

To George Rogers
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ILLUSTRATIONS AND PROOFS
OF THE
PRINCIPLE OF POPULATION:

INCLUDING
AN EXAMINATION OF THE
PROPOSED REMEDIES OF MR. MALTHUS,
AND A REPLY TO THE
OBJECTIONS OF MR. GODWIN
AND OTHERS.

By FRANCIS PLACE.

It to this day remains a problem, whether the number of our species
can be increased. Godwin, p. 115.

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ing people; among whom I do not include (neither ought they ever to be included) that class of wretched beings who seldom or never labour, but live or linger on in existence by the habitual practice of vice, and the perpetration of crime. Of the virtues of the working people it is not possible for Mr. Malthus to be accurately informed, for they are unobtrusive, and must be sought out. But although Mr. Malthus is necessarily deficient in knowledge on these points, I at least may make some pretension to better information. A hired workman myself for several years, enjoying the confidence of large bodies of workmen, an active promoter and conductor of trade-societies during those years, and an encourager of them to the present hour, I have had opportunities of *seeing* and *feeling*, and knowing most intimately, the characters and habits, the virtues and vices, the pleasures and pains, the joys and sorrows, of large masses of the population, and may still claim a sympathy with them, which I feel will never be eradicated. How then, I ask, can these be taught by those who are ignorant of their habits, and do not understand their real situation, who confound them with those whom they themselves despise, who suppose them infinitely less intelligent, less honest, less disposed to be virtuous, and less willing to be instructed than they really are; who attribute to them the most puerile notions, address them in the language of children, or goad them like slaves, who accuse them of making complaints they do not make, and pay no attention to those they do make?

CHAPTER VI.

MEANS OF PREVENTING THE NUMBERS OF MANKIND FROM INCREASING FASTER THAN FOOD IS PROVIDED.

SECTION III.

IDEAS OF THE AUTHOR RELATIVE TO THE MEANS OF PREVENTING THE PEOPLE FROM INCREASING FASTER THAN FOOD.

IN the preceding section we have seen one set of propositions, and one mode of teaching the people pointed out. Mr. Malthus, as has been shown, insisted that, as previous steps, the poor should be convinced they have no *right* to eat when out of employment, and that we are bound in justice and honour formally to disclaim their right to support, and these proposals if adopted, he tells us, would unite the rich and the poor more closely. The futility of these modes of teaching and uniting have been already shown. We will now proceed to examine another set of propositions, which, if well understood and steadily acted upon, would render the former propositions altogether unnecessary. They are, to be sure, somewhat at variance with the former propositions, but this is by no means an uncommon occurrence in the work of Mr. Malthus.

Many of the facts and observations to be found in the work of Mr. Malthus, are of the greatest importance, but to make them useful to the high as well as to the low, they should be arranged so as to form a whole, and not be scattered through the work. They should be elucidated in the plainest manner, their practical consequences should be shown, as well as the way in which those consequences are to be brought about. The *higher* classes are quite as ignorant as the *lower* classes, and the middle classes are by no means too well-informed on the subject of population. Mr. Malthus himself has produced evidence of this. "It is," he says, "of the utmost importance, that the gentlemen of the country, and particularly the clergy, should not from *ignorance* aggravate the evils of scarcity every time that it unfortunately occurs. During the dearths of 1800 and 1801, half the gentlemen and clergymen in the kingdom richly deserved to have been prosecuted for sedition. After inflaming the minds of the common people against the farmers and corn-dealers, by the manner in which they talked of them or preached about them, it was but a feeble antidote to the poison they had infused, coldly to observe, that, however the poor might be oppressed or cheated, it was their duty to keep the peace."* Mr. Malthus observes, that "it does not seem entirely visionary to suppose, that if the true and permanent causes of poverty were clearly explained, and forcibly brought home to each man's bosom, it would have some and perhaps a considerable

* Vol. iii. p. 202. Note.

