

1. *On the part of Labourers.*

Injury often occurs to his property from the negligent conduct of such men as he is sometimes obliged to employ. He would rather pay some for their absence than their presence on his farm. By the necessity of employing so much labour, he has found himself much constrained, and to great disadvantage, in choosing his mode of cultivation. He has nevertheless, at this time, six more labourers than he can possibly employ to advantage. They are frequently obliged to remain idle on the farm, because there is no dependence to be placed on their industry or attention to their work; and much of this arises from a consciousness in the men themselves that they are not wanted.*

We believe, that if it were possible to ascertain the loss from all these sources during the year ending the 25th March, 1832, it will be found at least to approach the 7,036,968*l.* which the Parliamentary Return states to have been directly expended.

From this pecuniary loss, indeed, must be deducted the pecuniary gain, such as it may be, obtained by those employers who have purchased the services of their labourers, for wages which an independent labourer would not have accepted; a gain which may at first sight be supposed to be considerable, since the endeavour to procure it has been one of the principal causes of the allowance system. Our inquiries have convinced us that the deduction which may fairly be made on this account, from the apparent charge of the poor-rates, is much less than it is commonly thought to be; that its amount is decreasing every day; and that, though in many instances much less is paid to the pauperized labourer by his employer, for his day or his week, than he could have received if he had been independent; yet that, even in these cases, the work actually performed is dearly paid for. We shall recur to this subject in a subsequent part of the Report.

It might have been hoped, that, under such circumstances, a general feeling would have arisen that these abuses are intolerable, and must be put an end to at any risk or at any sacrifice. But many who acknowledge the evil seem to expect the cure of an inveterate disease, without exposing the patient to any suffering or even discomfort. They exclaim against the burthen as intolerable, but object to any amendment, if it appears that it must be or may be attended by any immediate inconvenience.

And among all parties, labourers, employers of labourers, and owners of property, many are to be found who think that they *shall* suffer some immediate injury from any change which shall tend to throw the labouring classes on their own resources.

The labourer feels that the existing system, though it generally

* Mr. Power, App. (A.) Part I. p. 253.

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gives him low wages, always gives him easy work. It gives him also, strange as it may appear, what he values more, a sort of independence. He need not bestir himself to seek work; he need not study to please his master; he need not put any restraint upon his temper; he need not ask relief as a favour. He has all a slave's security for subsistence, without his liability to punishment. As a single man, indeed, his income does not exceed a bare subsistence; but he has only to marry, and it increases. Even then it is unequal to the support of a family; but it rises on the birth of every child. If his family is numerous, the parish becomes his principal paymaster; for, small as the usual allowance of 2*s.* a head may be, yet, when there are more than three children, it generally exceeds the average wages given in a pauperized district. A man with a wife and six children, entitled, according to the scale, to have his wages made up to 16*s.* a week, in a parish where the wages paid by individuals do not exceed 10*s.* or 12*s.*, is almost an irresponsible being. All the other classes of society are exposed to the vicissitudes of hope and fear; he alone has nothing to lose or to gain.

"In Coggeshall, Essex," says Mr. Majendie, "weekly wages are 8*s.*; but by piecework a good labourer may earn 10*s.* Now, consider the case of labourers with four children, for the subsistence of which family, (according to the Chelmsford scale, which is the law of that district,) 11*s.* 6*d.* is required. Of this sum the good labourer earns 10*s.*, and receives from the parish 1*s.* 6*d.* The inferior labourer earns 8*s.*, and receives from the parish 3*s.* 6*d.* The man who does not work, and whom no one will employ, receives the whole from the parish."*

Other classes of society are restrained from misconduct by fear of the evils which may result to their families. Parochial legislation rejects this sanction. Even in Barnard Castle, in Northumberland, Mr. Wilson states, that if any remonstrance is made on account of the applicant's bad character, the reply of the magistrate commonly is, "the children must not suffer for it." †

The following answers are specimens of the feeling and conduct in the southern districts:—

"The answer given by the magistrates, when a man's bad conduct is urged by the overseer against his relief, is, 'We cannot help that; his wife and family are not to suffer because the man has done wrong.' ‡

"Too frequently petty thieving, drunkenness or impertinence to a master, throw able-bodied labourers, perhaps with large families, on the parish funds, when relief is demanded as a right, and, if refused,

* App. (A.) Part I. p. 230.

† App. (A.) Part I. p. 143.

