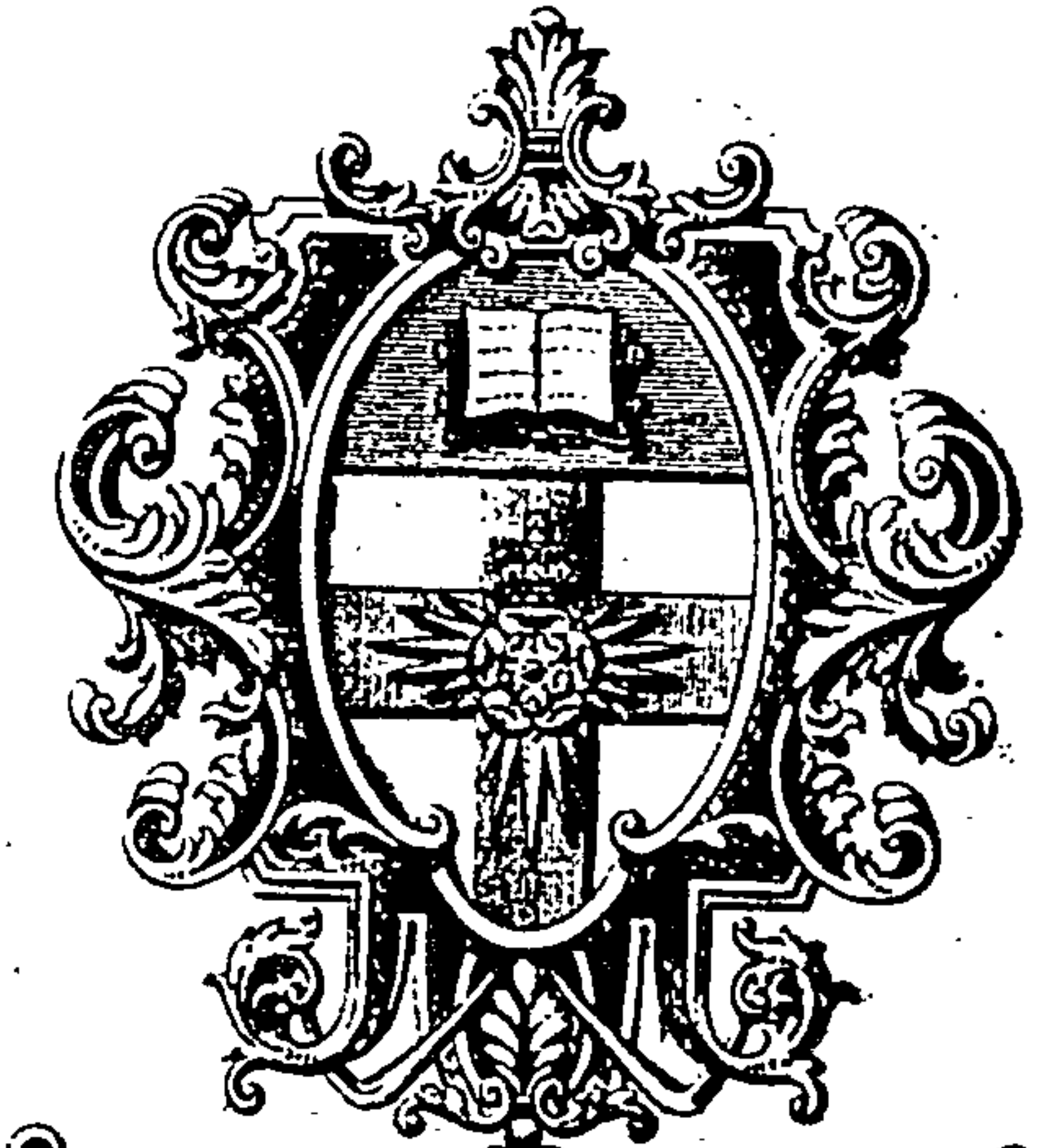

THIRTEEN LETTERS

ON OUR

SOCIAL CONDITION,

ADDRESSED TO THE EDITOR OF THE

SHEFFIELD COURANT.

SHEFFIELD

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MDCCCXXXII.

LETTER I.

Sir,—Allow me to thank you for the readiness with which you have received my first communication, and for the kindness with which you have expressed your willingness to forward my views.

If it should please God that the cholera should reach this country,—if it were to spread through our thickly peopled towns and parishes with its usual virulence,—if suffering and death were preying upon thousands of our population,—you can conceive, Sir, amidst all the panic that would undoubtedly prevail, how much we should witness also of active and judicious inquiry, and of self-denying charity. But above all, great as would be the evil, it would not be embittered by angry and revengeful passions amongst ourselves. It would arise so clearly from causes utterly beyond human power to counteract, that the sufferers themselves could attribute their calamity to no other source than the inscrutable will of God:—it would be so great and manifest a scourge that all persons would use their best and most vigorous endeavours to get rid of it.

Such is the case with the visitations of sickness; such is the case also with the visitations of famine, when they arise clearly from unfavourable seasons. But unluckily it is far otherwise with the visitations of poverty. Here the sufferers attribute the evils which oppress them to the faults of other men; and as passion is blind, they are apt to try any means rather than those which can really effect their object, to deliver themselves from their burden. On the other hand, they who are exempt from the visitation, instead of regarding it as an evil calling aloud for palliation, if not for total cure, are tempted to view it too much as coming in the natural course of things,—as resembling the fevers of autumn, or the agues of marshy districts—inconveniences which have happened and will continue to happen—against which it is vain to struggle, and they who escape them have only to enjoy their good fortune and congratulate themselves that *they* are not the victims.

The object, then, of every honest public writer at this moment should be to calm and to enlighten the poor; to interest and to arouse the rich. We are afflicted by a great evil, not certainly brought on solely by the hand of God—like the visitations of pestilence or famine,—yet brought on so far as men have been the authors of it, partly by a sort of chance medley, partly through ignorance, and partly from the mere indulgence of feelings so universal, and usually visited with so little blame, that no man has a right to impute them as a crime to his neighbour. On the other hand, the evil is so great, and ignorance and carelessness, however

excusable at first, become so deeply blameable after warning given, that it will not do to regard the actual state of the poor as an unavoidable drawback upon national prosperity,—a drawback which *must* be paid, and which it is the best way to think of as little as possible.

If I do but state ever so briefly the various causes which have brought on our present distress, the number of matters thus crowded together within a few lines will be almost enough to bewilder some readers. But if they can scarcely see their way through the subject when laid at once before them, how could others, while seeing only the unconnected parts of it, and without the aid of experience to enlighten them, be expected to see beforehand to what their conduct was leading? Our present distress is owing—

First—To the long war which raged through Europe for more than twenty years, everywhere deranging the state of society, and in England forcing suddenly the increase of our population and of our commerce and manufactures to an unnatural and therefore mischievous excess.

Second—To the natural tendency of wealth to become richer, and of poverty to become poorer; by which trade carried on on a large scale has driven trade on a smaller scale out of the market; by which the rich have been enabled to buy property to a large extent, and often at a great advantage; while men of small fortunes have been led to sell, often at a great disadvantage; so that, while a larger portion of the community has been forced to depend wholly on their labour, that labour itself, owing to the effect of great wealth in encouraging human invention, and thus leading to the discovery and use of machinery, has become far less valuable.

Third—To the effect of wealth in making men more alive to, and more able to procure intellectual pleasures; while poverty renders the same pleasures at once undesired and unattainable; so that the different classes of society have been removed to a greater distance from one another, have sympathised with and understood each other less, and thus have become strangers to each other, too ready, I fear, to become enemies also.

Fourth—To the Poor Laws—a beneficent institution,—harmless and even salutary in a wholesome state of society; but fearfully aggravating its evils when once it becomes diseased, by encouraging a want of forethought and exertion in the poor, and accustoming them not to look higher than the bare necessaries of life; while, on the other hand, the rich are galled by the burden of a compulsory charity, their feelings are hardened, and, accustomed to look on their neighbours as on paupers supported at their expense, they lose towards them all sense of equality and brotherhood.

Fifth—To the excess of aristocracy in our whole system, religious, political, and social: an evil arising from causes which run back to the earliest period of our history; and which have tended silently

and unconsciously to separate the higher classes from the lower in almost every relation of life. For instance, it is an enormous evil, yet one for which no one is to blame, that the rich and poor in England have each what is almost a distinct language; the language of the rich, which is of course that of books also, being so full of French words derived from their Norman ancestors, while that of the poor still retains the pure Saxon character inherited from their Saxon forefathers.

Now, Sir, in this brief and compressed statement there is matter enough to think upon, for those who are able and willing to think instead of clamouring and indulging mere ignorant abuse. These are real and intelligible causes of the present distress; but because they do not serve the ends of agitators, they are passed over in silence, whilst the changes are rung upon the vague words—"Corruption," "Misgovernment," "Tyranny," "Pampered oligarchy," "Boroughmongering faction," &c. &c. Truly it is hard to decide whether they who use this language are more wicked or more ignorant; for though their tone and spirit abundantly shows that truth is not their object, yet their excessive shallowness must wholly acquit them of having discovered it and then wilfully suppressing it. But popular principles are too sacred to be abandoned in disgust because of the vileness of their advocates; and I hope to labour unceasingly in the great work of social reform, notwithstanding the baseness and the folly by which it is obstructed under pretence of advancing it.

LETTER II.

Sir,—In the month of November last, a paper was found one morning, affixed to the church in a small parish in one of the midland counties, which was at that time, and afterwards, perfectly free from any disturbance. The paper was of some length; and from some particular circumstances, as well as from internal evidence, it was known to be the genuine production of one of the labourers in the village. It was so striking, both in matter and manner, that the clergyman of the place read it aloud immediately to the farmers in the vestry-room, and carried it about afterwards, to shew it to several persons in the neighbourhood. Amongst the rest he shewed it to me, and I read it with very great interest and attention. It seemed to me to be clearly genuine—that is, it expressed the real grievances of the labourers of that neighbourhood, just as they were likely to feel them of themselves, without having been influenced and corrupted by the falsehoods of the Jacobin press. Its complaints, therefore, appeared to me to be well worth our serious attention, and they certainly confirmed the views which I had long been accustomed to entertain as to the real evils of the labourers' condition and their causes.

This paper said nothing about rents, or tithes, or taxes: it complained neither of the squire, nor of the parson, nor of the government: neither did it cry out against the aristocracy, nor speak of the rich as the enemies and oppressors of the poor. It set out with saying, that God had intended that there should be both rich and poor in the world, but not that the poor should be so wretched and degraded as they were at present. It complained that cottages had been pulled down, and cottage gardens thrown together and ploughed up, to increase the size of the large farms. It dwelt particularly upon the distance which there now was between the farmers and the labourers: the farmers, it said, do not now call their labourers into their kitchen, and give them a draught of beer, but "take no more notice of them *than if they were dumb beasts*," and let them eat their crust by the ditch side, with nothing to drink with it but water." And it spoke of the fires which were then frequent in so many counties, as of great acts of wickedness; but that the farmers might certainly expect such a judgment on their hard-heartedness, if they still persisted in it. It concluded with praying for a blessing upon the clergyman of the parish, whom it described as "the good shepherd," who worked in the Church and out of the Church to do the people good.