influence on his conduct, at least *the experiment has never yet been fairly tried.*"* "We must explain to them the true nature of their situation, and show them that the withholding the supplies of labour, is the only possible way of really raising its price, and that they themselves being the possessors of the commodity, have alone the power to do this."†—"We cannot justly accuse them of improvidence, and want of industry, (although he has himself accused them,) till they act as they now do, after it has been brought home to their comprehensions, that they are themselves the cause of their own poverty, that the means of redress are in their own hands, and in the hands of no other persons whatever.‡" This is all excellent; and thus has Mr. Malthus replied to himself, and proved the absurdity and cruelty of the propositions before noticed. Were what he has here proposed but properly followed up, no doubt need be entertained of a remedy. He goes on—"The population once overtaken by an increased quantity of food, and by proportioning the population to the food, we are not to relax our efforts to increase the quantity of food, and thus unite the two grand desiderata, a great actual population, and a state of society in which abject poverty and dependence are comparatively but little known; two objects which are far from being incompatible."§

* Vol. iii. p. 108.

† Vol. iii. p. 114.

‡ Vol. iii. p. 108.

§ Vol. iii. p. 113.

“ This once effected, it (population) might then start afresh, and continue increasing for ages with the increase of food, maintaining always the same relative proportion to it. I can conceive that this country, with a proper direction of the national industry, might in the course of some centuries contain two or three times its present population, and yet every man be much better fed, clothed (and he might have added instructed), than he is at present.”*

“ The prudential restraint from marriage, if it were generally adopted, by narrowing the supply of labour in the market, would soon raise its price. The period of delayed gratification would be passed in saving the earnings which were above the wants of a single man, and in acquiring habits of sobriety, industry, and economy, which would enable him in a few years to enter into the matrimonial contract without fear of its consequences. The operation of the preventive check in this way, by constantly keeping the population within the limits of the food, though constantly following its increase, would give a real value to the rise of wages. As the wages of labour would thus be sufficient to maintain a large family, every married couple would set out with a sum for contingencies, all abject poverty would be removed from society, or would be confined to a very few who had fallen into misfortunes, against which no prudence or foresight could provide.”†

* Vol. iii. p. 116.

† Vol. iii. p. 86.

Yet, notwithstanding these and similar passages, Mr. Godwin accuses Mr. Malthus of being the enemy of the working man, “ and *always* an advocate for low wages.” Mr. Godwin, in his former reply, dwelt much upon the same topics as those which have just been noticed, but he brought his subject more home to the immediate attention of his readers, and did not obscure his statement by extraneous or irrelevant matter.

“ Let us suppose (he says) that population was at this moment in England, or elsewhere, so far advanced, that the *public welfare* demanded that it should not increase.”* Mr. Godwin enters into some calculations, to show how many would probably marry, and how many children each marriage *might be permitted to produce*; he then observes, that “ The prejudice which at present prevails against a single life, and the notion so generally received, that a man or woman without progeny has failed in discharging one of their unquestionable duties to society, frightens many men and women into an inclination towards the marriage state. This prejudice the doctrines of the *Essay on Population*, when they shall come to be generally diffused and admitted, will tend to remove. If this subject were further pursued, it would lead to many observations and details, curious and important in their nature, but which would prove repulsive to the general reader, and would more properly find a place in a treatise on medicine or animal economy.†

* First Reply, p. 68.

† *Ib.* p. 69.

“ *Another check* upon increasing population, which operates very powerfully and extensively in the country we inhabit, is that sentiment, whether virtue, prudence, or pride, which continually restrains the universality and frequent repetition of the marriage contract. Early marriages in this country, between a grown-up boy and girl, are of uncommon occurrence. Every one, possessed in the most ordinary degree of the gift of foresight, deliberates long before he engages in so momentous a transaction. He asks himself, again and again, how he shall be able to subsist the offspring of his union. I am persuaded, it very rarely happens in England that a marriage takes place, without this question having first undergone a repeated examination. There is a very numerous class in every great town, clerks to merchants and lawyers, journeymen in shops, and others, who either never marry, or refrain from marriage, till they have risen through the different gradations of their station to that degree of comparative opulence, which, they think, authorises them to take upon themselves the burthen of a family. *It is needless to remark, that where marriage takes place at a later period of life, the progeny may be expected to be less numerous.* If the check from virtue, prudence, or pride, operates less in the lower classes of life than in the class last described, it is that the members of those classes are rendered desperate by the oppression under which they groan; they have no character of prudence or reflection to support, and they have

