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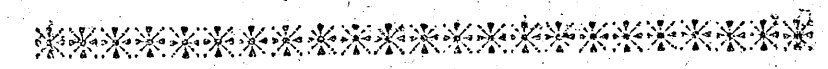
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OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

POOR LAWS.



Price 1s. 6d.

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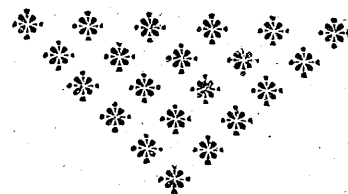
POOR LAWS,

ON THE

PRESENT STATE OF THE POOR,

AND ON

HOUSES OF INDUSTRY.



LONDON:

Printed for J. WILKIE, in St. Paul's Church-Yard.

M.DCC.LXXV.

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T O
T H E G E N T L E M E N
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K I N G D O M O F E N G L A N D,
P A R T I C U L A R L Y
T O T H E G E N T L E M E N
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B Y
T H E I R M O S T O B E D I E N T
H U M B L E S E R V A N T,

Scarning,
Jan. 10, 1775.

R. Potter.

OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

POOR LAWS, &c.

OUR domestic safety and comfort, our private wealth and prosperity, our national riches, strength, and glory, are greatly dependent upon an industrious and well-order'd Poor; a proper attention, therefore, to their morals and support must always be the concern of every wise and good administration; nor was the great Alfred more illustrious for his naval arrangements, and decisive victory in the forest of Bruham, than afterwards for his civil police, which introduced a good order and tranquillity unknown before, and is the the origin of those laws which constitute a great part
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of the happiness we now enjoy. Ever attentive to the welfare of his subjects, he divided all England into Shires, the Shires into Hundreds, the Hundreds into Tythings; and then by making each House-holder responsible for his Family, each Tything for its Householders, each Hundred for its Tythings, and each County for its Hundreds, he effectually checked the outrages of those insolent vagabonds which had infested every part of the kingdom. He then proceeded to encourage industry, civilization, and the blessings of peace, by introducing trade and commerce: and that no part of his people might be neglected, he ordained that the Poor should be sustained by Parsons and Rectors of Churches, and also by the Parishioners, so that none should die for want of sustenance; and of his own princely liberality, he assigned one-half of his revenues for religious and charitable uses, one-fourth of which was appropriated to the relief of the impotent and aged Poor, who found, we may suppose, a competent support in this benevolence, and those other acts of charity, which the royal example and the spirit of the times excited. Thus we see that this truly great man, in a barbarous age and tumultuous times, by restraining the idle and disorderly, encouraging the
sober

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sober and industrious, and relieving the old and infirm, drew the great outlines of that body of laws, which the prudence of after-ages hath been continually endeavoring to fill up. In the course of almost eight hundred years, much might be expected from experience, a more refin'd civilization, and a more enlighten'd policy; yet in effect little has been done. As to the first article, we in a great measure retain the divisions of Alfred, but have long suffer'd the wise ends for which he made them to sink into disuse; and the further we have departed from his regulations, the further are we remov'd from good order and tranquillity: many are the laws that, from time to time, have been made to restrain the vagabond Poor, but they serve only to show our wretched policy; the evil remains, and is a reproach to the nation. In the second branch, we have indeed made prodigious advances; our improvements in agriculture, manufactures, trade, commerce, and the liberal arts, have given the industrious Poor a support beyond the comprehension even of Alfred's enlarg'd ideas. But in the third, amidst all our public opulence and private wealth, the distresses, the miseries of the impotent and aged Poor are such as the firey-tressed Dane, even in those ferocious days, would have
B 2 beheld

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beheld with pity, notwithstanding all the laws which the wisdom and the humanity of our ancestors have framed for their relief.

It may perhaps be entertaining, it must be interesting, to trace these laws from that early æra to the present period; that we may see what improvements have been made, what defects yet remain, and how those defects may with the greatest probability of success be remedied or supplied.

For one hundred and sixty-six years after the death of Alfred, the invasions and conquests of the Danes gave but little leisure to attend to further improvements on this head; for where all were miserable, none could attend to the miseries of particulars; only we may observe that in every little interval of peace, the king, that most closely adher'd to the regulations of Alfred, most effectually promoted the happiness of his people: the reign of Edgar is a proof of this. The three first monarchs of the Norman line were attentive to enslave, not to redress. The reign of Stephen was one tumultuous scene of civil war. From the accession of Henry II. to the deposition of Richard II. an almost uninter-

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rupted series of foreign and domestic wars, the encroachments of insolent and avaritious Popes, and the glorious efforts of our noble ancestors in the cause of liberty engaged their chief attention. Yet 15 Rich. II. c. 6. it was agreed and assented, that in the appropriation of benefices the Diocesan should ordain a convenient sum of money to be paid and distributed yearly of the fruits and profits of the same churches, to the poor parishioners, in aid of their living and sustenance, for ever. Henry IV. was only solicitous to secure his usurp'd sovereignty; but in the 4th year of his reign, he confirm'd the above-mention'd statute of Richard. The reign of Henry V. was more celebrated for glories, conquests, triumphs abroad, than for civil regulations at home. The next weak reign is a disgrace to our annals, exhibiting nothing but losses, confusion and anarchy; and from the battle of Blore-Heath in 1459, to that of Bosworth in 1485, the disputes between the contending houses of York and Lancaster had distracted the nation, and wasted its richest blood.

DURING this long period, though we find some statutes regulating the wages of servants, labourers, and artificers, and some ill-policied acts for the restraint and

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punishment of vagabond beggars, yet I fear we must look for the able Poor in general in the demesnes of the Great, where they were treated as slaves, considered as cattle joint tenants of the glebe, and transferred from master to master with the lands which they were doomed to cultivate: yet they were fed, lodg'd, and cloath'd. The aged and impotent Poor were supported under the old regulations, somewhat enlarged as the number of abbies and monasteries, and their revenues encreased, (v. Statues 3 Edw. I. c. 1. 35 Edw. I. c. 1. 9 Edw. II. c. 11.) at the charge of ecclesiastics, by the hospitality of religious houses, and the benevolence of private persons: nor ought we to think that their necessities were imperfectly attended to, if we reflect that the genius of the times inclined to religion, and the genius of their religion strongly incited to deeds of alms. Hence princes and the great barons founded abbies, monasteries, and priories "to the honour and glory of God, and that sick and feeble men might be maintained, hospitality, alms-giving, and other charitable deeds might be done:" and the rich of inferior degree imitated these public acts of beneficence in private charities, according to their avoird.

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THE subtle and rigid policy of Henry VII. was directed through every part with an uncommon attention and profound sagacity; an instance of this was shown on the subject we are now considering. By the 19 Hen. VII. c. 12. Beggars are to repair, in order to be maintained, to the place where they were born, or else to the place where they last dwelled or made their abode, by the space of three years. And happy had it been if this wise regulation had continued inviolate to this hour.

THE passions of Henry VIII. though insolent and impetuous, were often productive of the greatest good, and sometimes temper'd with the greatest humanity. In the 27th year of his reign, when his most royal majesty, dayly studying and devysing the increase, advancement, and exaltation of true doctrine and virtue, and the total extirping and destruction of vice and sin, seized the small abbies, &c. he required that all, to whom these houses should be granted, should keep an honest and continual house and household in the same site or precinct, under the penalty of 6l. 13s. 6d. for every month so offending. But as this was only a prelude to his great design of dissolving all the abbies, he the same year

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passed

passed another act for the relief of the Poor, that does honour to his superior understanding. This act requires all cities, towns and hamlets, to succour, find, and keep their respective poor, by way of voluntary and charitable alms, in such wise as none of them shall of very necessity be compelled to go openly in begging; on pain that every parish making default shall forfeit 20s. a month. To compell every sturdy vagabond to be kept to continual labour. To put to service children under fourteen and above five years of age, that live in idleness, or be taken begging. It further requires the Churchwardens, or two of the most substantial inhabitants of every parish, to gather such charitable and voluntary alms with boxes on Sundays and other festival days, or otherwise, in good and discreet wise. It also requires every Preacher, Parson, Vicar, and Curate, on all occasions to exhort the people to be liberal, and bountifully to extend their charitable alms towards the comfort and relief of the said poor, impotent, decrepit, indigent and needy people, and for the setting and keeping to work the able poor. It also makes such collectors accountable to their respective parishes quarterly; and orders that books shall be kept in every parish of the money collected, and how disposed

disposed of, such collector not continuing in his office longer than one year.

