in its support, and in the support of the public tranquillity. It is not when wages are high and provisions abundant, but when they are low, and the harvest less productive than usual, that the manufacturing and thickly-peopled districts are disturbed by popular clamours and commotions. It was said of old, *Nihil lætius est populo Romano saturo.* And this is not the case in Rome or Britain only, but in all countries. *Dans aucune histoire, on ne recontre une seule trait qui prouve que l'aisance du peuple par le travail a nui à son obeissance.*[1] In fact there cannot be a doubt, notwithstanding all that has been said and written to the contrary, that high wages are the most effectual means of promoting industry and frugality among the labouring class, and of attaching them to the institutions under which they live; while they have the farther advantage, if properly husbanded, of insuring a comfortable subsistence and good education to youth, and of preventing old age and sickness from being driven to seek an asylum in workhouses and hospitals.

Poverty, like vice, is never so little feared as it is by those who are already entangled in its meshes. It is a familiar observation, that the lower we descend in the scale of society, the nearer we come to the haunts of vice, poverty, and wretchedness, the more is recklessness found to prevail. But, though the circumstance be of much greater importance, it is not so often remarked, that this very recklessness is at once the most efficient cause, and the most common result, of the wretchedness so much and so justly deplored. Abstinence is usually least practised by those to whom it is most essential. An ignorant and an impoverished population eagerly grasp, like the lower animals, at immediate gratifications. And it is not

[1] Forbonnais, *Recherches sur les Finances*, Tome i. p 100.

till some circumstance occurs to improve their condition, either by directly increasing the demand for labour, or by awakening them to a sense of the folly and turpitude of their conduct, that they begin to look forward to the results of their actions.

It may perhaps be urged that these statements must be fallacious; for happiness, we are told, does not depend on a man's being supplied with various and costly articles, or on his accommodation being superior, but on his being on a level with those around him. And it is said that an Irishman, plentifully supplied with potatoes, is quite as contented, and has as keen a relish of life, as a London workman, who must have bread, beef, and porter. But, though this may be true, it is little to the purpose. An American Indian, who has just killed a buffalo, has less care perhaps, and a more intense feeling of enjoyment, than the richest merchant of New York. But are we, on that account, to set the savage on the same level as the civilised man? or poverty on the same level as wealth? It may be all very well so long as the Irishman has his potatoes, and the Indian his buffaloes. But what is their condition when these happen to fail? They have no resource, nothing else upon which to retreat. And the famine that, under such circumstances, sweeps off whole tribes of Indians, would make equal ravages among the Irish, were it not mitigated or warded off by contributions raised by others.

Nothing, therefore, we repeat it again, can be so disadvantageous to any people, as a permanent depression in the rate of wages, or a decline in the opinions of the labouring class, respecting the articles necessary for their subsistence. No country can be flourishing where wages are low; and none can be long depressed where they are high. The labourers are the thews and sinews of industry. Their numbers are not estimated, like those of the other classes, by hundreds, by thousands, or even by hundreds of thousands, but by *millions!* It is by them that our machinery is constructed and kept in motion; that our agriculture, manufactures, and commerce, are successfully carried on; and that we have

been enabled easily to support burdens that could hardly have been supported by any other people.[1] Everything, then, that may have the slightest tendency to depress their condition, or to sink them in the social scale, should be most particularly guarded against. Those who feed and clothe all the rest, should themselves be well fed and well clothed. They are the foundation of the social pyramid; and so long as the standard of wages continues high, this foundation will be solid and secure; for so long will the labourers be industrious and orderly. But if this standard be permanently reduced, if the labourers be once brought to place their principal dependence on the cheapest food, and to rest satisfied with mere necessaries, the want of sufficient motives to exertion will infallibly render them idle and dissipated. The spirit of industry by which they are now so eminently distinguished, will evaporate; and with it the prosperity and tranquillity of Britain!

These statements sufficiently show, that it is as much for the interest of all governments, with a view to their own security, as it is their duty with a view to the happiness of their subjects, to do all in their power to improve the condition of the labouring classes, by adopting such wise and liberal measures as may be most favourable to the increase of capital, and as may contribute most to elevate the opinions of the labourers, and the standard of wages. It will be found, too, on taking an enlarged view of the subject, that the real and permanent interest of the capitalists, or employers of labour, should point out to them the propriety of their adopting a similar course. At first sight, it does indeed appear as if their interests were opposed to those of the labourers; but such is not really the case. The interests of both are at bottom identical; and it has been already seen that all the wealth of the country applicable to the payment of wages is uniformly,

[1] A great many taxes have been reduced and repealed since the peace; and several of the continental states are now heavier taxed than this.

in all ordinary cases, divided among the labourers. It is true, that when wages are increased, profits are at the same time most commonly reduced. But it does not, therefore, follow that capitalists would be placed in a really preferable situation were wages to fall and profits to rise. The rate of profit, how important soever, is not the only thing to which they have to look. Security and tranquillity are still more indispensable than high profits to the successful prosecution of industrious undertakings. And these are rarely found where wages are low, and the mass of the people immersed in poverty and destitution. Wherever this is the case, the poor are deterred by nothing, save the fear of the law, from engaging in all sorts of dangerous projects; and are always ready to listen to those who tell them that their unhappy condition is a consequence of misgovernment, and of the selfishness of their employers. Under such unfortunate circumstances, industry and enterprise are paralysed, and the condition of the capitalists is, if anything, worse than that of the labourers.

Hence, while it is impossible for the employers of labour artificially to reduce the rate of wages, it is further obvious that such reduction, could it be effected, would rarely, if ever, be for their advantage; for unless wages were previously at an unusually high elevation, it would necessarily be followed by a diminution of that security which is so essential to their interests. The conduct of those who pretend to wish for the improvement of the poor, and who at the sametime complain of high wages, is in fact contradictory, and must be ascribed to hypocrisy or folly, or both—the former because an increase of wages is the only, or at all events the most effectual and ready means by which the condition of the poor can be really improved, and the latter because high wages are incomparably the best defence of the estates and mansions of the rich.

Paley says, "It is in the choice of every man of rank and property to become the benefactor or the scourge, the guardian or the tyrant, the example or the corrupter of the virtue, of his servants, his tenants, his neighbourhood; to be the

author to them of peace or contention, of sobriety or dissoluteness, of comfort or distress."[1] This statement is more applicable to parties living in the country than to those who live in towns, or who carry on large manufacturing establishments, the masters of which can know little or nothing of the work-people in their employ, except what they may learn of their conduct in the mill or factory. But it is, notwithstanding, in a greater or less degree, applicable to all varieties of employers; their respective situations imposing on them corresponding obligations and responsibilities. Those who neglect the means of benefiting their inferiors, which Providence has placed within their command, are culpable in more ways than one. It would not, indeed, be easy to overrate the good that might eventually be accomplished were masters, who have the opportunity, generally to bestow some little attention on the character and conduct of those in their service; to assist them in establishing schools and useful libraries; and to satisfy them that those who distinguish themselves by the superior condition of their dwellings and families, their greater deposits in the savings' bank, &c., will not be overlooked or forgotten. In doing this, they would contribute to raise the character of the labouring class, and to strengthen the foundations of the public peace and prosperity.

Much has latterly been said, and with great justice, in regard to the beneficial effects that could hardly fail to follow from an improvement in the dwellings of the poor. In towns, where the injurious influence of the over-crowded, ill ventilated, and filthy habitations of the lower classes is especially evident, a good deal might probably be effected by judicious police regulations in regard to the building and occupation of inferior houses. And in the country, where cottages are often of a very miserable description, the landlords might, with a little attention and outlay, effect the greatest improvements. Besides the various benefits that it would confer on the cottiers, there are few things that would redound

[1] Works, V. 97, edition 1819.

so much to the credit of the owners of estates, or add so much to the beauty of the latter, as having them studded with neat, clean, and comfortable cottages.[1]

But though the conduct of government and of the wealthier classes, as regards the poor, were all that could be desired, still its direct influence over individuals must necessarily be confined to a comparatively small number of cases, while its indirect influence over the mass is usually feeble and but slowly manifested. What others can do for them is, in truth, but as the small dust of the balance compared with what they may do for themselves. The situation of most men not born to affluence, is always in great measure dependent on their own exertions. And this is most especially true of the labouring classes, the great majority of whom can owe nothing to patronage or favour. Industry, frugality, and forethought, are their only friends. But, happily, they are all-powerful. And how unpromising soever their situation, those who avail themselves of their willing assistance, are never disappointed, but secure in the end their own comfort and that of their families. Those, on the contrary, who neglect their aid, though otherwise placed under the most favourable circumstances, inevitably sink into a state of misery. The contrast between a well cultivated field and one that is neglected and overrun with thorns and brambles, is not greater than the contrast between the condition of the diligent and slothful, the careful and the wasteful labourers. The cottages of the former are clean, neat, and comfortable, their children well clothed and well instructed; whereas the cottages of the latter are slatternly and uncomfortable, being often little better than pig-styes, and their children in rags and ignorant. No increase of wages can be of any permanent advantage to the one class, while the smallest increase conduces to the well-being of the other.

[1] The Duke of Bedford, and some other noblemen and gentlemen, have done themselves much honour by the improvements they have effected in the cottages on their estates.

Vigilando, agendo, bene consulendo, prospere omnia cedunt. But on the other hand, *ubi socordiæ te atque ignaviæ tradideris, nequicquam deos implores; irati infestique sunt.* "If," says Barrow, "wit or wisdom be the head, if honesty be the heart, industry is the right hand of every vocation; without which the shrewdest insight and best intention can execute nothing." (Second Sermon on Industry.)

CHAPTER V.

Different Rates of Wages in Different Employments—Circumstances on which these Differences depend.

In the previous chapters of this Treatise, we have endeavoured to investigate the circumstances which determine wages in general. But every one is aware, that while their ordinary rate in some employments does not perhaps exceed 1s., 2s., or 3s. a-day, it may at the same time amount to 4s., 5s., 6s. or upwards in others. The consideration of the circumstances which occasion this inequality, will form the subject of this chapter.

Were all employments equally agreeable and healthy, the labour to be performed in each of the same intensity, and did they all require the same degree of dexterity and skill on the part of the labourer, it is evident, supposing industry to be quite free, that there could be no permanent or considerable difference in the wages paid to those engaged in them. For if, on the one hand, the work-people engaged in a particular business earned *more* than their neighbours, the latter would gradually leave their employments to engage in it, until their influx had reduced wages to their common level; and if, on the other hand, those employed in a particular business earned *less* than their neighbours, there would be an efflux of hands from it, until, by their diminution, the wages of those who remained had been raised to the common level. In

point of fact, however, the intensity of the labour in different employments, the degree of skill and training required to carry them on, their healthiness, and the estimation in which they are held, differ exceedingly; and these varying circumstances necessarily occasion proportional differences in the wages of those engaged in them. Wages are a compensation paid to the labourer for the exertion of his physical powers, skill, and ingenuity. They, therefore, vary according to the severity of the labour to be performed, and to the skill and ingenuity required. A jeweller or engraver, for example, must be paid higher wages than a common farm-servant or day-labourer. A long course of training is necessary to instruct a man in the business of jewelling and engraving; and if the cost of this training were not made up to him by a higher rate of wages, instead of learning so difficult an art, he would addict himself, in preference, to such employments as hardly require any instruction. Hence the discrepancies that actually obtain in the rate of wages are confined within certain limits—increasing or diminishing it only in so far as may be necessary fully to equalise the unfavourable or favourable circumstances attending any employment.

The following have been stated by Smith as the principal circumstances which occasion the rate of wages in some employments, to fall below, and in others to rise above, the *average* rate of wages:—

1*st*. The agreeableness or disagreeableness of the employments.

2*d*. The easiness or cheapness, or the difficulty and expense, of learning them.

3*d*. The constancy or inconstancy of the employments.

4*th*. The small or great trust that must be reposed in those who carry them on.

5*th*. The probability or improbability of succeeding in them.

First. The *agreeableness* of an employment may arise either

from physical or moral causes—from the lightness of the labour, its healthiness or cleanliness, the degree of estimation in which it is held, &c.; and its disagreeableness arises from the opposite circumstances—from the severity of the labour, its unhealthiness or dirtiness, the degree of odium attached to it, &c. The rate of wages must obviously vary with the variations of circumstances exerting so powerful an influence over the labourers. It is not to be supposed that any individual should be so blind to his own interests as to engage or continue in an occupation considered as mean and disreputable, or where the labour is severe, if he obtain only the same rate of wages that may be obtained by engaging in employments in higher estimation, and where the labour is comparatively light. The labour of the ploughman is not unhealthy, nor is it either irksome or disagreeable; but being more severe than that of the shepherd, it is uniformly better rewarded. This principle holds universally. Gilders, type-founders, smiths, distillers, and all who carry on unhealthy, disagreeable, and dangerous businesses, invariably obtain a higher rate of wages than those artificers who having equal skill are engaged in more desirable occupations. The unfavourable opinion entertained respecting some businesses, has a similar effect on wages as if the labour to be performed in them were unusually unhealthy or severe. The trade of a butcher, for example, is generally looked upon as low and discreditable, and this feeling occasions such a disinclination on the part of young men to enter it, as can only be overcome by the high wages which butchers are said to earn, notwithstanding the lightness of their labour. This also is the reason why the keeper of a small inn or tavern, who is never master of his own house, and who is exposed to the brutality of every drunkard, exercises one of the most profitable of the common trades. The contrary circumstances have contrary effects. Hunting and fishing form, in an advanced stage of society, among the most agreeable amusements of the rich. But from their being held in this degree of estimation, and from the lightness of their labour, those who practise them as a trade

generally receive very small wages, and are proverbially poor. The agreeableness and healthiness of their employments, rather than the lightness of their labour, or the little skill which they require, seem to be the principal cause of the redundant numbers, and consequent low wages, of the workmen employed in ordinary field labour.