‡ App. (B. 1.) Question 26, Easton, Southampton, p. 419 *b.*

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enforced by a magistrate's order, without reference to the cause which has produced his distress, viz., his own misconduct, which remains as a barrier to his obtaining any fresh situation, and leaves him a dead weight upon the honesty and industry of his parish."*

Mr. Stuart states, that in Suffolk, children deserted by their parents are in general well taken care of, and that the crime of deserting them is largely encouraged by the certainty that the parish must support the family. †

"When I was present," he adds, "at the committee of the Bulchamp House of Industry, early in October, a man came with four children, and applied to have them admitted into the house during his absence at the herring fishing. He was a widower. He had earned the high wages of the harvest month, and besides had work afterwards; yet he had made no provision for the support of his family while he went to the fishing, neither would he undertake to reimburse the parish out of his wages for the expense to be incurred during his absence. The committee offered to take charge of two, and that he should provide for the others. This he refused, and next day he left all his children to the parish."

"The whole charge on the parish of Tressingfield, within the year preceding the 26th September, was 77*l.* 3*s.* 6*d.* for deserted families."

"At the sessions of Framlingham, a man was brought up, who had left his wife and family chargeable, to avoid an order for a bastard child. On the intercession of the parish officers, his confinement was limited to a fortnight; but it was impossible not to observe that the lenity of the parish was called forth entirely with a view to save it from additional expense, by keeping him the shortest possible time away from his family."

"The overseer of the parish of Westhall, which lies near the coast, informed me that the farmers are frequently unable to find a sufficient number of labourers for their spring and October work, although they are burdened with the unemployed during the winter months. This arises from the temptation to go to herring and mackerel fishing, at which a man in a moderately successful season, may earn 7*l.* to 8*l.* in as many weeks. The families of these men are generally a burden on the parish during their absence, and it is very rarely indeed that any part of the expense can be recovered. When they are punished by being sent to gaol, it merely fills up the time till the high wages of harvest work can be obtained, or till the season for fishing returns."

Even the inconvenience which might fall on the husband by the punishment of his wife for theft is made the subject of pecuniary compensation at the expense of the injured parish. Under what other system could there be a judicial instrument concluding thus:—

* App. (B. 1.) Question 43, Castle Donington, Leicester, p. 280 *d.*

† App. (A.) Part I. p. 334.

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"And whereas it appears to us that the wife of the said Robert Reed is now confined in the house of correction at Cambridge, and that he is put to considerable expense in providing a person to look after his said five children: we do therefore order the churchwardens and overseers of the poor of the said parish, or such of them to whom these presents shall come, to pay unto the said Robert Reed the sum of 1*l.* weekly and every week, for and towards the support and maintenance of himself and family, for one month from the day of the date hereof."

"Given under our hands and seals this twentieth day of February, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and thirty-three."*

It appears to the pauper that the Government has undertaken to repeal, in his favour, the ordinary laws of nature; to enact that the children shall not suffer for the misconduct of their parents—the wife for that of the husband, or the husband for that of the wife: that no one shall lose the means of comfortable subsistence, whatever be his indolence, prodigality, or vice: in short, that the penalty which, after all, must be paid by some one for idleness and improvidence, is to fall, not on the guilty person or on his family, but on the proprietors of the lands and houses encumbered by his settlement. Can we wonder if the uneducated are seduced into approving a system which aims its allurements at all the weakest parts of our nature—which offers marriage to the young, security to the anxious, ease to the lazy, and impunity to the profligate?

The employers of paupers are attached to a system which enables them to dismiss and resume their labourers according to their daily or even hourly want of them, to reduce wages to the minimum, or even below the minimum of what will support an unmarried man, and to throw upon others the payment of a part, frequently of the greater part, and sometimes almost the whole of the wages actually received by their labourers. † Many of our correspondents from rural districts have replied to our question, as to the effects of prohibiting allowance to those employed by individuals, that "they do not see the justice of forcing the farmer to pay to the unmarried wages equal to those of the married;" that "such an enactment would produce a rate of wages which would be ruinous to the farmers;" that "the effect would be to prevent the tithe-owners and those who employ few labourers from paying their fair proportion of the wages of the parish."

* See the whole of this transaction stated in a letter from the overseer of Royston, Extracts, p. 383; the answer of the magistrates, App. (A.) Part I. p. 652; and the reply of the overseer, App. (A.) Part I. p. 654.

† See Capt. Pringle, App. (A.) Part I. p. 297, 300, 307; Mr. Majendie, App. (A.) Part I. p. 208, 209, 232; Mr. Stuart, App. (A.) Part I. p. 335, 344.

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Similar feelings show themselves in the following answers:—

" WYMONDHAM, NORFOLK.