WE are now advancing gradually to an orderly and regular police. By the 1 Edw. VI. c. 3. the Poor, that being impotent and aged cannot be taken for vagabonds, were to be provided for, by the places wherein they were born, or where they had been most conversant and abiding by the space of three years, of tenancies, cottages, or other convenient houses, there to be relieved and cured by the devotion of good people. And if any of the said persons be not so lame or impotent, but that they may work in some manner of work; then such city, town, parish, or village, shall either in common provide some such work for them as they may be occupied in, or appoint them to such as will find them work for their meat and drink. By 5 and 6 Edw. VI. c. 2. this voluntary contribution began to be reduced to a certainty; the Parson, Vicar, or Curate, and the Churchwardens, having in a book the names of all the inhabitants and householders, and of all the impotent and aged Poor within their respective parishes, were required on a certain Sunday, when the people were at church, and had heard God's holy word, gently to ask of every one

one what they of their charity will be contented to give towards the relief of the Poor; and the same to be written in the said book. If any person, able to give, should frowardly refuse, or discourage others, the Parson and Churchwardens shall gently exhort him; if they cannot prevail, the Parson shall certify to the Bishop of the diocese, who shall send for him, and by charitable ways and means induce and persuade him.

ELIZABETH soon found her kingdom in a very different situation from the greatest of her predecessors, and knew how to improve her advantage. Her grandfather's artfull policy had in a manner annihilated the power of the great Barons; the Poor therefore had no longer a resort to their castles, and a support in their pride and turbulence: no longer could they croud for relief at the hospitable gates of the rich abbies and monasteries; these were all dissolved by the rapacious avarice of her father; and his prudence had abolished the disgracefull custom of begging. The long and bloody wars, which had spread desolation over the land, had ceased with the accession of Henry VII. so that the nation was full of people; many new manufactures were introduced, commerce flourished, and the arts

arts were cultivated; good policy therefore, as well as humanity, required a firm and permanent support for the Poor; her plan was wise and great, dictated by necessity and experience, and she advanced to the execution of it

With lyon-port, and awc-comranding face,
Attemper'd sweet to virgin-grace.

First, she renew'd the statute of 5 and 6 Edw. VI. in all its lenity, but provided against the obstinacy of the refuser with spirit and dignity; in such case the Bishop shall bind him by recognisance in the sum of 10l. to appear at the next sessions; and if he refuseth to be bound, shall commit him. At the said sessions, the Justices there shall charitably and gently persuade him; if he will not be persuaded, it shall be lawfull for the said Justices, with the Churchwardens, or one of them, to seise, tax, and limit, according to their good discretions, what sum the said obstinate person shall pay weekly towards the relief of the Poor within the parish where he dwells. And if he shall refuse to pay the same, the said Justices, or two of them, shall commit him to jail, untill he shall pay the sum so appointed. 5 Eliz. c. 3.

THIS

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THIS Act, we see, was contrary to the spirit of all the former laws; and had it been made in these days of undefin'd liberty, it would probably have been clamour'd against as arbitrary and unconstitutional: but that firm administration went steadily on, and in the 14th year of the Queen's reign, on this act, which was devised for the compulsion of a few obstinate individuals, constructed the general assessment, which intended the ease and relief of all. This Act was three times revised and amended, till in her 43d year it receiv'd its finish'd form, and became the law by which the Poor have ever since been order'd and supported.

By the 43d Eliz. the Churchwardens, and four, three, or two substantial householders in each parish, shall be nominated yearly under the hand and seal of two or more Justices of the Peace, and shall be called Overseers of the Poor of the same parish. These shall take order, by and with the consent of two or more such Justices, for setting to work the children of the Poor, and all such persons as having no means to maintain themselves use no ordinary and daily trade to get their living by; also to raise by taxation a convenient stock of materials to set the Poor on work; to raise competent sums of money

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ney towards the necessary relief of the old and infirm, and to apprentice the children of the poor. And the said Justices, or any one of them, to send to the House of Correction, or common goal, such as shall not employ themselves to work, being appointed thereunto as aforesaid. Such parish officers are empower'd to contract with the Lords of the Manors, and upon waste or common ground within their parish, to build convenient houses of dwelling for the impotent Poor; and to place more families than one in one cottage or house. And sufficient powers are given to assess and levy such sums of money.

SUCH is this celebrated Act. But the great names of Cecil and Walsingham, their known abilities, and the acknowledged excellence of their plan, ought not to dazzle our eyes so far as to make us blind to our own necessities. It were next to a miracle if no defect were found in so comprehensive a scheme, though form'd by the wisest and greatest of mankind; the extensiveness of commerce, the wonderful improvements in manufactures and agriculture, the increase of wealth, the change of manners, must have created necessities for which they could not provide; and the experience of nearly two centuries

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centuries may have pointed out to us the proper remedies for them. An investigation then of these laws through their operations and effects, ought not to be consider'd as an affront to the wisdom of our ancestors, but as a prudent attention to the exigencies of the present times.

THE custom of former times, and the voice of former laws, had joined the Parson, Vicar, or Curate, with the Churchwardens, in the duty of relieving the Poor, which indeed originally was solely an ecclesiastical matter: this statute has divorc'd from the office the man, whose education tends to give him a more liberal and ingenuous turn of mind, whose holy calling makes him the natural guardian of the Poor, whose rank and character must give him a proper weight in the little counsils of his parish; it has committed the power to the Churchwardens, and two or more Overseers. The Churchwarden thinks himself exempted from the trouble; and the Overseer, having received the sanction of the Justices, enters upon and exercises his brief authority for half the year, and then resigns it to his colleague: this is the practice of almost every parish in the kingdom, and however wrong *communis error facit jus*. Mean time the persons, the liberties, the lives

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lives of all the Poor within his district, whose unhappy circumstances compell them to ask for relief, are at the sole arbitrement of this petty dictator. The statute indeed provides that he shall be a substantial householder; but this substantial householder may be ignorant, inattentive, avaritious, and inhuman; and under the most barbarous oppression, the Poor, by this Act, have no power of appeal. This must be considered as a fundamental defect.

THESE officers have a power to set the Poor on work, and to provide materials for such purpose. This is in the true spirit of good policy: but no power is given the magistrate to compell the Overseers, if they neglect it, to set the Poor on work, or provide materials for the purpose; no power is given for hiring or erecting a common house for such work, which in all respects is usefull, in some respects is necessary. Where the able poor man is not skill'd in works of flax, hemp, wool, thread, iron, &c. in short, the unemploy'd labourer in husbandry, of whom the village Poor mostly consist, has no provision in his favour; he shall not be reliev'd because he is able; no one is compell'd to employ him, therefore he must beg,
or

or steal, or starve. This surely is a great defect.

SUCH as shall not employ themselves to work, being so appointed, the Justices may send to the House of Correction, or the common goal of the county; and this, I presume, on the complaint of the Overseer. The complaint may be partial, may be aggravated; if it be just, the punishment is disproportionate to the offence; it is the punishment of felons. This cannot be right.

No provision is made for educating the children of the Poor, and training them up in habits of industry, and the principles of religion, till they shall be of age to be apprentic'd. This is a radical defect. Such children shall be bound to be apprentices, the man-child till he shall come to to the age of twenty-four years, the woman-child to the age of twenty-one years, or to the time of her marriage. The Maiden Queen was here properly attentive to the interests and the delicacy of her maiden subjects; but this long servitude of the males is cruel, impolitic, and pregnant with evils.

BUT let it be considered that laws will necessarily derive their temper from the temper

temper of the times in which they are enacted. The integrity of manners, and gracious simplicity of Elizabeth's golden days could not admit the thought that any men, to whom the care and management of the Poor should be committed, could ever by an ill-timed parsimony and an unfeeling selfishness abuse their trust to the oppression of the Poor. The spirit of manufacturing, lately introduc'd and warmly cherish'd, engag'd the whole attention of government to the neglect of agriculture. And industry was so severe, that no mercy was shewn to the idle. This reflection accounts for the spirit of this law, and its defects,

BUT in good time experience discovered a melancholy truth which had escaped the sagacity of Elizabeth's wise and able ministers. The statute of 3 William and Mary, found cause to complain of many inconveniencies that daily arose by reason of the unlimited power of Churchwardens and Overseers, who frequently upon frivolous pretences, but chiefly for their own private ends, give relief to what persons and number they think fit, the occasion or pretence of their receiving collection being oftentimes ceased. It also found cause to complain that such officers were often capable of mispend-
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ing, and applying to their own use, the collections for the Poor, and other publick moneys relating to their churches and parishes, to the great prejudice of such parishes, and the Poor. And it made provisions to punish and prevent such enormities.