nothing of that pride, arising from what is called the decent and respectable appearance a man makes among his neighbours, which should enable them to suppress the first sallies of passion, and the effervescence of a warm constitution.”* Mr. Godwin anticipates the operation of the preventive check in an improved state of society, in which “ The doctrines of the Essay on Population, if they be true, as I have no doubt that they are, will be fully understood, and in which no man would be able to live without character and the respect of his neighbours.”† In such a state of society, the checks alluded to by Mr. Godwin would, no doubt, be sufficient, without resorting to infanticide. Mr. Malthus has also drawn a picture of an improved state of society, which, he thinks, may be realized, “ in which there would be no improvident marriages, which would remove one of the principal causes of offensive war, and eradicate these two fatal disorders, internal tyranny and internal tumult, which mutually produce each other. Indisposed to a war of offence, in a war of defence, such a society would be strong as a rock of adamant. Where every family possessed the necessaries of life in plenty, and a decent portion of its comforts and conveniencies, there could not exist that desire for change, or, at best, that melancholy and disheartening indifference to it, which sometimes prompts the lower classes of the people to say, “ Come what will, we can’t be worse off.”‡

* First Reply, p. 72.

† Ib. p. 74.

‡ Essay, vol. iii. p. 99.

“The master-spring of public prosperity,” as Mr. Malthus has properly enough called the love of distinction; the hope of rising, and the fear of falling in the world, and in the moral estimation of his neighbours; “the decent pride,” and the effect it produces, which has been so well spoken of by Mr. Godwin, and to which my intercourse with the world enables me to bear witness, and which would, no doubt, be equally efficacious among the commonest mechanics and labourers; if without any thing which should have the appearance of immediate self-interest in the teacher, at the expence of the scholar; if without what to the people may appear like canting; if without airs of superiority and dictation; if without figure and metaphor, means were adopted to show them how the market came to be overstocked with labour; that this was the cause of the low rate of wages—that it was impossible for real wages to rise, so as to enable them to live in comfort while they continued to keep the supply above the demand;—if it were clearly shown to them, that inevitable poverty and misery would result from marrying and having a family while this state of things continued; if familiar instances were collected of the poverty and misery, the crime and disgrace, to which indiscreet marriages too frequently led; if it were shown, that overstocking the market, even in a small degree, with labour, inevitably deteriorated the condition of every working man;—if all this were clearly and familiarly shown, on the one side, and if, on the

other, it was as clearly shown, that by abstaining from marriage for even a few years, the supply of labour might be brought rather under the demand; that, when so, its price, like that of bread, or meat, or potatoes, when scarce, would rise, and might, by their abstinence from marriage, be raised so high as to enable them to maintain themselves respectably, and give many of them a fair chance of rising in the world;—if a hundredth, perhaps a thousandth part of the pains, were taken to teach these truths that are taken to teach dogmas, a great change for the better might, in no considerable space of time, be expected to take place in the appearance and the habits of the people. If, above all, it were once clearly understood, that it was not disreputable for married persons to avail themselves of such precautionary means as would, without being injurious to health, or destructive of female delicacy, prevent conception, a sufficient check might at once be given to the increase of population beyond the means of subsistence; vice and misery, to a prodigious extent, might be removed from society, and the object of Mr. Malthus, Mr. Godwin, and of every philanthropic person, be promoted, by the increase of comfort, of intelligence, and of moral conduct, in the mass of the population.

The course recommended will, I am fully persuaded, at some period be pursued by the people, even if left to themselves. The intellectual progress they have for several years past been making, the desire for information of all kinds, which is

abroad in the world, and particularly in this country, cannot fail to lead them to the discovery of the true causes of their poverty and degradation, not the least of which they will find to be in overstocking the market with labour, by too rapidly producing children, and for which they will not fail to find and to apply remedies.