The grinding of knives, razors, and other cutting instruments, is a very deleterious trade. The minute particles of steel thrown off from the metal in the process of grinding float in the atmosphere, and being taken into the lungs, occasion consumptions and other diseases of the respiratory system. Various contrivances have been suggested to obviate this result, but hitherto with no very marked success; and the mortality in this class of work-people continues to be very high. Their wages are in consequence considerably above the common level. But they are not so high as might have been anticipated from the extreme risk attending the business. And it is a curious fact, attested, we believe, by universal experience, that great danger leads rather to recklessness than to any systematic efforts to lessen or obviate the risk. Dissipation and excess of all kinds are never so prevalent as in cities subject to the plague. And the grinders are said to be, notwithstanding their high wages, the most depressed, dissipated, and reckless of the Sheffield workmen.[1] These, however, though they be the common, are not the universal characteristics of the class; and those workmen who are sober, and who use the necessary precautions, are comparatively comfortable and long-lived.

Mining, though it cannot be called an unhealthy employment, is extremely disagreeable, dirty, and dangerous. And it is really surprising that individuals should be found who are ready, without stipulating for any very extraordinary wages, to pass their time in working in coal and other mines; generally in a crouching posture; and sometimes, when the beds are narrow, lying on their sides, exposed all the while to

[1] Letter on Sheffield, *Morning Chronicle*, 15th February 1850.

the imminent risk of being blown to pieces. The recklessness of most miners, or their insensibility to danger, is indeed quite extraordinary. Many of them object to use the Davy lamp, because, though it lessens danger, it at the same time lessens light. And as they will not themselves take the necessary precautions, it might perhaps be expedient to interest their masters in their observance, by making them liable for the support of the widows and orphan children of the miners who lose their lives by explosions.

The quicksilver mines of Almaden, in Spain, some of the processes in which are extremely unhealthy, were formerly wrought by convicts; but this plan has been abandoned, and they are now wrought by labourers hired for the purpose. The latter, however, do not continue in the mines during the entire year. They leave them for some months in the summer and autumn, when they are most unhealthy; and, by means of this precaution, their health is comparatively well preserved.

The severe discipline, the various hardships to which common soldiers are exposed, and the little chance they have of arriving at a higher station, are unfavourable circumstances, which, it might be supposed, would require a high rate of wages to counterbalance. It is found, however, that there are few common trades in which labourers can be procured for such low wages as those for which recruits are willing to enlist in the army. Nor is it difficult to discover the causes of this apparent anomaly. Except when actually engaged in warlike operations, a soldier is comparatively idle; while his free, dissipated, and generally adventurous life, the splendour of his uniform, the imposing spectacle of military parades and evolutions, and the martial music by which they are accompanied, exert a most seductive influence over the young and inconsiderate. The dangers and privations of campaigns are undervalued, while the chances of advancement are proportionally exaggerated in their sanguine and heated imaginations. "Without regarding the danger," says Smith, "soldiers are never obtained so easily as at the beginning of

a new war; and though they have scarce any chance of preferment, they figure to themselves, in their youthful fancies, a thousand occasions of acquiring honour and distinction which never occur. These romantic hopes make the whole price of their blood. Their pay is less than that of common labourers, and in actual service their fatigues are much greater."

It is observed by Dr Smith, that the chances of succeeding in the sea service are greater than in the army. "The son of a creditable labourer or artificer may frequently go to sea with his father's consent; but if he enlists as a soldier, it is always without it. Other people see some chance of his making something by the one trade: nobody but himself sees any of his making anything by the other." But the allurements to enlist in the army are, notwithstanding, found to be much greater than those which prompt young men to enter the navy. The life of a sailor is perhaps more adventurous than that of a soldier; but he has no regular uniform; his employment is comparatively dirty and disagreeable; his labour more severe; and while at sea, he suffers a species of imprisonment, and cannot, like the soldier, excite either the envy or admiration of others. In consequence, the wages of seamen almost invariably exceed those of soldiers; and there is a greater difficulty of obtaining recruits at the breaking out of a war.

In England, the disadvantages and drawbacks naturally incident to a seafaring life, have been considerably increased by the practice of impressment. The violence and injustice to which sailors are exposed, by their liability to impressment, tend to prevent young men from entering on board ship, and thus, by artificially lessening the supply of sailors, raise their wages above their natural level, to the extreme injury both of the queen's and the merchant service. "The custom of impressment puts a freeborn British sailor on the same footing as a Turkish slave. The Grand Seignior cannot do a more absolute act than to order a man to be dragged away from his family, and against his will run his head

against the mouth of a cannon; and if such acts should be frequent in Turkey, upon any one set of useful men, would it not drive them away to other countries, and thin their numbers yearly? and would not the remaining few double or triple their wages? which is the case with our sailors, in time of war, to the great detriment of our commerce."[1]

In proof of the accuracy of this statement, it may be mentioned, that while the wages of all other sorts of labourers and artisans are uniformly higher in the United States than in England, those of sailors are generally lower. The reason is, that the navy of the United States is manned by means of voluntary enlistment only. The Americans are desirous of becoming a great naval power, and they have wisely relinquished a practice which would have driven their best sailors from their service, and have forced them to man their fleet with the sweepings of their gaols.

It has been estimated, that there were above 16,000 British sailors on board American ships at the close of last war; and the wages of our seamen, which in time of peace rarely exceed 40s. or 50s. a-month, had then risen to 100s. and 120s. This extraordinary influx of British seamen into the American service, and no less extraordinary rise in their wages at home, can be accounted for only by our continuing to resort to impressment after it has been abandoned by the United States. Formerly our seamen were in the habit, on the breaking out of a war, of deserting to Holland; but the difference of language was an insuperable obstacle to their carrying this practice to any very injurious extent. Deserters to the United States do not, however, encounter any such obstacle. There our sailors are assured of a safe asylum among their kindred and friends—among those whose language, religion, customs, and habits are identical with their own—and who are anxious to avail themselves of every means by which they may draw them to their service. The

[1] Richardson's Essay on the Causes of the Decline of Foreign Trade. Ed. 1756, p. 24.

abolition of impressment will be indispensable to countervail such overpowering inducements to desertion. And as it has been shown, that impressment is not really necessary for the manning of the fleet,[1] we trust that it may be abolished; and that the efforts of the Americans to increase their naval power may not be assisted by our obstinately clinging to a system fraught with injustice and oppression.

The officers of the army and navy, and many of those functionaries who fill situations of great trust and responsibility, receive only a small pecuniary remuneration. The consideration attached to such situations, and the influence they confer on their possessors, form a principal part of their salary.

Secondly, The wages of labour in particular businesses vary according to the comparative facility with which they may be learned.

There are several sorts of labour which a man may perform without any, or with but very little, previous instruction; and in which he will, consequently, gain a certain rate of wages from the moment he is employed. But, in civilised societies, a great variety of employments can be carried on by those only who have been regularly instructed in them. And it is evident, that the wages of such skilled labourers must exceed the wages of those who are comparatively rude, so as to afford them a sufficient compensation for the time they have lost and the expense they have incurred, in their education. Suppose, to illustrate this principle, that the ordinary rate of wages paid to unskilled labourers is £35 a-year: If the education of a skilled labourer—a jeweller or engraver, for example—and his maintenance up to the period when he begins to support himself, cost £300 more than is required for the maintenance of an unskilled labourer up to the same period, it is quite obvious the former will not be in so good a situation as his unskilled neighbours, unless his wages exceed

[1] Wealth of Nations—Note XII.

theirs by a sum sufficient not only to yield him the customary rate of profit on the extra sum of £300, expended on his education and maintenance, but to replace the sum itself previously to the probable termination of his life. If he obtain less than this, he will be underpaid; and if he obtain more, he will be overpaid, and there will be an influx of new entrants, until their competition has reduced wages to their proper level.

The policy of Great Britain, as of most other European nations, has added to the necessary cost of breeding up skilled labourers, by forcing them to serve as apprentices for a longer period than is in most cases necessary to obtain a knowledge of the trades they mean to exercise. But, as the wages of labour must be proportioned, not only to the skill and dexterity of the labourer, but also to the time he has spent, and the difficulties and expense to which he has been put in learning his business, it is plain, that if an individual be compelled to serve an apprenticeship of *seven* years to a business which he might have learned in two or three years, he must obtain a proportionally higher rate of wages after the expiration of his apprenticeship, than would otherwise have sufficed for his remuneration. The institution of unnecessarily long apprenticeships is, therefore, productive of a double injury. It injures the employers of workmen, by artificially raising the wages of their journeymen; and it injures the workmen, from its tendency to generate idle and dissipated habits, by making them pass so large a portion of their youth without any sufficient motive to be industrious.

By the common law of England, every man has a right to employ himself at pleasure in every lawful trade. But this sound principle was almost entirely subverted by a statute passed, in compliance with the solicitations of the corporate bodies, in the 5th year of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, commonly called the Statute of Apprenticeship. It enacted that no person should, for the future, exercise any trade, craft, or mystery, at that time exercised in England or Wales, unless he had previously served to it an apprenticeship of *seven*

years at least; and what had before been a bye-law of a few corporations, thus became the general and statute law of the kingdom. Fortunately, the courts of law were always singularly disinclined to enforce the provisions of this statute. Though the words of the act plainly include the whole kingdom of England and Wales, it was interpreted to refer only to *market towns;* and it was also interpreted to refer only to those trades which had been practised in England when the statute was passed, and to have no reference to such as had been subsequently introduced. This interpretation gave occasion to several very absurd and even ludicrous distinctions. It was adjudged, for example, that a coachmaker could neither himself make nor employ a journeyman to make his coach-wheels, but must buy them of a master wheelwright, this latter trade having been exercised in England before the 5th of Elizabeth. But a wheelwright, though he had never served an apprenticeship to a coachmaker, might either make himself, or employ journeymen to make coaches, the trade of a coachmaker not being within the statute, because not exercised in England at the time when it was passed. The contradiction and absurdity of these regulations, and the impolicy and injurious operation of the statute, had long been obvious; but so slow is the progress of sound legislation, and so powerful the opposition to every change affecting private interests, that its repeal did not take place until 1814. The Act for this purpose did not, however, interfere with any of the existing rights, privileges, or bye-laws of the different legally constituted corporations. But wherever these do not interpose, the formation of apprenticeships and their duration is now left to be adjusted by the parties themselves.

The class of female domestic servants comprises one of the largest divisions of the labouring population, and that, perhaps, which is best provided for. And as most descriptions of in-door female labour may be practised with but little training, it may seem difficult to account for the high wages paid to domestics, and for their superior condition as com-

pared with needle-women, washer-women, and those females generally who depend on chance employment. But, though in many respects desirable, the situation of domestic servants, whether male or female, has several considerable drawbacks. They are subject to numerous restraints. And, besides performing their respective menial offices, they are obliged to conform, whether they like them or not, to the rules and regulations of the families in which they live. Most people have, however, a disinclination to be thus dictated to by others. And those who consent to execute menial offices at the bidding of masters and mistresses, feel that they are engaged in what is reckoned a mean and servile employment, and that they occupy a low position in the public estimation. There is, we believe, much ill-founded prejudice in the estimate that is thus commonly formed of the station of household servants. We do not well see, supposing their education and other attainments to be equal, why a man's servants should be deemed to be of a lower class than his tradesmen. But such, whether right or wrong, is the opinion of the public; and its influence, and the various restraints to which they are subject, prevent many from entering service, and by lessening their numbers, contribute to raise the wages of those engaged in it.

These circumstances account, in so far, for what has been reckoned the extraordinary fact of great distress frequently prevailing amongst needle-women in London, while the condition of female servants is so very good. But very few of the former class have any desire to range themselves in the latter. They are mostly the daughters of professional people, decayed tradesmen, shopkeepers, and such like parties; and have from infancy been taught to look upon domestics as a lower class, to which, rather than descend, they would undergo any privation. And it is not to be denied, that their condition, besides its higher place in the public estimation, has some real and some supposititious advantages on its side. If they be less comfortably provided for than household servants, they at all events enjoy a greater degree of freedom; and

have more opportunities of becoming known, and of forming connections and *liaisons*, sometimes of a more and sometimes of a less respectable kind. And thus it is that domestics owe to the servitude in which they are placed, and the unjustly low estimation in which they are held, their high wages, and comparatively comfortable condition.