BUT this statute seems to be the great charter of the poor man's right of appeal; not express'd indeed in the statute, probably not intended; but under colour of the proviso in the said Act, it seems they took occasion frequently to apply to the Justices, and from their humanity were frequently reliev'd in distresses, which the obdurate overseer could not be mov'd to pity. This was thought to have been carried to excess; to remedy which it was enacted by 9 G. c. 7. that no Justice of Peace shall order relief to any poor person, untill oath shall be made of some matter which he shall judge to be a reasonable cause of relief, and that the person had by himself, herself, or some other, applied for relief at some vestry or other publick meeting of the parishioners, or to two of the Overseers, and was by them refused to be relieved, and untill such Justice hath summoned them to show cause why such relief should not be given, and the person so summoned hath been heard,

heard, or made default to appear. But notwithstanding this restriction, the Magistrate by this Act was constituted the Friend, the Advocate, the Patron, the Protector of the Poor; he heard their complaints, he adjudg'd them relief, his power was discretionary, and his award final; and every honest and good man rejoic'd to see the common cause of humanity supported by so respectable an authority. But this authority soon receiv'd a check that weaken'd its influence, and well nigh annihilated its benefit to the Poor, by 17 G. 2. c. 38. which enacts, that if any person shall be aggrieved by any thing done by any of his Majesty's Justices of the Peace, he may appeal to the next Quarter Sessions.

THUS then by our present laws the matter stands. The Churchwardens and Overseers are the legal Guardians of the Poor; should these be cruel, oppressive, and dead to pity, the Poor may apply to a vestry; — but in most parishes such meeting is held but once in the month, in many but twice in the year: — they may apply to the two Overseers; — but these may live at a distance, may be difficult to be found, may refuse the Poor access to their presence: mean time hunger be-

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comes more clamorous and importunate every hour, and sickness continues its ravages with uncontroll'd fury; what then is perishing misery to do?--But suppose them found, suppose them summoned, suppose them order'd to relieve: the delinquents themselves are to execute that order; they set the order at defiance; they appeal to the Quarter Sessions; that may be three months distant; must the poor man and his distress'd family continue starving all that time?—Alas, there is no remedy!—See the Case in Burn's Hist. of the Poor Laws. p. 284.

BUT on this head there is another circumstance which merits consideration. Great distresses are silent; penury depresses the spirits, as it emaciates the body; the modesty of fearfull poverty is unwilling to accuse; and who can say what numbers have sunk in uncomplaining silence to an untimely grave? Often have I seen the eloquent tear stand trembling in the eye of injur'd indigence, whilst the tongue made no complaint, and a smile of content has forc'd itself upon the pallid countenance. It is the ruder spirit that dares be guilty of the unpardonable offence of summoning the acting officer before the magistrate; and often,

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as he tells his story, his surly discontent, his saucy and audacious tongue may occasion him to be rebuk'd and sent away unreliev'd, as neither wanting nor deserving assistance.

DR. Burn, who knows the practices of Overseers at least as well as any man alive, has drawn the pourtrait of one of these petty tyrants, which I shall without apology exhibit here, for the inspection of such of my readers as may not have seen it in the original. “In practice, the
“office of the Overseer of the Poor
“seems to be understood to be this: To
“keep an extraordinary look-out, to prevent persons coming to inhabit without
“certificates, and to fly to the Justices
“to remove them; and if a man brings
“a certificate, then to caution all the inhabitants not to let him a farm of 10l.
“a year, and to take care to keep him
“out of all parish offices; to warn them,
“if they will hire servants, to hire them
“half-yearly, or by the month, by the
“week, or by the day, rather than by
“any way that shall give them a settlement;
“or if they do hire them for a
“year, then to endeavour to pick a quarrel with them before the year's end,
“and so to get rid of them: To main-

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“tain

“tain their Poor as cheap as possibly they
 “can at all events; not to lay out two-
 “pence in prospect of any future good,
 “but only to serve the present necessity:
 “To bargain with some sturdy person to
 “take them by the lump, who yet is not
 “intended to take them, but to hang
 “over them in terrorem if they shall
 “complain to the Justices for want of
 “maintenance: To send them out into
 “the country a begging (for why cannot
 “they go, as well as others they will
 “mention, who are less able in body?
 “and the feebler they are, the more pro-
 “fitable will be their peregrination):
 “To bind out poor children apprentices,
 “no matter to whom, or to what trade,
 “but to take especial care that the master
 “live in another parish: To move hea-
 “ven and earth if any dispute happens
 “about a settlement; and in that parti-
 “cular, to invert the general rule, and
 “stick at no expence: To pull down
 “cottages: To drive out as many inha-
 “bitants, and admit as few, as possibly
 “they can; that is, to depopulate the
 “parish in order to lessen the Poor Rate:
 “To be generous indeed, sometimes, in
 “giving a portion, with the mother of a
 “bastard child, to the reputed father, on
 “condition that he will marry her; or
 “with

“with a poor widow; always provided
 “that the husband is settled elsewhere:
 “Or if a poor man, with a large family,
 “appears to be industrious, they will
 “charitably assist him in taking a farm in
 “some neighbouring parish, and give
 “him 10l. to pay his first year's rent
 “with: And if any of their Poor has a
 “mercantile genius, they will purchase
 “for him a box, with pins, needles, laces,
 “buckles, and such like wares, and send
 “him abroad in the quality of a petty
 “chapman; with the profits thereof, and
 “a moderate knack at stealing, he can
 “decently support himself, and educate
 “his children in the same industrious
 “way.—But to see that the Poor shall
 “resort to church, and bring their chil-
 “dren there to be instructed; to con-
 “tract with a master, that he shall pro-
 “cure his apprentice at proper times to
 “be taught to read or write; to provide
 “a stock of materials to set the Poor on
 “work; to see the aged and impotent
 “comfortably sustained; the sick healed;
 “and all of them cloathed with neatness
 “and decency: These, and such like,
 “it is to be feared, are not so generally
 “regarded, as the laws intended, and
 “the necessity of the case requires.”—
 Hist. Poor Laws. p. 211.

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NOTWITHSTANDING the air of severe pleasantry which animates this description, observation and experience convince us that the traits are just. I would not insinuate that the heart of every Overseer is narrow'd with this selfish fordid policy; but whenever a man of more generous ideas and a more refined sensibility enters upon the office, that very sensibility, which shrinks at the disagreeable thought of disobliging his neighbours, and incurring the censures of the hard and unfeeling, confines him to the path prescrib'd by custom; and I have known the humane and benevolent man give by way of voluntary and charitable alms, when as Overseer he fear'd to charge the parish with a relief, which his own good heart thought necessary.

FROM these considerations on the managers, let us now turn our thoughts on the managed, and view them in their hovels, those wretched receptacles of suffering indigence. And here humanity would wish to draw the veil of silence over these squalid scenes of misery; but it is necessary they should be disclos'd; and however painful the task may be, not to discharge it would be to betray the cause I have undertaken to plead, the
cause

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cause of the infant, the impotent, and the aged Poor. These miserable tenancies are, many of them, open to the roof like barns, with ten thousand fluttering cobwebs pendent from the thatch; if they have chambers, these are in this condition; few of them have any floor, besides the naked earth; their site and precinct is generally damp and unwholesome; the door serves to let in the light, and let out the smoke; for the windows are generally so small and so patch'd, that they serve to little purpose but to admit the bleak and howling winds and driving snow; their beds are filthy masses of unsheltering rags that beggar description, many of them elevated from the bare earth only with a little rotten straw; in one room you shall find an aged couple, whose shivering limbs ach for want of better covering; contiguous to them a younger pair, with three of their children in the same bed, and in a corner of the same room a son and a daughter, each arrived at the age of puberty, couching together. In the same room lodges a decent man of 80, hourly insulted by two wanton wenches, each holding to her breast the fruits of unlawfull love. One room contains three, sometimes four beds with persons of different ages and sexes. One bed contains the husband, wife, and
four

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four children, two more lodg'd on straw. One bed contains the father, the mother, and two daughters, one of sixteen, the other of twenty years.—These are not cases of particular necessity, or particular neglect; but the common and general abuse of the Clause in the Statute of 43 Eliz. which empowers the Overseers to place inmates, or more families than one in one cottage or house; an abuse that deserves peculiar attention, and calls aloud for immediate redress, as it tends to extinguish every idea of delicacy, that guard which nature has planted around virtue, drives modesty by force out of the female heart, and lays it open to shameless, abandon'd impurity. And in case of sickness, in case of death—but let me not carry the imagination into such a scene of horror.