Now we see, Sir, that in this paper the grand grievances of the labourer are described as twofold: his absolute want of comforts, in getting only the poorest food, and a crowded and miserable dwelling; and his degradation in society, in being left to eat his meal in the open air, as if he were a dumb beast. The latter of these seemed to have made quite as deep an impression on the writer's mind as the former, and very deservedly; for a want of kindness is as bad as a want of food, and to society at large it is far more mischievous; for it spreads mutual suspicion, and fear, and hatred, and makes men ascribe the evils of their outward condition to the faults of their neighbours, and thus to think themselves not unfortunate, but aggrieved. There is no saying how much mischief is thus created, and the consequences cannot be better shewn than by what was said in the paper about the fires. The writer, it seems, would on no account have taken any part in them, yet he could not be altogether sorry if they were to break out in his parish; because those who suffered from them seemed to him to deserve punishment. Even a good man could go as far as this; and how many are likely to be found in every parish who would gladly go much farther?

I will go any lengths with any man in acknowledging the enormity of this evil, and the urgent necessity of correcting it. But still I know that it has not been brought about intentionally, and that it would not have been easy, unless they were far better than they are, to have avoided it. It is the consequence of the violent stimulus or spur given to the progress of society in our days, by various causes, some good and some bad:—by the long war in which we have been engaged, on the one hand; and by the increased activity of the human mind on the other. We have been living, as it were, the life of three hundred years in thirty. All

things have made a prodigious start together,—or rather all that could have done so, and those that could not, have, therefore, been left at a long distance behind. When an army makes a forced march, every one knows how impossible it is to make all the parts of it advance equally.

The process in its details has been this. The war created a great demand for every thing; and the other countries of Europe feeling the actual miseries and the distractions of war far more than we did, and being cut off by our great naval power, and Bonaparte's decrees, from foreign commerce,—left us to supply much more than our fair share of it. Large fortunes were made, and enormous sums of money brought into circulation; activity and extravagance were the order of the day. Every man in the richer and middling classes saw around him examples of greater enterprise in all sorts of ways, and of greater luxuries enjoyed in consequence, than he or his father had ever known. We know how contagious such examples are, and that in these matters no man likes to be left behind his neighbour. Accordingly rents were raised, wastes were inclosed, farms thrown together, small properties bought up, new branches of trade opened, new manufactories set up, new machines invented, and every hand that could be found was pressed into the service of capital, either to make it, or to increase it. All was busy and all was thriving; and of the quantity of national wealth thus created, you and I, Sir, and all the higher and middling classes are tasting the benefits;—some, it is true, with more or less of a drawback in their increased taxation, but still we are enjoying many more comforts, or luxuries if you will, than were enjoyed by our fathers. Nor is it to be denied that the poor also are deriving some benefit from it. Earthenware has succeeded to wood or pewter; their wives and daughters can dress better and cheaper; and cheap publications are much more numerous. But with the poor it has taken away with one hand more than it has given with the other. It is an universal rule, whether in morals, in knowledge, or in money matters, that "*much will make more*," and that "*little is apt to become less.*" The small farmer was driven out of the market by the large farmer; the small tradesman by the great one; the small home manufacturer, who eked out the produce of his farm or of his labour in the fields, by the spinning, or straw platting, or lace making, of his wife and daughters in the winter evenings, could not stand against the united powers of capital and machinery. Deprived of the means of selling anything else to advantage, they were forced to increase the class, already too large, of those who had nothing to sell but their labour. But here the market was becoming overstocked; for the war ended, and the demand for every thing lessened, and other nations were bestirring themselves to supply their own wants; so that there was getting less to be done, with more hands, and those wholly without other means of support, vying with one another to do it. Of course labour fell, for who could expect a farmer to pay more for work when he could get it done for less? But what was ever worse was this, that while one half of society was moving forward, and the other half sinking backward, the distance between them in feelings and habits was continually becoming

greater. I have often heard gentlemen speak with much indignation of the changed habits of farmers and tradesmen: the farmer, they say, keeps his hunters, and his wife and daughters dress as finely as ladies, and learn music instead of making pies and puddings, as formerly; and hence it is, they go on, that the labourers are turned out of doors to eat by the ditch side, and are treated like "*dumb beasts.*" I have never heard such language without feeling quite as much indignation as those who used it; but it was directed not against the farmers, but against themselves. What insolence is it, when we ourselves are so changed from the manners of our fathers, when we are so much better educated, and enjoy so many more comforts than they did, to complain of others for having made a similar advance. I rejoice most heartily in the changed habits of the farmers,—if the fact be true—and I only wish that the habits of the labourer had been raised also. The high Aristocrat is but echoing the language of the worst Jacobin; except that the Jacobin is the more consistent of the two. Both would pull down the higher of two unequal classes, instead of raising the lower; but whilst the Jacobin would reduce all ranks to the lowest level, the high Aristocrat would reduce all but his own. To both is the doctrine of the good and the wise utterly opposed. Our business is to raise all, and to lower none. Equality is the dream of a madman, or the passion of a fiend. Extreme inequality, or high comfort and civilization in some, coexisting with deep misery and degradation in others, is no less also a folly and a sin. But an inequality where some have all the enjoyments of civilized life, and none are without its comforts,—where some have all the treasures of knowledge, and none are sunk in ignorance, that is a social system in harmony with the order of God's creation in the natural world,—and which can alone fulfil his purposes for man as a reasonable and as a spiritual being, as capable of serving and glorifying his maker here, and of enjoying with him hereafter an eternal communion.

LETTER III.

Sir,—My last letter has brought me very nearly to the threshold of the grand difficulty which besets the whole matter of our inquiries; the difficulty of knowing *how things are to be mended.*—There are mistakes enough afloat as to the causes of our present evils, and yet here we have actual facts to investigate; they may be tangled and confused, it is true, yet we know that as the result is before our eyes, a careful tracing of things backwards will bring us at last to the true cause or causes of it. But in projecting remedies we are in a manner bridging chaos: we start from firm ground, but we instantly lose our footing, and all becomes uncertain; we may hope, we may suppose, fairly argue, and reasonably conclude; but with regard to the future we cannot *know.*

I wish that this view of the case were as vividly present to the minds of all political writers, as it must be to theirs who know the most and think the deepest. To read the arrogant language of many a journalist, one would suppose that they were the very wisest men of their species, whose clear sight could carry them with a firm step through intricacies where ordinary persons must grope on their way darkling. But the truth is, that they walk confidently only because they are so short-sighted as to see no obstacles in their path till they actually stumble over them.

Good sheer thorough ignorance is indeed apt to be presumptuous and violent, for its only chance of gaining credit is by preventing its readers from exercising their own reflection and judgment.—Whereas, he who understands something of his subject, and is really anxious to know more, desires nothing so much as a fair and full examination of his statements. He knows that there is something at least in them worth attending to; he is aware also that there may be much that is mistaken; but truth being his object, he wants the question to be fairly worked out, and he cares very little whether himself or any one else be the lucky man who shall first discover the vein of the precious ore. If nine-tenths of all that I have said, or may say, were to be entirely mistaken, I should yet be perfectly satisfied if its tone and manner had invited my readers to think for themselves, and so enabled them to correct my errors.

I may seem to be going a little out of the way, but it is bad economy of time in the end to set out on a journey unprepared.—Every newspaper, every tract, every pamphlet, nay I dare say every active member of a club or an union, has got a remedy at hand for the evils of the times. There is Mr. Owen, formerly the proprietor of the great cotton factory at New Lanark, who would begin with society from the very beginning, and make us all men of a different nature from what we are now. There is Mr. Carlile, of the Rotunda, who would make all things straight by merely persuading every man to get rid of his conscience, and labour, talk, write, and fight, if needful, to advance his own interest, and gratify his own passions; a doctrine, in short, which says in plain English, "every man for himself and the devil for us all." Others talk only of attacking "the drones of society;" of making those who live in idleness disgorge the wealth which they are daily sucking out of the poor man's labour: and especially of stripping parsons, pensioners, and stock-jobbers, by which last term Mr. Cobbett means "*those who have got any money in the funds.*" Then again others of a different party cry out for war and a paper currency, to give employment to the poor: they sigh for fresh issues of country bank notes, for long credits, and high rents: they think, in short, that the process of getting drunk is far pleasanter than that of getting sober; so they want to apply again to the dram bottle.

It may perhaps be worth while, therefore, to detain your readers a little while with a few simple reasons, to shew the groundlessness of those notions which are entertained by many rash and inconsiderate talkers.

In the first place I would protest against the extravagant expectation of a remedy for all evils, which some entertain from parliamentary reform. Not that I would disparage the utility or the importance of improvements in our representative system; but, in the first place, it is absurd to expect that any *system* should of itself bring about beneficial changes. The most perfect plan of representation can only only enable the people, to chuse, if they *will*, the fittest persons to represent them; but if the electors are influenced by private and personal considerations, and not by public spirit,—if they elect with a view to individual interest, or the interests of their own particular class, in opposition to that of the country, a reformed parliament is likely to be as corrupt as an unreformed; and if the members of parliament shew themselves selfish and unprincipled, they will in fact only be the fitter representatives of such electors. But in the next place, supposing that members are elected on the purest principles, and prove worthy of the trust reposed in them, they can do much indeed, but they cannot do all that is desirable towards remedying many of the national evils.—There is a great part of them which though time and wisdom combined may, I trust, gradually remove, will not admit of a sudden cure by any human skill; and there are, I fear, many objects contemplated by some, which no human means can ever possibly accomplish. No parliamentary wisdom, for instance, can at once sweep away the burden of the national debt. It is a debt contracted for money which was borrowed and *spent* in the course of a long and costly war; the money is gone and lost for ever. We might by wiping off the debt with a wet sponge, ruin the fundholders, and enrich the rest of the nation at their expense; but this would be no benefit to the community, because the fundholders are a part of the community; and it can be no benefit to any nation that one half of it should be robbed, and the other half robbers.

We may, however, by judicious frugality, gradually diminish the debt; and we can resolve never to increase it by resorting to the ruinous practice of borrowing.

But in order to avoid increasing the national debt, we must above all things endeavour to avoid a war. Those who honestly (and I believe there are some such) regard war as beneficial on account of its *furnishing employment*, are under the most mischievous of all delusions. Those whom war maintains and enriches, it enriches at the expense of the rest of the community, and at a far greater loss to the one party than gain to the other. And yet destructive as it is, both of life and of capital, I am persuaded that its disordering and demoralizing effects are far the greatest part of the evils of war.

