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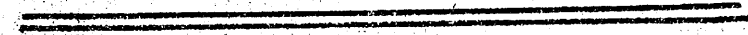
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OF THE
P O O R - R A T E S.



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REASONS
FOR THE
LATE INCREASE
OF THE
POOR-RATES:
OR,
A COMPARATIVE VIEW
OF THE
PRICE OF LABOUR AND PROVISIONS,

Humbly addressed to the Consideration of the
Legislature.

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR J. DODSLEY, PALL-MALL.
M.DCC.LXXVII,

REASONS, &c.

THE great increase of the rates for the relief and support of the poor, in most parts of England, within a very short period of time, seems to have given a very serious alarm to the nation in general, and particularly to the owners, and occupiers of land; in proportion as they support the burden. It has exercised the thoughts of many sensible, and valuable men, to account for the cause of this distress, and put them upon different schemes of invention, to remedy the inconveniencies arising from it. The author therefore, of the following observations, impressed with the idea, that every kind of information,

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mation, relative to the poor, will be received without giving offence, presumes to throw his mite into the public stock; and to suggest to his superiors, what strikes him as the principal cause of the evil complained of, together with the out-lines of a plan, for the better regulation of husbandmen's wages; which, he flatters himself, may have a happy effect, by giving encouragement to industry, and by laying no greater a burden upon land, than it ought to bear.

Some counties are full of contention about the propriety, or impropriety of houses of industry, (as they are styled;) and *the commons* have taken up the subject, with a view, as it is presumed, of laying all the poor of the kingdom under the regulation of some new law, to be provided for that purpose. How far this scheme may be calculated, to

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answer the design of easing land, *in part*, from the burden laid upon it, or how conducive it may prove to the comfort of the poor, no one, at present, can pretend to say. Nothing but time and trial, perhaps, can decide these questions. For my part, I do not take upon me to approve, or disapprove, any of the plans in agitation, or to commend, or arraign the judgment of any of the projectors. Such freedom would ill become me; as I am persuaded that all their designs have equally their rise in goodness of heart. I shall only, in my turn, take up the subject in a plain, unaffected manner, and endeavour to render equal service to the landlord, tenant, and labourer. The former of these, perhaps, will receive what I have to say with the greater degree of surprize, because, I think, I am not mistaken in supposing, that he has been

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greatly instrumental in bringing the matter upon himself, for want of observing better policy in the regulation and superintendency of his property ; and in his conduct towards those who have been chiefly employed in managing, and cultivating it. What I have to say shall be deduced from reason, and experience ; and I shall think myself happy, if some person, of greater ability, will enforce the argument further than I am capable of doing it.

I have always been persuaded, that there is a certain degree of proportion in expence, and appearance, necessary to be kept up between landlord, tenant, and labourer, and that it will not admit of interruption, without some ill effect resulting from it. That this proportion has lately been unusually disturbed, is evident to every man of observation. Industry and good conduct
will,

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will, and ought, to raise every man in the station he fills. But it is notorious, that an uncommon alteration has happened, within a few years, among the ranks I have mentioned. The gentleman, if he be very prudent, just contrives to keep his station ; the great farmer, is nearly mounted to a level with him ; while the poor labourer is depressed almost to the earth. His unfortunate situation will fully appear, by taking a comparative view of it, only forty years ago, and at present ; by which it will appear, that his wages have by no means kept an even pace, with the reasonable expences of supporting his family, in equal proportion to the respective incomes of the farmer, and gentleman. I might carry this comparison much further back ; and I am certain the further I went with it, the more it would make for my argument ; but

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the period of about forty years will be fully sufficient, to shew in what manner, and by what causes, the grievance has so much increased, though its first origin may have been of an earlier date.

I begin my argument with this fact, that, within the space of forty years, land is advanced in yearly value, more than one third, or about sixty per cent, most rents having been raised in that proportion. The price of provisions has mounted to the same level. Manufacturers have felt the change, and, where it was practicable, followed the alteration ; where it was not practicable, their business has in consequence, declined. But the most useful of labourers, namely, the man employed in the branch of husbandry, has not, in this convulsed state of things, derived an equal profit, to put him upon the same footing with his employer, which
his

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his ancestors were upon with their employers.