In the day-time the father, if able to work, is absent at his employment; the mother is gone out to buy her black Bohemian, to gather sticks, to pilfer turnips; mean time two or three infants are shut up with nakedness and hunger for their companions, or left to the care of another, itself an infant, in danger of the fire within, or the water-pit at the door. Many from 60 to 80 years of age are thought sufficiently favour'd by being placed

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placed in these wretched dwellings, and provided with a little damp turf, that smokes rather than burns. To those, whom age or infirmities have intirely disabled from working, the common allowance is two-pence halfpenny a day; and with this scanty pittance, the noblest work of God, wrapt in rags, distress'd with vermin, and tortur'd with rheumatic pains, unpitied, unvisited, drags on the unhappy remains of a life worn out in usefull labour; whilst the old hunter, now stiff and disabled for the chace, is valued for his past services, and enjoys at ease the rich luxuriance of the park. The pious Overseer may haply think that these wretches in their younger time were idle, or imprudent, and neglected the advantages which, if properly persued, would have render'd their old age more comfortable; and that their present sufferings are a punishment for their former misconduct: It may be so; but he should remember that he is the substitute of Heaven, not to judge and punish, but to redress and relieve. He may haply comfort them that, amidst the hardships they labour under, they have their liberty: but age and infirmities have depriv'd them of the liberty of action; penury, oppression, and an habit of suffering have extinguish'd the liberty of thought; one liberty

berty indeed is left them, the liberty to freeze, to rot, to starve in silence.— But the poor children, what have they done, that they are expos'd to nakedness, hunger, and ignorance? Why are they left to trace their progress from uninstru-cted youth thro' idleness, insensibili-ty, and poverty, to obduracy, violence, and vice, burdens to themselves, pests to society, and aliens from God?—If pe-nance were a part of our religion, and to inflict that penance were my province, I would sometimes take the rich and great from their sumptuous and splendid lux-uries, and injoin them to visit these man-sions of misery; that they might see what wretches feel, and know that this account is not imaginary, partial, or aggravated, but real melancholy matter of fact.

IN recounting the distresses of the poor, I must not omit to observe that one short Statute, and one single Clause, 13 and 14 Car. II. c. 12. by departing from the sim-plicity of the Act of 19 Hen. VII. has not only open'd the door to all the subse-quent litigations and inexplicable difficul-ties relating to settlements and removals; but is a dreadfull engine of oppression to the industrious; well therefore is it said to be “ a wanton or malicious chase of
“ the unhappy from one inhospitable re-
“ gion

“ gion to another,” The Statute of 8 and 9 Will. c. 30. by allowing certificates with great tenderness endeavors to redress this barbarous cruelty; but as a parish cannot be compelled to grant a certificate, it is in the power of any Churchwarden to defeat the humanity of the Statute. Facts may explain this better than argu-ment.—A bricklayer, allow'd to be a good workman, remov'd from a village, the place of his settlement, to a large town, where by a constant employment he ex-pected to be able to maintain himself. The Overseers of that town require a cer-tificate; he applies, is refused, and re-moved home. Not being there employ'd, he asks for relief; the Officer refuses to allow him money, but offers to set him on work in masonry, and limits his wages to ten-pence halfpenny a day: His com-mon wages being twenty-pence, never less than eighteen-pence a day, the man rejects the terms, and applies to a Ma-gistrate: the Officer is summoned; he pleads that he is ready to set the appellant on work, but adheres to his unconscion-able terms. The poor man's labour is his wealth; nature gives him a right to exert this to his own greatest benefit; the law of removals intervenes, and deprives him of that right: the Officer frustrates the humane intent of the Law of Certificates,
occasions

occasions the distress, takes advantage of that distress, and compells the poor man to work at an undue price, or to starve. What power has the Magistrate to redress this flagrant injury? — In justice to the honest farmer I must observe that this oppressive Officer is a gentleman of family and fortune.

My conclusion is, that our Poor Laws are neither perfect nor clear, nor easy to be executed; and that we have not in 800 years made such a progress in this branch of civil police as might have been expected from a wise and great people.— Our expences indeed on this head have increas'd to an alarming degree, and are yearly increasing. In the year 1680, a regular calculation was made of the annual amount of the Poores Rates in England, which was 665,392l. in the year 1764 it was something more than two millions two hundred thousand pounds; in the year 1773 it was three millions, which by the land-tax assessment is six shillings in the pound: an enormous burden, under which trade is oppress'd, nor can agriculture long support it; yet we have the mortification to find that this vast expence does not answer its benevolent and charitable intention: our poor are still in a very wretched condition.

WHILST

WHILST we are rolling thro' the kingdom in our post-coaches, post-chaises, chairs, whiskies, and a variety of whirligigs of a whimsical construction, the high culture of our lands gives us the idea of a *Ferme bien orné*, our nobility live in palaces, our gentry in villas, commerce has made us a nation of gentry, every farm-house is a grange, and the whole is one delightfull scene of convenience, plenty, elegance, splendor, and magnificence. Mean time our interior police is disgrac'd with the number of our starving, naked, unshelter'd, miserable Poor; this is an ulcer in our vitals, that spreads, and rankles, and diffuses its corruption thro' every part; some remedy, some timely remedy is necessary. " Humanity, religion, compassion, virtue, " honour, decency, love to our brethren, " the very frame of our composition, and " bowels of our nature (I use the words " of Dr. Burn) call loudly upon us for " some better regulation, to feed the " hungry, to cloathe the naked, to sustain the impotent, to employ the laborious, to encourage the industrious, to " instruct the ignorant, to reclaim the vicious, and punish the incorrigible." This hath long been observ'd, and hath engag'd the attention of very able men, who have propos'd their several plans of regulation

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regulation to the public. First of these stands the great and good Lord Chief Justice Hale; the strong and comprehensive genius of Sir Josiah Child form'd a bolder and a larger scheme; these have been follow'd by Dr. Davenant, Mr. Hay, Lord Hillsborough, Sir Richard Lloyd, Mr. Fielding, Dr. Burn, and many other writers of great sensibility, and penetration: These have all look'd up to Sir Matthew Hale as their great pattern, except Mr. Gee, who computed the Poor at a million, and upon that supposition was for sending them to the colonies; but whether his bad policy or his inhumanity is most to be execrated, may be a question. None of these plans has been adopted; and the Legislature hath gone on from time to time making fresh provisions, till "the Laws concerning the Poor, as Dr. Burn complains, may not improperly be compar'd to their apparel. Where a flaw is observed, a patch is provided for it. Upon that another. And so on, till the original coat is lost amidst a variety of patch-work. And more labour and materials are expended (besides the clumsiness and motley figure) than would have made an entire new suit."

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At length the strong and manly understanding of the late Admiral Vernon, temper'd by the gentle sensibility and cautious prudence of a very worthy Clergyman now living, propos'd a scheme to incorporate the parishes of the two Hundreds of Colnies and Carlford in the county of Suffolk for the purpose of the better relief and support of their Poor, and to erect an House for their general reception and employment. He was assisted in the framing of the Bill by the ablest lawyers of the time; Sir Richard Lloyd was particularly attentive and friendly to its construction; it receiv'd the sanction of Parliament, and the House was establish'd about seventeen years ago. —The largeness of this House, and its numerous inhabitancy, carried in it a certain idea of unwieldiness to many, who had no regular conception of its administration; and the certain expence of the building and furnishing, with the uncertainty of its correspondent utility, made it to be look'd upon as a very bold act: It was so: the man that first constructed his little skiff, and committed it to the rude and merciless sea, was a daring adventurer; but to the threefold brass around his breast, as the poet expresses it, we owe the various blessings of improv'd navigation; and the utility of Admiral

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Vernon's

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Vernon's scheme, confirm'd by the experience of about eight years, was acknowledg'd. Since that time six other Houses have been erected in Suffolk, whose districts comprehend more than one-third part of that county, and one in Norfolk, all upon the same general plan, and under the same general regulations, a little varied as use dictated convenience; and these having been establish'd six or eight years, we do not now reason upon speculation, but demonstrate from matter of fact.

THE first idea of difficulty to the common mind may possibly arise from his desire of knowing how the monies, necessary for building and furnishing such House, are to be raised, without levying an additional tax on the respective parishes, or withdrawing from the Poor any part of their present scanty allowance. I shall endeavor to explain the mode. First then, the Poor are to continue under the government and management of the Churchwardens and Overseers of the several parishes respectively, in the same manner they now are, till the House be built and fitted up for their reception. The yearly accounts of each parish for seven years past shall be examined, and from them shall be deducted all charges that

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that have been expended on account of journeys on the Poores account, Rates making, Nomination Warrants, Parish Meetings, Appeals to Poores Rates, or in defence of such Appeals; and also every sum of money, which shall appear to the major part of the Directors and acting Guardians to be improperly and unnecessarily expended with respect to the Poor: this will make a considerable deduction from the yearly accounts of each parish. Then the assessment in each incorporated parish will be according to the medium, average, or seventh part of seven years expences of the parish for the maintenance of its Poor; and such assessment will be distinct and separate in each parish, independent of, and unconnected with the expences of any other parish: and this average assessment will make another considerable deduction immediately from the yearly account of each parish: And such monies will be collected quarterly by the respective Overseers, and paid to a Treasurer. — The mode of raising the money for building and furnishing the House will be by mortgage of these Rates, or any part of them. The whole sum wanted will not be borrow'd at once, but as the occasions for carrying on the building shall require; and the interest will be paid out of the subsequent