Let it not again be supposed that it is in the power of any legislature, however enlightened and upright, and zealous to fulfil the expectations of many among the labouring classes, who seem to think that regulations might be established which should secure to every labourer—to all that now exist and shall hereafter come into existence,—*i. e.* to an indefinite number,—wages sufficient at all

times to enable them to maintain their families comfortably. The funds for the support of labourers, whether greater or less, cannot in any country be infinite; and a law which professes to insure to *all* who demand it, whether they worked well or ill—whether they were few or many, a comfortable subsistence, would profess an impossibility. To compel a farmer to employ a certain *fixed number* of labourers at a certain rate of wages, whether it answered or not, would be only *unjust*; to compel him to maintain *all* that offered, would be impossible. I *ought* not to be made to part with all I have; I *cannot* be made to part with *more* than I have.

But I do think that a wise and active legislature may do much towards mitigating, and in time doing away the sufferings to which the labouring classes are, and long have been exposed in many parts of England.

The practice of making up wages out of the poor rates, which, in the southern parts of England especially, has for some time been very prevalent, is, in fact, under the mask of kindness to the poor, one of the most degrading systems of oppression. When men are paid, not according to their industry and skill, but according to their wants,—when for the same species of labour, one man receives only half the weekly wages of the other, not because his work is worth less, but because he is a single man,—we are so far advanced towards a state of slavery. The slave (like one of the domestic animals) being his master's property, receives, whether the profits of his labour be small or great, as much, and *only as much* as is sufficient to support him in tolerable condition: his maintenance is proportioned to his need, not to his exertions; and as a *necessary consequence* of this want of a stimulus, he is kept to work by the *fear of punishment*.

On this, and several other evils connected with the mal-administration of the poor-laws, I am happy to say I feel confident that the attention of the present Ministers is strongly fixed.

LETTER IV.

Sir,—It has given me great satisfaction to observe, that several of the provincial papers, and amongst the rest the *Voice of the People*, have thought my statement of the causes of the existing distress and bad feeling amongst us, worthy to be copied into their pages. It is a sincere pleasure to me, quite independent of any personal vanity, to find what I really believe to be truth received as such, at least to a considerable extent, by others; and it encourages me to think, that in suggesting remedies or palliatives for our actual evils, I may also hold a course in which other writers, with

greater means of doing good than I possess, may be disposed to go along with me.

But, Sir, if I was right in attributing the evils of our social relations to various causes, it cannot be probable that the remedy is to be sought for in any single measure. I may have my own notions, like other men, as to the measure most especially called for in the first instance; but I am quite satisfied that any one by itself will be totally inefficient towards working any substantial improvement. Neither Reform in Parliament, nor emigration, nor lowering the interest of the debt, nor church reform, nor giving the poor allotments of land, nor spreading knowledge and a taste for intellectual pursuits among them, nor yet the abolition of the corn laws and of the tithes, for which many call so loudly,—none of all these things will do us any great or real good, unless, as the waters of bitterness have flowed in by so many different channels, we set vigorously to work at stopping up *all* the inlets of mischief, on one great system, clearly and comprehensively devised, and steadily and perseveringly executed.

For, if I may be allowed to refer to my former statement of the causes of our distress,—the increase of our population and of our manufactures to an unnatural excess, which I have put at the head of these causes, might perhaps be relieved by emigration, or by home colonies, as they are called, or as some think by the abolition of tithes and corn laws; but how will these things affect the moral evils of our condition? how are they to raise the moral and intellectual character of the poor, to bring them and the rich nearer to one another? or how will they prevent the return of the same evils, or of others even still worse, in the course of a few years, if circumstances should again favour their revival? Or, again, capital and machinery have, as I have stated, and when combined with other causes, helped to depress the condition of the labourer; and it may be thought that to fix a maximum of property or a minimum of wages, or to destroy steam engines and machines of all other descriptions, might at least cure this evil. But here we should be further still from our object; for though I believe that capital and machinery have, *under actual circumstances*, done much harm, yet the fault is not in them, but in those unfavourable circumstances which have drawn evil out of what is in itself good. And thus, to destroy what is good in itself, and yet not to meddle with the circumstances which alone have made it in part injurious, would only leave us in a worse state than we are in now. So, again, the ignorance of the poor might be removed by education: but how can you really educate a man, unless he and his equals in society go along with you, and appreciate the good which you would give them? And who can be expected to desire general knowledge and intellectual pleasures, while his mere bodily wants are ill satisfied? Yet again—the Poor Laws are and have been injurious, *owing to other unfavourable circumstances*. Should we mend the matter by striking off the Poor Laws at one sweep? Or would not this be an act as wicked as it is utterly impracticable, and should not we by so doing deserve all the horrors of that

general convulsion, for which we should ourselves have given the signal? Lastly, for the evils produced by a spirit of ultra aristocracy prevailing throughout our social system, many, I fear, would think that, for this at least, they knew a short and effectual remedy. To overthrow the peerage and the church, to divide great properties, or, in short, to do away with such a thing as a gentleman altogether, would strike home, they would say, to the root of this mischief, once and for ever. It is waste of time to talk of wickedness to a jacobin, for it is the very essence of his nature. But setting aside the guilt of such a scheme, and granting its practicability, I say boldly that on the lowest notions of utilitarian morality *it would not answer*. It might, if we had as much elbow room as in America, *and a population of slaves to do all our hardest and most irksome work for us:* but conceive our population of fifteen millions pent up in the narrow limits of this island, with society in an utter chaos, all its former landmarks gone, all hitherto respected principles of order utterly rooted out, all property submitted to a scramble, and the best restraints of our ferocious passions snapped into a thousand pieces. No living man can tell, and God forbid that we should have any real cause to speculate, when such a sea of troubled waters would ever grow calm, in what direction a volcano so fraught with all elements of destruction might discharge its fury. Whether foreign war with all its evils might come as a welcome relief to the utter miseries of domestic anarchy,—whether England might renew the career of Napoleon, and after spreading the curse of its conquests over Europe, might provoke, as he did, a bitter revolution on her own head; or whether, from very weariness after civil war, want of employment, and their consequences, famine and pestilence, had effectually reduced the superfluous population, the people might fly for relief to despotism: this much is certain, that the moral and physical condition of the poor (and who would then be other than poor?) would be ten times more miserable and degraded than it is now.

All these considerations show the enormous difficulty of the subject, and should teach us that a great deal of knowledge, and a great deal of good judgment, and very comprehensive views, and good principles and good temper, are all required in the public men who would help us out of our present evils. For instance, to take only one question out of many, that of our population, how many various opinions exist about it: first as to the fact, whether it be excessive or no; and then as to the remedies, whether emigration or home colonies are preferable, or whether some mere political changes would effect all that is wanted. On some of these points, I doubt whether any one is sufficiently well informed; and happy should I be if I could direct the attention of some of your readers, who may be far better qualified than I am, to the importance of gaining and communicating information upon them. I know how much I have to learn about them myself, and I see that some writers of great name and much pretension are exactly in my own situation, although they do not appear to be aware of it. My next letter, on population, therefore, will be very like an honest map of an imperfectly surveyed country; it will exhibit great blanks by the

side of spots laid down in full detail; but how much better is this than to do like some of the old geographers, who filled up from imagination the parts for which they had no real authorities; and thus, as far as in them lay, perpetuated to posterity the ignorance of their own generation.

LETTER V.

Sir,—It is more than two thousand years ago that a Greek philosopher, Phaleas of Chalcedon, impatient, like Mr. Owen in the present day, of the existing evils of society, proposed to remedy them by an equalization of property and of education. Upon the first of these remedies Aristotle remarks, that a limit set to property is inefficient, unless you also set a limit to population. Otherwise, says he, your system in the first place cannot last, and besides you will in the course of a few years have as much poverty as ever. Within our own memory, Mr. Godwin, better known perhaps as the author of "Caleb Williams" than from his work on "Political Justice," repeated the complaint of Phaleas, and again maintained that the evils of society arose from misgovernment, and especially from the unequal distribution of property. Mr. Malthus replied to him as Aristotle more than two thousand years before had replied to Phaleas. He said that there was another cause at work quite independent of political misgovernment, and as powerful in producing evil;—namely, *the tendency of population to outgrow the means of subsistence*. So that, to use Aristotle's words, a limitation of property is nothing, unless you can also limit within proper bounds the increase of population.

Here, Sir, you have in a few words what is called the Malthusian theory of population; but which, in fact, was known to Aristotle and to the philosophers of ancient Greece, quite as well as to Mr. Malthus. The doctrine, however, had long been forgotten in modern Europe, because, since the days of the Roman Empire, Europe had never been fully peopled, and therefore the advantages of a large population were much more an object of desire, than its inconveniences were matter of alarm. It had become a habit with literary men to retail the complaints of the Roman writers upon the decay of the true strength of a state, a free and hardy population, and the growth of overgrown luxury among the rich in its stead.—And in them this complaint was reasonable; for, partly owing to long and bloody civil wars, partly to the general buying up of small properties by the rich, and the employment of slave labour instead of that of free men, and partly to an unequalled profligacy of manners, the free population in Italy was, even as early as the Christian era, exceedingly scanty, and every encouragement was given to the rearing of a family, both to increase the number of citizens, and by opening a field for the domestic affections, to bring back a more wholesome state of public morals.

I have stated thus much to account for the alleged novelty of Mr. Malthus' theory when he first published it; although it had been well known in Greece two thousand years earlier. People are not apt to think of the evils of one extreme, when they themselves are actually suffering from those of the other; and therefore while Europe was under peopled, and labour was sure to find a good market, because there was a constant demand for it, no one was inclined to anticipate the time when the tide would turn, and when instead of wanting men to do the work, work would be often sought for in vain to employ the men.

But though our fathers may well be excused for not anticipating an evil which they did not feel, I cannot extend the same indulgence to those who would persuade themselves that the evil which they do feel is not an evil, because their fathers never complained of it. There are generally, it seems, two periods in the history of a nation, at which its population is found to press too hardly upon its means of subsistence. The first takes place when its most obvious and first-found resources become insufficient; when the slovenly farming and careless enjoyment of the earliest stage of a nation's existence are exchanged for a harder industry, a more careful search after other and more hidden sources of wealth, and the calling in of science to quicken the somewhat enfeebled powers of nature.—And this period occurred in England towards the middle of the sixteenth century; when landlords began to understand the value of their land, and to employ it in the manner which would return them the greatest profit; when commerce began to be followed up with unaccustomed vigour; and when, as the sure mark of a great change working in the state of society, the distress and numbers of the poor increased beyond all further example, and rendered the hazardous experiment of the Poor Laws welcome and necessary, as they deemed it, to the statesmen of that generation. Then begins a second period—the period of systematical improvement, so far as the physical resources of a nation are concerned, but, unhappily, by no means of equal improvement in the higher points of national wisdom and national virtue. And, therefore, a crisis is hastened which otherwise might never have arrived: national wealth is enormously increased; but because great moral ignorance generally prevails, national poverty increases also. The population thus goes on increasing too rapidly; because, whilst the high state of commercial activity on the one hand offers it constant encouragement, the poor, as no pains are taken to elevate them, become less and less thoughtful, less and less desirous of a high state of comfort, and therefore ready to marry and to raise a family, if they have a prospect of the bare necessaries of life. Thus, however skilfully and vigorously a nation's whole resources may be called into action; however much its agriculture may be improved, its commerce extended, its manufactures multiplied; still the population is increasing too fast, because there is a large portion of the community whose habits belong rather to the first stage of society than the second, who marry and have families as if the earth were still yielding its first luxuriant abundance for its handful of original settlers, instead of being come to that point, when civilization being neces-

sary to call forth its powers, men are ill fitted for the state in which they are living if they are content to multiply as savages.

