THOUGHTS

ON THE

Present State of the Poor;

WITH

HINTS

FOR THE

IMPROVEMENT OF THEIR COMPTION

IN



A LETTER

ADDRESSED TO THE

ARCHDEACON OF LINCOLN.

BY

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PREBENDARY OF LINCOLN,

AND ONE OF HIS MAJESTY'S JUSTICES OF THE PEACE FOR THE COUNTY OF BUCKS.

LONDON:

PRINTED BY W. JEFFERY,

Holyday Yard, Ludgate Street,

FOR RIVINGTONS, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH YARD; AND CADELL AND DAVIES, STRAND.

PRICE ONE SHILLING.

1818.

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ARCHDEACON

ADDRESSED TO 1

DEAR SIR. THE situation of the lower orders of the community, in every part of the kingdom, being, at length, so deeply depressed. and the relief they require having become so burthensome upon parishes in general, that, in some instances, it has amounted almost to a total inability to provide for their support, the subject demands, and appears to be obtaining, the consideration not only of individuals, but of the Legislature itself.

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The rapid increase of the poor rates, as also of the number of paupers, as appears by the concurrent testimony of statements from the most respectable quarters in every county, and by the recent Report of the Select Committee of the House of Commons to the same effect,

grounded on the best authorities, are painful to humanity, and, politically considered, truly alarming. The question, "what can be done "(though something must be done) to remedy "the evils that press so heavily on society at " large," is one, undoubtedly, which involves many difficulties. The subject of the Poor Laws, when taken in a general and extended view, branches out into so many details, and embraces such an immense variety of matter, that it is scorcely to be expected that any but those who have made it their study, would be able to elucidate so intricate a question : I shall decline, therefore, going into the general merits of the case. I must, however, remark on this head, that, to suppose an adequate remedy can be found, while the present system continues, is vain and nugatory. Not only the provisions of that system are exhausted, but the system itself is found, by experience, to encourage the very evils it was intended to remove. I will, however, endeavour to suggest some of the means by which, in my humble judgment, the condition of the poor may be ameliorated, in a MORAL VIEW, and which, in concurrence

with un improved plan of parochial relief. would render the state of the poor, not only more comfortable to themselves, but make them also better members of society. These is some radical evil lurking at the bottom of the plan of the Poor Laws, though it appears, prima facie, to have been founded in wisdom, and dictated by a spirit of benevolence. Experience proves that the statutes new in force for the sell of of the industrious and unfortunate Poor, do, in reality, operate as a premium upon dileness and improvidence, by furnishing that support to the young. the healthy, and the strong, which was properly intended, by the Legislature, to assist those only, who are worn out by honest industry, embarrassed with numerous families, or sinking under the weight of misfortune or of at a start age.

There have been, we know, many plans lately suggested from the press, which have for their object the correction of the evils, of which society so loudly and so justly complains. Many have taken a comprehensive view of the subject, and treated it in an able and masterly manner: but, notwithstanding this, as I know

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you to be deeply interested in the question, and have expressed to me your wish to hear my sentiments upon it, I have put them together in a brief, and, I acknowledge, rather a hasty manner, for your perusal.

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We find, that, on every topic, something, perhaps, may be picked up, from the remarks of even the humblest writeras. I have ventured, therefore, to commit to the press my thoughts upon the subject, in the hope, rather than with the expectation, that they may furnish any useful hints: its out provide out furnish any useful hints: its out provide out furnish any use-

After having acted for several years in the Commission of the Peace for the County of Bucks, in a district where nauperism prevails to a considerable extent, I am enabled to remark there, what, I hear, prevails very generally ëlsewhere, a total want, on the part of the Poor, of that proper feeling, which? ought to urge a man to support himself and his family by their joint labour. Formerly, a poor man solicited relief of the parish officers with sentiments of laudable shame; but what is the fact at present? he applies for relief, as to a fund upon which he has an unqualified claim, and is not satisfied until he has obtained it. He now no longer looks to his own exertions; he seems to forget that he has a station assigned him in society, the duties of which he is bound to fulfil. Thus habits of inactivity and indolence are formed, his efforts for his support become relaxed, enfeebled, and paralised; and, by degrees, he is led to commit (what idleness always encourages) actions which he knows to be wrong; till, from continued improvidence, and a supine reliance on parochial relief, he finds himself doomed to wear out the remainder of his days within the walls of a workhouse; or, (what is dreadful to think of.) in the progress of depravity, having lost all sense of morality, he commits one crime after another, in rapid succession, and at length becomes a victim to the justice of his country. To obviate these fatal consequences, there appears to me to be no other adequate remedy, than to improve the moral principles of the Poor, particularly of the rising generation, by giving them, in early life, habits and sentiments which will lead to a different line of conduct.