The case of the hand-loom weavers affords a striking illustration of the unfavourable influence which the easy acquisition and conduct of a business usually has over the condition of those engaged in it. The art of weaving most fabrics may be learned with the greatest facility. And the lightness of the work, and the circumstance of its being principally carried on in the houses of the weavers, who are assisted by their families, make it be resorted to by a very large class of persons, many of whom are of weakly constitutions, and unable to engage in most other employments. Hence the wages of hand-loom weavers have been almost always below the ordinary level of wages in the generality of businesses. Latterly they have, through the increasing competition of power-looms, been reduced to a very low rate indeed, and the weavers have frequently been involved in extreme distress. But despite their low wages, the probability is, that the spread of power-looms will in the end effect the all but total annihilation of the hand-weaving business. And there can be no doubt that the labouring class, as well as the other classes, will eventually gain by the change. In the meantime, however, the weavers have strong claims on the public sympathy; and every practicable means should be tried that may seem most likely to abridge and facilitate the painful state of transition in which they are involved, by introducing their children to other businesses, and by facilitating their emigration, or otherwise.

Thirdly, The wages of labour, in different employments, vary with the constancy and inconstancy of employment.

Employment is much more constant in some trades than in others. Many trades can only be carried on in particular

states of the weather, and seasons of the year; and if the workmen, who are engaged in such trades, cannot easily find employment in others during the time they are thrown out of them, their wages must be proportionally augmented. A journeyman jeweller, weaver, shoemaker, or tailor, for example, may, under ordinary circumstances, reckon upon obtaining constant employment. But masons, bricklayers, paviors, and, in general, all those workmen who carry on their business in the open air, are liable to perpetual interruptions. Their wages must, however, not only suffice to maintain them while they are employed, but also during the time they are necessarily idle. And they ought also to afford them, as Dr Smith has remarked, some compensation for those anxious and desponding moments which the thought of so precarious a situation must sometimes occasion.

This principle shows the fallacy of the opinion so generally entertained respecting the great earnings of porters, hackney coachmen, watermen, and generally of all workmen employed only for short periods, and on particular occasions. Such persons frequently make as much in an hour or two as a regularly employed workman makes in a day; but this greater hire, during the time they are employed, is found to be only a bare compensation for the labour they perform, and for the time they are necessarily idle. Instead of making money, such persons are almost invariably poorer than those who are engaged in more constant occupations.

The interruption to employments occasioned by the celebration of holidays, has a similar effect on wages. There are countries in which the holidays, excluding Sundays, make nearly a third part of the year; and the necessary wages of labour must there be about a third part, or 33⅓ per cent., greater than they probably would be were these holidays abolished.

Fourthly, The wages of labour vary according to the small or great trust reposed in the workmen.

"The wages of goldsmiths and jewellers are everywhere superior to those of many other workmen, not only of equal, but of much superior ingenuity; on account of the precious materials with which they are intrusted.

"We trust our health to the physician; our fortune, and sometimes our life and reputation, to the lawyer and attorney. Such confidence could not safely be reposed in people of a very mean or low condition. Their reward must be such, therefore, as may give them that rank in the society which so important a trust requires. The long time and the great expense which must be laid out in their education, when combined with this circumstance, necessarily enhances still further the price of their labour."[1]

Fifthly, The wages of labour in different employments vary according to the probability or improbability of success in them.

This cause of variation chiefly affects the wages of the higher class of labourers, or of those who practise what are usually denominated liberal professions.

If a young man be bound apprentice to a shoemaker or a tailor, there is hardly any doubt but he will attain to an ordinary degree of proficiency and expertness in his business, and that he will be able to live by it. But if he be bound apprentice to a lawyer, a painter, a sculptor, or a player, there are perhaps three or four chances to one that he never attains to such a degree of proficiency in any of these callings as will enable him to subsist on his earnings. But in professions where many fail for one who succeeds, the fortunate one ought not only to gain such a rate of wages as may ndemnify him for all the expenses incurred in his education, but also for all that has been expended on the education of his unsuccessful competitors. It is abundantly certain, however, that the wages of lawyers, players, sculptors, &c., taken in the aggregate, never amount to so large a sum. The lottery of the law, and of the other liberal professions, has

[1] Wealth of Nations.

many great prizes, but there is, notwithstanding, a large excess of blanks. "Compute," says Dr Smith, "in any particular place, what is likely to be annually gained, and what is likely to be annually spent, by all the different workmen in any common trade, such as that of shoemakers or weavers, and you will find that the former sum will generally exceed the latter. But make the same computation with regard to all the counsellors and students of law in all the different Inns of Court, and you will find that their annual gains bear but a very small proportion to their annual expense, even though you rate the former as high and the latter as low as can well be done. The lottery of the law, therefore, is very far from being a perfectly fair lottery; and that, as well as many other liberal and honourable professions, is, in point of pecuniary gains, evidently under-recompensed."

But the love of that power, wealth, and consideration, which most commonly attend superior excellence in the liberal professions, and the overweening confidence placed by each individual in his own good fortune, are sufficient to overbalance all the disadvantages and drawbacks that attend them, and never fail to crowd their ranks with all the most generous and aspiring spirits.

It is unnecessary to enter upon any farther details with respect to this part of our subject. It has been sufficiently proved, that the permanent differences that obtain in the rates of wages paid to those who are engaged in different employments, in countries where industry is free and unfettered, merely suffice to balance the favourable or unfavourable circumstances attending them. When the cost of their education, the chances of their success, and the various disadvantages incident to their professions, have been taken into account, those who receive the highest wages are not really better paid than those who receive the lowest. The wages earned by the different classes of workmen are equal, not when each individual earns the same number of shillings, or of pence, in a given space of time, but when each is paid in

proportion to the severity of the labour he has to perform, to the degree of previous education and skill that it requires, and to the other causes of variation already specified. So long, indeed, as the principle of competition is allowed to operate without restraint, or so long as each individual is allowed to employ himself as he pleases, we may be assured that the higgling of the market will always adjust the rate of wages in different employments on the principle now stated, and that they will be, all things considered, nearly equal. If wages in one employment be depressed below the common level, labourers will leave it to go to others; and if they be raised above that level, labourers will be attracted to it from those departments where wages are lower, until their increased competition has sunk them to their average standard. We do not, however, mean to affirm, that this equalisation is in all cases immediately or speedily brought about. On the contrary, it often happens that, owing to an attachment to the trade, or the locality in which they have been bred, or the difficulty of learning another trade, individuals will continue, for a lengthened period, to practise a peculiar trade, or to continue in a particular district, when other trades in the same district and the same trade in more remote districts, yield better wages to those engaged in them. But how difficult soever, wages, taking everything into account, are sure to be equalised in the end. And the extraordinary facilities that are now afforded for becoming minutely acquainted with the various branches of industry carried on in all parts of the country, and of travelling from one point to another, will no doubt contribute to hasten the adjustment of wages according to the advantages and disadvantages incident to different businesses and districts. Without, however, insisting on these considerations, it is enough to state, that all inquiries, such as those in which we are now engaged, that have the establishment of general principles for their object, either are, or ought to be, founded on periods of average duration; and whenever such is the case, we may always, without occasioning any material error, assume that the wages earned in

different employments are, all things taken into account, about equal.

It may farther be observed, in reference to these principles, that wherever industry is unfettered, and knowledge generally diffused, the talents of all are turned to the best account. Indeed, it may be safely affirmed, that of the myriads of individuals engaged in industrious undertakings in Great Britain as conductors, overseers, or workmen, the situation occupied by each is, in the vast majority of cases, that which is best suited to his capacity, and his salary or wages such as he is fairly entitled to by his services. Agriculturists, manufacturers, and merchants, whether their businesses be large or small, are always most anxious to give the greatest efficacy to their establishments, to adapt their means properly to their ends, and to select the parties that are, all things considered, the most suitable for their purposes. The prosperity of all industrious undertakings principally depends on the skill with which this selection is made, on the proper parties being placed in the proper situations, and their wages adjusted according to their merits and the confidence reposed in them. Mistakes in a matter of such primary importance as the proper distribution of the labour employed, in any considerable undertaking, would be so very fatal to its success that we may be sure they will be carefully guarded against. The principle of *detur digniori* is the only one on which their managers can act with safety or advantage to themselves. And it is quite as much for the interest of the employed as of the employers that this distribution should be fairly made; for otherwise trickery, ignorance, and sloth, might carry off the rewards due to integrity, skill, and diligence. The society in which we live has its disadvantages and drawbacks; but, at all events, it must be said of masters and capitalists engaged in business, that they never willingly fail duly to appreciate and reward the superior talents and industry of the lower classes; and never suffer, or, if ever, only through error and for a moment, that the fund which should

feed and support labour should be misemployed to support idleness. And yet there have been, and still are, persons, calling themselves social reformers and friends to the poor, who propose that this natural and admirable system should be subverted, and that the employment and the wages of every man should be determined by agents nominated by government for the purpose! We should show but little respect for our readers, were we to waste their time by exposing in detail the palpable quackery of such a scheme. The innumerable abuses to which it would infallibly lead, were any attempt made to act upon it, would be such, that it could not be maintained for six weeks. If it were, it would destroy industry, and fill the land with bankruptcy and beggary.

CHAPTER VI.

Hiring by Time and by Piece Work. Advantages of the latter. Inexpediency of making Wages depend on the Result of Undertakings.

WAGES are sometimes paid by the day, week, month, year, or other term, and sometimes by the piece or job, that is, by the quantity of work done. Domestic servants are usually hired in the former mode, or by time; but large amounts of manufacturing, agricultural, and other labour, are performed by the piece, and wherever it can be adopted, this is the preferable mode of hiring work-people. Their strength, skill, and assiduity, are widely different. And when they are hired by time, it is often impracticable, and is always a difficult, troublesome, and invidious task to arrange them in classes, and adjust the wages of each, according to their real deserts. Hiring by the piece or job does away with these difficulties; and, by exactly apportioning the reward to the amount of labour, not only takes away all temptation to idle-

ness, but prompts workmen to put forth all their energies. It makes their own immediate interest, and not their duty to their employers, the main-spring of their exertions. Laborious and skilful workmen are no longer underpaid, as compared with those who are slothful and ignorant. The system admits of no partiality on the part of the masters, and of no pretence or shirking on the part of the employed. It is thoroughly honest and equitable. The wages earned under it may be low or high; but whatever may be their amount, they are distributed in the exact ratio of the services that have been performed. The labourer who executes twice the work that is executed by another, receives double wages, and so in proportion.

The stimulus which this plan of hiring gives to exertion, is so very powerful, that in some cases it has been thought necessary, in the view of preventing the labourers from overworking themselves, to limit the sums which they could earn in a given time. But this ultra zeal is not manifested, except in the case of parties engaged for a short period only, or when they first begin to work under the system. Regular task-work labourers, though distinguished by their industry and perseverance, do not overwork themselves. They are, also, much more their own masters than those engaged for certain terms. They are, in truth, contractors as well as labourers. And provided they execute their work within the term stipulated (if such stipulation be made), they may choose their own time for working, and begin and leave off when they please.

Piece-work is also by far the most likely, if it be not the only means, by which the mere labourer can expect to advance himself to a higher station. A man undertakes to cut down corn at so much an acre, to make roads and drains at so much a rood, to weave cloth at so much a yard, in short, to execute a certain amount of work for a certain price. Sometimes he restricts his undertaking to what he thinks he an execute himself, with perhaps the assistance of his family. at whether he do this, or employ others (sometimes in the

way of sub-contractors) to assist him, it is his object to finish his task as expeditiously as possible, and to employ his profits as a means of extending his business. In this way he gradually rises in the scale of society, till, having ceased to work with his own hands, he becomes a contractor on a large scale, or engages in some other occupation. And it is plain that the training and experience he has had, and the habits he has formed, must make him at once a vigilant and a discerning master. The foundations of thousands of middling, and of very many large fortunes, have been laid in the way now stated. It is, in truth, the broadest, the easiest, and the safest of the various channels by which diligent, sagacious, and frugal individuals emerge from poverty, and attain to respectability and opulence. Those who thus rise to distinction may be emphatically said to be the architects of their own fortunes They owe nothing to interest, to favour, or to any unworthy means. They stood originally on the same level with their fellow-workmen, and they owe their elevation to the judicious exercise of talents common to them all.

There cannot, therefore, as it appears to us, be any reasonable doubt that the introduction of the practice of piece-work, or of hiring by the job, has been, and that its further extension would be, a great advantage to all classes, but especially to the labourers. It appears to be the only plan by which a man's earnings are not only made to depend upon, but are exactly proportioned to, his labour, skill, and ingenuity; while it has the further advantage of enabling prudent and enterprising individuals to advance themselves, by comparatively easy steps, to a superior condition, and, in the end, to merge the character of labourer in that of employer.