“One objection to decreasing the supply of labour (says Mr. Malthus) which perhaps will be made, is, that *from which alone it derives its value—a market rather understocked with labour.* This must undoubtedly take place to a certain degree, but by no means in such a degree as to affect the wealth and prosperity of the country. But putting this subject of a market understocked in the most unfavourable point of view, if the rich will not submit to a slight inconvenience, necessarily attendant on what they profess to desire, they cannot really be in earnest in their professions. Their benevolence to the poor must be either childish play or hypocrisy; it must be either to amuse themselves, or to pacify the minds of the common people with a mere show of attention to their wants. To wish to better the condition of the poor, by enabling them to command a greater quantity of the necessaries and comforts of life, and then to complain of high wages, is the act of a silly boy, who gives his cake and then cries for it. *A market overstocked with labour, and an ample remuneration to each labourer, are objects perfectly incompatible with each other.* In the annals of the world they never existed together;

and to couple them even in imagination, betrays a gross ignorance of the simplest principles of political economy.”*

This is all very true; but hitherto the conduct of the rich has not only been quite as absurd as has been described, but it has also been directly in opposition to their professions. The very men who pretended to be most desirous to better the condition of the poor man, even while they were making professions to serve him, took the advantage the laws gave them to prevent even the remote possibility of a labouring man becoming chargeable to a parish, to which he did not at the moment belong by acquiring a legal settlement; and when a man was found likely to obtain a new settlement, he was either expelled the parish, or transported back to his own; no matter what were his prospects, or how well soever he was doing; it was quite enough that in the opinion of the magistrates he might some day become chargeable to the parish in which he resided, if allowed to make a settlement. Thus he was imprisoned in his own parish. Having got him into this state, the next thing was to reduce him as low as possible, and to keep him so. For this purpose, the land-owners, magistrates, and principal farmers openly combined, and formed what the law in the case of the labourer treats as a conspiracy; and having, in their capacity of conspirators, ascertained the smallest quantity of food necessary to keep the male human animal in barely working condition, this they said,

* Essay, vol. iii. p. 115.

or its equivalent in money, should be the wages paid to him ; * if he chose to marry and have children, then he was to receive from the parish “ *a gallon loaf for feed, and 3d. in money for clothes, for his wife, and for each of his children once a week.*” But as this would not afford assistance to any of his family in sickness, he was to look for aid to private benevolence. But if at any time he dared to complain, he was to be punished ; if he congregated, or made an attempt to congregate, for the purpose of preventing his own degradation, he was prosecuted as a felon, and told from the seat of justice, by the mouth of an English judge, that “ *his crime was worse than felony, and as bad as murder,*” and sentenced to two years solitary confinement, separated from his family, and in some cases almost entirely debarred from even a knowledge of the deplorable distress and misery to which his unjust and cruel sentence had been the means of reducing them.

This has been the justice meted out by the rich to the poor ; this the intelligible proof of their desire, when associated together, to improve the condition of the working man. This is the practical lesson many are at the present moment learning in different gaols ; this is the recompence they have received at the hands of the rich, for attempting to perform their moral duties ; and this is the way, or,

* About twenty years ago a meeting so composed was held in Berkshire, and a table of wages, calculated by the price of bread, in order to ascertain the money-wages to be paid, was published, with a recommendation to those whom it might concern, not to pay more than was allowed by the table.

rather, one of the ways, the rich have taken to “ draw the bonds of society closer.” Such were the laws the British legislature thought it wise to enact, and such the proceedings under them which they sanctioned. Have not the poor, then, a right to complain ? Can it be of any use to preach to people thus treated, of the *law of nature excluding them from all claim to support* under any circumstances ? Will they believe, merely because they are told so, that these barbarous laws, savage denunciations, cruel sentences, and conspiracies to degrade and pauperize them, are any thing but wanton outrages of power ; and ought any man to expect they will be operated upon by those whom they have but too much reason to believe are their decided enemies, whenever their pride, their ignorance, and love of power, induce them to suppose they have an interest in doing them mischief ? Do they not know, that the whole practice of the government, in respect to them, has been, and still is, an attempt to keep down the wages of labour ? Do they not know that this has all along been recommended to the government, by the gentry, the magistrates, and the great manufacturers ? Do they not know that it has been the intention of all above them to reduce them to the most abject state of dependence ? Do they not know that, while they are preached to, as it were, with one hand, they are scourged with the other ? Do they not know that no attempt has been made to lead them, but that on all occasions they have been driven ? That the laws and the magistrates have always treated them

as a seditious, dishonest, covetous, dissolute set of brutes, and that they have never been recognized in any other capacity? * Yes, all this they know,