This has always appeared to me to go to the

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root of the evil: and so convinced am I that we must *principally* look to *that* source for the remedy, that I have no difficulty in affirming, that, without it, all other efforts will prove ineffectual.

For the purpose, then, of improving the present state of the Poor, I would strongly recommend, in the first instance, the employment, on a scale commensurate with the evil, of that powerful engine, a RELIGIOUS EDUCATION.

. The salutary influence of education on the human mind, is now well understood and appreciated; and it is to education, in fact, that we must principally look for the correction of those evils we so much deplore. The effects already produced in every part of the kingdom by the introduction of Dr. Bell's admirable system of instruction, are sufficient to establish From my own knowledge I can affirm, this. that a school of this description has materially improved the younger part of the parish of Wendover, where it has been established only about two years; and I have observed the same beneticial effects in many other places which have fallen under my notice, and which enjoy the advantages of a similar institution. It is the essential principle of the National System of Education to store the minds of children with refigious instruction; but this is far from being all that is taught them: for while they are trained up as Christians, they are also taught to become useful members of society, by forming habits of willing obedience to their superiors, of kindness and benevolence towards those of their own level, and of truth and honesty in their ordinary dealings.

To affirm that the statutes now in force are adequate to restrain the Poor within the line of their duty, is to affirm what we find, by daily experience, to be untrue: and, to affirm generally, that the interests of society are promoted by multiplying penal enactments, discovers no great insight into human nature, nor any extensive knowledge of political acconomy. It is only by improving the moral nature of man by wholesome instruction, especially in the early period of life, that we may ever hope to witness that improvement in the state of the lower orders, which is the wish of every wise and good man to promote. 2dly, In this view, and in order to encourage a habit of *frugelity*, also, which is now so much neglected by the labouring classes, and to the want of which is to be ascribed, in a great measure, the abject state to which they are reduced, used I recommend the establishlishing of SAVING BANKS, in which the smallest sums may be safely deposited, and which bear a legal interest?

These institutions are founded on the acknowledged principle, that what a man acquires by industry, he would save with care, instead of squandering it in a thoughtless manner, if he had a convenient opportunity of placing it in a state of security. The natural effect therefore of these beneficial establishments is to give to the Poor the means of providing for themselves; and thus relieving parishes from the hurthen of their maintenance; a new feeling, a spirit of activity and energy, at present unknows, would thus be given to the Poor; they would consider themselves as belonging to a respectable condition in life, and as having a character to maintain. But here it may be asked, (as it sometimes has been,) what can they have to

spare, when they have not a sufficiency? accumulation necessarily implies superfluity. I grant But this is no argument against the it does. policy and propriety of the measure. All I contend for is, that, as the system of Saving Banks applies principally to persons in early life, before they are incumbered with the care of a family, when their wages are good, and their unavoidable expenses comparatively small, there cannot exist a doubt, whether such persons have not the ability of making some provision for their future years; and others, also, may lay by something, though, perhaps, not much; which, without this opportunity of safely depositing it in the Bank, they might have wasted at the public-house, as they are too apt to do, without consideration. In short, the arguments in favour of these institutions are so many, and so cogent, and the good resulting from them has been already found to be so great in every place where they have been established, that it is impossible for any candid person to withhold from them a just measure of approbation and applause.

. One very essential good resulting from them

(Saving Banks) is, that, by enabling the poor man to pay, perhaps, in ready money, or, at least, without long credit, for his Bread and other necessaries, he may avoid the ruinous practice, which is now so common among them, of running into *debt* with the Baker and the Shopkeeper.—The consequences arising from this are almost too apparent to require my pointing them out: I will, however observe, that if the poor man could pay every week for his necessaries, he would then be enabled to lay out his earnings with the greatest advantage, by dealing with those who will supply what he wants the best both in quality and quantity, and at the lowest price.

