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ON
THE FREQUENT RECURRENCE
OF
NATIONAL DISTRESS,
AND THE
BEST MODE OF PERMANENTLY RELIEVING IT,
AND AMELIORATING
The Condition of the Labouring Classes:
IN
A LETTER,
ADDRESSED TO
H. R. H. THE DUKE OF SUSSEX.

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A LETTER.

SIR,

PERMANENTLY to ameliorate the condition of the labouring portion of the community, and particularly that of the manufacturer, so frequently supreme in misery, appears to be an object too worthy your Royal Highness's consideration and support, to render any apology on the present occasion needless.

We may, indeed, be told, that trade is reviving, or the operatives more generally employed. Yet, what is this but merely to assert, that trade, occasionally too fluctuating, under the wisest regulations, has not finally departed from the shores of Britain, as it has from those of Mauritania and the Adriatic! How many famine-wasted limbs are now unfit for labour! How many independent spirits broken! and patriotic hearts estranged from Britain!!—And when we reflect how numerous the manufacturers still shivering at uncongenial employments,—pinning in reluctant indolence,—wandering as vagabonds,—subsisting as nightly plunderers,—mourning as exiles, or returned upon their native villages

to crave the subsisting pittance wrung by law from desponding tradesmen and indigent housekeepers, scarcely their inferiors in wretchedness; and, further, place to the account a year's total suspension of labour, and the immense influx of liberal voluntary charity! can it possibly be otherwise, *so long as clothing is worn by man*,—can it possibly be otherwise than that a considerable quantity must, at present, be manufacturing, and the situation of the inhabitants of most of the large towns be improving considerably? But what legislative measures have yet been taken to prevent a recurrence of the past?—of appalling and alarming scenes that, since the days of the Luddites, return continually?—Benevolence has, indeed, kindly afforded temporary alleviations; and a childless monarch, in the vale of years, evinced the affection of a parent towards his patient, suffering people. But what new laws have been proposed by the Ministry, to prevent the *operatives* again becoming the unhappy tools of blind speculation and cupidity; or the miserable slaves of their own passions, too long perverted and misdirected? What institutions proposed to give them force? what eloquence in the senate exercised in the cause of humanity?

Valour, *Learning*, and the *Arts* have their establishments, and their rewards; and shall *Industry*—shall the poor labourer merely have an *institution*, which, though it may keep him from actual starvation, incites him to prodigality and

vice!—an *institution* whose baneful influence has no counterpoise, except the halter and the sword!—Mr. Owen was, indeed, for adopting a system of government by *hope* and by *reward*, rather than by *fear* and by *punishment*. A system which he appears evidently to have derived from an anonymous publication suggested by the present writer:—a system, by that gentleman's alterations, rendered too beautiful in theory ever to be generally useful. Mr. Owen, however, came personally and manfully forward, the beneficent champion of national morality and domestic happiness, and deservedly obtained the patronage of the great. But placed, unfortunately, in Lanarkshire, like a king without a senate, his establishment, instead of progressing in excellence and public favour, remained stationary, and miscarried.

With regard to the principal Plan by which it is now proposed immediately to meet, and permanently remove the extreme distress that has so frequently excited, and still continues to excite so much commiseration and alarm, it may, with equal facility, be comprehended and adopted, and merely consists in the unostentatious and costless institution of Town or Parochial Gardens for the Poor, subject to the following simple regulations:—

One portion of ground to be let at very moderate rents, and in some instances for mere acknowledgments, to the most respectable parents of families, particularly to weavers and artisans, anxious to

maintain their children with the least parochial assistance. The lots might vary in extent, from the twelfth of an acre to the sixteenth, and be indicated by rows of fruit-trees, &c.

Another portion of the Institutional Ground to be converted into a town or Parish Garden, for the occasional healthful employment of the youthful operatives, under an age to be afterwards determined by the managers of the respective institutions. Nor may it be useless to suggest, that frequent *half-day's works* in the open air (the weather favouring) may be more conducive to health, comfort, and emolument, than half the number of whole ones.

A further benefit to the institution, would be the appropriation of a third portion of ground for the occasional employment of any parishioner out of work, or suffering in health from confinement; and also for the punishment, by means of lengthening the usual hours of labour, of any venial offender. But the two last plans are chiefly calculated to benefit populous and manufacturing parishes; the *first* is adapted for general use.

Respecting the necessary lands for carrying the project into effect: these might be cheaply, and even profitably procured by leases of twenty-one years, renewable every seven, in the manner usual with much of the Church Lands. The lessees, or parishes, to have, however, the privilege, in cases of non-renewal, of removing (or selling to the lessor)

all fruit-trees, &c. *planted out* (from the nursery) during the last seven years of occupancy.

Or, the necessary ground might be obtained by *common leases*, of from seven to twenty-one years, if considered more eligible (in some instances) by the Select Vestry or Managing Committee.