I leave it to others, to account for this vast change in the value of land. Let the cause proceed from what it may, it will be sufficient, to consider the consequences, that have resulted from it.

First, it is evident, that the person who sold an estate within the period I mention, and vested its produce in the funds, or in any similar security, would have been all this while in possession of an estate, capable of no improvement, and would have been gradually sustaining an inconvenience, similar to that of the labourer, in not having his income rise, in proportion to the price of provisions. In a like situation are all officers upon fixed salaries under government, and other persons, who have had their dependance upon a settled annuity, or stipend. But the land-
B 4 owner

owner has been differently affected, by the additional reputation which land has acquired. If he chooses to carry his property to market, at this time, he can get almost double the sum for it, that the person did, who sold *his* forty years ago; because he has not only considerably advanced it in its rent, but can now sell it at that advanced rent to greater advantage; because the purchaser is content, provided he can make three per cent. interest of his money, whereas a former purchaser expected to make four. His rents having been advanced, he has likewise enjoyed a greater yearly income from his estate, in the mean while, than the person has, who sold an estate, of equal value, at the time I mention, and put his money to interest.

Lest the foregoing remark should be thought unnecessary, I think it proper
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to say, that I make it, in order to shew the vast advantage which men of landed interest have had over their neighbours, within a few years past, the better to prepare them to listen to the propriety, and reasonableness of my argument; and to convince them that so great, and so sudden, a change in their fortune, could not have been expected to happen, without entailing some inconveniencies upon their estates. The present inconvenience however, which these gentlemen complain of, bears no proportion to the advantages they have gained; and therefore it should be submitted to with cheerfulness; or rather, they should not grudge the poor labourer a decent support, whose importance in society ought to be provided for with a degree of liberality.

The value of estates being so considerably raised, the farmer stood in need
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of no apology, for endeavouring to obtain a higher price for the produce of his land. Yet, perhaps, his attempts to carry that point, would not have succeeded so soon, had not a series of unkind seasons happened; and, what is still worse, had not the luxury taken place, about the same time, of keeping a much greater number of horses for pleasure, than formerly, together with the pernicious custom of destroying little farms, which fed all the channels of the markets with plenty. Many other causes, less obvious, have undoubtedly contributed to enhance the price of provisions; but I apprehend it is sufficient, on the present occasion, to observe, that by these, or some other means, the rise on provisions, and the rise on land, have visibly kept a pretty even pace.

But neither the gentleman, nor the farmer sustains any disadvantage by this alteration,

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alteration. As the former has an increase of income, he is enabled to bear the increased price of provisions, and of other articles in proportion; and (abating the change which luxury makes in every station) is upon a footing with his ancestors. The farmer, by the augmentation of the prices he obtains for his cattle, corn, &c, can better pay his rent, support his family better, and the advanced charges incident to his farm, than he could when his rent was less, his incidental charges more moderate, and his articles of produce less valuable.

It is indeed very apparent, that the landlord, and tenant, have lately had nearly equal chances, and have both gone hand in hand in keeping the labourer down; from a mistaken notion that they could not raise his wages, but at the expence of their respective emoluments. And thus the harmony of the
the

the old connection between them has been interrupted, which nothing can again restore, but a rise of wages or a fall of provisions. If the latter should take place, rents must be again lowered; and then the three parties will be again united upon their old scale of connection; but if the price of things keep up, wages must be advanced, or some better remedy applied, than has hitherto been thought of.

But the inconveniencies which the labourer, in the branch of country business sustains, will more clearly appear by an induction of particulars.

About forty years since, or less, the average - price of butcher's - meat was 2d. halfpenny a pound; butter 4d. milk was sold at 2d. the gallon (and that in much greater plenty than now); wheat from 3s. to 3s. 6d. a bushel, malt at 2s. 9d. and most of the other necessaries

necessaries of life, in the like proportion. The pay of a labourer was then, in most places, a shilling a day; it was indeed, in some few places, only ten-pence; but then in others it exceeded a shilling; so that a shilling may be looked upon as the then medium-price of wages. At present, butcher's meat may be reckoned at 4d. a pound, butter at 7d. milk at 4d. a gallon, wheat at 5s a bushel, malt at 4s. 6d. &c. The pay of a labourer, taken between the two extremes, of a shilling, and sixteen-pence, may be estimated, at an average, at fourteen-pence a day. Let us suppose the wife capable of having returned, both then, as well as now, fifteen-pence a week, by spinning or other employment, besides giving proper attendance upon her family. The preceding facts being admitted, what result could there have been, than what has happened?