To this second period we are come, and to the time when its crisis is most threatening. The great point on which I would insist is this;—that let railways be multiplied as they will, or new markets opened for our manufactures, or still further improvements introduced into agriculture, still our population will continue to be excessive so long as the wages of labour are low, and the bulk of the people depend solely on their labour. And this will continue to be the case, until the habits and tastes of the poor can be raised, and they can be taught to look for better prospects for their children than merely keeping them from starving. I come to the conclusion, therefore, that our population requires to be lessened: and I propose, in my next letter, to consider the different means of effecting this great object thoroughly and permanently.

LETTER VI.

REJECTION OF THE REFORM BILL.

Sir,—I think that both yourself and your readers will forgive me, if the urgency of the circumstances in which we are now placed draws me aside from the regular course of my Letters. Every one is thinking of the Reform Bill, and it seems unnatural, at this moment, to write on any other subject. Indeed, the question now has assumed such a magnitude, that every other, even that most important one on which I have been permitted to address you, becomes involved in its settlement. Meantime, Sir, as a lover of my country, may I urge most earnestly on every one of your readers the following considerations:—

1. *Let us judge justly and fairly.* The House of Lords has done no more than it has a most undoubted *legal right* to do. A legal right, however unwisely exercised, must not be restrained by illegal means. If this be forgotten, all our duties to society are violated.

2. *Let us lay the fault on the right head.* A majority of 41 has thrown out the Reform Bill; but no fewer than 158 Peers have voted in favour of it. For seventy years, with some few trifling exceptions, the Tory party has governed this country;—all the creations of Peeers, and they have been very numerous, which have taken place since the beginning of George the Third's reign, have been made, to speak generally, by Tory Ministers. Every Archbishop and Bishop on the Bench, except two who voted for the Bill, have been appointed by the same party. This affords a very good reason why the Tories should never again be in power for seventy years together; but not the shadow of a reason for attacking the institutions of the Peerage, and of Bishops sitting in Parliament.

For the majority, and I believe a very great majority, of the old Peers whose creations are older than the last seventy years, *voted for the Bill;* and so did the only two Bishops who had not been appointed by a Tory government; namely, the Bishop of Norwich, and the Bishop of Chichester.

3. *Let us beware of the arts of our enemies.* Our enemies, Sir,—the enemies of religion, of liberty, of order, of general prosperity, of all that is valuable in our old institutions, of all the salutary improvements which those institutions need,—are the Tories and the Jacobins. It is not the first time that these extremes have met: evils, however opposite, will combine with one another, if they can crush the good which both alike hate and fear. They will combine for the moment, each hoping in the end to make the other its victim. This is the game of the Carlists and Republicans in France;—and which I greatly fear to see repeated in England. It may be that the Jacobins will join the Tories in upsetting the present government, in the atrocious hope that a revolution will then be sure, and that they shall ride on it triumphantly. As to the hope of the Tories of recovering their former ascendancy, it is as wild as to expect that the printing press and the steam engine will be forgotten, and the days of castles and of tournaments come back again. It is a hope well befitting the wisdom of a party who know nothing of the past, and therefore can never judge rightly of the future,—a party whose rule it is to live from hand to mouth, to resist good as long as they can, and to do it at last not from principle, but because they know not to what else to turn themselves. Let us baffle these tricks, by steadily upholding the present government. Whatever be their faults, they are our only chance of safety now.

4. *Let us cling to the real vital parts of the Reform Bill—Schedules A. and B.* These schedules abate the nuisance of the rotten boroughs: they are essential to any thing like an effectual reform. In other respects the Bill may very likely be amended. I do not like one uniform standard of franchise to be adopted for all the various interests of this great empire. I think the Bill might be rendered at once more popular, and in the good sense of the word more conservative. But these are points on which the true friends of Reform may fairly differ. The true test, THE TEST WHICH WILL AT ONCE DETECT THE PRETENCES OF REFORM set up by the Tories, is a steady adherence to schedule A. and to schedule B.

5. *Let us petition the King to save us from the imminent dangers that threaten us, by continuing his confidence in his Ministers.* If he does this, there are means strictly legal and strictly just, by which the triumph of the Bill can be ensured with absolute certainty. These means are, *a creation of Peers sufficiently large to restore the independence of the House of Lords, which is now destroyed by the effects of seventy years of Tory dominion.* The bench of Bishops is filled by the nominees of a party; the Law Lords are judges promoted under a Tory administration, in times when to be a Whig was a certain exclusion from the highest professional advancement. Is this an independent House of Lords?

6. *Let us be prepared for all contingencies.* Ere this letter reaches you, nay, ere it is written, petitions to the King may be too late, and the Duke of Wellington may be again Prime Minister. It may be, too, that members of the House of Commons may think that they have redeemed their pledges to their constituents by once voting for the bill, and may regard themselves at liberty now to follow other courses. A majority of the House of Commons may declare against the Government; or, what comes to the same thing, may decline giving them that decisive support which the crisis calls for. But fearful as this state of things may be, it is our own fault if it prove desperate. Desperate for all good ends it will be, if legal courses are once departed from. The profligate agitators of the press may see their own game in inflaming the passions of the people; the ambitious and the unprincipled, of whatever rank, of whatever condition, may long to try the chances of revolution. What those chances are, none can tell: whether the pike or the bayonet may triumph; whether a Committee of Public Safety or a Protectorate be the result; or whether we may be doomed to taste the double curse of both;—yet the ruin of our Constitution, and of all those means of good which our present state of society gives us, is inevitably certain; and every husband, father, and brother, the poorest as well as the richest, may well shrink from the unutterable horrors by which the process of that ruin will be accompanied.

7. *Let us be temperate but firm;*—let us try to increase the strength of public opinion by at once enlightening it and calming it;—let us labour at that real elevation of the labouring classes in physical comfort and knowledge, which will make them thoroughly one with their richer neighbours,—and render the dread of mere riots and insurrections against property from henceforth impossible. Much will have been gained by what the present Ministers have already done;—for the Tories dare not again show themselves what they have been. Already in the last Ministry their worst specimens were no longer producible; even the Duke of Wellington had got rid of Lord Eldon: and, perhaps, the Duke himself may now be forced to give way to a less uncompromising opponent of Reform; to some one who allows that something ought to be done to amend the representation. Every year that passes will add strength to the good cause; more and more liberal measures will be carried; till the Reform Bill, at last, will be won with scarcely a struggle. I wish for the Reform Bill chiefly because I think it will tend to benefit the poor, by obliging the aristocracy to consider them more, and to assist more heartily in raising them: but if this great end can be gained even without the Reform Bill, I for one could wait very patiently for the time when the bill must pass, rather than mar every prospect of good by adopting measures of violence. And I call it a measure of violence, of most illegal and unwarrantable violence, if men talk of combining with one another not to pay the taxes. Such a measure would at once disorganize society; it would ruin thousands of innocent families, and cripple our means of asserting the national interest and honour, in our transactions with foreign nations: it would expose us to a war, because foreigners would think that we had no means of maintaining one. And all

this would be done because we were too impatient and too unjust to overcome a legal resistance to our wishes by legal means: because we would pull the constitution to pieces in our fury, rather than wait for a time to purify it effectually without mischief. If, indeed, the House of Lords could for a long course of years resist public opinion, it would be a tyranny; but at present, though I believe their decision to be perfectly wrong, and though I hope and trust that the King will use his legal means of correcting it, yet there is a wide difference between applying to legal means and to illegal ones; and though the time is fully come for the application of the first, yet it is very far from come, as far as regards the second.

LETTER VII.

Sir,—The storm, I trust, has blown over, and has spent its violence upon Nottingham and Derby. Your own townsmen, I am glad to see, have kept up their usual character for good sense and a regard to justice in abstaining from such disgraceful outrages as have been perpetrated in the neighbouring counties. Disgraceful and atrocious outrages indeed they are, and almost more disgraceful to that portion of the public press which excited them first and then tried to palliate their guilt, than to the miserable ruffians who perpetrated them. If the friends of liberty and the people would save their cause from utter disgrace, they should not gently regret such crimes and half excuse them, but denounce them with disgust and abhorrence, and try to bring the actors and abettors of them to condign punishment.

Meantime, what additional interest is thrown by all these disgraceful scenes upon the subject on which I am addressing you? What can more plainly show how insufficient any one remedy would be to bring things to a better state? An increase of work or a rise in wages would do nothing for these Derby and Nottingham rioters in the way of making them better members of society: so long as they continue in their present state of ignorance and demoralization, they would but eat and drink the more for the time, without doing any thing to raise their condition permanently. And yet whilst they continue in their present poverty, how are they to be enlightened and humanized?

Since I wrote the last letter of my series, I have read a very able pamphlet by Mr. Richardson, of Haydon, in Norfolk, on the general question of the poor laws and the employment of the agricultural population. Mr. Richardson thinks that there is no excess of population in the agricultural districts; but that many more hands might be profitably employed. He proposes that every county should constitute one entire parish, thus making the market of labour perfectly free within the bounds of each county: he would simplify the laws of settlements, and make them settlements on counties, not on

parishes: he would provide for the employment of the principal part of the labourers by allotting a certain number to every rate-payer, according to his assessment, giving him however, the choice of his men: and for the employment of the remainder he would provide by what he calls district farms, to be hired by the county; and which he supposes would cover their own expenses by the sale of their produce.

It seems to me that there is much good in these suggestions, and particularly in the plan for doing away with parish settlements, at present a frightful source of misery. Mr. Richardson is a practical man, and his opinions are recommended by a large experience. I should be very glad to see his reforms adopted, but still I am clear that the mischief lies deeper than his plan alone would reach. For granting that more hands than are now employed might be set to work with advantage, yet still the evil is not only that many men are now out of employment, but that those who do work are under paid; and no man can imagine when he takes into the account the population not of the agricultural districts only, but of the manufacturing, and above all of Ireland, that the wages of labour can materially rise while there is so great a competition at hand to keep it down.

