

CHAPTER SIX

The Remedies of 1795

The collapse of the economic position of the labourer was the result of many causes, and in examining the various remedies that were proposed we shall see that they touch in turn on the several deficiencies that produced this failure. The governing fact of the situation was that the labourer's wages no longer sufficed to provide even a bare and comfortless existence. It was necessary then that his wages should be raised, or that the effects of the rise in prices should be counteracted by changes of diet and manner of life, or that the economic resources which formerly supplemented his earnings should in some way be restored, unless he was to be thrown headlong on to the Poor Law. We shall see what advice was given and what advice was taken in these momentous years.

DIET REFORM

A disparity between income and expenditure may be corrected by increasing income or by reducing expenditure. Many of the upper classes thought that the second method might be tried in this emergency, and that a judicious change of diet would enable the labourer to face the fall of wages with equanimity. The solution seemed to lie in the simple life. Enthusiasts soon began to feel about this proposal the sort of excitement that Robinson Crusoe enjoyed when discovering new resources on his island: an infinite vista of kitchen reform beckoned to their ingenious imaginations: and many of them began to persuade themselves that the miseries of the poor arose less from the scantiness of their incomes than from their own improvidence and unthriftiness.(1*) The rich set an example in the worst days by cutting off pastry and restricting their servants to a quartern loaf a week each.(2*) It was surely not too much in these circumstances to ask the poor to adapt their appetites to the changed conditions of their lives, and to shake off what Pitt called 'groundless prejudices' to mixed bread of barley, rye, and wheat.(3*) Again oatmeal was a common food in the north, why should it not be taken in the south? If no horses except post horses and perhaps cavalry horses were allowed oats, there would be plenty for the poor.(4*) A Cumberland labourer with a wife and family of five was shown by Eden(5*) to have spent £7, 9s. 2d. a year on oatmeal and barley, whereas a Berkshire labourer with a wife and four children at home spent £36, 8s. a year on wheaten bread alone.(6*) Clearly the starving south was to be saved by the introduction of cheap cereals.

Other proposals of this time were to break against the opposition of the rich. This broke against the opposition of the poor. All attempts to popularise substitutes failed, and the poorer the labourer grew the more stubbornly did he insist on wheaten bread. 'Even household bread is scarcely ever used: they buy the finest wheaten bread, and declare (what I much doubt), that

brown bread disorders their bowels. Bakers do not now make, as they formerly did, bread of unsifted flour: at some farmers' houses, however, it is still made of flour, as it comes from the mill; but this practice is going much into disuse. 20 years ago scarcely any other than brown bread was used.'(7*) At Ealing, when the charitable rich raised a subscription to provide the distressed poor with brown bread at a reduced price, many of the labourers thought it so coarse and unpalatable that they returned the tickets though wheaten bread was at 1s. 3d. the quartern loaf.(8*) Correspondent after correspondent to the Annals of Agriculture notes and generally deplures the fact that the poor, as one of them phrases it, are too fine-mouthed to eat any but the finest bread.(9*) Lord Sheffield, judging from his address to Quarter Sessions at the end of 1795, would have had little mercy on such grumblers. After explaining that in his parish relief was now given partly in potatoes, partly in wheaten flour, and partly in oaten or barley flour, he declared: 'If any wretches should be found so lost to all decency, and so blind as to revolt against the dispensations of providence, and to refuse the food proposed for their relief, the parish officers will be justified in refusing other succour, and may be assured of support from the magistracy of the county.'(10*)

To the rich, the reluctance of the labourer to change his food came as a painful surprise. They had thought of him as a roughly built and hardy animal, comparatively insensible to his surroundings, like the figure Lucretius drew of the primeval labourer:

Et majoribus et solidis magis ossibus intus
Fundatum, et validis aptum per viscera nervis;
Nec facile ex aestu, nec frigore quod caperetur,
Nec novitate cibi, nec labi corporis ulla.

They did not know that a romantic and adventurous appetite is one of the blessings of an easy life, and that the more miserable a man's condition, and the fewer his comforts, the more does he shrink from experiments of diet. They were therefore surprised and displeased to find that labourers rejected soup, even soup served at a rich man's table, exclaiming, 'This is washy stuff, that affords no nourishment: we will not be fed on meal, and chopped potatoes like hogs.'(11*) The dislike of change of food was remarked by the Poor Law Commissioners in 1834, who observed that the labourer had acquired or retained 'with the moral helplessness some of the other peculiarities of a child. He is often disgusted to a degree which other classes scarcely conceive possible, by slight differences in diet; and is annoyed by anything that seeks to him strange and new.'(12*)