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sums borrow'd; which therefore cannot possibly affect the Poor, or any occupier of lands within the Hundreds.—The overplus of the assessments, after maintenance of the Poor, expences of the House, and payment of the Interest, will be annually applied to the discharge of the sums borrow'd, whereby the debt and interest will be annually reduced, till the whole be discharg'd; and then the assessment of each parish will be proportionably lessen'd.—Suppose, for instance, the average assessment of the parishes within the Hundreds of Mitford and Launditch should amount only to 3500l. and that, from a judgement founded on the accounts and experience of the Houses in Suffolk and Norfolk, the expences of maintaining all the Poor within the Hundreds of Mitford and Launditch, in and out of the House of Industry, should one year with another amount to 2600l. and suppose the sums borrow'd should amount to 12,000l. the interest of that sum at 4 per cent. is 480l. which added to the 2600l. makes 3080l. per ann. The overplus then will be 420l. exclusive of the profits of the work of some of the Poor in the House. — To show that this is not mere speculation, the expences of building and furnishing the House at Bulcamp amounted to 10,000l. the annual income
of

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of the House is 3080l. the House was fitted up for the reception of the Poor at Michaelmas 1766; it has saved and paid off 3000l. Hence it appears that, though the Poores Rates of the kingdom have in these years advanc'd nearly 1s. 9d. in the pound, the Parishes in the Hundred of Blything have not only not advanc'd, but have saved nearly 2s. 5d. in the pound, which together amount to 4s. 2d. in the pound by the land-tax assessment, without reckoning the reduction of the rates by the average assessment.

A JUST attention to œconomy is a becoming part of the character of every man in every station of life; therefore it was proper to state these facts to the public: but if these Houses were taken up only upon the idea of saving, the writer of these sheets had never appear'd as their advocate; for in the care of the Poor, the preservation of their health ought to be the first concern; their morals the second; then follows an attention to their cleanliness, food, rayment, and their habit of industry; expence is the last consideration. In the Parish-Houses we have seen that expence is the sole consideration, and all the other great concerns of humanity are totally neglected.

LET us now take a view of the Poor in the House of Industry. And here the assessment of every parish being precisely fix'd, and uniformly the same, precludes every possible advantage to penurious parsimony, and obviates every inducement to oppressive and injurious treatment: and this is the foundation of every advantage they enjoy. Here they are no longer at the mercy of the little occupier, who is perhaps but one remove from asking the relief he so cruelly denies; no longer are they under the severe necessity of crouching to him for a morsel of bread; but whoever in their parish are of larger occupation and more affluent circumstances, and so, we hope, of a better understanding and more enlarg'd benevolence, these continue their protectors and guardians; and every Gentleman in the Hundreds, from whose liberal education and rank in life they have reason to expect the greatest humanity; even those Magistrates, to whose authority they often fly for refuge, and who in some cases find a difficulty, in some a want of power to relieve them, attend them here, are oblig'd in their turns to attend them, and with paternal tenderness direct and superintend all their concerns.

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THIS care first discovers itself in an attention to their health. Benignity of air and soil first determin'd the situation of the House; and the same idea directed its construction, thro' every apartment; where spaciousness and the continual undulation of the purest breath of Heaven remove the cause of vitiated air, and obviate the effects of nauseous and putrid accumulation. But as the human frame, notwithstanding all precaution, is obnoxious to distempers, Infirmaries are provided at a proper distance, that the disease may not be communicated to others; the casual sick are carefully nurs'd, and have all the relief that medicine can afford them, skilfull surgeons and apothecaries being engag'd to attend them as often as occasion shall require. At Bulcamp there is also an Airing House to receive them for a time after their recovery, that no remains of the disease may annoy others: a caution worthy of imitation. The happy effect of this care appears from hence, that on the 19th of December last in the House at Shepmeadow of 262 Poor not one was sick, on the 20th in the House at Bulcamp of 340 one only slightly indispos'd, on the 21st in the House at Heckingham of 252 not one.

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As soon as they are remov'd from their miserable cottages, and receiv'd into this hospitable mansion, they are stript of their filthy rags, made perfectly clean, and decently habited, before they are admitted to join the family; and ever after cleanliness is indispensibly requir'd. At breakfast, dinner, and supper they are all assembled, by the ringing of a bell, in the common hall, where they are provided with wholesome and well-dress'd food, proper for their station in life, and in a liberal abundance; their numbers, good order, and evident satisfaction make this a very pleasing sight.—Their beds are good, well cover'd, and clean; every thing around them is clean; the House in every department, and all its utensils, neat to a degree that surprises. One circumstance in their lodging is worthy of notice. Dr. Burn has objected to schemes of this nature that “they seem to annihilate all family connexions, except that of one great family under one head. The men are proposed to be kept apart; so likewise the women; so that there will be a *populus virorum*, and a *populus mulierum*, &c.” No wonder then that a popular writer, now before me, takes up the objection, and considers this plan as a means “to undomesticate

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“ticate people, and render them indifferent to the social advantages and comforts of life.” No wonder that the objection has extended in proportion to the weight and authority of its respectable proposer: And indeed, was this the case, did these Houses separate husband, wife, and child, whatever might be their advantage in other respects, they must be given up as subversive of the very foundations of civil society. But the fact is otherwise. Many an husband, disabled from labour by sickness, or maim'd by accident, finds a comfortable asylum here; in the Infirmary his wife, however healthy and strong, attends him, a child perhaps in her arms, another at her knees. Every married couple has a bed and a room distinct and appropriated to themselves, which they have the liberty to lock up if they please, to retire to it when they please, undisturb'd, unintruded upon by others; and their children, if young, are lodg'd in the same or the adjoining apartment, under the immediate care of their parents. And indeed these decent lodgings for the married constitute one of the most striking beauties and conveniencies of each House.

WITH regard to industry, whenever a person is incapable of maintaining himself

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self and his family, the community, which takes that burden upon itself, has a right to his labour, so that it be proportion'd to his abilities, and exacted with moderation. Of the aged no labour is requir'd; their silver cord is loosed, and their golden bowl broken; the evening of their days is here made comfortable; they are rescued from want, and consign'd to respect and tranquillity; to them the doors are always open, and whenever inclination and the weather tempts them abroad, and their strength permits, all proper indulgence is allow'd; or in the House they have the liberty of decent rooms, where they form their little parties of conversation, sit around the fire, and tell their tales of antient times.—In the Infirmaries little work is expected.—The strong and healthy ought not to be here.—Light employments are adapted to the powers of each: in the Bulcamp House they manufacture every article of dress, hats excepted, and all the linnen used in the house; and to encourage their industry, each receives two-pence in the shilling of what he earns; and all more than sixty years of age, one-half.—The children are at school from three to five years old: from that age, during their stay in the House, they are at the allotted hours in the work-rooms; these are busy scenes

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scenes of chearfull industry, whilst content smiles on every little countenance. The males, by the Act, are to remain under the government of the House till they are 18, the females till they are 16 years old; but it gives one pleasure to observe that there is scarcely a child more than eleven in any of the Houses; the Directors and Guardians making it a point to provide them with services as soon as the abilities of the child permit; the neighbouring farmers readily accept them; or to bind them apprentices; and the humanity of the Act provides that such apprenticeship shall not exceed the term of seven years, nor extend to the males beyond the age of 21, to the females beyond 18. How different this from the long servitude permitted by Elizabeth, calculated probably to retard marriage! Our ancestors fear'd a great increase of people, which there was not sufficient trade and manufactures to employ*. Cock, who publish'd a pamphlet in 1658, asserts that population was then so much dreaded, that a poor man was not permitted to marry till the age of 30, nor a poor woman till the age of 25. Our more enlighten'd policy proceeds upon different principles, and every working person at

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* Observations on the more antient Statutes, by the Hon. Daines Barrington. p. 477.

15, whose life is estimated at 23 years purchase for labour, is valued at 326l. 2s. 5d.* and as every master, that employs a workman, may be supposed to be advantaged two-pence in the shilling paid for wages, his private profit from every labourer during 23 years amounts to 54l. 7s. od. three farthings, 2-6ths. From ideas of this kind probably it arose that in antient times almost every infant state punish'd murder or mutilation with a fine estimated according to the rank of the sufferer, that is according to his suppos'd value to the state: one thing at least is clear, the God of Nature has so inseparably united our interest and the constitution of our nature, that we cannot violate the one without injuring the other; and we then best consult our true interest, when we most attend to the dictates of humanity.

THE attention to their morals is very exact. To impress them with an habitual sense of religion, prayers are read every night and morning, and all, that are able to attend, are oblig'd to be present. Every Wednesday and Friday a Clergyman reads Prayers in the Chappel, catechises the children, and visits the sick, if they desire it. Every Sunday he reads Prayers

* See Hanway's Letters, vol. 2. p. 95.

ers and preaches to the Poor of the House; the Directors and Guardians thinking it as much their duty to provide them the means of passing their lives here in a decent religious manner, as to furnish them with subsistence whilst they live. The children are taught to read, and instructed in the principles of religion; and for that good purpose sufficient time is allow'd them. No indecency of language or behaviour is suffer'd; no strong or spirituous liquors, that fatal source of vice and immorality, are permitted in the House.