The evil, Sir, lies deeper; and it is this. Freedom and property are things so essentially united, that to have a large free population *wholly* dependent on their labour, when that labour is of a sort which every man can perform, is of itself a state of things fraught with mischief. Perhaps some of your readers may not be aware that this state is one of rare occurrence in the history of the world; because generally speaking either the great mass of labourers have been slaves, or else their numbers have been much below the resources of the country, and their market has been so good that industry has enabled them to acquire property. Now when the labourers were slaves, their welfare as little entered into the consideration of statesmen as that of the brute creation; the happiness of the *nation* was never thought to be affected because its *slaves* were oppressed and miserable. In truth this was the readiest way of solving the problem, how to ensure the happiness of civil society—shut out from society those whom it is most difficult to render happy, and you can then effect your object easily.

Slavery, Sir, is justly looked upon with abhorrence; but it would have been well if, when priding ourselves upon its extinction, we had considered the new and most difficult duties which then devolved upon us. It is very easy to say, "we will not tolerate slavery," but it is a very different matter to know how to untie that knot which the system of slavery cut in twain summarily.—Society, if it deserve the name, must provide for the welfare of all whom it receives into its pale; and we have truly learnt from christianity that it should receive every human being. We cannot and we ought not to go back, but neither can we remain as we are; for our poor at this moment have the name and rights of freemen, while their outward condition is that of slaves. And this is the case, be-

cause we have transferred to our free population the notions which were entertained of a population of slaves: because labourers, when slaves, had and could have no property, we have thought it no evil that labourers when citizens should be equally destitute.

It is on this view of the case that I call our present population excessive. I do not doubt that a much larger population could be maintained in a state of slavery; but the question is, whether our present numbers are not so great as to make it impossible for the labourer to acquire property by his labour,—in other words, whether they are not so great as to hinder the labourer from becoming what a freeman ought to be. I may be told that they are not too great, if the property be fairly divided: but to this I answer that a division of property is no more a just proposal on the part of the poor, than it would be just on the part of the rich to bring back the poor to their original state of slavery. Either of these measures would, no doubt, remove the particular inconsistencies of our present state, but it would be only by introducing far greater injustice and greater misery in the room of it.

By the law of the land as it now is, every poor man may claim from society the maintenance of a slave: he has a right to be kept from starving, as a slave would be kept; and in return society may justly claim his work, as it would the work of a slave. But according to my notions, society should do more than this; it should put the poor man, being a freeman, into a situation where he may live as a freeman ought to live: and I see not how this can be done except in one of two ways, either by what are called home colonies, or by emigration. This was the regular course pursued in ancient times, when our present difficulty presented itself. When a large population who had formerly been slaves or conquered in war grew up to the condition of freemen and citizens, they were provided for by being settled on the unappropriated lands of the state, or when none of these were to be found, they were sent out to be settled in a colony. And this was the only way of avoiding one of two evils, each of which was then considered intolerable; the existence on the one hand of a free population in beggary; and on the other, a total overthrow of society, by dividing the property of the old citizens, in order to satisfy these new partners in the political firm, who wanted to come into a share of its profits for nothing. But my limits warn me to conclude, and what has been here stated may afford sufficient matter for reflection.

LETTER VIII.

Sir,—When I spoke in my last letter of the evil of having the bulk of our population dependent wholly upon labour, when that labour was of a sort which every man could perform, I said that in our present circumstances I could see no other remedy for this evil

except in what are called Home Colonies, or in emigration. I am willing, however, to take the expression "Home Colonies," in the widest possible sense, and extend it to every measure for giving the labourer an interest in the soil, whether as a tenant or as a proprietor. And I do believe that if these and emigration, accompanied with other measures, to be specified hereafter, were fairly tried, there is nothing in our present condition which forbids our entertaining lively hopes for the restored and much improved welfare of our country.

But I am told that the people cannot bear to hear that our population is excessive; they say, that before any are turned out for the general good, the resources of the country should first be more equally divided; that it is only because some have too much that others have too little. Why, Sir, no one talks of *turning out* any body. I never heard any man dream of *forcing people to emigrate*, which would be in plain English to *transport them*; neither is it doubtful that if all persons fared alike, and we could persuade one half of the community peaceably to share their property with the other, that there is food enough in the island to maintain us all till next summer. But it is one thing to encourage the poor to emigrate, and another to force them to do it—it is one thing not to be overpeopled if an utterly impossible change in society were to take place, and another not to be overpeopled as society now exists. No doubt human beings might be packed much closer in Great Britain than they are now: but the real question is, whether such a crowding is practicable under actual circumstances, and whether also it is desirable: whether, in short, England *could* make itself like Judæa in the time of Solomon; and whether, if it could, this would be the best means of mending our actual condition.

I am at a loss to understand how it can be unjust or inhuman to say to a man who is here barely able to keep himself from starving, that we will assist him to go to another country, where he may live in comfort, and provide sufficiently for himself and his family. I know that such a proposal made to persons in the richer classes is not thought a hardship or an insult, but a great favour; that fathers are glad to get situations for their sons in India, even though they part with them for such a number of years, that they cannot expect to live till they return. No doubt a parent would rather be able to provide for his son comfortably at home than send him to India; but he would much rather send him to India than see him live in beggary at home; and it does not occur to him to ask his neighbour to give him a piece of his estate, rather than that he should have to bear the pain of parting. Or if any particular trade be overstocked in any town, the man who finds himself best able to support himself by capital previously acquired, does not think himself injured if he be advised to go and look for an opening in his trade elsewhere.—It is, indeed, a shocking thing that poor men should be persuaded to emigrate without knowing anything of the country to which they are going, and without having any one to advise them when they get there. And this ignorance, I am inclined to think, is one of the greatest obstacles to emigration. No man likes to take a leap in

the dark; and emigration is nothing better than a leap in the dark, when a man has never before been ten miles from his own village, when he has no notion of distances, and knows not a single particular about the climate, productions, customs, and manner of living in foreign countries. A mere elementary knowledge of geography would instantly dispel the vague fears which many of the poor now feel unreasonably: emigration would thus lose its terrors, and their knowledge would not only make them cease to fear it, but would teach them how to derive the full benefit of it.

This is a subject which the Government have taken up, and on which I hope they will proceed to act on a large scale, as soon as the Reform question is once settled. You will observe too, Sir, that here, as every where else, the importance of increasing the knowledge of the poor forces itself upon us most strongly. Ignorance, indeed, meets us at every turn, as one of the greatest difficulties which we have to encounter.

What I am next going to notice is one proof of the mischiefs of ignorance. Nothing is more common than to hear people talk of the millions of unproductive acres which are to be found in this island, on which they tell us our whole labouring population might be advantageously settled. It is impossible that persons who talk thus can know much about these unproductive acres. There are enough of them doubtless in point of extent between Cornwall and Northumberland; your own county, as you well know, Sir, possesses its full share of them. I have sometimes thought that the Railways hereafter may do a great deal for your moors, by enabling you to get lime and manure in sufficient quantities to make a completely new soil in such parts as may be brought into cultivation. In this way the enclosure of Hounslow Heath, and the other wastes within ten miles of London has been found to answer tolerably well. But the moors offer three obstacles which I do not believe all the Railways in the world would ever effectually overcome: the three obstacles of great extent, an impracticable soil, and a bad climate. Some people seem to fancy that because a great many new enclosures have taken place within the last fifty years, that therefore the waste lands still remaining may also be enclosed with advantage. They forget that what has been left was naturally the most impracticable part of the whole country; and I speak upon a general knowledge of every extensive tract of waste now remaining in England, when I say that almost all present difficulties either of soil or climate, or both, such as to render their cultivation on a large scale in our present state of science a matter practically hopeless.

This is quite a sufficient answer to the mere idle talk about our millions of unenclosed acres, which some indulge in who ought to know better. At the same time I do not doubt that much may be done on a small scale in different parts of the country, by allotting portions of reclaimable waste to the poor of particular parishes and districts. And I should like to know whether there does not often exist great abuse as to the employment of what is called the *poor's plot*; that is, the ground which was awarded to the poor of the

parish at the time of an enclosure, in compensation for the loss of their rights of Common. I am afraid that in some instances this land is let by the parish officers to a farmer, and even the rent of it, instead of being given to the poor, goes partly to eke out the poor rates.

Besides the enclosure of wastes, there is another way of giving property to the labourer, namely, by allotting him a portion of land for a garden. This is a measure which every one seems to approve of; which I know in practice to be a source of great benefit to the poor, and of great comfort; which, I believe, is daily becoming more and more adopted, and which I heartily hope will spread over the whole country.

But, what is to be done meanwhile for the manufacturer? He cannot be set to inclose wastes,—and where, in the midst of a crowded town, can he get the pleasure and the profit of a garden? How can he be put in a condition to acquire property,—or how can life be rendered to him something more befitting a man and a Christian than it too often is at present? This is a question, Sir, which, I doubt not, has frequently occurred to your mind as well as to mine:—and what is more to the purpose, it is become perfectly familiar to the manufacturers themselves, and if a good and fair answer be not given to it by others, they are but too likely to answer it themselves in a manner ruinous and disgraceful alike to them and to their neighbours.

It cannot be answered, however, without touching upon various points, both moral and political, in which the evil is plain enough, but the remedy seems beyond the power of any legal enactment, and to rest mainly with the people themselves. But the urgency of the crisis may make men listen to a statement which would have found them deafer than the deaf adder, if uttered in the season of apparent prosperity.

LETTER IX.

Sir,—It has been often said, that there are some prophecies which tend to ensure their own fulfilment; and the language which I see and hear used every day by persons perfectly well-intentioned, seems likely to furnish another instance of the truth of this. People talk as if we were arrived at a period when every thing is to be thrown, as it were, into the crucible, and come out again in a new form. Not only the details of government, but the very principles on which society is held together, are spoken of as likely to be questioned: not only the mere external constitution of the Church Establishment, but the foundations of our duty to God and man are considered as on the point of being subjected to a rude inquiry.

Now, if men accustom themselves to hold this language, they are assuredly helping to bring about the very thing which they fear. There never have been, and never will be wanting some few wretches, or madmen, who, in their folly or their wickedness, would be glad to get rid of every law and every principle. There are always some to be found who have strong personal reasons for thinking gaols a nuisance, and who would be glad to make converts to their opinions. But are honest men really to stand and discuss such questions as this?—or would it not be the greatest possible encouragement to pickpockets and thieves, if we were gravely and mournfully to regret the prospect of having soon to examine the right of enacting laws against them, and to dread the possibility of the speedy repeal of all such restrictions, after they had been fully subjected to the scrutiny of public opinion?