" I fear the employers would discharge such men as could not maintain their families without high wages, and employ only single men, and such as have small families, who can do the work cheaper. Thus the former would become a heavy expense to the parish, and the latter would receive more than is necessary for a maintenance."*

" HAWKHURST, KENT.

" In this parish, one of the effects of such a measure would be, to shift from the tithe-holder (the lessee of the Dean and Chapter of C. C. Oxon), who exacts a high tithe from the occupiers, a portion of that which he now pays as poor-rate, upon the farmer, in the shape of increased wages."†

" BOREHAM, ESSEX.

" There has been much said upon this subject, which, in my opinion, is very wrong, as it is quite contrary to reason that any person should pay a man for his work sufficient to support a whole family, which in some cases would be 20s. a week." ‡

And even if they pay in rates what they would otherwise pay in wages, they prefer the payment of rates which recur at intervals, and the payment of which may, from time to time, be put off, to the weekly ready-money expenditure of wages. § High rates, too, are a ground for demanding an abatement from rent: high wages are not. In Mr. Richardson's instructive statement of the reforms effected by Mr. Litchfield, in Farthingoe, Northamptonshire, we find that Mr. Litchfield has been opposed, not only by the labourers, but by the farmers;—first, because they grudged giving the labourer with no children 8s. a week; secondly, because they were afraid to displease the labourer who had two children, and preferred head-money; and, thirdly, because they were fearful lest, if the rates were lowered, their rents would be raised: and that they encouraged the labourers, at first openly, and afterwards covertly, in their attempts to deter Mr. Litchfield by menaces and insult. ||

" When a valuer," says Mr. Cowell, " values a farm to an in-coming tenant, or fixes the rent from time to time, (in these parts they have no leases,) he says, ' What are your poor-rates?' If the tenant answer, ' Rates are low, but wages are high,' the valuer says, ' I have nothing to do with wages, that is your affair, but rates are a positive thing, and I allow for them.' This, Mr. Ellman ¶ considers a bad custom, as it

* App. (B. 1.) Question 40, p. 330 d.

† App. (B. 1.) Question 40, p. 249 d.

‡ App. (B. 1.) Question 39, p. 169 d.

§ Capt. Pringle, App. (A.) Part I. p. 304; Mr. Majendie, App. (A.) Part I. p. 179; Mr. Stuart, App. (A.) Part I. p. 344.

|| Mr. Richardson, App. (A.) Part I. 408.

¶ The witness whose examination the Report details.

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holds out an inducement to the farmer to prefer low wages and high rates.

" Mr. Ellman stated this circumstance as accounting for the predilection of the farmers for the allowance system, which is so strong in this neighbourhood, that I was told by a member of a family which has lately come into possession of considerable property in the county, the head of which has been anxious to eradicate the allowance system over his estates, that ' We can do little or nothing to prevent pauperism; the farmers will have it; they prefer that the labourers should be slaves; they object to their having gardens, saying, ' The more they work for themselves, the less they will for us.' They wish that every man should receive an allowance from the parish according to his family, and declare that high wages and free labour would overwhelm them!' " *

" One of the first inquiries," says Mr. Meadows White, a solicitor of great experience in the purchase and sale of land in Suffolk, " in seeking to purchase an estate is, what is the amount of poor-rate? and again, are the poor well managed or not? and the answers in a great degree regulate the price. So, in the present system, if a tenant seek a renewal of his lease, a high rate is a bonus to him, for it is a sure plea for a reduced rent. And although when he has obtained a renewal he is interested in proportion to the length of his term in keeping down the rate, yet as the greater number of agricultural occupations are held on tenancies from year to year, the preponderance of interest is thought by the tenant to lie in a high rate, partly because he is short-sighted enough to fancy that as his fellow-parishioners share in it, it falls lighter on himself, and partly because he is long-sighted enough to see that though he pays the rate at first hand, yet it falls at last on his landlord in the shape of abatement of rent in the current year, and a reduced rent for the next." †

" Tenants at will," says Mr. Cogshill, " too often think the more poor-rates, the less rent. Confidence between landlord and tenant seems quite lost. I have witnessed a great deal of this." ‡

The following replies to question 36 of our Rural Queries are further testimonies to the same effect:—

" I think the Poor Laws have not diminished the capital, but rather the rent of the landlord, as the tenant considers rents and rates as payment for the farm, and one can only be increased at the expense of the other." §

" The farmers are aware that (excepting in cases of long tenures and very sudden augmentation of rates) the burden does not at all affect them. It is a rent paid to the parish instead of the landlord." ||

" It should be understood that poor's-rates are deducted in all calculations for rent, and that landlords pay them, and not the farmers." ¶

* Mr. Cowell's Report, App. (A.) Part I. p. 610. † App. (C.)