Examine

Examine the situation of a poor man, his wife and four small children, at these different periods: and, to calculate upon an even sum, suppose the extra-earnings of the family in harvest, and at other seasons, to be equal to the expence of house-rent and firing. The week's earnings then, formerly, appear to have been seven shillings and three-pence; which, at that time, made the following provision.

Five gallons of wheat, which would make, without taking out the bran, about 43 pounds of bread, being nearly the quantity such a family would consume, allowing a pound and a half to the man, as much to his wife, and three quarters of a pound to each of his children. This, at 3s. 6d. a bushel, would have cost

0	2	$2\frac{1}{4}$
Carried over	-	0 2 2 $\frac{1}{4}$
		Milk

Brought over	-	-	0	2	$2\frac{1}{4}$
Milk sufficient for the family,	-	-	}	0	0 6
Three gallons of small beer, malt being at 2s. 9d. a bushel,	-	-	}	0	0 6
Ten pounds of beef, or mutton, at 2d $\frac{1}{2}$. a pound,	-	-	}	0	2 1
Four pounds of cheese, at 2d. or two pounds of butter, at 4d.	-	-	}	0	0 8
Soap and candles,	-	-	}	0	0 6
Balance towards providing cloaths, &c.	-	-	}	0	0 9 $\frac{3}{4}$
				0	7 3

The week's earnings appear to be, at present, 8s. 3d. The same articles now will be nearly as follow.

Five gallons of wheat at 5s. a bushel,	-	-	}	0	3 1 $\frac{1}{2}$
Milk sufficient for the family,	-	-	}	0	0 9
Carried over	-	-	}	0	3 10 $\frac{1}{2}$

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Brought over	-	o	3	10 $\frac{1}{2}$
Three gallons of small beer, malt at 4s. 6d. a bushel,	}	o	o	9
Ten pounds of beef, or mutton, at 4d. - - -	}	o	3	4
Four pounds of cheese, at 3d $\frac{1}{2}$. or two pounds of butter, at 7d. a pound,	}	o	1	2
Soap and candles, - -		o	o	9
		o	9	10 $\frac{1}{2}$
The week's income, -		o	8	3
Dead balance against the present labourer, - - -	}	o	1	7 $\frac{1}{2}$
Add, what the former la- bourer could save, towards purchasing cloaths or other articles not taken notice of,	}	o	o	9 $\frac{3}{4}$
Weekly difference between the former and present la- bourer, - - - - -	}	o	2	5 $\frac{1}{4}$

Before I offer any reflections upon this
apparent disproportion, which, how-
ever

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ever, was not equal to the reasonable
expences of a labouring man, and his
family, though it be much superiour to
his present income; I wish to antici-
pate every kind of objection, that may be
made to these estimates; because I am
sensible that the whole support of the
argument I am advancing, rests merely
upon their credit. The former cal-
culation is not only taken from the
mouths of men of strict veracity now
living, who remember the respective
prices, but has been compared with
different accounts, where the said prices
have been registered at that period.

The present calculation is as nearly
made as can be. I have been parti-
cularly careful, to avoid exaggerating it
in the poor man's favour; for every one
must be sensible, that if this compara-
tive examination had been made but last
year, the difference would have been

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much

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grown, like their betters, fond of delicacies and luxuries. They would, in a time of scarcity, confine them to barley-bread; and exclaim against the general use of tea; as though every ploughman and thresher indulged himself in that article, like an idler in a coffee-house. But, with respect to bread, if it be considered, that, when a poor man's family is large, he can scarce afford to eat of any other article, it would be very cruel to confine him to the worst sort. The objection to tea carries with it a better face of reason. All mankind agree that tea is not a nourishing thing; therefore, of course, it is improper for the poor. But the charge is much exaggerated; I have never known a husbandman guilty of this effeminacy. His wife indeed frequently dips her hard crust in a vile composition so called, but few who have
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seen the mess, will envy her the luxury of it. However I will make no apology for her. I think her penny would be much better bestowed, upon a wholesome pottage of oatmeal and onion. But carry our censure of this article as far as we will, this one charge will not be sufficient to account for the full grievance. The true cause lies deeper; and they who investigate the matter candidly, and considerately, will, I am persuaded, trace it to the source I assign. But affluence, which never feels the gnawing pains of hunger, and seldom condescends to visit the miserable recesses of want and wretchedness, is often apt to conceive the burden of poverty to be much lighter than it truly is.