I proposed to speak of the state of the manufacturer; and great need there is of speaking plainly about it. It is in the manufacturing towns that we are told to look for the seeds of all these wonderful changes—in the increased knowledge and improved organization of the working classes. I am heartily glad to think that their knowledge is increased; and if it were increased a little more, I should think their improved organization a great blessing also. But will any man in his senses tell me that the working classes in any town in Britain have acquired knowledge enough to put us all at sea again as to the very main principles of social, nay even of human life? Mr. Loudon tells us (I quote from an extract in your last week's *Courant*,) that the intelligence of the Birmingham workman is particularly remarkable. This, he says, is owing partly to the peculiar skill which their manufacture requires, and partly to the prevalence of school education in that neighbourhood. The former cause, no doubt, makes them remarkably intelligent in matters connected with their own manufactures, and gives them a great facility of turning their hand from one sort of work to another, as the state of the market may require; and it is owing to this that the distress in Birmingham has never equalled that which has been felt occasionally in the cotton districts in Cheshire and Lancashire. It gives them an intelligence in matters connected with their own business, which I have noticed with high admiration, not without some shame at my own inferiority to them. But skill in the working of metals will not give an acquaintance with the far more difficult working of society: and as to their school education, Mr. Loudon knows, as I know, that neither the nature of the instruction given at what are called English schools, nor the time that any workman can spend at them, are such as to give him much moral and political knowledge. Or, are they to get this knowledge in after life from newspapers? I am sure you yourself would be the first man to laugh at the utter absurdity of such a notion. Do newspapers pretend, or is it their business to give a general view of the principles of any science? To tell us of past times, or of the state of foreign countries? It is true, they give us an account of passing events in other countries, but they cannot do more, and how little is this towards giving us an accurate knowledge of what is really thought and done in them! And supposing that newspapers could teach a great deal

more than they either do or can,—what are the working man's opportunities for reading it calmly, and for thinking it over, and properly digesting it in his own mind? And what previous cultivation has his mind received to enable it to turn any fresh information to the best account? When, therefore, I hear so much said of the intelligence of the working classes, and of the enlightened state of public opinion, I feel very much as I should do if any ill judging friends were to overwhelm a clever and intelligent child with compliments, and make him think himself as wise as his teachers. I should say that these friends were taking the very way to hinder him from ever being as wise as his teachers,—by teaching him to think so too soon, and thus to slacken his efforts, or to misdirect them. I am, indeed, indignant at the insolent language in which some persons depreciate both the capacities and the knowledge of the working classes, and treat them as if they knew nothing and were unable to think for themselves. I have known quite enough of the working classes to make me justly impatient of such foolish and impertinent language as this. But it is one thing to speak of them as ignorant and incapable of judging about politics, and another to suppose them capable of disproving principles established by the general consent of the best and wisest of men, or to say that they can possibly judge as well upon subjects which they have not fully studied, as those who have a hundred times greater knowledge and experience. Assuredly we may learn a great deal, even on political subjects, from the working classes: I never talked with an intelligent man amongst them, I never read any of their speeches at public meetings, or of their writings, without deriving some instruction from them. But take even Mr. Cobbett, with all his extraordinary natural abilities, and the great advantages which he has had in later life; and who can only be put on the same grounds with the working classes as far as regards his original defects of education. We all know how cleverly Mr. Cobbett writes; but to talk of him as an oracle of political or moral wisdom would be ludicrous. And he is so violent, and, I fear, so little scrupulous, that some may attribute many of his most absurd assertions,—such for instance, as that England was formerly more populous than it is now,—to a wilful intention to deceive. But, in truth, I do believe that it is sheer ignorance; not indeed honest or excusable ignorance, for no man ought to write about a question without learning the facts of it,—but yet a very natural ignorance in a clever man who has been ill educated;—who has read little, and has never been taught how to digest and appreciate properly what he has read.

I do not know whether the Mechanics of Sheffield are likely to do me the honour of reading this letter. I wish they may, for I am sure that they will have the sense to allow the truth of my statement; and I am not afraid of their suspecting me of any aristocratical pride in saying it. God knows that I have not a particle of any such feeling,—and that my most earnest wish is to see the working classes raised in every thing, that there may be one hearty feeling of brotherhood between us all. But to flatter them is to insult them; and we seem now to be in some danger of overvaluing their knowledge and judgment, just as, for a long time, they were

undervalued. As long as they listen readily to any one who appeals to their passions, and turn away from him who addresses their reason, so long must they necessarily remain half instructed; for truth can only be attained by overcoming prejudice, just as virtue can only be attained by the conquest of our selfish passions.

I have been led on by my subject, for it is an important one, and one which falls directly in my way. It will not do to be run down by the cry of ignorant men, merely because they have a numerous body of hearers and disciples. And as to mere physical force, I have no more fear of its triumphing over truth and justice, than I have of the brute creation rising in rebellion against mankind, and trying the force of horns and hoofs against reason and the laws of God's creation.

LETTER X.

Sir,—I wrote my last letter in the full confidence that the truth spoken in sincerity would not generally offend. Had any covert object lurked behind the language which I used, had I secretly desired to uphold or palliate existing abuses, or to keep the working classes in their present degraded state, I should have been ashamed to have written it. But as it is, I should be ashamed not to have written it: I should be ashamed of nothing more heartily than of speaking the truth on one side only: a practice, I am sorry to say, quite as common amongst the professed friends of the people as amongst their supposed enemies.

If any principle or general statement be founded on truth, the course of events will serve continually to bear witness to it. In one of the earliest of my letters I stated "that the different classes of society have been removed to a great distance from each other—have sympathized with and understood each other less, and thus have become strangers to each other, too ready, I fear, to become enemies also." How dreadfully has this fear being verified by the riots at Bristol; how boldly has the fact been affirmed by Mr. Dyer, at the Cripplegate Ward meeting, when he said that there could be no union between the employer and the employed; and by another person at the same meeting, who asserted "that it was as impossible to effect a union between the high and the low classes of society, as to mix oil and water; *there was no reciprocity of feeling between them.*" If this be true, that is, if it is "impossible to effect a union between the higher and the lower classes," then indeed the Reform Bill is too late—all the efforts of individuals and of public bodies are alike too late, and a sort of Jacqueline war throughout the country is the only thing to be looked for.

But, Sir, I utterly deny that it is impossible to effect a union be-

tween the rich and the poor. Wretches whose only hope of distinction consists in preventing such a union, may well wish to make us believe it impossible, and the less hateful wretches who carried on the work of plunder and burning at Bristol, would no doubt be happy to have it believed also. But good and honest men, of whatever rank or fortune, from the richest peer to the poorest mechanic, will feel that it is a doctrine as false as it is wicked.

Yet even this Mr. Dyer, whoever he may be, tells us something from which we may take a lesson. "There can be no union," he says, "between the employer and the employed." Why not? "*Because*," he goes on, "*it is the interest of every employer to get as much work as he can done for the smallest sum possible.*" Truly, Sir, this is a text on which there might well be preached an awakening sermon.

Where is the church most hated? Where is the aristocracy most hated? Where is the alienation of the poor from the rich most complete? The answer will always be, wherever the relation between them has been most exclusively that of employer and employed: in other words, where the relation has been most purely mercenary, I do not say, like that of master and slave, but actually worse.

I say "actually worse than that of master and slave," and I say it advisedly. West Indian Slavery is the relation of employer and employed: the use of the slaves is merely to make them work in the plantations, and they may be sold like the hoes with which they work. But the old system of English slavery called villainage, was absolutely a far kinder relation.—There the villain was a fixture on the land and could not be sold away from it. Belonging to his lord from his cradle to his grave he was thought of not only as a living and moving tool, but as a human being. Affection often subsisted between him and his master,—of which there is this decided proof, that the system of villainage chiefly wore out by the master's voluntarily giving his villains freedom. This never would have happened, had the relation between them been only one of profit and loss:—of employer and employed.

Or look, Sir, to agricultural parishes, and to private families. A farming labourer, a domestic servant, were once considered members of the household; they lived in the same family for years, and a mutual attachment subsisted between them and their masters. But how is it now? The relation of employer and employed has come into full action; farmers will not keep their labourers, masters sometimes will not and sometimes cannot keep their servants; they are afraid of letting them get a settlement in the parish, if they stay over the year, and so completely is this understood in some places that a servant leaves his situation naturally at the end of a twelvemonth, unless something be expressly said about his remaining longer.

Now, Sir, our great manufacturing towns have risen solely with a view to this relation of employer and employed. The very name

shows this, that they are places where men have assembled together, not for the purposes of social life, but to make calicoes, or hardware, or broad cloths. A man sets up a factory, and *wants hands*: I beseech you, Sir, to observe the very expressions that are used, for they are all significant. What he wants of his fellow creatures is the loan of *their hands*;—of their heads and hearts he thinks nothing. These *hands* are attached to certain mouths and bodies which must be fed and lodged: but this must be done as cheaply as possible;—and accordingly, up starts a miserable row of houses, built where ground is cheapest, that is, where it is least generally desirable to get it;—built as close as possible, to have the more of them on a given space, and for the same reason without any sort of garden or outlet attached to them, because the comfort and enjoyment of the human being is quite independent of the serviceableness of his *hands*. But further, Sir, these *hands* are not only attached to mouths and bodies, but to reasonable minds and immortal souls. The mouths and bodies must be provided for, however miserably, because without them the hands cannot work; but the minds and souls go utterly unregarded. And is this any other than a national crime, a crime in the civil government, a crime in the church, a crime in all the wealthy and intelligent part of the English people, that while *hands* have been multiplying so enormously during the last forty years in every corner of the kingdom, no greater efforts have been made to provide for the welfare of the human beings who have multiplied with them; beings born not for time only but for eternity.

Hear the cry with which the bishops in particular are now assailed in every part of the kingdom, and most loudly in the great manufacturing districts. Whence comes the especial bitterness with which they, above all the other anti-reforming peers, are every where attacked? Whence the hatred with which the whole order of the clergy is sometimes pursued? Is it not because the people have never been made to feel the full amount of the good which an established church may and ought to effect, and therefore are the more ready to complain of its endowments? Is it not because in our large manufacturing towns the church has allowed thousands and tens of thousands of its members to grow up in misery and in ignorance; and that a step-mother's neglect is naturally requited by something of a step-mother's unpopularity.

I am not blaming individuals,—nor have I in my mind a single personal allusion to any one either dead or living. But the reproach attaches itself to the body. What worse than folly was it to talk of delicacies, and difficulties, and the danger of Parliamentary interference, and the mischief of interfering with Church property, when the very end for which the establishment existed was left unattained? Was it fit to wait for money enough to build an expensive Church, rather than license the first room, or the first court-yard that could be found, wherever the inhabitants of the parish became too numerous or too remote to attend the Parish Church? Was it even decent to leave many thousand persons to the instruction and care of one minister, rather than apply to Parliament for power to

make a new allotment of the Church property, such as the new state of things required?