It has sometimes been said, that it would be good policy to endeavour to interest labourers in the zealous prosecution of the tasks in which they may be engaged, by making their wages depend, in part at least, on the result of their exertions. But, except in a few limited and peculiar cases, this could

not be done. The wages of sailors may be, and, indeed, usually are, made to depend on the successful termination of the voyage. But how could the wages of the work-people employed on a farm, in a foundry, or in a cotton-mill, be made to depend on the result of such speculative undertakings? Very frequently, however, the work-people now referred to, are paid by the piece; and, when such is the case, they have a plain and tangible motive, level to their capacities, and not depending on anything remote or contingent, to make every exertion.

But, though the practical difficulties in the way of making the wages of labourers dependent on the results of the employments in which they are engaged, were less formidable than they appear to be, we should not, in the great majority of cases, anticipate any advantages from the scheme being adopted. On the contrary, the presumption is, that it would be most injurious. If labourers are to participate in the advantages of successful enterprises, they must also participate in the losses resulting from those of a contrary description; and must, consequently, in cases of failure, be deprived of their accustomed and necessary means of subsistence. The hazard to which they would thus be exposed, might, it is true, be lessened by making a part only of their remuneration depend on the issue of the enterprise. But if it were really an advantage to be allowed to participate in a chance of this sort, the fixed portion of their wages would be proportionally diminished, and at every failure of an enterprise, the labourers engaged in it would be thrown upon the workhouse, or on the contributions of the benevolent. It is nugatory to suppose that the condition of the poor should be improved by their engaging in such uncertain projects. Security, and a reward proportioned to their deserts, conduce most to their wellbeing. And these, we have seen, are enjoyed in the highest degree by the piece-work labourers. They are nowise dependant on the seasons, or on any one of he thousand unforeseen contingencies that may occur to deeat the most carefully conducted industrious speculation.

They depend on themselves only; and being sure of a commensurate return, they invariably put forth all their energies.

It is further obvious, that if work-people are to be interested in the result of an undertaking, they must have some control over its conduct, and be authorised to inquire into the accounts and proceedings of those by whom the undertaking is managed. All the advantages of individual enterprise and responsibility would, in consequence, be lost, and the most necessary and judicious steps, in the conduct of a business, might be objected to or censured by those most incompetent to form a judgment upon such matters. At present, when a capitalist engages in any undertaking, he knows beforehand that he will reap all the advantage if it be successful, and that, if otherwise, he will have to bear all the loss. He is consequently determined, by the most powerful motives, to act discreetly, to proscribe all useless expense, and to avail himself of every means or incident that may present itself, to facilitate his projects. Except in a very few cases, all industrious undertakings are sure to be carried on most efficiently and economically by individuals. But of all sorts of interference, that of the workmen would be most objectionable. It would hardly, indeed, be more absurd for a general to take the opinion of the privates of his army on questions of strategy, than it would be for a capitalist to call his labourers to his councils, and mould them according to their opinions. "Le surcroit d'intérêt qu'auraient les ouvriers à la réussite des opérations, ne saurait compenser ce qui manquerait à l'action du gérant; car ils ne pourraient participer en rien à la direction de l'entreprise, à moins que l'on ne voulût entraver sa marche, la rendre plus versatile et plus incertaine, et renoncer aux avantages de l'unité de gestion, si essentielle au succès. L'application des moyens semblables, loin d'améliorer le sort des ouvriers, n'aboutirait donc qu'à le rendre plus misèrable; l'excédant de rémunération qu'ils pourraient obtenir en cas de réussite des opérations serait peu important pour chacun d'eux, et il serait loin d'établir une compensation suffisante pour leur participation aux chances

des pertes accrues, dans ce système par l'affaiblissement de l'intérêt des gérants." [1]

CHAPTER VII.

Law for repressing Combinations among Workmen repealed in 1824—*Impolicy of that Law—Its real effect—Voluntary Combinations ought not to be forcibly suppressed—Necessity of adopting vigorous Measures for preventing one set of Workmen from obstructing others in their Employments.*

Besides the causes of variation in the rate of wages, specified in Chapter VI., they are supposed to be materially affected by the combinations which frequently exist among workmen; and as this is a subject that has attracted much attention, and with respect to which there is a considerable difference of opinion, we shall examine it shortly.

From the reign of Edward I. down to a very recent period, it was the practice of the legislature occasionally to interfere respecting the stipulations in the contract of wages between masters and servants; and, as its deliberations were in most cases guided by the advice of the masters, it was natural that it should interfere rather in the view of promoting their particular interests, than of treating both parties with the same even-handed and impartial justice. But the gradual though slow advance of civilisation, and the dissemination of sounder and more enlarged principles of public economy, having impressed all classes with a conviction of the general impolicy of such interference, it is now rarely practised. The experience of nearly five hundred years has shown that, while every attempt to set a *maximum* on the price of labour is oppressive and injurious to the workmen, it

[1] See the excellent essay of M. Clement, "Recherches sur les causes de l'Indigence," p. 252.

is of no real advantage to their employers; for it has been found, that workmen have invariably become more persevering, sober, and industrious, according as their freedom has been extended, and as they have been relieved from the vexatious restraints to which they were formerly subjected.

But though the legislature has long since ceased to dictate the precise terms on which masters should buy and workmen sell their labour, a set of laws were of late much extended, and were very frequently acted upon, by which workmen were severely punished for *combining* together to raise their wages, or to oppose their reduction. These laws, which seem to us to have been in no ordinary degree partial and unjust, had their origin in a dark and barbarous period. The dreadful plague that desolated England, in common with most other countries of Europe, in 1348 and 1349, having destroyed great numbers of the labouring poor, a greater competition took place for the services of those who survived, who, in consequence, obtained much higher wages. Parliament, however, instead of leaving this temporary rise of wages, to which the poor had an unquestionable right, to be reduced by the increase of population it must have occasioned, passed, in 1350, the famous act (25 Edward III., c. 1) for regulating wages. By this statute, labourers were obliged to serve for such wages as were common in the districts in which they resided previously to the pestilence. But, as this gave rise to a great deal of cavilling, a statute was passed two years after, fixing the specific amount of the wages to be given to reapers, mowers, haymakers, thrashers, &c., and to the more common and important class of artificers.[1] A variety of subsequent acts were passed, to enforce compliance with the regulations in the statute of wages, of the spirit of which some idea may be formed from the fact of its having been made *felony*, by a statute, passed in 1425 (3 Henry VI., c. 1), for masons to confederate or combine together to raise their wages above the statutory rate. And though this barbarous law has long

[1] See the Rates in Sir F. M. Eden's State of the Poor, vol. i. p. 33.

ceased to be acted upon, it was not effaced from the Statute-book till 1824, and may be considered as the parent-stock from which the late statute against combinations was derived.

This statute (39th and 40th Geo. III. cap. 106.), after declaring all combinations to obtain an advance of wages to be unlawful, went on to enact, that any workman who entered into a combination, either verbal or in writing, to obtain an advance of wages, to lessen the hours or time of working, to decrease the quantity of work, to persuade, intimidate, or by money or otherwise, endeavour to prevail on any other workman not to accept employment; or who should, for the purpose of obtaining an advance of wages, endeavour to intimidate or prevail on any person to leave his employment, or to prevent any person employing him: or who, being hired, should, without any just or reasonable cause, refuse to work with any other workman; such workman should, on the oath or oaths of one or more credible witnesses, before any two justices of the peace, within three calendar months after the offence has been committed, be committed to, and confined in, the common gaol within their jurisdiction, for any time not exceeding three calendar months; or, at the discretion of such justices, should be committed to some house of correction, within the same jurisdiction, there to remain, and be kept at hard labour, for any time not exceeding two calendar months!

The extreme severity of this enactment must strike every one. Justices of the peace belong to the order of masters; and, however respectable individually, they generally possess a full share of their peculiar feelings and prejudices. To invest two of them with the power of imprisoning workmen for three months, without the intervention of a jury, was certainly intrusting them with an authority very liable to be abused, and which, if it were to be exercised at all, should have been placed in the hands of those less likely to act under a bias. It is true, the workmen could appeal to the quarter-sessions: but as this was only an appeal from one set of justices to another, it was of little importance. There were a variety of

other clauses, discharging all workmen from attending any meeting for the purpose of combining, from contributing to defray the expenses incurred by persons acting contrary to this Act, and compelling offenders to give evidence, &c., &c., under the above-mentioned penalties.

A very strong feeling had been spreading for many years, not only among the workmen, but also among the more intelligent portion of the masters, that the attempts to enforce the provisions of the Combination Act had done more harm than good. And in unison with this feeling, a Committee of the House of Commons was appointed, in 1824, to inquire into the operation of the laws for preventing combinations among workmen, and for preventing their emigration, and the exportation of machinery. This committee collected a great deal of evidence on these subjects. And such was the impression made on the House by this evidence, and by the growing conviction of the impolicy of the combination laws, that a bill for their repeal, introduced by the chairman of the committee, was soon after carried through both Houses, and passed into a law.

The effects that have followed the repeal of the combination laws, have not been such as many of the supporters of that measure anticipated. And it must be admitted, that the workmen have in many instances discovered a refractory and turbulent disposition; and that there is hardly a branch of industry in which they have not resorted to a *strike*, and entered into combinations, not unfrequently accompanied with violence, to raise their wages, and to dictate to their masters the mode in which they should be employed. Much, however, as we regret, and ready as we are to condemn, many of the proceedings that have taken place since the repeal of the Combination Act, we are very far from thinking, that they form any valid reason either for its revival, or for the enactment of any similar statute.

That workmen ought to be allowed freely to combine or associate together, for the purpose of adjusting the terms on

which they shall sell their labour, is apparently a most reasonable proposition. Wages, like everything else, should always be left to be regulated by the fair and free competition of the parties in the market, and should never be controlled by the legislature. "The property," says Adam Smith, "which every man has in his own labour, as it is the original foundation of all other property, so it is the most sacred and inviolable. The patrimony of a poor man lies in the strength and dexterity of his hands; and to hinder him from employing this strength and dexterity in what manner he thinks proper, without injury to his neighbours, is a plain violation of the most sacred property." But it is false to affirm that workmen are allowed to dispose of their labour in any way they please, if they be prevented from concerting with each other the terms on which they will sell it. Capacity to labour is to the poor man what stock is to the capitalist. Now, a hundred or a thousand capitalists may form themselves into a company, or combination, take all their measures in common, and dispose of their property as they may, in their collective capacity, judge most advantageous for their interests:—And why should not a hundred or a thousand labourers be allowed to do the same by their stock? Of all the species of property which a man can possess, the faculties of his mind and the powers of his body are most particularly his own. And to fetter him in the mode in which he is to exercise or dispose of these faculties and powers, is a manifest encroachment on the most inviolable of all rights, and can be justified only by an overwhelming necessity.

It is easy, however, to show that, in point of fact, no such necessity ever did or can exist. The wages of any set of workmen who enter into a combination for the purpose of raising them, must be either, 1*st*, below the natural and proper rate of wages in the branch of industry to which they long; or, 2*d*, they must be coincident with that rate, or ve it. Now, it is clear that, in the first case, or when es are depressed below their natural level, the claim of

the workmen for an advance is fair and reasonable; and it would obviously be unjust and oppressive, to prevent them from adopting any measure, not injurious to the rights of others, which they may think best fitted to render their claim effectual. But a voluntary combination among workmen is certainly in no respect injurious to any of the rights of their masters. It is a contradiction to pretend that masters have any right or title to the services of free workmen in the event of the latter not choosing to accept the price offered them for their labour. And as the existence of a combination to procure a rise of wages shows that they have not so chosen, and is a proof of the want of all concord and agreement between the parties, so it is also a proof that the workmen are fairly entitled to enter into it; and that, however injurious their proceedings may be to themselves, they do not encroach on the privileges or rights of others. Not only, therefore, is a voluntary combination, unaccompanied by violence, a fair exercise of the right of judging for themselves on the part of the workmen, but when it is entered into for the purpose of raising wages that have been unduly depressed, its object is proper and desirable. Few masters willingly consent to raise wages; and the claim either of one or of a few individuals for an advance of wages is likely to be disregarded so long as their fellows continue to work at the old rates. It is only when the whole, or the greater part, of the workmen belonging to a particular master or department of industry combine together, or when they act in that simultaneous manner which is equivalent to a combination, and refuse to continue to work without receiving an increase of wages, that it becomes the immediate interest of the masters to comply with their demand. And hence it is obvious, that without the existence either of an open and avowed, or of a tacit and real combination, workmen would not be able to obtain a rise of wages by their own exertions, but would be left to depend on the competition of their masters.