In the estimate which I exhibit, of what a moderately-sized family will require, I consider only common articles of sustenance. Nothing superfluous is taken notice of; and it appears from

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this plain calculation, that the most industrious man, with only four children, and full employment, cannot live without abridging himself of common food, or running into debt by having a considerable weekly balance accumulating against him. How then is a man to support himself, and family, who may have six, seven, or even eight children? Thousands of these poor wretches for many years past, though exceedingly industrious, have had nothing but a gaol-allowance, bread and water; and scarce a sufficiency of the former. Who, that has any bowels of compassion, can know this, and not endeavour to remedy it, as much as his situation will enable him? But when we aim at a remedy, let it be a remedy becoming Englishmen, who are famed for charity and benevolence. Many, undoubtedly, are sensible of the truth of what I say,

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and yet supinely view this scene of calamity, and content themselves with an ineffectual wish to see it amended by others, rather than attempt the means. But so it will be, as long as things are circumstanced as they are at present. For I conceive there is a capital error, in the very idea that men of fortune often entertain of the poor. They are apt to consider them as a tax, and a burden upon their property, when, in fact, their property is of no value without them. I do not affect to say, there is any want of mercy, or compassion, in the breasts of men of fortune, more than in any other body of men; I am far from thinking there is. Indeed the ample charities which have been established in this country by them, prove the contrary. But I conceive they often act, with respect to the poor, upon mistaken principles. Otherwise, why have gentlemen, in the commission of the peace,

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so generally neglected the most important duty of magistrates? I can easily conceive, that many well-meaning, tender-hearted men may have slighted the poor, merely through indolence; others, through a modest sense of their own want of consequence in the community; from a just fear of incurring a general odium in their respective neighbourhoods, without obtaining the desired effect. But that no public-spirited person should have arisen, to maintain their cause; that they should, to a man, have neglected to enforce two salutary acts of parliament, made with a manifest view of providing a remedy for a grievance, which has been lately, and is, even now, so much felt; can be accounted for upon no other principle, than a general misconception of the utility and real importance of the labourer to the good of society. The first act I allude to, is the 5th Elizabeth, Chap. 4. "which au-
 "thorizes

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"thorizes justices of the peace, &c.
 "to assemble once a year, viz. in Easter
 "sessions, and having respect to the
 "plenty, or scarcity of the time, and
 "other circumstances, to limit, rate,
 "and appoint the wages of artificers,
 "handycraft-men, husbandmen, or any
 "other labourer, servant, or workman,
 "whether their wages have been before
 "rated, or not." The other is, 1st
James, Chap. 6. which impowers
 justices residing in any liberty, or divi-
 sion, "to rate the wages within such
 "division, as if the same were done, in
 "general sessions for the county." The
 latter law seems to have been made in aid
 of the former, and designed to be enforced
 in cases of sudden emergency; yet, not-
 withstanding, I do not find, that either
 of them has been attended to, though
 they seem to prescribe a remedy ade-
 quate to the disease.

It is sometimes alledged as an ob-
 jection

jection to the raising of wages, that tradesmen, and manufacturers, will be more advantaged than they ought to be, by such a measure; that they contribute most largely towards stocking a parish with poor, and if they are not obliged to furnish their proportion, according to the present mode of levying the rates, the sole burden of maintaining them will fall upon the land. But this is arguing upon a false ground. Notwithstanding the power of taxing stock in trade, is this really done, with effect, in any parish that can be named? How is the value of this stock to be ascertained? Or what law shall oblige a tradesman to lay open his circumstances to all the world, which may perhaps ruin his credit, and cruelly prevent him from raising a competency for himself, and family, which he has a fair prospect of gaining? As far therefore as law can tax the tradesman, or manufacturer,