By the latter mode, the advantage of the improvements to the parish (though varying in proportion to the duration of the lease) would be impaired: a most important consideration. For ground planted, and turned into gardens, would soon more than double its original value; and, if too sloping for the plough, would quadruple it. Yet, in the choice of ground, common leases may afford some facilities.

A law, compelling all towns or parishes in which the poor rates should be found, on an average for the last three years, to have exceeded a third of the assessed rent, to provide conveniently-situated garden grounds (within a certain period) for the poor, and bearing a specified proportionate value to the whole poor rates levied, would be most judicious. Yet, encouragement by *premium*, of a few pounds the *institutional* acre, for the purchase of fruit trees and garden seeds, appears to be preferable. Both modes, should the Government *premium* be small, would be beneficial. And the system of *reward* might be wisely seconded by any patriotic individual; or adopted without any countenance from the Legislature.

A Select Vestry or Committee (with the overseers) would alone arrange and conduct the institution, as any other town or parochial business. And the daily superintendence of the young operatives (when employed), might be equally costless, by giving the office to any infirm person already kept at the parish charge. Were the Committee, however, at the conclusion of the first year, to reward six of the best managers of the parcelled portion of the Institution, by selecting them to aid in their deliberations; and, from these six, were their less skilful fellows to have the annual privilege of electing three, to point out, each working morning (in weekly or monthly succession), the various work to be done;—or were each to take a third of the ground under his own management, (subject to the advice of visitors,) and a premium given to the individual whose portion should be the best conducted and most profitable, the improvement seems obvious. Every occupier of the *subdivided garden* would feel peculiarly interested; and linked, as it were, to the higher classes of the community; additional honours and rewards would stimulate; and the youths would be under the daily care of the most talented and respectable of their own friends.—To change the selected six, one or two might vacate annually in succession, or by secret ballot. But, in forming regulations for minor matters, much variety might be admitted, adapted to temporary or local circumstances, or

the ideas of any one contributing liberally to the Institution.

“The earth,” says Fenelon, “is never ungrateful: she refuses her treasures only to those who are niggardly of their toils. La nature seule tiroit de son sein fécond tout ce qu’il faudroit pour un nombre infini d’hommes modérés et laborieux: mais c’est l’orgueil et la mollesse de certains hommes, qui en mettent tant d’autres dans une affreuse pauvreté.” Who is ignorant that gardening and rural economy enable the *Celestial Empire* to support its incredible population; or that Holland, in some measure, still acts, and Spain, when occupied by the Moors, and Egypt, and Judea of old, acted upon principles similar to the Chinese? And similar principles (if I mistake not) are also, at this momentous period ably advocated by Sir John Sinclair. Now, every branch of the proposed Establishment not only powerfully tends to effect this important object, but also (by furnishing employment) to keep the houses of the large manufacturing towns occupied, notwithstanding any reduced commercial demand; and enabled, as well as the lands adjoining, in some measure to supply the funds for the parish poor: whilst that portion assigned for the occasional employment of the youthful operatives (*the merits of the second division are obvious,*) could not fail also to render them healthful and robust, and fitted, should need require, for

agricultural toils and *emigration*; and yet the additional advantages of the project for rewarding merit are immense. To this portion of the Institution peculiarly belongs the fostering of industry and morality, with their attendant train—domestic comfort, patriotism, and loyalty; and enabling them probably to struggle with the oppressions to which they at present are subjected by one engrossing passion—a *thirst of gain*. In short, the rising generation, particularly of operative manufacturers and artisans, would be a new race. All the baneful consequences of our present parochial code would be counteracted, and the enormous expenditure diminished gradually, without injury to the distressed; or without any necessity for the adoption of a similar system in other portions of the empire.

To every benefit enumerated in the foregoing Parochial Establishment, additional advantages, which have hitherto been considered of the first importance, may, for the peculiar relief of the manufacturing towns, with facility be added. The *auxiliary* project consists in the *purchase* of the whole or a part of the *Institutional Grounds*, subject to the following conditions:—

First,—The Government to advance, on security of the purchase, from one to two-thirds of the purchase-money, as circumstances may require.

Second,—For the present, the county to pay the interest of the Government advance, and (if neces-

sary) at a low rate of interest, to be gradually increased, at the discretion of the Legislature, and, finally, paid by the town borrowing; yet, of course, subject to a parliamentary re-transfer, and abatement of interest in any exigence.

Third,—The parochial rates or property to indemnify the State from any loss by the purchase.

Fourth,—That portion of the purchase-money, not advanced by the State, to be also secured on the purchase; and, further, on the poor rates, to the amount of one-tenth of the sum agreed to be paid for the whole purchase.

Fifth,—The interest of this sum to arise either from the produce of the ground, the poor rates, or other parochial property, or all, or any of these, as may afterwards appear eligible to the Select Vestry or Committee of Management.