UNDER these prudent regulations, and carefully superintended by all the Gentlemen and Clergy within the district, we may reasonably expect to see these Houses scenes of health, cleanliness, comfort, chearfulness, industry, good order, and good morals. And such indeed we find them; the more inquisitive and curious the observer is, the more will he find to approve. At Bulcamp, perhaps in all the Houses, is an order that does honour to the liberal and ingenuous spirit of the Directors, "That at all times in the Committee-Room a book shall lie open, with pen and ink near it, that in case any Guardian, or other person visiting the House occasionally, shall perceive any

“ any thing amiss, or can suggest any new
 “ proposal for the better conducting this
 “ undertaking, he may write his thoughts
 “ or observations therein, that the week-
 “ ly Committee may consider the same,
 “ and report it to the next quarterly
 “ Meeting, if they think proper.” — In
 the construction of any future House it
 may possibly be thought eligible to make
 the windows larger, and the rooms loft-
 tier, and in all the bed-chambers to adopt
 the plan of the apartments for the mar-
 ried.

BUT as no human institution can be
 perfect, so it is generally the fate of those,
 that come nearest to perfection, to be
 most objected to. To these it has been
 objected, that as large and populous towns
 are more vicious and profligate than small
 villages, so the profligate and debauched
 of a large district, collected together in
 the same house, are more likely, by their
 conversation and example, to corrupt the
 morals of the youth confined in the same
 house, than any examples the same youth
 could possibly meet with in their different
 cottages.

THAT large and populous towns are
 proportionably more vicious than the vil-
 lages, may well be questioned. They
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have a much higher sense of decency and
 religion; and that, one would hope, must
 have an happy influence on their morals.
 The voice of riot is more often heard in
 their streets; but the gloomy rustic can
 skulk to his alehouse, and murder his
 time, his money, and his health in un-
 social drunkenness. The village, I fear,
 has adopted the vices of the town; and
 retains its own; the clown, the churl, and
 other terms of opprobrious import, are
 translated from the country. Be this as
 it may, the impotent and the aged are
 collected together in these Houses, not
 the profligate and debauched; these are
 left to the civil Magistrate and the Laws:
 if haply any of these are at any time here,
 they are in apartments where the children
 never come, and their behaviour is care-
 fully adverted to. The children are
 mostly taken from the Parish-houses, those
 filthy nurseries of shameless and aban-
 doned vice; and no where can they see
 more corrupt examples. Here they see
 the males and females of every age sepa-
 rately lodg'd; hence they acquire a sense
 of decency: some grave and sober per-
 sons, their masters and governing matrons,
 are ever with them, to restrain the wan-
 tonness of youth; and the fear of God,
 diligently inculcated on their tender
 minds,

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minds, is we hope to them the beginning of moral wisdom.

It is objected, that in these Houses the children are brought up too tenderly, fitted indeed for sedentary trades, but rendered incapable of undergoing the cold and fatigues of laborious husbandry and active life.

THE comparison can only lie between these children, and those taken from the Parish-Houses: the latter, for want of necessary food and covering, are emaciated, enfeebled, dispirited, and unfit for any work; for want of instruction they are ignorant of all goodness; and the evil practices, in which they are early initiated, harden them to vice: the honest farmer knows this, and scruples to admit them into his family. The children of these Houses are well fed, lively, and strong. If you plant, would you take your trees from the bleak and barren waste, or from the sheltered nursery? Their hours of play, in which they are obliged to be abroad, their casual employment in the garden and fields belonging to the House, inure them to the air, and render them more fit for the labours of husbandry than this objection supposes. It has been observed that the children in the Orphan
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and other Hospitals are brought up nearly on the same plan; yet are they not thought too delicate even for the service of the navy: their present education is only for a few years, and to habituate them to industry, till they can be ushered into the world. The children of the laborious cottager, accustomed from their infancy to the open fields and the objects of their future employment, are doubtless best trained for works of husbandry; and this makes it desirable that these Houses had larger portions of land to occupy, that the more strong, hardy, and active of the boys might be more employ'd in rural labour.

It is objected that these local and partial Acts, as they are called, are unconstitutional, contrary to the genius of our laws, and subversive of the liberty of the subject. This deserves attention.

OUR Poor Laws began first to be reduced to their present system, and were taken up with the true spirit of legislation by Henry VII. who confined the Poor to the place of their abode. Henry VIII. provided for their support. Edward VI. appointed each tenantry or cottage provided for them a Workhouse in little. Elizabeth enlarged this plan, by empow-

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ering the Overseers to place more families than one in each cottage. She also by two Acts, 35 Eliz. c. 7. and 39 Eliz. c. 5. encouraged the erecting and incorporating Hospitals, Maisons de Dieu, Abiding-places or Houses of Correction, as well for the relief and support of the maimed or impotent people, as to set the Poor to work. And this last Act was made perpetual by 21 Jac. c. 1. Lord C. J. Hale calls these Houses "the best kind of Hospitals:" certainly they are: and had Vernon lived in the days of canonization, the British Admiral had probably been enrolled a saint, and the conquest of Porto Bello been less celebrated than the erection of the Maison de Dieu at Naeton. The Statute of 9 Geo. c. 7. is well known. These Houses then are not unconstitutional, nor contrary to the genius of our laws.

But liberty! the very word has music in it, tho' its notes are frequently irregular and wild: let us then endeavor to bring them into harmony.—All men have by nature a right to all things: Liberty is the power of exercising that right: this surely is not the liberty for which the objector contends. The very idea of civil liberty supposes restraint; not the restraint of the inconstant, unknown, uncertain, arbitrary will of another; this is tyranny; but

but the restraint of such laws as the legislative power of the community shall have enacted, according to the trust put in it. No society can subsist without some restraint; no restraint is here established, but what is necessary to the good order of the society: the old sailors in Greenwich Hospital, the maimed veteran in Chelsea, the children in Christ's and the Foundling Hospitals, are all, and must be, under restraint and rule. But let us examine this closer. The inhabitants of these Houses are children, the impotent, and the aged: that children ought to be under proper restraint will be acknowledged; but here they are allowed two hours in the day for play, and more when their industry deserves it: Infirmary and age are of themselves a confinement; but such as have the ability to go out are never denied a proper liberty; neither is the Governor constituted the Judge of that propriety, but the weekly Committee. If any idle or disorderly persons are at any time here, they can have no just cause to complain, as the lenity of these establishments provides them the comforts of food, cloaths, and lodging, and rescues them from the miseries, the horrors of a Bridewell, to which the just laws of the injured community assign them.

BUT this objection is founded upon a generous principle, a just abhorrence of the Statute of 9 Geo. c. 7. the error is in not distinguishing between two institutions so widely different. The 1 Edw. VI. wears indeed a more ferocious air, but is not more barbarous and oppressive to the Poor than this Statute, which empowers the Overseer to cram them into a narrow, nasty Workhouse, and to contract with any person to lodge, keep, and maintain them. The fund of such House is not sufficient to redeem them from their filthy rags; nor the capacity of it to furnish them with convenient, decent, and distinct apartments; but the young the old, the virtuous the profligate, the sick the healthy, the clean the unclean, huddled together, and inhaling a stagnated and putrid air, deplore their miserable situation; which receives its utmost aggravation from their irremediable servitude to the Contractor, some low-born, selfish, surly ruffian, from whose sordid tyranny there is no appeal, no redress, till the unhappy sufferers repose in the grave. If any Workhouse is under a better regulation, it is owing to the humanity of one or more Gentlemen that direct its management, not to any proviso in the Act. Whether the Directors and Guardians of the Houses of Industry be, by this

this Statute, vested with the power of farming out their Poor, or not, it were to be wished that a preventive Clause were inserted in every future Bill, were it only to vindicate the integrity of their intentions, and to satisfy the public: On the same principle it were to be wished that the Clause, which empowers them to contract with any person for employing all the Poor within the House, were omitted; And that also, whereby they may bind the children apprentices to the Governor of the House; one end of the institution being to make such children useful to the community as soon as may be; and such unnecessary detention, tho' it has nothing oppressive in it, little answering that salutary purpose.