he is still open to it as much as ever. But if the husbandman's wages be raised, the manufacturer will more effectually tax himself. He must proportionably raise the wages of his inferior workmen, and thus relieve the poverty which his business is falsely said to occasion. He will not indeed so soon grow rich, because if he be obliged to sell his commodities at their present price, his gains will be less; but general happiness will be more plentifully diffused, which is a point of greater moment. I mean not hereby to aggrieve such useful members of society, or to retrench their just profits. They are honourable in their station, and a great injustice is done to trade, when it is said to occasion poverty; whereas it has ever been justly considered as the riches of a nation. But I distinguish between trade carried on upon just principles, and the practices of tradesmen, and manufacturers. They do

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not always give the poor a living profit from their labour. Nor ought they, upon this account, to incur a greater degree of censure than their neighbours. For, in truth, all orders and degrees of men in higher stations, have long been unthinkingly, but unnaturally thriving at the expence of the poor. Few of them, for a long time past, have given the labourer his just hire. And therefore it is no wonder, that so many sensible, but inexperienced people are ready to join in the common cry, that in whatever parish a manufacture is established, there poverty is infallibly intailed. But if the poor man had the due reward of his work, this would not be a common case. It is true, that where greater numbers are assembled, there you will find a proportionable number of idle persons. But this is not the fault of trade, but of human nature. And if manufactures, which are a great source of wealth to a nation,

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be not to be encouraged, because they assemble large bodies of people together, and because there will be a greater propensity to vice among ten persons, than in one single individual; this is an argument not to be admitted; as it tends to reduce mankind to a state of nature, by dissolving the best ties of society.

Having thus freely expressed my opinion upon the hardships the poor sustain, I shall venture to proceed a little further, by endeavouring to shew the want of policy, in not raising wages in proportion to the price of provisions. Previous to which, however, it will be necessary to consider the importance of the labourer in the scale of agriculture. Land itself, as I have said, must be considered as of no value without him; and that value which it acquires by his means, must be allowed to rise, and fall, in proportion to his strength, and industry.

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industry. In Poland, I am told, estates are valued by this standard, and the labourer is paid in produce, instead of money; but in what proportion I am not enabled to say. When our minds are thus properly prepared, with a due notion of the importance of this useful member of the community, we shall be inclined to allow, that it is absurd to weaken his body, or dishearten his spirits, by hard or negligent usage.

A farmer, when he takes a farm of a gentleman, will insist upon good barn-room, a comfortable stable, dry sheds for his cattle, and a covering for his carts, and implements; but never stipulates for any cottage-room for his labourers, though they are certainly more necessary than his horses, or any part of his cattle: which, at once, accounts for the miserable hovels that are to be found in all parts of the kingdom; hovels which are a disgrace to
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this plentiful country. In Elizabeth's reign there was a law enacted, that no cottage should be built but what had four acres of ground laid to it. They who framed this law had, undoubtedly, a proper reference to the comfort, prosperity, and population of this country. The system is now quite changed. If there be but one acre to a cottage, the farmer thinks it too much, next contrives to take it away, and the gentleman generally acquiesces in the monopoly. The poor then have neither a proper habitation, nor proper encouragement to work; if they had, every honest, industrious man would be enabled, to keep a cow, and a pig, as his forefathers did. The farmer now absurdly asserts, that *he* keeps the poor. They are indeed kept in misery; but even in their present condition, I deny that they are kept at his expence. They are, on the contrary, kept at the charge
of

of the land. They work for the land, and, having no property of their own, the land must support them by one means, or other. Beween the land and the labourer there is a tie of reciproca- tion. The soil of England is, in gene- ral, fruitful, and apt to make due re- turns for its culture; and an Englishman is not naturally indolent. I may go further, and say, that no people work harder than English labourers, when they are duly encouraged. But the bad policy of considering them as an incumbrance, has had the worst effect imaginable. It has broken their spirits, and so disheartened them, that many of them are become negligent; and when they find they are more than likely to come to the parish, they do not strive as they otherwise would, to keep from it.