It is abundantly certain, however, that this competition on the part of the masters will always raise wages that have

been unduly depressed. And it was from not adverting to this fact, that the influence of the late combination laws in depressing wages was so very greatly exaggerated. If the wages paid to the labourers engaged in any particular employment are improperly reduced, the capitalists who carry it on must obviously gain the whole amount of this reduction, over and above the common and ordinary rate of profit obtained by the capitalists engaged in other businesses. But a discrepancy of this kind could not possibly continue. Additional capital would immediately begin to be attracted to the department where wages were low and profits high; and its owners would be obliged, in order to obtain labourers, to offer them higher wages. It is clear, therefore, that if wages be unduly reduced in any branch of industry, they will be raised to their proper level, without any effort on the part of the workmen, by the competition of the capitalists. And looking generally to the whole of the employments carried on in the country, we do not believe that the combination laws had the slightest effect on the average and usual rate of wages. That they occasionally kept wages at a lower rate in some very confined businesses than they would otherwise have sunk to, may be true; though for that very reason they must have equally elevated them in others. This, however, is no good reason why the workmen engaged in employments in which wages happen from any cause to be unduly depressed, should be interdicted from adopting the only means in their power of doing themselves justice. When they are allowed freely to combine, their combination may occasion an immediate rise of wages; but when their combination is prevented, more or less time must always elapse before the high profits caused by the undue reduction of wages becomes generally known, and consequently before capital can be attracted from other businesses. And hence it is clear, that every attempt to prevent combination in such cases as this, is neither more nor less than an attempt to hinder workmen from making use of the only means by which their wages can be speedily and effectually raised to their *just level*. It is

committing injustice in behalf of the strong, at the expense of the weaker party!

We admit that the object of the second class of voluntary combinations, or of those which take place when the wages of the combining workmen are already equal to or above their natural and proper rate, is improper and unreasonable. Still, however, it is easy to show, that there is no more cause for the interference of the legislature in their case, than in the former. There is no good reason why workmen should not, like the possessors of every other valuable and desirable article, be allowed to set whatever price they please upon the labour they have to dispose of. The apprehensions formerly so prevalent respecting the injurious effects of *forestalling* and *regrating*, and the forming of combinations to raise the price of the necessaries of life, have almost entirely vanished. Experience has shown that all markets have been better supplied with every species of useful and desirable produce, and at less expense, according as legislative interference has been withdrawn, and a greater freedom of action allowed to the dealers and producers. And what ground is there for supposing that the relieving of workmen from restraint, and allowing them to concert measures in common, should have a different effect? The merest tyro in economical science would not hesitate to ridicule all apprehensions of famine, or even of a stinted supply of the market, from a combination of corn dealers, or of bakers, to raise the price of corn or bread. For he would feel assured that there were a hundred chances to one that no such combination would ever be generally entered into; and that supposing it were, the moment prices were raised ever so little above their natural rate, it would become the interest of a large body of the combiners to secede from the combination, and to throw their stocks upon the market. And if we may thus securely trust the supply of the most necessary articles to the unfettered competition of a comparatively small body of masters, can any-

thing be more childish than to fear any continued bad consequences from leaving the market for labour to be supplied by the unfettered competition of the workmen?—a body in which, because of its being infinitely more numerous, combination must be infinitely more difficult than among the masters.

But, supposing that the mass of workmen should occasionally combine together to raise wages beyond their natural limits, or to enforce vexatious or improper conditions in regard to their employment, there are no grounds for supposing that their combination will be successful. It may be taken for granted, that the masters will resist what they believe to be an improper demand; and the slightest glance at the relative condition of the parties must satisfy every one that, supposing them to be in earnest in their opposition, they cannot fail in all ordinary cases to succeed in defeating it. The workmen always suffer more from a *strike* than their masters. It is indeed true, as Dr Smith has observed, that in the long run, they are as necessary to their masters as their masters are to them. But this necessity is far from being so immediate. The stock and credit of the master are in almost every instance much greater than the stock and credit of his labourers; and he is, therefore, able to maintain himself for a much longer time without their labour, than they can maintain themselves without his wages. In all old-settled and fully-peopled countries, wages are seldom so high as to enable labourers to accumulate any considerable stock; and though the scanty funds of those engaged in strikes are frequently eked out by contributions from the work-people in other businesses, and in other parts of the kingdom, the combination never fails, provided the masters do not give way, to break to pieces.

It is also evident, that when workmen enter into a combination to enforce an unreasonable demand, or to raise wages that are already up to the common level, they can gain nothing, but must lose by entering into other employments to which they have not been bred; while it is equally evident that a small extra sum will be sufficient to

entice other labourers to the business they have left. All the great departments of industry have so many closely allied branches, that a workman who is instructed in any of them, can, without much training or difficulty, apply himself to some of the others; and thus the workmen who enter into the combination, will not only fail of their object, and be obliged to return to their work, but, owing to the influx of other labourers into their business during the period of the *strike*, they will be compelled to accept of a lower rate of wages than they had previously enjoyed.

Many extensive combinations have been broken up by the masters acting on this principle, or by their bringing workmen from other districts, or other businesses, to supply the place of those in the combination. At first, these workmen may not be so skilful or expert as those who have seceded; but these deficiencies soon become insensible, and are more than compensated by the greater command the masters have over the new hands, who, it is commonly stipulated, shall not enter into any union or association with other workmen for the purpose of raising wages, regulating the hours of work, &c.

The combination of the coal-miners of the north in 1844, when about 40,000 hands struck for a modification of the conditions under which they had previously been employed and an advance of wages, though one of the most formidable that has hitherto existed, was defeated in the way now mentioned. It was carefully organised, and had, when it began operations, a reserve fund of about L.24,000, besides receiving subscriptions from trades'-unions in most parts of the country. But the coal-owners determined not to give way, and made every exertion to bring miners and other labourers from Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, to supply the place of those who had seceded. The result justified the wisdom of their determination; for the turn-outs, after an obstinate strike of from four to five months' duration, in which they exhausted every resource, and suffered the greatest privations, were compelled to abandon every one of their pretensions, and to beg to be allowed to resume their employment, under the same regula-

tions as formerly, at their old, and in some cases even at lower wages. And this, with but few exceptions, is the ordinary result of the best organised combinations.

The substitution of machinery for manual labour, and its improvement, has done more perhaps than anything else to put down combinations in manufacturing employments. And though injurious to the work-people, combinations for an improper purpose may perhaps be said to be publicly advantageous, by the stimulus they give to the improvement of machinery. In corroboration of this statement, it is only necessary to refer to the machines for wool-combing, mule-spinning, and others of the same kind, which were invented and introduced because of the capricious and unreasonable demands and proceedings of the wool-combers, cotton-spinners, &c. They have been completely successful. And have, in truth, not only rendered these employments comparatively independent of the whims and combinations of the work-people, but have materially improved and cheapened the products of the manufactures into which they have been introduced.

For these reasons, we think it is impossible that any one, who will calmly consider the subject, can resist coming to the conclusion, that a combination for an improper object, or to raise wages above their proper level, must cure itself, or that it must necessarily bring its own chastisement along with it. In some instances, strikes have been entered into from hostile feelings against obnoxious masters; and not unfrequently the workmen are seduced into them by the artful representations of agitators, in whom they place undeserved confidence, and who make them a means of advancing their own selfish ends, without caring for the misery they may entail on their dupes. But, in the majority of cases, a strike can hardly fail, under all ordinary circumstances, to be a subject of the most serious concern to workmen who have either forethought or experience. And the privations to which it unavoidably exposes them, form a strong presumption that they are honestly impressed with a conviction that the advance of wages claimed

by them is moderate and reasonable, and that the strike has been forced upon them by the improper resistance of their masters. Even in those cases in which wages are notoriously depressed below their proper level, workmen will, if they consult their own interests, be shy about striking, and will resort to it only as a last resource. Such a proceeding instantly deprives them, and those who are dependent on their exertions, of their accustomed means of subsistence. In the event of their masters delaying, for any considerable period, to come to an accommodation, they are obliged, from inability to support themselves, to depend for a while on the grudging and stinted contributions of others; and when this humiliating resource is exhausted, they must return to the business they have left, or else engage in employments to which they have not been bred, and which are not congenial to their habits. It is not, therefore, easy to suppose that workmen, when they become acquainted with the real effects of combinations, will rashly enter into them, and proceed to a strike, for the purpose of obtaining unreasonable or exorbitant wages. But if they should be at any time foolish enough to do so, their efforts will, no doubt, be ineffectual; and besides exposing themselves to great temporary hardship and distress, they will in the end have to accept the terms dictated by their masters.

Even though it were conceded that it might be expedient for government to interfere to put down a combination to raise wages above their proper level, or to frame improper regulations in regard to the employment of work-people, the concession would be of no real value to the apologists of the combination laws; for the result of the combination is, in fact, the only test by which we can discover whether the advance of wages claimed by the workmen and the regulations proposed by them, were fair and reasonable, or the reverse. If government were to refer to the opinion of the masters for information on the subject, they would be taught to consider the best founded

claim for a rise of wages as unjust and ruinous; and if, on the other hand, they were to refer to the opinion of the workmen—an opinion which is quite as deserving of attention as the other—they would be told that the most exorbitant and unreasonable demand was extremely moderate and proper, and that a compliance with it was imperiously required. It is only by the fair and free competition of the parties in the market that we discover which of these opposite and contradictory assertions is most consistent with the truth. There neither are, nor is it in the nature of things that there can be, any other means of coming to a correct conclusion on the subject. If the workmen are in the right, they will, as they ought, succeed in their object; and if they are wrong, they will be defeated. The interference of government in the decision of such questions must obviously, therefore, be productive only of evil. Having no means of informing themselves of the real merits of the case, they must, if they act at all, necessarily act blindly and capriciously. And even if they had such information, it would be unadvisable for them to interfere, it being abundantly certain that every combination for an improper object will be better and more effectually put down without their assistance than with it.

The great evil of the combination laws consisted, as already observed, in the mistaken notions respecting their influence, which they generated in the minds both of workmen and masters. They taught them to believe that there was one measure of justice for the rich, and another for the poor. They consequently set the interests and the feelings of these two great classes in direct opposition to each other; and did more to engender hatred between the different orders of society—to render the masters despotic and capricious, and the workmen idle and turbulent, than can be easily conceived or imagined by those not pretty intimately acquainted with the former state of society in the manufacturing districts. Instead of putting down combinations, they rendered

them universal, and gave them a dangerous character. For the fair and open, though frequently foolish and extravagant, proceedings of men endeavouring to advance themselves in society, and to sell their labour at the highest price, the combination laws gave us nocturnal meetings, private cabals, and oaths of secrecy. There was not a workman to be found who did not consider it as a bounden duty to embrace every opportunity of acting in the teeth of their most positive enactments. And all the means which the intelligence, the cunning, and the privations of workmen could suggest, for defeating and thwarting their operation, were resorted to from a conviction of their partiality and unfairness.

It appears, therefore, on every ground both of justice and expediency, that the repeal of the combination laws was a wise and salutary measure. Until that event, the terms of the contract between masters and workmen could not be said to be adjusted, as it always ought to be, on the fair principle of free and unrestrained competition. We readily allow that combinations of workmen and of masters may be, and indeed frequently are, formed for the accomplishment of improper objects. But it is quite clear that these combinations will, when let alone, inevitably cure themselves, and that the efforts of government to suppress them are uncalled for and unnecessary, oppressive and unjust. Every individual who is not a slave is entitled to demand any price for his labour that he thinks proper. And if one individual may do this, why may not fifty, or five thousand, demand the *same* price? A criminal act cannot be generated by the mere multiplication of acts that are perfectly innocent. We are not to confound the power and the right to set a price on labour, with the reasonableness of that price. It is the business of those who buy labour, and not of government, to decide whether the price set on it is reasonable or not. If they think it is unreasonable, they may, and they certainly will, refuse to buy it, or to hire the workmen; and as the latter cannot long subsist without employment, necessity will oblige them to moderate their demands.

It will be observed, that the observations we have now made apply exclusively to the justice and policy of attempting to prevent *voluntary* combinations among workmen; and we trust they will not be understood as being intended to countenance in the slightest degree the attempts that have frequently been made by combined workmen, forcibly to prevent others from working except on the conditions they have fixed for the guidance of their own conduct. Every such attempt is an obvious breach of the peace; and if not repressed by prompt and suitable punishment, would be subversive not only of the freedom of industry, but of the national welfare. The reason that combinations among numerous bodies are rarely injurious is, that the motives which individuals have to break off from the combination are so numerous and powerful, that it can seldom be mainained for any considerable period. But if those who adhere to the combination were to be allowed to maltreat and obtruct those who secede from it, this principle would be subverted, and the combination might become so very injurious as to require the interference of the legislature for its suppresion. This, therefore, does not really seem to be a case in which there is much room for doubt or difference of opinion. It is plain, that we must either reduce the workmen to a servile condition, or authorise them to refuse to work, or to sell their labour, except under such conditions as they may chose to specify. But when they are allowed this power, they are allowed *all* they are entitled to; and if they go one step further—if they attempt to carry their point by violence, either towards their masters or their fellow-workmen, they are guilty of an offence that strikes at the very foundations of the manufacturing and commercial prosperity of the country, and which no government can or ought to tolerate It is indispensable that that system of intimidation which the workmen in some places have endeavoured to organise, should, at all hazards, be effectually put down. And to secure this object, every practicable means should be adopted for facilitating the prosecution, speedy conviction, and punishment of those who are guilty of obstructing and intimidating others.