But these things were neglected; neglected by the church, neglected by the government, neglected by the master manufacturer, and by the rich generally. Thousands of men grew up devoid alike of physical comforts, and of intellectual and moral culture; and now we are reaping the fruits of it. Having no property of their own they hate property,—having no means of intellectual enjoyment, they are driven to seek the pleasures which we have in common with brutes,—having never been made Christians, their undisciplined natures are incapable of valuing Christianity, and their evil passions teach them to hate it.

Still it is not too late now to remedy the evil; it is not too late *now,—but in five years it will be.* Enough of individual kindness still exists, enough of individual goodness, to ensure the success of measures carried into effect by well combined exertions of men co-operating with each other. Mr. Dyer and men like him may yet be silenced; and the two orders of society may be brought together, each feeling too deeply their own faults to dare to reproach those of the other. But I am insensibly running into thoughts and feelings, which I shall find it hard to check if I once allow myself to indulge in them. Meantime let me congratulate you on the honourable contrast which Sheffield presents and has long presented to so many other manufacturing towns; so that in what I have said above, other places have always been present to my mind; when I think of the remedies to be applied, Sheffield always occurs to me, to fill me with hope and encouragement.

LETTER XI.

Sir,—If my last letter but one was likely to give offence to some of the working classes, my last, I suspect, would be viewed with as little favour by those who call themselves the conservative party—but who, if we may name them from the tendencies of their conduct rather than from their intentions, may be well called ultra-revolutionists. I have, however, been always of opinion, that the whole truth, when not spoken in malice, can never be inflammatory—that all the mischief is done either by giving half the truth, or by throwing round the whole truth a violent, and therefore an unfair expression. At any rate, if my two last letters have been disliked by two different classes of readers, I trust that my present one, while it explains and justifies its predecessors, will at least give offence to none, even if none are convinced by it.

Take the facts of my two last letters, if so I may be allowed to call them, and place them by the side of each other. On the part of the working classes, there is a mass of imperfect and ill-digested

knowledge, which has just succeeded to deep and general ignorance. On the part of the rich, there is a mass of half informed and half awakened attention to the poor, newly risen, after a long continuance of great neglect. Surely, here are the elements of a most happy state of things, if this imperfect knowledge on one hand, and partial attention on the other, are by all means brought to assist in improving each other—if the past, instead of being for ever appealed to to inflame angry passions, be forgotten as if by common consent, like an evil dream, from which we are most thankful to have been awakened. But if the poor, instead of looking to be helped on by the rich, think to get on faster by plundering and pulling them down—or if the rich, instead of increasing their efforts a hundred fold, and in a wiser spirit, now stand aloof in fear or in disgust, the consequence will be, that both rich and poor will suffer, or rather that all good men will suffer, whether rich or poor; while they who profit by the general ruin will be the dregs of either party, perhaps of both; the treacherous, lawless, greedy, profligate, and cruel; that class of wretches, who whether they have called themselves aristocrats or democrats, have been always alike in their tyranny, alike in their contempt of every law of God and man, and in their exclusive love of themselves, and their own interests and passions.

It has been a great evil that the relations between the rich and the poor have been so much confined to the single one of employer and employed. But is not this a very natural state of progress between the time when they stood to one another as master and slave, and that when they will stand to one another as citizen to citizen? The matter is now to hasten forwards as quickly as possible to this last state; and in order to do this, we must make efficient those great means of blessing whose inefficiency has been the cause of so much evil, but whose destruction would render the matter utterly hopeless.

I say plainly,—and I beg not to be cried down unheard,—that those great means of blessing are the *Aristocracy* and the *Christian Church*. No man alive is more aware than I am of the evils of an Aristocracy, or of an Established Church, when there is nothing to balance them; no man is more aware than I am of the quantity of good which they have left undone. But I should not blame them for their neglect, if it was not that their active exertions are capable of rendering us such enormous services. No man wishes more earnestly to see them reformed; and I hesitate not to say, that no man would more deeply grieve to see them destroyed. When I have been travelling in your beautiful neighbourhood, and looking over the magnificent domain of Lord Fitzwilliam, I have often heard my companions exclaim against the steam engine chimnies which in various parts of the view were sending up into the air their columns of smoke; but I have always said in answer, "Those unsightly chimnies, and that disfiguring smoke, are a most wholesome balance to the palace, and the gardens, and the woods of Wentworth. Were it not for them, England would be no better than Russia or Poland, —we should be the mere serfs of a territorial aristocracy." And what if a companion of another sort were to exclaim against the aristocratical pride of Wentworth House, and against the useless

costliness of keeping up the Churches of Ecclesfield and Rotherham? I should say to him as heartily and truly,—"that park and mansion and those churches are a most wholesome balance to the chimnies of the iron furnaces. Were it not for them, we should be without two of the greatest means of elevating and purifying mankind, nobility, and religion;—we should be in danger of becoming what the French sometimes falsely call us, a nation of buyers and sellers. But as it is, let all work together, and all do their duty, and we have the means of arriving at the happiest and highest state of society that the world has ever yet witnessed.

The perfection of Parliamentary Reform would be one which so raised the working classes, as to oblige the aristocracy to treat them more liberally, without throwing in their hands an exorbitant power before they are instructed, and softened enough to use it wisely. I wish the aristocracy in every place to come forward manfully, to join the political unions or any other lawful and honest societies of the working classes, to state fairly the amount of their past neglect, and their hearty wish to make up for it. They may then meet the mere agitators boldly face to face, and indignantly deny their outrageous and shameless falsehoods. While confessing their great and most blameable neglect, that they have too long suffered their poorer brethren to live in a state of suffering and ignorance, they may most truly say that from wilful oppression and injustice they are, generally speaking, clear. The laws have hitherto, by carrying to excess the principle of non-interference with a man's private concerns, allowed him unintentionally to cause great public mischief. As it is the business of civil society to defend property, so it is no less its duty to limit the exorbitant exercise of its power. The famous Thellusson Act has already decided the principle, that a man may not do all that he will with his own:—he may use it but not capriciously abuse it. Undoubtly it is a matter of public concern that our great towns be not injured at the discretion of every individual speculator, who runs out street after street, and row after row of houses, till the working man in the heart of the town can neither breathe fresh air, nor find any open ground within his reach on which he can venture without being guilty of a trespass. It would be no slight benefit if public walks and gardens, and still more public places of exercise, so laid out as to be ornamental as well as useful and agreeable, were of necessity attached to every great town in the empire. And it might be fairly imperative on every man who builds a certain number of houses, to annex to them a certain portion of ground which might never be built upon, and which should serve in various ways for the sports and recreation of the inhabitants.

I know it is said that the poorer people have no respect for works of art, nor for public property: that if indiscriminately admitted to museums, libraries, churches, or gardens, their greatest pleasure would be to do mischief. True it is that the poor do not respect these things in England as much as they do abroad; and why? because, Sir, they have never been thought capable of enjoying them, and therefore have been carefully denied access to them. Certain it is, that they never will respect them, till they are allowed to have

an interest in them; but, I should think it well worth while to risk the injury or destruction of a great many works of art, that the people might at last, as they surely would, become fond of these things, and feel that it was indeed a public injury to misuse them. And as a step to this, I have thought that advantage might in the first instance be taken of any societies actually formed amongst the working classes, such as benefit clubs, self-supporting dispensaries, political unions, or the like: and that it would be well worth the while of benevolent individuals to assist in the formation of libraries, or museums, or if possible in renting ground to serve for a public garden and place of amusement, not to be open at first to all the working classes, but to be placed under the management of one or more of these societies for the benefit of their own members. I say "placed under the management of these societies," perhaps with the addition of one or two honorary members of the richer classes, who might advise without being able to controul their poorer associates; for it is most important to put the poor in authority, to intrust them with the care of property, and with the making and enforcing of regulations for its protection and improvement. The true and only way to make civil society really deserving of its name, is to give its members an active and not merely a passive part in the management of its concerns.

It will be said that all this is easy to talk of, but not so easy to execute. True it is that no single individual can execute it,—but a number of individuals may do a great deal towards it themselves, and still more may be done if plans of this sort are pressed forward on the public attention, till from being at first only noticed, and discussed, they end with being generally adopted. Nor does it signify if any one particular plan be objectionable; the principle of raising the working classes in their bodily, in their intellectual, and in their spiritual condition, is the great thing that should be for ever inculcated on every man possessed of any influence in society. Of the truth and importance of this principle I am sure; whether the suggestions that I have thrown out in this letter be the best means of carrying it partly into effect, many of your readers can judge better than I can; only if my plan be not a good one, it is essential that some one should devise a better, otherwise I am sure it is far better to try mine than to try nothing.

In my next letter I shall speak of what can and ought to be done by the Church. This is a vast subject,—and on none has there been poured forth a greater quantity of audacious ignorance,—to use the very gentlest term. But it is a matter far too momentous to be left to such writers as Mr. Beverley.

LETTER XII.

SIR,—It is now about 120 years ago since a Tory clergyman was impeached by the House of Commons for preaching a sermon full of the most violent doctrines of Toryism. During his trial, the popular feeling ran so strongly in his favour, that as he passed backwards and forwards from his lodgings to the House of Lords, the populace obliged all persons to take off their hats to him: the members of the House of Commons who conducted the impeachment, were abused and insulted, the houses of the Whig ministers were attacked, and the Queen, who was supposed to have no great affection for her ministry, was greeted with shouts of "God bless your Majesty *and the Church*." Nor was this feeling confined to London: I read in the history of those times that *Birmingham*, *Bristol*, Norwich, and many other places were the scene of riots, in which the popular cry was "Down with the Whigs! High Church and Sacheverel for ever!"

But this was more than a hundred years ago. Well then, Sir, it is only just forty years since "Church and King" was again the war cry of a riot. In the year 1791, the Birmingham mob with this cry in their mouths committed the same or even worse atrocities than those which have been lately committed at Bristol; and as a dinner given to an Anti-Reforming Recorder was the excuse for the Bristol riots, so those at Birmingham were excited by a dinner given by a number of eminent liberals and reformers, to celebrate the anniversary of the first French revolution.

This last event was noticed the other day in your paper, and it appears that a bishop has been lately burnt in effigy at Birmingham, on the very spot where Paine, the noted author of the "Age of Reason" and the "Rights of Man," had received the same tribute forty years before. But it is paying far too great a compliment to the actors in either of these burnings to call their acts an instance of the change of *public opinion*. They are merely an instance of the ease with which ignorant men are excited to violence, without knowing why or wherefore. The populace of 1709 shouted "God bless the Church" with just as much reason as the populace of 1831 are shouting "Down with the Bishops." And if there is any one fact undeniably certain, it is that the clergy of the English Church, far from having fallen off since the days of Dr. Sacheverel, were never so enlightened, never so zealous, never so generally exemplary in their lives, as they are at this present hour.