3dly, But then, in order to keep alive, in the minds of the Poor, the sentiments which have been instilled into them by a good education, and to secure to them the benefits resulting from the deposit of their superfluous earnings in the Bank, it will be proper that they should be protected against that degrading custom, which now prevails to an extent for which there appears to be no absolute necessity, of parish officers sending them upon, what is called, their ROUNDS.* There is something in the idea of a Roundsman, at which the generous mind revolts; no practice hitherto resorted to has so much destroyed all proper feeling in the hearts of the Poor, or checked their industry so completely as this. Under this system no mutual sentiments of attachment between masters and servants are formed, nor do the latter feel any interest in their own exertions, since their masters are assigned to them at the . will of the parish-officers, and their wages are regulated, in a great measure, by the same per-It is to be hoped, therefore, that the sons. Legislature will guard with vigilance against a practice so manifestly objectionable, and, at the same time, so unfair towards those who pay

[•] In Agricultural Counties, a ROUNDSMAN is one who is sent in rotation to the parishioners, at the will of the parishofficers. Nothing is more common, when a labourer applies to the farmer for work, than for the latter to tell him, he has no employment for him. The labourer then applies to the parish-officers for work, who give him a ticket, to go, perhaps, to the very same person, who had, in the first instance, refused to hire him; and thus, coming in the character of a parish pauper, the farmer obtains his labour at a reduced price. If his wages, earned in this manner, are not sufficient to support himself and his family, (which they seldom are,) the deficiency is made up from the parish rates.

their proportion of the parish rates, but derive no benefit from the labour of the poor, who are thus relieved at their expense.

4thly. While I would venture to recommend these measures in order to ameliorate the condition of the poor. I would also suggest. as equally necessary, the introduction of such indicious regulations. as may operate in the way of RESTRAINT. I wish to see the poor treated with the utmost lenity, and to have all possible encouragement extended to them; but I am also aware, how necessary it is, when occasion requires, to punish the idle, and to curb the daring and unruly. For this purpose, the PARISH WORKHOUSES might be put under a better system of regulation, by enforcing a more strict observance of order, propriety, and cleanliness: and this would be much promoted by arranging them in classes, according to their deserts ; by appointing weekly visitors from amongst the most respectable inhabitants, and by having a regular account kept of all the proceedings in the house, inserted in the columns of a book under distinct heads ; to be ready for inspection by the Parishioners at their public Vestries

Workhouses, when properly managed, are highly useful; but quite the revense as they are generally conducted. In a place where several persons are crowded together, without employment, without order, and without restraint, it is impossible that much evil should not arise.

It will, however, be too much to expect that Parish Workhouses, though conducted in the best possible manner, both with respect to arrangement and discipline, should be able to meet every case that may occur. Even in the best regulated Parishes, some are always to be found, of tempers so refractory and turbulent, that they require the strong arm of a higher authority, to restrain them within the limits of good conduct, and to reduce them to obedience and submission. It will, therefore, be found expedient to cause such persons to be committed to the House of Correction, where they may be employed in hard labour. But, in order that this may have the intended effect upon the prisoners, it is necessary, that Houses of Correction should really be what they profess to be, places where their faults may be corrected, and their manners be improved.

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5thly, It is much to be regretted, that the way in which our public prisons are generally managed, is so deservedly open to censure. No fact is better ascertained than this, that many persons, after the period of their confinement in them is elapsed, become, on their discharge, worse members of society than they were before. And what else can be expected? when it is acknowledged, that the prisoners are indiscriminately crowded together, without due care being taken to separate the most notorious offenders from those who are only noviciates in crime, and who can, therefore, hardly fail of being further corrupted by associating with such abandoned characters. What may be effected in such places, by well regulated discipline, has been proved in a striking manner, by the humane and judicious treatment of those who have been sent to the Penitentiary, in Westminster.

I understand, from the most respectable authority, that the happiest effects have already resulted from that Institution, whose object has been greatly promoted by the persevering and conscientious professional labours of Mr. Bennet, the Chaplain, and by the frequent attention paid to it by many benevolent individuals, particularly by G. P. Holford, Esq. the Bishop of London, and Archdeacon Pott.