ANOTHER consideration remains, not properly indeed an objection, but a plea of good nature. It may sometimes happen that the honest, industrious cottager, now incapable of labour and reduced to ask for support; by a long continued residence, an association of ideas, a partial affection to one particular spot, is wedded to his little habitation; to divorce him from it would be cruel; he raised that hedge; he planted that tree; or some unaccountable attachment hangs upon his mind; in the church-yard of his village

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Causes lies his wife, a son, or a darling daughter. All this indeed is ideal: but many of our acutest pains and sublimest ~~ideas~~ exist only in idea. It is a prejudice: but it is founded in human nature; and from this prejudice the noblest of our passions, the love of our country arises. Might not this rural veteran be favoured with a little relief in his favorite cottage? It cannot be expected that the Act can provide for his case; but the Guardians and Directors can; they are his neighbours; they know him and his merit; he never can want some friendly voice to plead his cause; the circumstance will seldom happen; an indulgence to it can be attended with no ill consequence; he surely will not be refused; the philanthropy of an English Gentleman cannot refuse him.

FROM these considerations it appears that the present miserable situation of the Poor arises from the Defect of the Laws, which commits the management of them to the Parish Overseers; that the Magistrate often in their greatest distress has not the power to redress them; and if more power was given him, the exertion of it must increase the Poors Rate, and be more oppressive to the inferior tradesman and little occupiers; that this plan, by committing the care of them to Gentle-
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men of rank and fortune, of understanding and integrity, who discharge the duty on principles of humanity, good policy, and religion, whilst it lessens the public expence supports them under a regular and well-ordered government with a decency due to our fellow-creatures, fellow-subjects, and fellow Christians.

BUT, it may be asked, if these Houses are so advantageous, so friendly to the Poor, whence comes their unconquerable aversion to them? The causes of this are various. Some are grown old in profligacy and licentiousness; these hate to be reformed, and would not be controuled. Ignorance, and a distrust of their future situation, mixed with something of delicacy, operate on many. An abject groveling fordidness of mind binds some to their present filthy hovels. Many have known, all have heard of the horrid practices of the Workhouse; and they have been taught, wickedly taught, to look upon this House as a Workhouse on a larger scale, and more severe; hence their minds are terrified with apprehensions of cruel whippings, imprisonment, chains, dungeons,

Gorgons, and Hydras, and Chimeras dire.

We know the clamour, confusion, and
E 4 riots,

riots, which were raised against the building of the House at Bulcamp; we know too that the experience of eight years has conquered all their prejudices, and that they now are as fond of the House as ever they were averse to it: but this may be carried too far; prudence directs us to cultivate in the lowest minds a conscious sense of the superiority of honest industry, and a repugnance to any dependence but on the labour of their own hands.

THESE considerations are addressed not only to the Gentlemen of Norfolk; (where this humane spirit is now awake, and many other Hundreds wait with earnest impatience for the reception which the Petition of the Hundreds of Mitford and Launditch shall meet with in Parliament) but to all the Gentlemen of England; because, tho' each House operates in its little district, yet to the general, universal institution of them throughout the kingdom, and to that only, are we to look up for an abolition of one evil that has disgraced our civil police from the earliest antiquity to the present hour, I mean that of vagrant mendicancy. Could penal laws have remedied this grievance, it had not remained for our consideration; our ancestors were not deficient in severity; imprisonment in the stocks for three days

days and three nights, and there to have none other sustenance but bread and water, bloody scourgings, pillories, amputation of ears, were its punishments of old; but these were tender mercies to the cruelty of 1 Edw. VI. c. 3. The reader, who is not acquainted with that statute, will be struck with astonishment at the perusal of it. The preamble well expresses idleness and vagabondrie, its mischievous effects, and the inefficacy of former laws to repress it; then the vagabond is described as one that does not offer himself to labour with any man that will take him to work, though only for meat and drink; or after being so taken to work shall leave it, or run away from such master; then such master, or any other person espying the same, shall bring him to two of the next Justices of the Peace there resident or abiding, who upon proof or confession of the party shall immediately cause the same loiterer to be marked with a hot iron in the breast, the mark of V. and adjudge him to such presentour to be his slave for the space of two yeeres; who, only giving the said slave bread and water, or small drinke, and such refuse of meate as he shall thinke meete, shall cause him to worke by beating, chaining, or otherwise, in such worke and labour (how vile soever it be) as he shall

shall put him unto. And if such slave shall runne away, his master shall pursue and fetch him back, and punish such faulte by cheines or beating; and proving such offence before two Justices, they shall cause such slave or loiterer to be marked on the forehead, or the ball of the cheeke with an hot iron with the signe of an S. that he may be knowne for a loiterer and a run away, and shall adudge the loyterer and run away to be the said master's slave for ever. If hee runne away the second time; such faulte shall be adjudged felonie, and such runne away being lawfully indited and atteinted, or otherwise, be condemned to suffer paines of death, as other felons ought to doe.— Elizabeth ordered that vagabonds be grievously whipped, and burned thro' the gristle of the right ear with a hot iron of the compass of an inch, unless some credible person will take him into service for a year. If he after do again fall into a roguish life, he shall suffer death as a felon, unless some credible person will take him into service for two years. And if he fall a third time into a roguish life, he shall be adjudged a felon.— These are acts of ferocity that would shock an Horde of Savages. The gentler spirit of modern times has softened these rigors; whipping, confinement in the House of Correction

Correction till the next sessions, then a removal to the place of their settlement, is their punishment by the present laws; but even this is too severe, and therefore but seldom executed; and as this unhappy class of people are not considered as just objects of political care, they are suffered to wander at large, and levy their contributions with impunity. Many of them are real travellers to a distant home, and through improvidence, accident, sickness, or some other pitiable or pardonable circumstance, are objects of real compassion. Some of them are driven out by the inattention or obduracy of the Parish Officer to beg a precarious subsistence from door to door. Many, and I fear the greatest part, are what our old laws deemed them, valiant and sturdy beggars, wretches that prefer a sordid idleness to honest labour. But when the miserable object implores our charity in the streets, or fixes himself a breathing statue of misery at our doors, we cannot always distinguish the fictitious from the real distress; not to relieve is unkindness enough; to punish with whipping, or confinement in the dolefull prison-house, revolts our nature; the voice of polity may dictate a different language, but humanity whispers "he is a man;" and religion inspires us in the midst of judgement to remember

ber mercy. Therefore one preventive law is more wise and effectual than twenty penal. Were Houses of Industry universally established, and open for their reception, where they are not subjected to any cruel or injurious treatment, where simple confinement from their lawless courses and a moderate employment in social and reputable labour is their only punishment, many doubtless would thankfully accept a shelter in this hospitable asylum, and become usefull members of the community; and to compell them all to come in would be an act of real charity. But if the gentleness of the government, and the blessings that await them here, cannot correct their judgements and convince them of their welfare, if their laziness is incorrigible, or their ferociousness not to be subdued, they might be consigned over to severer laws, and destined to perpetual confinement and perpetual labour. Our laws however would be vindicated from this stain, the administration of them be freed from censure, and the kingdom delivered from the most disgracefull, profligate, and mischievous of its people.

LET me be indulged in another consideration. In respect to the subsistence of the Poor, the first wish of humanity is, that

that every man may be enabled by his industry and frugality to procure a decent and comfortable subsistence for himself and his family: as this cannot always be, the next wish is, that every one may have this decent and comfortable subsistence provided for him: this is effectually done by the Houses of Industry within their respective districts, which evinces their general utility. The former power, tho' never to be render'd universal in such a state as that of human life, where vice and folly must feel their attendant miseries, and accident and misfortune may happen to all, might possibly be much enlarged, and extended to a degree not readily to be conceived: more happiness might be produced; every promise of happiness to man deserves attention from man.

IN our consideration of the morals of the Poor, the first thing that strikes us is their insolence, and licentiousness, their indecent contempt of subordination, their dissipation, and profligacy abroad, their ignorance, irreligion, insensibility and fordid misery in their houses. Before we think of happiness for them, we must think of a remedy for these evils; nor can this be applied with any hopes of success, till we have investigated and found

found the cause of them. We remember when this was ascribed to Gin; that has long been suppressed, yet the evil remains. Next the Alehouse has been represented as "the infernal mansion, where the demons of avarice, extravagance, fury, and prophaneness hold their perpetual residence; and whence the demons of famine and disease issue, like a strong man armed, to desolate the cottages of the hamlet, or the streets of the city."* This is a melancholy truth; but it is a consequence, rather than a cause: the matter must be taken deeper.

In the first place then, the Laws themselves are made an occasion of the evils we complain of. If any unhappy female, whose passions are too strong for her reason and her virtue, once suffers her loose desires to get dominion, she is totally and irretrievably undone; with an allowance of eighteen-pence a week to maintain herself and child, abandoned to infamy and want, she becomes desperate and profligate, and now makes a trade of that vice, which at first was a pitiable weakness. This awakes the Overseer to interpose his charitable offices; an husband must be provided

* Observations on the present State of the parochial and vagrant Poor.

provided for her, no matter who, so that his settlement be in another parish; and she becomes the bride of some miserable object of her disgust and aversion, who for a treat and a little money accepts the yielding fair, and leads her in triumph to his own mansion, where she becomes each year the fruitful mother of a legitimate bastard. The situation of the unhappy progeny of such infamous marriages needs not be described.—The intelligent reader will observe that Houses of Industry hold out a remedy to this evil.