‡ See Letter of Mr. Cogshill, App. (C.)

§ App. (B. 1.) Quest. 36. White Waltham, Berks. p. 29 c.

|| App. (B. 1.) Quest. 36. Blunham-cum-Moggerhanger, Beds. p. 2 c.

¶ App. (B. 1.) Quest. 36. Pulborough, Sussex. p. 520 c.

"Capital is decreasing from the loose manner the laws are administered, and the tenants feeling that they do not in effect pay the rate, but the landlord. I cannot otherwise account for the apathy with which they view, and the tenacity with which, in many instances, they defend abuses." *

In towns the allowance system prevails less, probably because the manufacturing capitalists form a small proportion of the rate-payers, and consequently have less influence in the vestries than the farmers in country places. But even in the towns it exists to a very formidable degree. The northern counties are least infested by it; but if we turn to Mr. Wilson's Report from Darlington and Barnard Castle, and Mr. Henderson's from Preston, we shall see it creeping in, and enlisting the same private interests in its defence. To which it must be added, that the persons who supply the workhouses, or whose shops are frequented by the poor, are more immediately benefited, as tradesmen, by parochial extravagance, than as rate-payers by parochial economy.

The owners of rateable property might, at least, be expected to be favourable to any change which should avert their impending ruin. But we have seen, that of the property liable to poor-rates, there is a portion, and a portion of considerable importance, less from its value, than from the number of rate-payers among whom it is divided, and their influence in vestries, which not only is in practice exempted from contributing to the parochial fund, but derives its principal value from the mal-administration of that fund. This property consists of cottages or apartments inhabited by the poor. We have seen that in almost all places the dwellings of the poor, or at least of the settled poor, are exempted from rates, and that, in a very large proportion, the rent is paid by the parish. The former practice enables the proprietor often to increase the rent by the amount of rate remitted, and always to be an owner of real property, and yet escape the principal burdens to which such property is subjected. The latter practice gives him a solvent tenant, and if he has influence with the vestry, or with the overseer, a liberal one.

Of the higher classes of landlords, those who reside in towns seldom take much part in parochial government, or have any distinct ideas as to the extent or the effects of its mismanagement, and the majority of those who have become familiarized with the abuses of the villages, seem to have acquired habits of thinking, and feeling and acting which unfit them to originate any real and extensive amendment, or even to understand the principles on which it ought to be based. To suppose that the poor are the

* App. (B. 1.) Quest. 36. Langley Marish, Bucks. p. 39 c.

proper managers of their own concerns; that a man's wages ought to depend on his services, not on his wants; that the earnings of an ordinary labourer are naturally equal to the support of an ordinary family; that the welfare of that family naturally depends on his conduct; that he is bound to exercise any sort of prudence or economy; that anything is to be hoped from voluntary charity; are views which many of those who have long resided in pauperized rural districts seem to reject as too absurd for formal refutation.

It appears, therefore, necessary to state at some length the effects of the existing system, both to show how short-sighted are the views of those who think that they continue to profit by it, and to show, before we suggest any remedy, the absolute necessity that some remedy should be applied.

These effects may be considered, first, with respect to the owners of property; secondly, with respect to the employers of labour; and, thirdly, with respect to the labourers and their families.

I.

EFFECTS ON OWNERS OF PROPERTY.

THE Committee appointed by the House of Commons in 1817, to consider the Poor Laws, stated their opinion, "that unless some efficacious check were interposed, there was then every reason to think that the amount of the assessment would continue to increase, until at a period more or less remote, according to the progress the evil had already made in different places, it should have absorbed the profits of the property on which the rate might have been assessed, producing thereby the neglect and ruin of the land and the waste, or removal of other property, to the utter subversion of the happy order of society so long upheld in these kingdoms." In consequence of the recommendations of that Committee, a check was interposed by the 59 Geo. III. c. 12. But though that Act, by restricting the power of the magistrates to order relief, and by authorising the removal of the Irish and Scotch paupers, the appointment of representative vestries and of assistant overseers, the rating the owners of small tenements, and the giving relief by way of loan, occasioned, during the six years that immediately followed it, a progressive diminution of the amount of the Poor Law assessment, its beneficial enactments appear to be no longer capable of struggling with the evil tendencies of the existing system. The year ending the 25th of