* Among a thousand instances which might be given, the act of the 1st and 2d of the King, called the New Vagrant Act, may be cited as the most recent instance of unwise legislation. Under this act, if a man cannot find employment in his own parish, and either does not choose to become a pauper, or to remain one, but laudably endeavours to remove himself to some other place, in the hope of being able to maintain himself by the labour of his hands; if a man so circumstanced should fail to obtain employment, until his poverty had compelled him to commit an act, which any Justice of the Peace should deem to be an act of vagrancy, he may commit him to prison for any time not less than one month, nor more than three months, and there keep him to hard labour on the gaol allowance. A little time ago two men were brought before one of the Aldermen of the City of London; they had been found sleeping in the sheep pens in Smithfield Market. One of them stated that he was a farrier, and had travelled all the way from Alwrick in Northumberland, seeking employment in his business; he had endeavoured to obtain work all along the road, but without success, and had never been in London before. The other said that he had been shopman to a grocer in Shropshire, but having been long out of employment, had come to London in the hope of obtaining it. Both begged to be discharged, and promised to make their way home again in the best way they could; but to this request the magistrate would not accede. The act allows two magistrates to pass vagrants to their respective parishes at once, if they think the case requires it. The Alderman therefore, as this was the first case which had occurred under the act, carried it before the Lord Mayor. The Alderman observed that he did not like to form a precedent for his brother magistrates, yet he felt it was necessary that a rule should be laid down which might be uniformly adhered to in all future cases of this nature. In the present case he was of opinion the *prisoners* were *not justified* in coming to town without any pros-

and much more, and nothing can be so absurd as to expect their confidence can be obtained by those who treat them thus, whose pretensions to do them service are "*either childish play or hypocrisy.*"

Three things must be done, if there be where there ought to be a real desire to better the condition of the working people.

1. A repeal of all the laws relating to the combinations of workmen to increase their wages. No good reason has been or can be given for restrain-

pect before them, for they *must* have known that, in the present state of trade, no one would take them in, nor indeed would any one be justified in taking in a perfect stranger; and, therefore, they *must have been aware that they would ultimately become burthensome to the district where they fell.* But whether their conduct arose solely from ignorance or not, he considered was immaterial; the magistrates could not know their minds, and could make no distinction.

The Lord Mayor agreed with the Alderman. The City Magistrates wished it to be known in the country at large, that in future they should feel themselves *bound to send all to hard labour for the term enacted, whether they were actuated by a vicious spirit of vagabondage, or with whatever professed object or speculation they came to town.* In short, they would put the law in full force against all who could not prove reasonable assurance, or certainty of obtaining employment, as their motive for coming to London. The men were passed home to their respective parishes. No comment is necessary, on a law which authorizes a magistrate to tell a labourer, or a journeyman mechanic, that if unable to live by the labour of his hands in his own parish, he seek it in another, and failing to obtain it, commits an act of vagrancy, he shall be punished as severely as he would be, after he had been convicted of one among many serious crimes. But it may be asked, if this be not one of those laws which induce men to commit crimes?

ing the workmen and their employers from making their bargains in their own way, as other bargains are made.

2. A repeal of the laws restraining emigration. These laws might all be repealed at once.

3. To repeal, as rapidly as possible, all restrictive laws on trade, commerce, and manufactures,* and particularly the corn laws.

Before, however, the latter sentence could be well pronounced, the rich, it might be expected, would rise in arms against both the proposition and the proposer. This would, however, only prove how very far we are from the desirable state contemplated, inasmuch as it depends upon the rich. If, however, the rich are not disposed to take this course, they, of all men, ought to cease complaining of the conduct of the poor, and the pressure of the poor's rate.

Were those in whose hands the power is held, to show a sincere desire to do but bare justice to the working people, they would find them not the last to acknowledge the intended benefit. They would be the first, not only to acknowledge the benefit intended them, but eagerly desirous to become acquainted with the truths on which their welfare so materially depends.