Paisley, Manchester, Macclesfield, &c. seem peculiarly to claim the immediate, but partial essay of this *auxiliary* to the general plan. Besides the important advantage of giving the sole benefit of trebling the original value of the Institutional Grounds to the occupying towns or parishes, it seems clearly to decide the long-agitated and difficult question, as to the wisest mode of rendering the less burthened portion of the community liable to aid the parishes unequal to the maintenance of their own poor; since it would enable the Government to give (at all times) immediate and effectual

relief, with little or no national or provincial expenditure; and equitably to apportion that little on the county and nation for a temporary season only. It also further points out a method for the State (or Bank) to extend the circulating medium, by the most praiseworthy and honourable means, at a fair rate of interest, and on the most undeniable security.

Nor may it be useless to remark, that any bank, company, individual, or charitable society, might advance the sum necessary to enable any town or parish to adopt the plan of purchase. In fact, any parish might wisely adopt it by giving security on the purchase, and even on the poor rates also, to the amount of one-sixteenth of the purchase-money.

Another important project, for the benefit of the labouring classes, consists in the establishment of friendly societies, on entirely new principles; a project which might either be adopted as a potent auxiliary to the Institution, or independent of it.

The particulars, when better digested and arranged, it is hoped, may be successfully submitted to the consideration of your Royal Highness and a British Public.

To the large manufacturing towns, no inconsiderable relief might also be afforded by the master-manufacturers dismissing their youthful and able-bodied operatives for two or three months

during the turnip season and the harvests, and constantly employing them (and warehousing) in the winter. Will it be credited, that whilst the manufacturer and artisan have been famishing in reluctant idleness, immense quantities of grain have been wasted, in consequence of a deficiency of reapers! The Cossack's life is a pleasing and healthful union of several occupations; and, by engrafting on the manufacturers not only the gardeners, but in some measure that of the agriculturists, the toils of the field and of harvest would be mitigated to the husbandman; the health, comforts, and resources of the manufacturers improved; and the tendency of the *Institution*, to keep the houses of the manufacturing districts tenanted, and to fit the inmates for field labour and emigration, could not fail to be considerably promoted.

Another important project for ameliorating the condition of the manufacturing population, simply consists in the abatement of a few shillings per pound on the house tax, for every twenty-five or fifty square yards of British silk, cotton, or mixture, with which the walls, during the previous year, may have been hung. An Act which, by being occasionally put in force, by the Minister, or Legislature rather, would divest trade of that excessive fluctuation which devotes the master to bankruptcy, and the operative to a feverish and unenviable existence, in which painfully-conti-

nued labours and reluctant indolence, riotous excesses, and beggary and famine, ceaselessly alternate.

With regard to the prevailing modes already adopted to relieve the national distress, *road-making, canals, &c.* appear to be rather calculated to employ the idle labourer than the manufacturer, and are already most liberally encouraged. ~~Emi-~~ *gration* also seems not only unnecessary at present, but ineligible for the manufacturer; yet, for the sake of the marine, something in this way might, certainly, though with great caution, be attempted.

The *Game Laws*, however, imperiously demand some parting remarks:—Ought not the people to be encouraged, occasionally, to lift up their voices in a season of dearth, or of involuntary idleness, for a temporary, but considerable mitigation of the penalty at present attached to the killing of four-footed game by day? And might not this humble, yet to them important boon, be with great wisdom extended, at least in some degree, to similar trespasses by night, provided no fire-arms were taken in their possession? The increase in the produce of the wasted turnip and corn-fields would be immense, by the adoption of such a regulation; and how many famishing parents, at a season like the present, would escape incarceration; and how many brave men cease to bleed in sanguinary nightly contests in a cause, to

any but the famishing, the most unworthy and contemptible!

Such are the intelligible—the simple projects for permanently improving the condition of the labouring classes, which now solicit the countenance and support of your Royal Highness. Nor is it merely to a Prince ever favourable to the cause of the people, or to the peaceful patriot and the philanthropist, that I now earnestly appeal. Let the warrior look to his fame. The once-envied country, for whose sake he has so gloriously combatted, his compatriot is anxious to abandon. The sigh of a people's misery is upon his laurels; and they are withering beneath the blight. May the present appeal to your Royal Highness, and to every British spirit, be effectual!—May it be acceptable in the sight

“Of HIM by whose almighty nod the scale
“Of empire rises, and alternate falls!”

Then shall Britain again witness, and at no distant period,

“The saving VIRTUES sent around the land,
“In bright patrol;
“And in their radiant front superior shine
“That first paternal virtue, *public zeal*;
“Who throws o'er all an equal wide survey,
“And, ever musing on the common good,
“Still labours glorious with some great design.”

Then, may the bones of a patriot yet find their final rest in the bosom of his country; and he who, during life, dared not to court the shout of the people, still hope, not merely to merit, but to obtain their grateful tears upon his grave.

PATRIOTISM AND PHILANTHROPY.

The **THIRD PART**, completing the Work, is in progress, containing the Prospectuses and Information of the Progress of the **MISCELLANEOUS COMPANIES**—embracing the whole which have appeared.

PART I.—On FOREIGN MINES, may be had of the Publishers, Price 3s.