THE situation of the children of the Poor in general has already been described. Trained up in ignorance, nakedness, hunger, and filthiness, unprincipled in any school but that of laziness, pilfering, and vice, untinged with any sense of decency or religion, their advancing years at length call them out into the world; they carry with them the habits of their education, and whether servants, apprentices, or laborers, are idle, dishonest, and dissolute. They are however susceptible of the softer passions; they marry, and propagate a like progeny in like manner to disgrace, disorder, and burden the community.

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IF any of these, tempered of nature's finest clay and formed in her favorite mold, emerges from this sink of corruption, and by some happy circumstance becomes a servant in a reputable family, where he acquires ideas of decency, industry, frugality, and religion, what is the prospect before him? One short sentence will express it, "he must work, and he must starve." Every encouragement is taken away, every avenue to a more comfortable subsistence is choked up. Our wiser forefathers left little cottages, and little portions of land annexed to them, as incitements to their servants, and rewards of their good conduct; to these, after their period of approved service, they were permitted to retire; they looked up to their master as their greatest benefactor; they enjoyed themselves with something of their own; their houses were happy scenes of domestic content, and little nurseries of a successive race of laborious, frugal, and honest servants. Our ruinous parsimony has demolished these cottages, and united their little precincts to the great farm, which now, like Aaron's Rod, is become a Serpent, and has swallowed up all the rest, leaving humanity and good policy, as well as poetry, to lament *the deserted Village**.

* The late Earl of Leicester, being complimented upon
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OUR next view of this hopeful young man shows him enamoured of some village beauty: the favoured Fair has the fine features and delicate complexion of our lovely country women; they make an impression upon his heart; he marries, and enters the world with all the vivid ideas of love heightened with the inexperience of a youthful imagination. The first year brings him a child; he is proud of it, exerts his industry with double vigor, and is yet happy. The next year brings him another child, the next another, and so on, till now he finds that the most unabated labour but ill supplies the necessities of his increasing family: by this time also he has made another, and a more cruel discovery; he has discovered that his wife is ignorant and improvident, a stranger to domestic œconomy, and unacquainted with the use of the needle; his children are ill fed, untaught, filthy, and in rags; he blames his wife's misconduct, and negligence; she recriminates; and the poor man wonders

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the completion of his great design at Holkham, replied, "It is a melancholy thing to stand alone in ones country; look round; not an-house is to be seen, but mine; I am Giant of Giant Castle, and have eat up all my neighbours." The expression was strong, but it marked the strong sensibility of his heart. His Lordship intended to have peopled the country, but unhappily he died soon after.

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to find himself unhappy; hence he repairs to the Alehouse, and drinks oblivion to his cares; he there mingles with the dissolute and abandoned, by degrees becomes one of them, sinks from poverty and vice to lower degrees of both, till at length we find him and his distressed family in one of those wretched tenancies, which the Overseer has legally provided for the miserable Poor.

FROM hence we derive the cause; to this we must apply the remedy. The House of Industry, it may be said, was calculated for this purpose, and fully answers the design. The observation is allowed in its full extent: yet it is our interest to take care that this House be not over-burdened; and our duty to protect those honest and frugal families which support themselves independent of that House. If this protection can be administered to them without expence, and only with a little pleasing attention, it deserves to be adverted to.

“ The life of man (says the benevolent
 “ Hanway) whether he be of sixty years,
 “ or only six days standing, is equally
 “ sacred. The young, instead of being
 “ the least, are the most valuable to the
 “ community. The glory of the world,
 “ like

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“ like the rising sun, springs from the
 “ growing strength, beauty, and mental
 “ powers of a rising generation.”—To
 call forth, to cultivate, to direct these
 mental powers, should therefore be our
 first care. If religion has any influence
 on morals, and good morals contribute
 to the happiness of the community, this
 ought to be made their earliest and most
 important lesson. The fear of God is the
 beginning of wisdom; and where this is
 not taught, in vain will you inculcate the
 fear of man; a contempt of the laws and
 a ferocious licentiousness takes place, and
 tramples upon good order and rational li-
 berty.

To remedy this, a proper school should
 be established in every parish, under the
 direction of well-qualified persons, to
 which all the Poor of that parish should
 be obliged to send their children constant-
 ly. Much learning is not necessary; but
 they should be taught to read the Bible;
 they should be impressed with an early
 knowledge and veneration of God, as
 the Creator and Governor of the World;
 with a sense of their duty to him, as ac-
 countable to his laws; of his goodness in
 the redemption of the world; of the ne-
 cessity of holiness to happiness; of the
 resurrection from the dead, of the day

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of judgement, and life everlasting. In this school all the females should be taught to knit and sew, to qualify them for their own domestic occasions hereafter; their earnings would soon pay for their teaching, and be moreover a comfortable assistance to their parents. The boys, in like manner, under the direction of some sober man advanced in years, should some hours each day be employed abroad; they might at proper seasons gather stones, pull up weeds, wield their little mattocks in the high-ways, or be engaged in any service suitable to their abilities, that trains them up to industry; their earnings in like manner to pay for their teaching, and the overplus given to their parents. Every Sunday they should be obliged to attend their master or mistress to the church. It cannot be doubted but that every Gentleman in each parish, every Farmer of an humane and benevolent disposition, and particularly every Clergyman, would with pleasure attend, encourage, and direct this little seminary of rural simplicity, and religious education.

FROM hence at a proper age they would be taken into service; by their being inured to industry, trained to obedience, and brought up in the faith and fear of God, all possible security is given for their

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their fidelity and good behaviour. At the age of 16 for the females, at 18 for the males, their wages should be limited at somewhat a less price than the farmer now gives, for a reason that will soon be mentioned. If in their service any of them should be turbulent, unruly, and refractory to their master's commands, he should apply to the Directors and Guardians of the House of Industry at their next weekly Committee, who upon proof of the complaint should take them into the House, and keep them there for the remaining part of that year.—If they behave well in their service, at the expiration of their year their master should give them a certificate of their good behaviour, or show cause before a magistrate why he refuses it. When such persons marry, they should bear such certificates to the Churchwardens of the parishes in which they were granted, and be intitled to receive for each certificate a certain premium, suppose 15 or 20s. to be raised by rate upon such persons only in the parish as usually keep servants. This would be no burden upon the farmer, as his share would be saved by the limitation of wages: it would be a great encouragement to servants to behave faithfully and obediently; and would enable them to enter

enter upon the married state with comfort and decency.

AND here it is much to be wished that some encouragement might be continued to their virtuous conduct throughout their lives. Encouragement is the soul of industry; an industrious and frugal peasantry is the glory of the country; they deserve every reasonable favour that can be shown them. What then if the Gentleman, the humane, the benevolent Gentleman, the friend, the patron, the protector of this truly valuable class of men, should rebuild the demolished cottage, re-people the desolated village, and replace the faithful servant in the station our forefathers assigned his humble meri? That station was a decent dwelling, and the occupation of a few acres of land. The large occupier must have his constant laborers, besides his domestic servants; and to whom can he better assign that labour, than to the man who has been faithful and diligent in his house? Suppose then on every farm that employs a constant laborer, and so in proportion to such laborers employed, a little cottage were built, a little portion of pasture land annexed to it; the Cecils, the Walsinghams of former times assigned four acres at least; 31 Eliz. c. 7. let us act constitutionally,

onally, and adhere to the genius of our laws. A little money would erect this building, and the rent pay ample interest for it. We have before endeavour'd to raise the honest occupier a small fund to enable him to stock this little farm: this cow, says he, is MY OWN; there is more music in those two short words, than in all the notes of Rossignole. The wife attends to this little business, and the daughter is early initiated in the work of the dairy: at night the husband returns from his labour with pleasure; with pleasure he looks over his little domain; his children are come home from their school, he wonders at their improvement, and beholds them with transport; he feels no want; he finds every thing neat and comfortable around him, and becomes every day more temperate, more frugal, more industrious, to secure the continuance of the happiness he now enjoys.

THESE ideas of benevolence, good order, and happiness may by many be thought visionary, and even romantic; they may be so: yet they are interesting to the human heart, and give one's mind at least a pleasure beyond that of the most refined voluptuousness: yet they are ideas of possible benevolence, possible good order, and possible happiness. If they are treated

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treated with contempt and ridicule, the credit of an obscure individual is a trivial sacrifice, where a public good is in view: it is possible they may appear to some Gentleman of large estate and extensive humanity in the same light they appear to him, who may realize these ideas, and that on a better plan; and if only one single village, one single family, or one single person be hereby made more virtuous and more happy, he will think that he has not wrote, that he has not lived in vain.

F I N I S.