These remarks proceed from no unfriendly feeling towards the workmen, but from a desire to do them service. It is the extreme of folly to suppose, that any combination can maintain wages at an artificial elevation. It is not, as we have already shown, on the dangerous and generally ruinous resource of combination, but on the forethought, industry, and frugality of work-people, that their wages, and their condition as individuals, must always depend. If they attempt, by adding violence to combinations, to force wages up to an artificial level, one of two things will follow—they will either draw down on themselves the vengeance of the law, or they will bring about their permanent degradation by forcing the transfer of that capital, from which alone they derive their subsistence, to other businesses, or to countries where it will be better protected.

CHAPTER VIII.

Interests of the Labourers promoted, and their condition improved, by increased facilities of Production and Exchange. —Circumstances which have conspired to prevent the Inventions and Discoveries of the last half-century from effecting a greater change for the better in the condition of the Labourers.—Influence of Taxation.

Though the labourers engaged in a particular trade may occasionally suffer from the introduction into it of new or improved machinery, or of new or cheaper methods of production, such suffering is but of brief duration, while the entire labouring class is sure to be benefited by the change. This has been demonstrated over and over again, and is a proposition of the truth of which no doubt is now entertained. An increased facility of production immediately

increases the command of all classes over necessaries and conveniences; and it further leads, by increasing the demand for the articles whose cost has been reduced, to an increased demand for labour. When the cost of cottons was reduced by the introduction of the spinning-frame, it is plain, as that reduction did not affect the demand for labour or the rate of wages in other employments, that the condition of the labourers generally must have been improved by their being able to supply themselves with cheaper cottons. The fall in the price of the latter was, in fact, equivalent to a corresponding rise of wages; while the increased demand for cottons, and the powerful stimulus which was thereby given to invention and discovery, by still farther lowering their price, and bringing them within the command of a constantly increasing number of consumers, has so much increased their consumption that the cotton trade is now, next to agriculture, the most important business carried on in the kingdom, employing millions upon millions of capital, and hundreds of thousands of work-people! And such is invariably the case, in a greater or less degree, with every increased facility of production. An increase of supply is sure to occasion an equal increase of demand. In this case, therefore, as in all others, the interests of the manufacturers and employers of labour are coincident with those of the labourers. Every additional facility of production really raises wages, or, which is the same thing, it gives the labourers a greater quantity of produce in return for the same amount of labour or of money.

Plain bobbin-net lace is said to have sold in 1813 and 1814 for about 21s. a square yard; and the same article, but of an improved quality, may now be had for about 3d. the square yard! Hence, as compared with bobbin-net, wages are now about eighty-four times higher than in 1813-14.[1] And the number of hands employed in the manufacture of

[1] This takes for granted that money wages have not fallen in the interval, which they have not done, at least to any considerable extent.

the article has increased at least a hundred-fold in the interval.

The employment of machinery, and the increased facility of production consequent thereon, has also a tendency to raise the condition of the labourer, by bringing the powers of his mind more into action. Some of the most laborious operations of industry—such, for instance, as the thrashing out of corn—are now either wholly or principally performed by machinery, the task of the labourer being confined to its construction (in which he is usually assisted by other machines) and guidance. And the presumption is, that this substitution of the powers of nature for those of man will be carried to a much farther extent, and that he will be progressively still more and more employed in making new applications of their exhaustless energies.

The same results follow from the repeal of prohibitions on importation, and from the opening of new commercial channels, by which produce may be brought from abroad cheaper than it can be furnished at home. It is proper, however, in the view of preventing any sudden shock being given to any great branch of native industry, that such changes should be cautiously introduced, and be accompanied with the necessary safeguards. But, apart from the temporary injury that it may occasion to a particular class, every additional facility given to commerce, like the additional facilities given to production, never fails to add to the well-being and happiness of the public. Owing partly to improvements in agriculture, and partly to greater facilities of importation, the price of corn has not, during the last four or five years, amounted to half its price previously to the termination of the late war; so that, as compared with this most indispensable of all articles, wages may be said to have more than doubled since 1815. There is nothing, in truth, either isolated or in any degree peculiar in the situation of work-people. On the contrary, their interests are inseparably associated with, and promoted by, all that contributes to national opulence, civilisation, and good government.

After what has now been stated, the reader will be prepared to hear that the condition of most classes of work-people has been much improved since the close of the American war, and that they are at present better fed, better clothed, and better lodged, than at any former period. We are aware that Lord John Russell is reported to have said, in 1844, that the labouring classes had retrograded within the last century, and that they were not so well off as they had been in 1740. But, despite the deference justly due to so high an authority, we are satisfied that this is an erroneous statement. Most things on which wages are expended are as cheap now as in 1740, and very many—including all articles of clothing—are much cheaper. Notwithstanding the well-founded complaints of the badness of the lodgings of the lower classes, they are incomparably better now than they were in the last century, or at any anterior period. The older portions, indeed, in all our towns and villages, are precisely those in which the poor are in all respects the worst lodged. The bread, also, which is used in poor families in the present times is much superior, and in towns at least the consumption of butcher's meat by the labourers has greatly increased. Drunkenness and immorality, if they have not been materially abated, have not increased; while the manners of all classes have been humanised and softened. The great improvement that has taken place in the health and in the longevity of the population could not have been realised had not their condition been materially bettered.

At the same time, we are ready to admit that the condition of the labouring class is far from prosperous; and Lord John Russell was quite right in saying, that they do not appear to have profited as much as they should have done, or as much as the middle classes have done, by the extraordinary improvements that have taken place during the last half-century, and especially by the fall in the price of most articles since 1815. The middle classes have, however, always evinced far more prudence and forethought than

those below them, and have, consequently, been the better able to avail themselves of the favourable circumstances referred to. There can, indeed, be no manner of doubt, that the peculiar poverty and distress which are always found to prevail, to a greater or less extent, among all sections of the labouring classes, must be unhesitatingly ascribed to their own vicious habits, improvidence, and want of industry. And yet it is true, that, however deficient in these respects, the work-people of the present day are less vicious and improvident, and more industrious, than their predecessors of any former age; and this improvement in their conduct must have conspired with the improvement in the arts, and the greater facilities of production, to raise them in the scale of civilisation.

But apart from the innumerable cases in which poverty and destitution may be traced to accidental circumstances, or to improvidence, misconduct, or want of industry on the part of individuals, still, as it appears to us, the average rate of wages is lower, and the condition of the best-behaved labourers less comfortable, than it might have been expected to be. And it is not probably very difficult to discover why this is the case; for, despite the favourable circumstances influencing the condition of the lower classes noticed above, others of a contrary character, and having also a powerful influence, have been at work for a lengthened period; and we are inclined to ascribe to the latter a good deal of what is most unfavourable in the present condition of the industrious and provident classes.

Of the circumstances now alluded to, the more important seem to be the influx of immigrants from Ireland, the greater dependence on the potato as an article of food, and the employment of children or young people in factories.

1. In some of the previous parts of this treatise, we have glanced at one or two of the circumstances, such as the dependence on the potato, the splitting of the land into minute fractions, and so on, that appear to have been most instrumental in filling Ireland with what is still probably a re-

dundant, as it is an improvident and a degraded population. But while their destitute condition has compelled the Irish poor to emigrate, their proximity to this country, our comparatively high wages, and the facility with which they get across the channel, have tempted them, especially since the introduction of steam navigation, to come and settle in vast numbers in England and Scotland. At present, from a fourth to a third part of the population of Manchester, Liverpool, Glasgow, Paisley, and other great towns on the west side of Great Britain, consists of native Irish, and their descendants. Even at Edinburgh, where there are no manufactures, the Irish constitute at this moment five-tenths of the lowest class, and nine-tenths of the paupers.[1] Few things, indeed, could have exercised so fatal an influence over the condition and prospects of the English and Scotch labourers as this immigration. Their forethought and industry have, in fact, tended rather to facilitate the invasion of this pauper horde, than to improve their own condition. Their wages have been reduced by the competition of the famished serfs that have been cast upon our shores; and, which is still worse, their tastes and opinions in regard to what is necessary for their subsistence, have been lowered by the contaminating influence of example, and by familiar intercourse with those who are content to live in destitution and misery. If the character and condition of the Irish immigrants had been materially improved, it would have been some, though a most inadequate, compensation for the injury their invasion has done to the native population of Great Britain. Hitherto, however, this does not appear to be the case. The Irish immigrants, and their descendants, continue to occupy the lowest place in society, and deteriorate the British without advancing themselves. Had they belonged to a foreign country, their influx would long since have been either checked or prohibited. And it is not easy to see why a system, productive of little or no good to Ireland, and of much

[1] Geographical Dictionary, *voce* Edinburgh.

evil to Britain, should be permitted to continue. The late extraordinary emigration from Ireland to the United States has, however, given a decided check to the emigration to this country, and it may, perhaps, not be so great in future. But if it should again attain to anything like its extent in some late years, justice to our own people would seem to require that measures should be adopted to hinder England and Scotland from being overrun with the out-pourings of this *officina pauperum*—to hinder Ireland dragging us down to the same hopeless abyss of poverty and wretchedness in which she is sunk.

2. We have already endeavoured to exhibit the disastrous consequences resulting in Ireland from the general dependence of the population on the potato. Happily, the dependence on it has not been carried to anything like the same extent in any part of Great Britain; yet it has here been productive of similar though less calamitous results. Wherever it has become a principal part of the food of the working-classes, their wages are low, and their situation precarious. When the labourers principally subsist on wheat, or any other variety of corn, they may, by economising in their consumption of bread, acquire a considerable additional supply of other things. But potatoes are so very cheap, that no economy in their use can enable those using them materially to increase their command over other articles. And when they fail, those depending on them are here, as in Ireland, reduced to the extremity of want.

The reader will not, therefore, be surprised to learn that we are not of the number of those who regret the check given to the potato culture by the late failures of the crop. On the contrary, we incline to think that their influence should have been strengthened by legislative measures; and that it would be sound policy to discourage the growth of a root which is otherwise almost sure to become a staple article of food, and which never fails to exercise a most pernicious influence over those dependent upon it. Were it used, alon-

with bread, as a subsidiary article, it would be different. But it can hardly continue for any very considerable length of time to be so used; its greater cheapness, and the facility with which it is made ready for use, tempting the poor to resort to it in preference to any other article. But this is a fatal proceeding on their part. After they have been accustomed to subsist on it, they become its slaves; for their wages being determined by its price, they cannot, how anxious soever, leave it for a better or more costly article It is not easy to exaggerate the evils inseparable from such a state of things. We are persuaded, indeed, that the growing dependence on the potato has, not in Ireland only, but also in Britain and elsewhere, had a most injurious tendency, and that but for it the labouring classes would have profited to a much greater extent than they have done by the wonderful progress of industry and invention since 1815.

3. We are also disposed to think that the increased demand for juvenile labour, growing out of the rapid extension of the manufacturing system, has not a little injured the condition of the labouring classes. It made the manufacturing towns in so far resemble new colonies, that for a while a family became (and to some extent continues to be) a source of wealth to their parents rather than a burden; and those who could with difficulty have subsisted themselves and their families on their own earnings, were rendered comparatively comfortable through the earnings of their children. But this resource, though advantageous in the meantime, has proved in the long run to be injurious. For, by encouraging improvident unions, and weakening the principle of moral restraint, it contributed to increase population, and has probably taken from the wages of the adults as much as it has given to the children, or more. And in addition to this, it made young people be employed in factory labour at a premature age, before their physical powers were sufficiently developed, and before they had time to acquire any considerable amount of school education. Its effects upon the parents were still more unfavourable; for, by teaching them to depend to a considerable extent on the gains of their children, it made them less industrious, and generally also less frugal and parsimonious than they would otherwise have been. We are, therefore, inclined to approve of the policy of the Act which limits and restricts the labour of young people in factories. It is right that the state should interfere to protect those who are unable to protect themselves. And in emancipating them from the slavery in which they were frequently involved through the selfish and vicious conduct of their parents, we are really contributing to improve the habits and condition of the latter.