Farmers themselves allow, that if they can privately assist an industrious man, it is better than suffering him to

come upon the rate. So it certainly is; and this proves, in a very forcible man- ner, how much better still it is, to put him in a way to live by his own labour. If wages were properly raised, it would undoubtedly give a very great encourage- ment to industry; and let me ask, where will be the difference to the owners, of occupiers, of estates, whether they give more in wages, and less to the poor- rates, or whether they continue to pay rates and wages in their present pro- portion? The matter is quite equal to landlord and tenant; evidently so; and must strike every impartial man with conviction. It seems, therefore, very strange, when land, in general, is in- creased in its yearly value sixty per cent, great part of its produce nearly as much, and wages hardly in the pro- portion of twenty per cent, that man- kind should wonder at the increase of the poors rate, and that such remedies

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should be fought after, as do not promise a cure of the evil. It would be thought very absurd conduct, if the owner of a horse, when oats and hay rose in price, should abridge his beast of his former quantity of provender, because he could not buy so much for a stated sum, as he formerly did; and yet that he should continue to exact the same work from him, and wonder at his losing flesh, and getting out of condition. It would be still more absurd if, when he perceived this alteration in his animal, he should apply to a farrier to cure his horse of poverty by medicines. No; he knows better. He abates not his food, but expects to levy the more, upon the extra-part which he sells, in order to make him amends. Why then should the human servant be more abridged than the animal servant? And yet the present treatment of the poor, the general wonder

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der that they cannot live as formerly, and the vain endeavour to make their condition comfortable, without advancing their wages, or sinking the price of provisions, is a case very near akin to that of the man and his horse.

I am persuaded that no one, upon just reflection, can think that I have carried the representation of the state of the poor, further than is strictly consistent with truth. I am one of the last men, who would wish to un-hinge order, or loosen the bands of society; nor have I any passion for idle declamation; but have been led to undertake their cause purely in the course of my profession; from having been much engaged in country business, where scenes of distress among the poor, and of misconduct in the managers of them, have often made a deep impression upon my mind.

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It will doubtless be expected, that as I presume to pronounce the present rate of wages to be inadequate to the value of labour, I should state, and define, what a due proportion is. I have no objection therefore to declare, that I think a labourer who does a fair day's work, at a time when wheat sells for 4s. 6d. a bushel, is justly entitled to eighteen-pence a day : or, whenever the price varies, to the value of a third part of a bushel, be the price what it may. This should be the standard. There was a time during the present century when wheat sold for 2s. 6d. a bushel. The labourer then earned beyond the proportion I recommend, without any ill consequence to the publick, as it lasted but for a short time. But this proportionably hurt the farmer, and raised his just complaints. But to raise wages in the afore-mentioned manner,

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ner, will not exceed, but rather fall short of the advance which land and its produce have attained. I will likewise venture to assert, that the parish which paid such wages, would have the advantage over the parish, which paid only fourteen-pence, because it would hold forth greater encouragement; and on that account the extraordinary four-pence given in wages, would save at least as much in the rates. The week's earnings of the family I have described, would, in this case, amount to ten-shillings and three-pence. With this a labourer might buy the same things, which the labourer did formerly, and have the small balance of nine-pence halfpenny a week in his favour; which, tho' a mere trifle, would be a very different thing from being obliged to starve, or else run in debt every week. A man with a less family would be able to do still better; and those few whose fa-

D 3 families

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milies are still larger, would, when they were thus encouraged, consent to pinch themselves a little, in hope to see their children grow up, to be in a condition to assist *them*, and then to shift for themselves. When illness happens, or age and infirmities come on them, they must have help; and this would be the chief weight of the rates, except that of widows and orphans.

I found my reasons for proposing eighteen-pence a day as proper wages, when wheat is at 4s. 6d. a bushel, partly upon a reasonable estimation of the labourer's wants, and partly upon the wisdom of our ancestors, register'd by the accurate Bishop *Fleetwood*, in his *Chronicon preciosum*. From a perusal of this curious, and valuable treatise, I plainly perceive, that a labourer was in a much better situation two or three hundred years ago, than he has been for some years past. By this book of authority, (pag. 129.)