If a similar mode of management was introduced into other places of the same description throughout the kingdom, they would then become places of reformation as well as security, and would operate most favourably in reclaiming the idle and abandoned, and in deterring others from acting wrong. But then a necessary part of such a plan, in many instances, would be solitary confinement; which, so long as culprits crowd the Prisons in the numbers they now do, is hardly practicable. Still something, nay, a great deal, might be done for the regulation of Prisons immediately; the rest must be waited for, until, by diminishing, through moral correctives, the number of those to be lodged and superintended, the lodging and the superintendance of them can be made effectual to the purposes of reform.

6thly, The next and last head I would advert to (though it is far from being the least important) is the state of the PUBLIC HOUSES, where, it is notorious, the Poor are induced to spend their money, to the ruin of their health and morals, and the distress of their families, There it is where they meet bad companywhere schemes of robbery and plunder are formed; and where, imperceptibly, the youth is seduced at once into ebriety and dishonesty, by the old and hardened offender. Too much caution, therefore, cannot be exercised, (and I make the remark with great submission,) on the part of the magistrates, in granting licenses to publicans. The number of public houses ought surely to be governed by the extent of the accommodation that the public really require, and these limits should not, on any consideration, be transgressed. The greatest mischief to society has arisen from multiplying such places of public resort beyond necessity, and there is no doubt, that the suppression of a large proportion of them would be just so much gain to the public morals and the public welfare.

These are some of the observations I could wish to offer on the subject of the present state of the Poor; and what I mean you to infer from them is, that, supposing the provision intended to be made by Parliament should prove less oppressive on parishes, in the mode of raising it, than by the present method, (though this would undoubtedly be a considerable and important point gained,) yet the evil will not be completely removed, unless provision is also made for the improvement of the principles of the Poor. Every barfier against the inroads of idleness, and its consequent evils, should be formed; and all possible encouragement to honesty, order, industry, and frugality, held out to them; for, unless these points are strictly attended to, I cannot help observing, that the state of the Poor cannot be materially improved. nor the expence attending their provision be permanently reduced. But should the regulations I have here suggested, or others of a similar tendency, be adopted, I shall then indulge the hope, and even the expectation, that the time is not far distant, when the lower orders will be brought back to that state of industry and good order in their habits, which formerly prevailed among them, and restored to that simplicity of mind, which they seem now to

to have lost, and which ought to be the leading characteristics of their condition. Unless these desirable objects are attained, I fear no regulation can be made that will be attended with general and extensive advantage.

The eyes of the nation are now turned, with anxious attention. to the enactments Parliament will make on this subject, a subject, in its consequences, both immediate and remote, one of the most important that can come under their discussion. It involves, in an eminent degree, the prosperity of the whole empire, which depends not on the extent of its population singly taken, but also, and chiefly, on the good conduct of the labouring poor, a class which forms a very large majority of the whole. If the Legislature should afford effective relief to parishes, and, at the same time, ameliorate the condition of the Poor, in a moral view, they will then have done all that can be accomplished by human means, and will become justly intitled to the thanks and gratitude of the country, which cannot fail of suffering, even in a political view, until the Poor are brought under better regulation than they are at present. But,

if the system adopted should be some half measure only, neither effectually relieving the conntry from the intolerable burthen of the Poor rates, nor exonerating the parish-officers from the necessity, in many cases, of giving relief to the idle, the dissolute, and the dishonest; if foundations. at the least, are not laid, by legislative enactment, for a progressive improvement of the temporal condition of the Poor, by the resources of honest industry; and of their moral and religious condition by wholesome habits and wholesome instruction: new laws, by modifying the evil only, and rendering it, perhaps, more complex, will aggravate our present situation ultimately, and will (it may justly be apprehended) render a solid, a radical, and effectual reform hereafter absolutely and utterly impracticable.

If any remarks I have here thrown out should be found of use in promoting this great and desirable object, I shall feel the highest satisfaction. I know your general opinion of the timidity which restrains, and the manliness which encourages, the communication to the public of what may, by any possibility, be of service to it; and I shall, at all events, be satistied, if what I have said possesses your favourable opinion. To your suggestions on many interesting topics, as well as on the subject in question, I feel myself already much indebted; and it is with pleasure I reflect, that the mark of good opinion and confidence, which I have very recently received from our common diocesan, places me in the same chapter with yourself; and will give me increased opportunities of intercourse and communication with the archdeacon of that part of the diocese, where my family has so long been fixed.

I am,

Dear Sir,

With great Respect,

Your faithful Servant, CHARLES TURNOR.

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Vicarage-House, Wendover, Bucks, April 12, 1818,