* There would be less difficulty and less inconvenience in carrying this recommendation into effect than is generally supposed. The committee of the House of Commons on "the depressed state of agriculture," says, "It may well be doubted whether, with the exception of silk, any of our considerable manufactures derive benefit from the *assumed protection* in the markets of this country." Report, folio 23.

Mr. Malthus seems to shrink from discussing the propriety of preventing conception, not so much it may be supposed from the abhorrence which he or any reasonable man can have to the practice, as from the possible fear of encountering the prejudices of others, has, towards the close of his work, resolved all his remedies into one, the efficacy of which he has all along doubted, and on which he seems afraid to rely. "He candidly confesses that if the people cannot be persuaded to defer marriage till they have a fair prospect of being able to maintain a family, *all our former efforts will be thrown away. It is not in the nature of things, that any permanent general improvement in the condition of the poor can be effected without an increase in the preventive check.*"* Nothing can be more true than the concluding clause of the sentence quoted, and we need give ourselves no further trouble to discuss the propriety or cruelty either of infanticide, or excluding children from parish aid. Neither would be adequate to the end proposed, and neither are likely to be adopted. Mr. Malthus confesses that his proposal to exclude them would not remove the evil, and both he and Mr. Godwin have declared that the true remedy can alone be found in preventives. It is nothing to the purpose that Mr. Godwin has, at length, persuaded himself that "we have more reason to fear a decrease than to expect an increase of people." It is time, however, that those who really understand the cause of

* Essay, vol. iii. p. 299.

a redundant, unhappy, miserable, and considerably vicious population, and the means of preventing the redundancy, should clearly, freely, openly, and fearlessly point out the means. It is "childish" to shrink from proposing or developing any means, however repugnant they may at first appear to be; our only care should be, that we do not in removing one evil introduce another of greater magnitude. He is a visionary who expects to remove vice altogether, and he is a driveller who, because he cannot accomplish what is impossible to be accomplished, sets himself down and refrains from doing the good which is in his power.

One circumstance deserves notice, as an objection which will probably be made—would not incontinence be increased, if the means recommended were adopted? I am of opinion it would not; so much depends on manners, that it seems to be by no means an unreasonable expectation that if these were so improved, as greatly to increase the prudential habits, and to encourage the love of distinction, "the master spring of public prosperity," and if, in consequence of the course recommended, all could marry early, there would be less debauchery of any kind. An improvement in manners would be an improvement in morals; and it seems absurd to suppose an increase of vice with improved morals. Mr. Malthus has, however, set the question of continence in a very clear point of view; he says, "it may be objected, that, by endeavouring to urge the duty of moral restraint" "we may increase the quantity of vice relating to the sex.

I should be extremely sorry to say any thing which could either directly or remotely be construed unfavourably to the cause of virtue; but *I certainly cannot think that the vices which relate to the sex are the only vices which are to be considered in a moral question, or that they are even the greatest and most degrading to the human character.* They can rarely or never be committed without producing unhappiness somewhere or other, and, therefore, ought always to be strongly reprobated. But there are other vices, the effects of which are still more pernicious; and there are other situations which lead more certainly to moral offences than refraining from marriage. *Powerful as may be the temptations to a breach of chastity, I am inclined to think that they are impotent in comparison with the temptations arising from continued distress.* A large class of women and many men, I have no doubt, pass a considerable part of their lives consistently with the laws of chastity; but I believe *there will be found very few who pass through the ordeal of squalid and HOPELESS poverty, or even of long-continued embarrassed circumstances, without a great moral degradation of character.***

The most effectual mode of diminishing promiscuous intercourse is marriage, if all could be married while young, with reasonable hopes that propriety of conduct and a fair share of industry would save them from degradation, and the multiplied evils of the wretched poverty which exist in a poor

* Essay, vol. iii. p. 117.

man's family, and which, although much talked about, cannot be fully appreciated, even by the imagination of those whose situation precludes them from witnessing those evils for any long-continued period, as well as from feeling them.* If means were adopted to prevent the breeding of a larger number of children than a married couple might desire to have, and if the labouring part of the population could thus be kept below the demand for labour, wages would rise so as to afford the means of comfortable subsistence for all, and all might marry. Marriage,