The Church has always had the fortune to be defended and attacked with equal violence and equal unreasonableness. At this day, when the cry is all against it, there is no subject of which popular writers are so profoundly ignorant. The writers for the public press, whether lawyers, or men in trade, or young men who live by their writings, know and can know next to nothing of the

clergy. They seldom fall in their way; their habits and views of things are so different as to preclude much intimacy when they do meet, and while, from residing in large towns, they see a quantity of the evil which the Church has not prevented, they know little of the many thousand country parishes where it is daily more or less effective in doing direct good.

Again, when men attack the Church it is very desirable to know for what reasons they dislike it. Many excellent men amongst the dissenters are unfriendly to it because they think it a hindrance to religion; but a greater number I fear hate it for the very opposite reason, namely, because it recommends religion. Many good men complain of its total want of discipline among its own members; but a notorious declaimer against it in an adjoining county has been annoyed by what he thinks its over strictness. He is violent against Church abuses, because his moral character in one particular is such, that the clergymen of his parish will not visit him. I am always anxious, therefore, when I hear any attacks against the Church, to know what sort of a man they come from; for though a great deal that is said against it may be very true, yet considering the principles of many of those who say it, I should exceedingly object to any remedy of their proposing.

The most general complaint against the Church turns upon the excessive amount, and the unequal distribution of its property, and especially upon the burdensome and impolitic nature of the tithe system. There is also a strong popular feeling against the political opinions of the clergy, particularly of the Bishops and other dignitaries among them; and this, together with the evils of the tithe system, is, I believe, the main cause of their unpopularity among persons who are not ill affected to religion itself.

My conviction of the benefits of *a* Church Establishment arises from this: that thus, and thus only, can we ensure the dispersion of a number of well educated men over the whole kingdom, whose sole business is, *to do good of the highest kind;* to enforce, in their public teaching, the purest principles and practice that mankind have ever yet been made acquainted with; and to exhibit these in their own persons in all their daily intercourses with their neighbours, instructing the young, visiting the sick, relieving, advising, and maintaining the cause of the poor;—and spreading amongst all ranks the wholesome influence of a good life, a cultivated understanding, and the feelings and manners of a true gentleman.—For these reasons, I most earnestly admire and love a Church Establishment; and because it has in it the means of doing all this better, I think, than any other sect of Christians, therefore, I value and would most rigorously reform *the actual* Church Establishment. Nor are the needful Reforms so difficult as many persons imagine.

I will state them, Sir, even at the risk of seeming to dogmatize, because I have not space to state at length the arguments on which they rest.

1st. A commutation of Tithes; even if it can only be effected at a great loss to the Church, because it is far better that the Church should be somewhat poorer, if at such a price it can remove what is at present a great cause of offence.

2nd. An entire remodelling of the Episcopal Order, that many scandals may be removed, and the Church obtain an efficient government.—For this object it seems essential,—

1st. That Translations should be made illegal.

2nd. That the incomes of the smaller Bishoprics be so increased out of the larger ones, as to supersede the necessity of annexing to them Deaneries, livings held in commendam, or any other ecclesiastical preferment whatsoever.

3rd. That the Dioceses be divided, so as to give the Church an efficient government.—For this purpose all Deaneries should be made Bishoprics, retaining their present incomes, and of course with no seats in Parliament. The Prebends should be annexed to underpaid livings in large towns, and the largest Church in all such towns should be erected into a Bishop's See; so that there should be no great town throughout England without its resident Bishop, who, without being raised to any undue elevation in rank and fortune, would yet in both be sufficiently respectable to maintain the just influence of the Church with the higher classes as well as with the poor.

4th. That in all large towns and populous districts a sufficient number of new parishes be created, with a resident minister to each. Funds might be provided by annexing, for the future, every one of these new parishes to some valuable country living, if possible, in the same neighbourhood or county. Any incumbent accepting such living for the time to come being bound to reside in his town parish nine months in the year, and to keep a resident curate on his benefice in the country.

5th. The Church government being thus rendered efficient, by reducing the size of the dioceses to what would be within the power of an individual to manage, a system of ecclesiastical jurisdiction should be framed, for the prompt punishment, not only of scandalous vice in the clergy,—which is, happily, very rare,—but of what may be called unclerical conduct and neglect of duty; so that the class of "sporting clergy," as they are called, should be gradually weeded out of the establishment.

These reforms would, I am persuaded, work a change in the usefulness of the Church, and in the state of feeling towards it, especially in the manufacturing districts, which would be well worth purchasing at the cost of far greater innovations. Of reforms of a more strictly religious character,—such, I mean, as relate to the liturgy and articles of the Church, I have purposely said nothing; because I think that a newspaper is not the best place for such dis-

cussions. But there are some other points of a less serious nature, such as the relations of the Church with dissenters, and its excessively aristocratical character, which, perhaps, I may be allowed to notice in a following letter.

LETTER XIII.

Sir,—It happened to me some years since to be visiting at the house of a Scotch clergyman, the number of whose parishioners amounted to nearly five thousand souls. I asked him how he found it possible to look after so large a population without assistance. His answer was, that he *had* assistance: that there were three or four dissenting congregations in the town, and that the ministers of these were very useful auxiliaries to him, in providing both for the physical and spiritual wants of his parishioners.

The words of this answer, as well as the simple and natural manner in which they were spoken, have often recurred to my memory when I have noticed the totally different light in which the Dissenters are regarded even by some of the best of the clergy in England. With us, the notion of an opposition of interests between the Church and the Dissenters seems always paramount; and I have heard it said, over and over again, when people were giving the highest praise to the zeal and general excellence of a Minister of the Establishment, that such a man would soon thin the meeting houses, and bring back the people to the Church.

Now, Sir, at first sight, we cannot doubt that the Scotch clergyman's feelings with regard to Dissenters is a far happier one than that generally entertained in England. It is a great misfortune that Christians should not all heartily co-operate with one another; and a still greater that they should actually look on one another as rivals—almost as enemies. It is a most tremendous evil at a time when their most vigorous efforts, if strengthened by the closest union, would not be in any degree too great to meet the dangers which threaten them both in common.

But it is an evil which must be laid as much to the fault of the Dissenters as of the Church. They have been quite as intolerant, and talked quite as foolishly about the superstition of the Church Services, as their antagonists on their side have talked of the sin of schism. And at this moment, if the Government should attempt to effect an union between the Church and the Dissenters, there would be found quite as many obstacles to such a plan on the part of the latter as of the former. Nor is this wonderful, if we remember that the Dissenting Ministers, generally speaking, are men of inferior education, and inferior rank to the Established Clergy, and have thus a less share of the two great antidotes to bigotry—a large

acquaintance with the wisdom of ancient times on the one hand, and with various classes of living men, viewing things in many different lights, on the other.

But it is far from my purpose to throw blame either on Churchmen or Dissenters. Thus much, however, is clear, that from the Church, as holding the vantage ground, ought to proceed the first advances to a reconciliation. Now, if uniformity be insisted on, reconciliation is of course out of the question: two men of different habits cannot live together on friendly terms, if either be called upon to conform to the fashions of the other; and a compromise of our own opinions has always something about it so bordering upon meanness and insincerity, that no good fruit can be looked for from a seed so rotten.

One great cause of Dissent has been the utter inefficiency of the Church, in populous towns, as a religious society. Mens' feelings of Christian union, all their social propensities as Christians, desire some better satisfaction than to be members of a parish of 10,000 or 20,000 souls, half of whom must necessarily be strangers to the other half. It is impossible that they can have much personal knowledge of their Minister under such circumstances; and what sort of a society, is it in which the members neither know one another, nor him who, in some respects, is their head? In forming themselves into a distinct religious society when so situated, the Dissenters acquired a bond of charity more than they had before, but I know not what bond it was which their conduct violated.

This cause of Dissent would cease if the parishes in our large towns were properly subdivided; and the same measure would remove another cause not less powerful, the actual want of room in the Churches of the Establishment for the population which that establishment professes to instruct. But other causes would still remain, and could not be so easily obviated. Some, however worldly their character, are in practice among the most difficult to overcome. I mean the property vested in the different Dissenting chapels, and the incomes actually enjoyed by their ministers. It would not be easy to purchase these, and this alone, therefore, would seem an indissoluble bar to such an union with Dissenters as should merely merge them in the Church Establishment, supposing that by some compliance with their religious objections the Establishment might become such as they would not on religious grounds alone object to join.

There is yet another cause of dissent very deeply rooted. The established clergy must belong generally to the richer classes, because so long as a residence at the university is a necessary passport to ordination, none but the rich can afford to enter the Church. But separated as the richer and poorer classes are from one another in England, separated not only in manners, habits, and feelings, but actually in language also, who can wonder if the poor desire a religious instructor with whom they can more nearly sympathize than with their regular clergyman,—an instructor who by birth, station,

language, and manners, is more nearly one of themselves. True it is that when the regular clergyman is at once a good man and a sensible man, his being a gentleman is all so much in his favour: for though a gentleman parson be a very bad thing if the gentleman be the predominant element in the compound, yet a good parson who in education and feeling is a thorough gentleman besides, in the best sense of the word, inspires justly a degree of respect and confidence as well as of affection which the poor never can feel towards a man of coarser manners and less education. But in the nature of things there will be always a great many of the clergy in whom the gentleman, *not in the best sense of the word*, is predominant over the parson; and then as far as the poor are concerned, the salt that had lost its savour was not more worthless than they find such a minister.

Besides these causes of Dissent, there is yet another, which, however, I am inclined to rank among the least really powerful of all: I mean the actual differences of opinion on matters of religion. I cannot enter into particulars on this point, for the same reason which made me abstain in my last letter from considering the expediency of some reform in our liturgy and articles. But when I think *what* the points are on which we and the Dissenters disagree, except in the case of the Unitarians, I am fully satisfied that they ought not to hinder good men, while keeping firmly to what they themselves think the truth, from co-operating in the great cause common to all Christians with those who hold the opposite opinions.

I see then some cause of dissent existing which a needful reform in our own establishment would remove; others again are independent of any conceivable extent of reform; while a third class are indeed invincible obstables to *uniformity*, but ought to be none to *union*. And he who knows the history of the Christian Church has too good cause to remember how fatally the pursuit of this foolish phantom uniformity has lured men from the attainment of the real and substantial blessing, union. Let us leave the Dissenters in the undisturbed enjoyment of their own organization, and government, and doctrines; but let us cease to call or to think them schismatics or enemies. By reforming ourselves in those points which manifestly need it, we shall probably bring over many to our communion in the most honourable manner; and for those who remained, if we treated them as allies more valuable in their own independent manner of fighting, than if forced against nature to adopt ours—capable of meeting the wants of the poorer classes in the very points where the Establishment can least satisfy them, and affording an exercise for that natural and commendable desire after social organization, which a national Establishment has less room for,—we should find the Dissenters most valuable friends and co-operators in that great work of Christian improvement which is, or ought to be, the one great object of every Christian society.

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