It may probably be thought that, in referring to the causes which have impeded, and which continue to impede, the improvement of the labouring classes, the pressure of taxation is entitled to a prominent place. And if any considerable stress could be safely laid on the harangues of honourable gentlemen at public meetings, and even in the House of Commons, such would appear to be the case. Probably, however, these harangues are made rather in the view of conciliating popular favour than from a conviction of their truth. But whatever may be their motive and object, they tend to perpetuate a mischievous delusion, and are in great measure, if not wholly, unfounded. It is more than doubtful whether the condition of the labouring class would be sensibly improved, supposing it were possible, without upsetting good order and security, to sweep off every tax now existing in the United Kingdom. It might be somewhat improved by the repeal of the duty on tea—though, if it were placed on a proper footing, its pressure would hardly be perceptible, which is the case with the duties on sugar and soap. But the repeal, or even reduction, of the duties on spirits, tobacco, and malt, would be decidedly injurious. The duties on these articles should in truth, be regarded as sumptuary penalties intended to check the indulgence in pernicious

habits and wasteful expenditure. It is contradictory to imagine that it is possible to improve the condition of the labouring classes, by giving them increased facilities and greater temptations to plunge still deeper into that intemperance and dissipation which is their scourge and ruin. We are not aware that it has occurred to the financial reformers of China to attempt to elevate the character and condition of their countrymen by cheapening opium and facilitating its introduction into the Celestial Empire. But we take leave to doubt whether such a policy would be more absurd than to attempt to improve the condition of our labourers by cheapening gin and tobacco.

It is needless, we presume, to dwell on the destructive influence of an intemperate indulgence in intoxicating drinks—on the poverty, the vice, and the wretchedness, of which it is the fruitful source. The taste for tobacco, though in some respects less injurious than the taste for spirits, makes a much more serious inroad than is commonly supposed on the means of the poor. The duty on tobacco produced in 1850 a nett revenue of L.4,410,323. And it is generally supposed that the tobacco, after it has been partially manufactured into snuff and cigars, distributed over the country, and sold by retail, costs at least double the duty, or L.8,820,646. So that, allowing for smuggling and adulteration, the expenditure on this filthy and offensive stimulant cannot be taken at less than from L.9,000,000 to L.10,000,000 a-year, being about equal to the receipts of all the railways in the kingdom. And of this immense sum, more than three-fourths is contributed by the working-classes. So deeply-rooted is the taste for tobacco, that in some country parishes in the south of Scotland the expenditure upon it equals or exceeds the expenditure upon tea. Under such circumstances, it would be the climax of folly to do anything to increase the demand for tobacco. A duty on it is quite unexceptionable; and should be fixed at the point, whatever it may be, that will produce the greatest amount of revenue.

The repeal or reduction of the taxes on the middle and upper classes would have no sensible effect in increasing the demand for labour. And supposing it had, it would be advantageous only to the industrious and provident labourers. Nothing, in truth, can be of any real service to the others. Those who spend Sunday and Monday in gin shops and skittle grounds, would not be much bettered by being able to spend Tuesday in the same way. Nothing, therefore, can be a more perfect fallacy than to suppose that our existing system of taxation has any sensible influence in depressing the labourers. The protective duties that were formerly laid on corn and sugar may have had that effect. But since their repeal, the influence of our taxation has been on the whole entirely different; and the labouring class would not gain, but lose, by its abolition.

Ireland is, and has always been, compared with its extent and fertility, one of the least heavily taxed countries in the world. And yet her population has been uniformly sunk in the lowest abyss of poverty. This circumstance would of itself suffice to show that the condition of a people does not depend nearly so much on the taxes paid by them, as on their character and conduct—that is, on their habits, industry, and forethought.

CHAPTER IX.

Friendly Societies.—Saving Banks.—Advantages of these Institutions.

THE formation of benefit clubs, or friendly societies, seems to be one of the best devices for enabling the poor to provide for themselves, without depending on the charity of their more opulent neighbours. Friendly societies are formed on a principle of mutual insurance. Each member contributes a certain sum by weekly, monthly, or annual subscriptions, while he is in health; and receives from the society a certain

pension or allowance when he is incapacitated for work by accident, sickness, or old age. Nothing, it is obvious, can be more unexceptionable than the principle of these associations. Owing to the general exemption from sickness until a comparatively late period of life, if a number of individuals under thirty or thirty-five years of age, form themselves into a society, and subscribe each a small sum from their surplus earnings, they are able to secure a comfortable provision for themselves, in the event of their becoming unfit for labour. Any single individual who should trust to his own unassisted efforts for support, would, it is plain, be placed in a very different situation from those who are members of such a society; for, however industrious and parsimonious, he might not be able to accomplish his object; inasmuch as the occurrence of any accident, or an obstinate fit of sickness, might, by throwing him out of employment, and forcing him to consume the savings he had accumulated against old age, reduce him to a state of indigence, and oblige him to become dependent on the bounty of others. Wherever a liability to any unfavourable contingency exists, the best and cheapest way of obviating its effects, is by uniting with others. It has, we are aware, been frequently said, that those individuals who are members of friendly societies, and who have passed through life, as many of them have done, without having occasion to claim any portion of their funds, lose the whole amount of their subscriptions. But this is a most erroneous statement. It is true that the individuals in question have not received any pecuniary compensation; but they have enjoyed what was of equal value—a feeling of security against want, and a consequent peace of mind and consciousness of independence. The vast majority of those who insure their property against fire, reap no advantage from it, except a feeling of being secured against a casualty to which all property is liable. This, however, is a sufficient motive to induce every considerate person to execute an insurance. And, on the same principle, all individuals not possessed of incomes derived from land or stock, but who depend for

support on the wages of their labour, if they would place themselves in a state of security, and provide effectually against the risk of being reduced to pauperism and destitution, ought not to neglect to enroll themselves in friendly societies.

For these, and other reasons, which our limits will not permit us to state, we are glad to find that friendly societies have made so considerable a progress, that the number of members of *enrolled* societies, in England only, is at present (1851) estimated at about 800,000 individuals. This is a satisfactory proof that the poor of England are animated by a strong spirit of independence; and that the adverse influences to which they have been exposed have not had so great an effect as might perhaps have been expected. It should also be recollected, that the progress of these societies has been much counteracted by the ignorance and mismanagement of their officers, and by the real difficulty of establishing them on a secure foundation. The great error has consisted in their fixing too large a scale of allowances. At their first institution they are necessarily composed of members in the prime of life; there is, therefore, comparatively little sickness and mortality amongst them. In consequence, their funds rapidly accumulate; and they are naturally tempted to give too large an allowance to those members who are occasionally incapacitated. But the circumstances under which the society is placed at an advanced period are materially different. Sickness and mortality are then comparatively prevalent. The contributions to the fund decline at the same time that the outgoings increase. And it has not unfrequently happened, that societies have become altogether bankrupt; and that the oldest members have been left, at the close of their life, destitute of all support from funds on which they had relied, and to which they had largely contributed.

But the errors in the constitution of friendly societies are not incurable; and various efforts, many of which have been productive of beneficial effects, have been made by private

individuals and associations, and by the legislature, to obviate the chances of their failure, and to encourage their foundation on sound principles. Two Reports, in 1825 and 1827, by a Committee of the House of Commons, on the Laws respecting Friendly Societies; the Report of the Highland Society on the same subject, and other publications, embody a great mass of the most valuable information with regard to these societies. There are, doubtless, several important points which still remain to be satisfactorily cleared up; but, in the meantime, so much has been done that government has been enabled to interfere with effect in assisting the formation of friendly societies on a secure foundation, and several acts have been passed in that view. Such societies as may think proper to claim the benefit of these acts are bound to submit a statement of their rules and regulations for the approval of the officer (Mr Tidd Pratt) appointed for that purpose; and in the event of these being approved by him, and of the tables of payments and allowances appearing suitable to the justices, the society is confirmed by the latter, and becomes entitled to the privileges conferred by the acts referred to. These consist in being allowed to invest the funds of the society in government securities at a minimum rate of interest (£3, 0s. 10d. per cent.), and in the funds of savings-banks. But it is, of course, open to all individuals, not seeking any connection with government, to establish friendly societies on any footing, and in any form, they may think proper.

Savings-banks deserve also the warmest support of all who are friendly to the improvement and independence of the poor. The formation of a habit of saving is of vital importance; and to that two things are necessary, viz.—first, the ability to save, and second, a safe and convenient place in which to deposit savings. Now, most persons, even in the lowest walks of life, have the first and most indispensable of these requisites. Wages are not determined by the wants, but by the numbers, the skill, and the ability of la-

bourers; and, supposing the latter to be about equal, the labourer with a wife and family, and he that is unmarried, will each receive the same amount of wages. It consequently follows that the latter may, if he choose, save all, or nearly all, the sum which the other expends upon his family. This is not a matter about which there can be any doubt. The fact of other labourers providing for the wants of two, three, or four persons out of the same wages that are paid to him, shows conclusively that he has the means of becoming, to a certain extent, independent, and of in so far securing himself against those contingencies to which every one is liable. If he neglect to profit by this golden opportunity, if he spend all his earnings on immediate gratifications, and make no provision against adversity, he will be utterly destitute should he lose his employment, be attacked with sickness, or meet with an accident. And though he were fortunate enough to escape these evils, the respite is temporary only. When he becomes old and unfit for labour, "*poverty will come upon him as one that travelleth, and his want as an armed man.*" And to avoid being starved, he will have to renounce the society and the freedom to which he has been accustomed, and consent to be immured and despised in a workhouse.

It is true, however, that even where the means and the desire to save some portion of their earnings have co-existed, the want of a safe place of deposit for their savings, where they would yield a reasonable interest, and whence they might be withdrawn at pleasure, has formed a serious obstacle to the formation of a habit of accumulation among labourers. Public banks do not generally receive a less deposit than L.10; and there are but very few amongst the labouring classes who find themselves suddenly masters of so large a sum; "while, to accumulate so much by the weekly or monthly saving of a few shillings, appears at first view almost a hopeless task; and should an individual have the resolution to attempt it, the temptation to break in upon his little stock at every call of necessity might be too strong to

resist. At all events, the progressive addition of interest is lost during the period of accumulation, and it even frequently happens that the chest of the servant or labourer is not safe from the depredations of the dishonest; while the very feeling of insecurity which such a circumstance inspires must operate as a fatal check to habits of saving."[1] A similar effect results from the instances that have often occurred, where those poor persons, who had in despite of every discouragement accumulated a little capital, have been tempted, by the offer of a high rate of interest, to lend it to persons of doubtful characters, whose bankruptcy has involved them in irremediable ruin. It is plain, therefore, that few things are likely to be of greater advantage, with a view to the formation of those new and improved habits which must necessarily result from the diffusion of a spirit of frugality and forethought among the poor, than the institution of savings-banks, or places of safe, convenient, and advantageous deposit for their smallest savings. They no longer can plead the want of facility of investment, in excuse for their wasting what little they can save from their wages in gin shops, or other idle or injurious gratifications. They may now feel assured, that their savings, if they carry them to a savings-bank, and the interest accumulated upon them, will be faithfully preserved to meet their future wants. And those only who are so thoughtless or so degraded as to prefer idleness and dissipation to industry and economy, will decline availing themselves of whatever means of accumulation may be in their power. The habit, once contracted, of carrying their surplus earnings to a savings-bank, they will find that it involves no privation; and that the consciousness of having improved their position, and provided some security against unlooked-for evils, is in itself a high enjoyment.

It may be said, perhaps, that these statements apply rather to what savings-banks should be than to what they are; and

[1] Duncan on Parish Banks, p. 3.

it must be confessed that instances have occurred in which these establishments have been grossly mismanaged, and the funds of the contributors been wasted and embezzled. Luckily, however, these instances bear but a small proportion to the entire number of savings-banks. And it is to be hoped that means may be devised to prevent their recurrence; and to afford to the depositors that perfect security which is so desirable, and so essential to the completeness of the system.

The deposits in savings-banks are very large, having amounted in Great Britain, on the 20th Nov. 1850, to the immense sum of £31,208,322. But the practical value of the system must not, we are sorry to say, be measured by the magnitude of the deposits. Advantage has not, in truth, been taken of it to nearly the same extent by those work-people for whose use it was mainly intended, as by the classes immediately above them. Tradesmen and farmers, and their families, and many individuals belonging to the middle classes, have not been slow to avail themselves of the advantages of savings-banks; and they have been a good deal resorted to by domestic servants, especially by females. But ordinary labourers, and particularly those working by the day, have been seldom found, at least compared with those now referred to, carrying their surplus earnings to savings-banks. This is much to be regretted; for they are the very class to which these institutions would be of the greatest service. Perhaps something might be done to overcome or lessen this culpable neglect of their own obvious interests on the part of work-people. A man who will not avail himself of the means in his power for securing himself against want, has but slender claims on the bounty of others. And it were well, perhaps, if the treatment of the poor applying for relief were made materially to depend on the extent to which they had availed themselves, when in health and in employment, of these and similar institutions.