* Abject poverty sometimes paralyzes all exertion, destroys all hope. The extent to which it produces hard-heartedness, and extinguishes even the love of parents for their offspring, would scarcely be believed, without actual knowledge of the facts. I have known but too many instances. A few years ago, upon an investigation made from house to house, and from room to room, in the upper part of Drury Lane, and the courts and alleys adjoining, for the purpose of ascertaining the real state of the people, Mr. Edward Wakefield, one of the investigators, after reporting many instances, sums up his report by observing, that he "witnessed great wretchedness and misery, which appeared to be permanent. The unhealthy appearance of the majority of the children was too apparent; it would seem as if they came into the world to exist for a few years in a state of torture, since by no other name can I call the dirt, ignorance, want of food, and sickness, which I found to prevail."

Mr. Wakefield met with several parents evidently not bad people, yet so reckless, that all regard for themselves or their children was nearly or entirely extinguished. In a family where one child was dying and another sick, the father, who had not been always in extreme poverty, confessed that he had no hope of being able to bring up his family, and had made no application for medical aid, since death, he said, would be a relief both to the children and himself.

under these circumstances, would be, by far, the happiest of all conditions, as it would also be the most virtuous, and, consequently, the most beneficial to the whole community; the benefits which might reasonably be calculated upon are very extensive and very numerous; the poor's rate would soon be reduced to a minimum, and the poor laws might, with the greatest ease, be remodeled and confined to the aged and helpless, or might, if it should appear advisable, be wholly abolished. Much even of that sort of promiscuous intercourse carried on by means of open prostitution, now so excessively and extensively pernicious, would cease, and means might be found which, without greatly infringing on personal freedom, might render so much of this sort of promiscuous intercourse, as could not be prevented, less pernicious, even to those females, the most degraded and most unfortunate of all human beings; a vast many of whom, in large towns, are doomed to continual prostitution, and of whom a very competent judge says, "With respect to the prostitutes, there are such innumerable instances of extreme misery, that I could almost cut my hand off, before I could commit so poor a wretch to additional misery; they are miserable in the extreme.— Within our present district of Westminster, or half way down the Strand, towards Temple Bar, there may every night be found above 500 to 1000 of that description of wretches. How they can gain any profit by their prostitution, one can hardly conceive; but they are the most hardened

and despicable of the whole, notwithstanding the misery which makes them objects of compassion.”*

I cannot for a moment admit the observation, however general, of well meaning people to have any weight, namely, that we are not to mitigate, by means of regulations, such a horrid mass of misery, or remove, as much as is possible, the temptation to promiscuous intercourse, as it is now indulged in, an indulgence excessively pernicious to young men, and to which a prodigious number of young women are sacrificed, lest we should seem to countenance the course of life followed by common prostitutes. A large portion of the mischief done to society by these women, and the exceedingly gross and vicious conduct they adopt, might, to a considerable extent, be prevented, were we not restrained from making the attempt, by our mistaken apprehensions, that, by interfering, our virtuous notions might be deteriorated, and our detestation of vice be diminished. But as this, as well as many other vices, owes its extent, both as to enormity and number, to the too great proportional increase of population, its great corrective must be looked for in proportioning the labourers to the demand for labour, and to the increase of the means of subsistence.

There appears, upon a view of the whole case, no just cause for despair, but much for hope, that

* The late William Fielding, Esq., chief magistrate at the Police Office, Queen Square, Westminster, in his evidence before the Police Committee of the House of Commons, in 1817, fol. 405.

moral restraint will increase, and that such physical means of prevention will be adopted, as prudence may point out and reason may sanction, and the supply of labour be thus constantly kept below the demand for labour, and the amount of the population be always such as the means of comfortable subsistence can be provided for. The improvement which, under very adverse circumstances, the mass of the people have acquired the general desire for information which exists, and the means of instruction which have been of late adopted, would be increased, and would produce a high state of knowledge, of ease, and comfort, among all classes, and this country would attain an eminence in wealth, in strength, and in wisdom, far beyond any which has hitherto been known.