I find,

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I find, that in the year 1351, *Parliament* settled wages in wheat, at the rate of 10d. a bushel. At that time a labourer had 5d. for mowing an acre, or by the day: so that in one day he could earn the value of half a bushel of wheat. Threshing indeed was only 2d $\frac{1}{2}$. a day, which is equal to 1s. 1d $\frac{1}{2}$. at present, wheat being at 4s. 6d. the bushel. These seem to be summer, and winter-wages; the medium of which is equal to 1s. 8d $\frac{1}{4}$. a day, wheat being at the above standard. I am inclined to think, from the great difference between the two prices, and other circumstances, that this took in extra, as well as ordinary work; which was indeed a good allowance, and what a labourer would be very comfortable with now.

Page 79th, it appears, that in 1407, wheat was at 5d. a bushel, and a day's work of threshing 2d; so that a labourer

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could

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could then earn a bushel of wheat in two days and a half; which was rather better than 1s. 9d. $\frac{1}{4}$. would be now, still reckoning wheat at 4s. 6d. a bushel.

Page 82, it appears, that in 1425, wheat was at 6d. a bushel, and that 3d. $\frac{1}{2}$. was paid for threshing a quarter, generally esteemed two days work. This is the lowest wages, in proportion to the price of corn, I meet with; as a labourer could not earn quite a bushel of wheat in three days; but even that was equal to 1s. 5d. a day at present, wheat being estimated at 4s. 6d. a bushel.

Page 87, in the year 1445, wheat is mentioned at 4s. 6d, and in 1447, at 8s. a quarter. In the year 1446, page 131, labourers wages appear to be 3d. $\frac{1}{2}$. a day; so that, taking the medium-price, it brings wheat to about 6s. 3d. a quarter; which is nearly 10d. a bushel. The price of labour then was
equal

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equal to about 1s. 9d. a day at present, wheat being reckoned as before.

Pag. 133, and 134, it appears, that in the year 1514, labourers had 4d. a day in summer, and 3d. in winter. And this price was for ordinary work only, because, in the last of these pages, 6d. is mentioned as harvest-wages. The medium of these ordinary wages is 3d. $\frac{1}{2}$. The price of wheat is not mentioned; but by the price of beans, and oats, in the preceding and subsequent years, it may be reasonably supposed, that it was not particularly dear; and consequently, that the value of labour still rose much above the proportion of modern times.

I have confined myself, in this comparison, to the value of wheat only, because the price of all other things must, in general, depend upon the price of this capital article, this staff of the human life; wheat stamping a proportional value
lue

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lue upon all other kinds of provisions, as gold does upon all inferior metals. This would be a better regulator of wages, than any set of justices can be. It could neither mistake in a time of plenty or scarcity; and a law enacted to fix the price of wages, according to the price of wheat at the capital market-town of each county, twice in the year, seems to have its foundation in every rule of equity, and sound policy. It appears that a proper regulation of this business, has been the object of government, for several centuries past, tho' it has failed, for a reason which, to me seems very obvious, and which I shall presently mention.

As a candid quoter of so respectable an author as *Fleetwood*, I have no inclination to conceal his opinion, "that
"parliaments have thought fit to regulate the wages of workmen with no
"great success." But I must have leave
to

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to make my own comment upon this failure, which is indeed the reason I have just alluded to. Their regulations, from time to time, were made upon just principles, but they had no permanency, or fixed standard. Government seems to have been sensible of this defect, when, in the reigns of *Elizabeth* and *James I.* it devolved the care upon justices of the peace, in each county, at their Easter sessions. These have a perpetual power to rate, and appoint wages, according to the plenty or scarcity of the times. But, in their hands, the business has fatally dwindled, and come to nothing; and gentlemen, losing sight of that nice and just proportion that ought to be established, have bewildered themselves in forming ineffectual plans for the relief of the poor, who, with the blessing of health, and the just reward of their labour, are best able to relieve themselves.

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When the wisdom of parliament shall again take this matter into their own hands, and regulate the price of labour by statute, according to a fixed standard, then, and then only, may the industrious poor expect to reap the comforts they are entitled to. It is too arduous, and invidious a task, for private men, in the capacity of justices of the peace, to undertake, could they vainly hope to effect it. But parliament has a power adequate to the redress of the grievance; and the man who shall make a successful motion for, so beneficial a law, will deserve to be considered as a blessing, and ornament to his country, and as the friend of human nature.

F I N I S.