It is unnecessary to engage in this place in any discussion with respect to the comparative merits of friendly so

cieties and savings-banks. Both are excellent, and well fitted to promote the advantage of the labouring-classes. The promotion of habits of accumulation is but a secondary object in the formation of a friendly society; and though it certainly has that effect, it has it, generally speaking, in a less degree than a savings bank. Its grand object is to provide *a security against future want*—to guard against those accidents and casualties to which all are liable, and against which no individual efforts can ever afford an effectual protection. A savings-bank is unquestionably also a most valuable institution; but it does not supersede the other. It does not give the poor man that security which is given him by his becoming a member of a well-constituted friendly insurance society. Nothing, therefore, can be more unreasonable and ill-founded, than the hostility to friendly societies manifested by many patrons of savings-banks. Both institutions are intended to promote the improvement of the poor, and to enable them to support themselves. And being equally well calculated to effect these desirable objects, it is, to say the least, not a little inconsequential and absurd for those who are the friends of the one, to labour to misrepresent the other, and to bring it into disrepute.

It would, however, be unjust not to mention, that though some of the patrons and supporters of savings banks are opposed to friendly societies, there are many amongst them who take a more correct and comprehensive view of the subject, and who are equally friendly to both. The advantages of friendly societies are nowhere better stated than in the tract, to which we have already referred, of the late Dr Duncan of Ruthwell, who was one of the first to promote the foundation of savings-banks, and to whose philanthropy and intelligence these institutions have been largely indebted. "There is one point of view," says he, "in which the friendly society scheme can claim a decided advantage. An individual belonging to the labouring part of the community cannot ect, by making the most assiduous use of the provisions avings-bank, to arrive at sudden independence; on the

contrary, it is only by *many years* of industry and economy that the flattering prospects held out by that system can be realised. But health is precarious, and accident or disease may in a moment put an end to all the efforts of the most active and expert. It is under such circumstances that a very striking difference appears in favour of the friendly society scheme. He who should trust entirely to the progressive accumulation of his funds in a savings-bank, might now find himself fatally disappointed. If he had not been fortunate enough to realise a considerable capital before the sources of his subsistence were dried up, the illness of a few weeks or months might reduce him to a state of want and dependence, and cause him to experience the unhappiness of mourning over impotent efforts and abortive hopes. On the other hand, the man who has used the precaution to become a member of a friendly society has made a comfortable and permanent provision against the sudden attack of disease and accident. The moment he comes to acquire the privilege of a *free member*, which, by the rules of most of those institutions, is at the end of the third year after he began to contribute, he is safe from absolute want, and the regular manner in which his weekly allowance is paid him enhances its value. Nor is this provision liable to any of these objections, which have been so strongly urged against the system of poor rates. Instead of degrading and vitiating the mind, its tendency is directly the reverse. The poor man feels that he is reaping the fruit of *his own* industry and forethought. He has purchased, by his own prudent care, an honourable resource against the most common misfortunes of life; and even when deprived of the power to labour for a livelihood, an honest pride of independence remains to elevate and ennoble his character."[1]

[1] An Essay on the Nature and Advantages of Parish Banks, 2d Edition, p. 50.

CHAPTER X.

Influence of the Poor-Laws over the condition of the Labourers.

It would be foreign to the purposes of this treatise to enter into any lengthened inquiries in regard to the principles and practical operation of the poor-laws. They were instituted principally with a view to the advantage of the poor. But by providing a refuge and a support to the latter in periods of revulsion and distress, they powerfully contribute to maintain the public tranquillity, and consequently conduce to the prosperity of the other classes. Practically, however, their influence is of a mixed description, and is in part at least unfavourable. It would be easy to show that in countries like this, a compulsory provision for the maintenance of those who are unable to maintain themselves, is not only a most valuable, but an indispensable institution. Yet it is plain that such provision being independent of their own industry and thrift, will in some degree detract from that sense of self-reliance on which the well-being of every man must always mainly depend. And it is farther plain, that if you make the provision equal and indiscriminate—if you place the industrious and the lazy, the frugal and the thriftless, on the same footing, you can hardly fail to weaken some of the most powerful motives to good conduct in the virtuous part of the community, and to strengthen the vicious propensities in those that are bad. And hence it is, that much of the real effect of a compulsory provision for the poor depends on the mode in which it is administered. The law says that no man in England shall be allowed to suffer the extremity of want, and in so far it treats all classes alike. This equality does not, however, go for much. Her peculiar rewards still remain to industry. The labourer who has aved some little property by contributing to a savings-bank

or a friendly society, and who perhaps has acquired a cottage and garden, has nothing in common with a pauper. He is elevated by the consciousness that he has not neglected the opportunities afforded him of improving his condition; that he is not indebted for his subsistence to the grudging charity of others; and he enjoys a much larger share of comfort and respectability than those in higher situations will readily imagine. But those who have nothing but the poor-laws to fall back upon when their health fails, or they happen to be out of employment, are in a widely different situation. They are not left to die by the way-side, to be starved or frozen to death, and that is about all that is done for them. They are deprived of their liberty, shut up like felons in workhouses, and compelled to submit to the discipline and perform the tasks enforced in these establishments. Nothing, therefore, can be a greater error than to suppose that the labouring classes are placed, how different soever their characters and conduct, through the operation of the poor-laws, nearly on the same level. And in point of fact, the poor have themselves the greatest interest in preventing any such equalisation; for, were it realised, good conduct, industry, and forethought would no longer enjoy that superiority to which they have an irresistible claim; and the external circumstances of the virtuous part of the community would be reduced to the low level of the vicious and the improvident. Imprisonment, hard labour, and inferior food, are all that the law of England assigns to sloth, dissipation, and profligacy. And it is of the utmost importance that these vices should never fail to be accompanied with their proper punishment. To make work-houses comfortable, is to pervert them from their peculiar purpose. The more they are complained of, provided they be not unhealthy, the better. They should be places of refuge for the destitute, but with as little to recommend them as possible.

It is true that the best and most industrious individuals are subject to bad health—to all sorts of accidents, and that they may be compelled, without any fault of their own, to

become claimants for public relief. And it may be asked, are these parties to be obliged to resort to work-houses, and to be subjected to the same treatment as the slothful and the disorderly? We answer, certainly not. Such cannot be the case, unless the administration of the poor-laws be grossly defective. Industrious labourers, if overtaken by poverty, should, if practicable, be provided for at their own houses, or those of their relatives or friends. The work-house either is or should be appropriated to the use of a very different class, of those whose destitution has been occasioned by their own misconduct, or of those who are suspected of counterfeiting poverty, or whose laziness and disorderly habits prevent their being employed. These, and these only, are the proper inmates of work-houses. The really deserving poor should never be sent to them, or, if ever, only in cases of emergency; and while there, a marked difference should be made in their treatment. If work-houses be conducted on any other principle,—if they treat all who may be forced to resort to them in the same manner without any regard to their previous character and conduct, they level in as far as possible all distinction between virtue and vice; and they cannot do this without adding to the misery they profess to relieve, and becoming formidable engines of demoralisation.

CHAPTER XI.

Education.

Of all the means for providing for the permanent improvement of the poor hitherto suggested, few, if any, seem to promise to be so effectual as the establishment of a really useful system of public education. Much of the misery and crime which afflict and disgrace society have their sources in ignorance—in the ignorance of the poor with respect to the circumstances which really determine their condition. Those

who have laboured to promote their education seem, generally speaking, to be satisfied, provided they succeed in making them able to read and write. But the education which stops at this point omits those parts that are really the most important. A knowledge of the arts of reading, writing, and arithmetic may, and indeed very often does, exist in company with an all but entire ignorance of those principles with respect to which it is most for the interest of the poor themselves, as well as of the other portions of the community, that they should be well informed. To render education productive of all the utility that may be derived from it, the poor should, in addition to the elementary instruction now communicated to them, be made acquainted with the duties enjoined by religion and morality; and with the circumstances which occasion that gradation of ranks and inequality of fortunes which are of the essence of society. And they should be impressed, from their earliest years, with a conviction of the important truth, which it has been the main object of this work to establish and illustrate, that they are in great measure the arbiters of their own fortune—that what others can do for them is but trifling compared with what they can do for themselves—and that the most liberal government, and the best institutions, cannot shield them from poverty and misery, without the exercise of a reasonable degree of forethought and good conduct on their part. It is a proverbial expression, that man is the creature of habit; and no education can be good for much in which the peculiar and powerful influence of different habits and modes of acting over the happiness and comfort of individuals is not traced and exhibited in the clearest light; and which does not show how those productive of advantage may be most easily acquired, and those having a contrary effect most easily guarded against. The grand object in educating the lower classes should be to teach them to regulate their conduct with a view to their well-being, whatever may be their employments. The acquisition of scientific information, or even of the arts of reading or writing, though of the greatest

importance, is subordinate and inferior to an acquaintance with the great art of "living well;" that is, of living so as to secure the greatest amount of comfort and respectability to individuals, under whatever circumstances they may be placed. That the ultimate effect of an education of this sort would be most advantageous, there can be little doubt. Neither the errors nor the vices of the poor are incurable. They investigate the practical questions which affect their immediate interests with the greatest sagacity and penetration, and do not fail to trace their remote consequences. And if education were made to embrace objects of real utility—if it were made a means of instructing the poor with respect to the circumstances which elevate and depress the rate of wages, and which improve and deteriorate their individual condition, the presumption is, that numbers would endeavour to profit by it. The harvest of good education may be late, but in the end it can hardly fail to be luxuriant. And it will amply reward the efforts of those who are not discouraged in their attempts to make it embrace such objects as we have specified, by the difficulties they may expect to encounter at the commencement, and during the progress of their labours.

The Archbishop of Canterbury has excellently observed, in reference to the diffusion of education, that—"Of all obstacles to improvement, ignorance is the most formidable, because the only true secret of assisting the poor is to make them agents in bettering their own condition, and to supply them, not with a temporary stimulus, but with a permanent energy. As fast as the standard of intelligence is raised, the poor become more and more able to co-operate in any plan proposed for their advantage, more likely to listen to any reasonable suggestion, more able to understand, and therefore more willing to pursue it. Hence it follows, that when gross ignorance is once removed, and right principles are introduced, a great advantage has been already gained against squalid poverty. Many avenues to an improved condition are opened to one whose faculties are enlarged and exercised; he sees his interest more clearly, he pursues it more steadily, he does

not study immediate gratification at the expense of bitter and late repentance, or mortgage the labour of his future life without an adequate return. Indigence, therefore, will rarely be found in company with good education."[1]

It is not to be expected, nor perhaps to be wished, that the mass of the people should be profoundly learned. The great works in which new principles are developed, can neither be read nor understood by them. But the results of these works, and the truths which they contain, may be embodied in elementary treatises, may be taught in schools, and made to circulate in workshops and hamlets. This has been done with the physical and mathematical sciences; but it has not hitherto been done with those more important sciences, which explain the mechanism of society, unfold the sources of private opulence and public prosperity, and of national poverty and degradation. And yet it would seem that the safety of the government, and the tranquillity of the state, not less than the comfort and well-being of the people, must in all cases principally depend on the intelligence of the latter, with respect to these sciences. If people are ignorant of the circumstances which really determine their condition, they must necessarily act blindly and capriciously, both in their private capacity as masters of families, and in their public capacity as citizens. An ignorant and an ill-educated multitude possess no self-regulating principle; but necessarily become the prey of their own imaginary fears and apprehensions, and of the sinister designs of crafty demagogues. It is observed by Dr Smith, that an instructed and an intelligent people is always more decent and orderly than one that is ignorant and stupid. They feel themselves each individually more respectable, and more likely to obtain the respect of their lawful superiors, and they are therefore more disposed to respect them. The widest experience confirms the truth of this observation. The violence and outrageousness of mobs have uniformly been proportioned to the strength

[1] Records of the Creation, Vol. II. p. 298.

of the prejudices by which they have been actuated, or, which is the same thing, to their ignorance. What other cause can be assigned for the religious massacres and persecutions that desolated Europe for so many ages, except that the ignorance of the people rendered them a prey to the grossest delusions of superstition and fanaticism? Would an enlightened populace, capable of appreciating the services they had rendered to their country, have imbrued their hands in the blood of that able and upright statesman, the Grand Pensionary De Witt, and his unhappy brother? Could the London riots of 1780, on account of the relaxation of the Catholic penal code, have happened, had the people been generally informed? What but the ignorance and infatuation of the Irish, could make them believe that a repeal of the union would be of advantage to Ireland? Or to give a still more striking example, could the enormities and atrocities of the French revolution of 1789 have been perpetrated, except by a mob, whose ignorance fitted them for the commission of every crime, by rendering them the willing and unsuspecting dupes of shallow and sanguinary sophists? It would be easy to quote myriads of similar instances of the baneful effects of ignorance on the public conduct and tranquillity of states. But what has been stated is more than sufficient to show, that instead of its being true, as has often been affirmed, that ignorance is the surest pledge of the submission of the lower orders to established authority, that it is, on the contrary, a prolific source of confusion and disorder. And hence it appears that it is the duty of governments, both in the view of promoting the happiness of their subjects, and of providing a security to themselves against the blind and dangerous impulses by which an uneducated and ill-informed populace are so apt to be actuated, to lend their aid to establish a really useful system of public instruction.

THE END.