Apart from the constitutional conservatism of the poor there were good reasons for the obstinacy of the labourers. Davies put one aspect of the case very well. 'If the working people of other countries are content with bread made of rye, barley, or oats, have they not milk, cheese, butter, fruits, or fish, to eat with that coarser bread? And was not this the case of our own people formerly, when these grains were the common productions of our land, and when scarcely wheat enough was grown for the use of the nobility and principal gentry? Flesh-meat, butter, and cheese, were then at such moderate prices, compared with the present prices, that poor people could afford to use them in common. And with a competent quantity of these articles, a coarser kind of bread might very well satisfy the common people of any country.'(13*) He also states that where land had not been so highly improved as to produce much wheat, barley, oatmeal, or maslin bread were still in common use. Arthur Young himself realised that the labourer's attachment to wheaten bread was not a mere superstition of the palate. 'In the East of England I have been very generally assured, by the labourers who work the hardest, that they prefer the finest bread, not because most pleasant, but most contrary to a lax habit of body, which at once prevents all strong labour. The quality of the bread that is eaten by those

who have meat, and perhaps porter and port, is of very little consequence indeed; but to the hardworking man, who nearly lives on it, the case is abundantly different.'(14*) Fox put this point in a speech in the House of Commons in the debate on the high price of corn in November 1795. He urged gentlemen, who were talking of mixed bread for the people, 'not to judge from any experiment made with respect to themselves. I have myself tasted bread of different sorts, I have found it highly pleasant, and I have no doubt it is exceedingly wholesome. But it ought to be recollected how very small a part the article of bread forms of the provisions consumed by the more opulent classes of the community. To the poor it constitutes, the chief, if not the sole article of subsistence.'(15*) The truth is that the labourer living on bread and tea had too delicate a digestion to assimilate the coarser cereals, and that there was, apart from climate and tradition, a very important difference between the labourer in the north and the labourer in the south, which the rich entirely overlooked. That difference comes out in an analysis of the budgets of the Cumberland labourer and the Berkshire labourer. The Cumberland labourer who spent only £7, 9s. on his cereals, spent £2, 13s. 7d. a year on milk. The Berkshire labourer who spent £36, 8s. on wheaten bread spent 8s. 8d. a year on milk. The Cumberland family consumed about 1300 quarts in the year, the Berkshire family about two quarts a week. The same contrast appears in all budget comparisons between north and south. A weaver at Kendal (eight in the family) spends £12, 9s. on oatmeal and wheat, and £5, 4s. on milk.(16*) An agricultural labourer at Wetherall in Cumberland (five in family) spends £7, 6s. 9d. on cereals and £2, 13s. 4d. on milk.(17*) On the other side we have a labourer in Shropshire (four in family) spending £10, 8s. on bread (of wheat rye), and only 8s. 8d. on milk,(18*) and a cooper at Frome, Somerset (seven in family) spending £45, 10s. on bread, and about 17s. on milk.(19*) These figures are typical.(20*)

Now oatmeal eaten with milk is a very different food from oatmeal taken alone, and it is clear from a study of the budgets that if oatmeal was to be acclimatised in the south, it was essential to increase the consumption of milk. But the great difference in consumption represented not a difference of demand, but a difference of supply. The southern labourer went without milk not from choice but from necessity. In the days when he kept cows he drank milk, for there was plenty of milk in the village. After enclosure, milk was not to be had. It may be that more cows were kept under the new system of farming, though this is unlikely, seeing that at this time every patch of arable was a gold-mine, but it is certainly true that milk became scarce in the villages. The new type of farmer did not trouble to sell milk at home. 'Farmers are averse to selling milk; while poor persons who have only one cow generally dispose of all they can spare.'(21*) The new farmer produced for a larger market: his produce was carried away, as Cobbett said, to be devoured by 'the idlers, the thieves, the prostitutes who are all taxeaters in the wens of Bath and London.' Davies argued, when pleading for the creation of small farms, 'The occupiers of these small farms, as well as the occupiers of Mr. Kent's larger cottages, would not think much of retailing to their poorer neighbours a little corn or a little milk, as they might want, which the poor can now seldom have at all, and never but as a great favour from the rich farmers.'(22*) Sir Thomas Bernard mentioned among the advantages of the Winchelsea system the 'no inconsiderable convenience to the inhabitants of that neighbourhood, that these cottagers are enabled to supply them, at a very moderate price, with milk, cream, butter, poultry, pig-meat, and veal: articles which, in general, are not worth the farmer's attention, and which, therefore, are supplied by speculators, who greatly enhance the price on the public.'(23*) Eden(24*) records that in Oxfordshire the labourers bitterly complain that the farmers, instead of selling their milk to the poor, give it to their pigs, and a writer in the Reports of the Society for Bettering the Condition of the Poor says that this was a practice not unusual in many parts of England.(25*)

The scarcity of milk must be considered a contributory cause of the growth of tea-drinking, a habit that the philanthropists and Cobbett agreed in condemning. Cobbett declared in his *Advice to Young Men*(26*) that 'if the slops were in fashion amongst ploughmen and carters, we

must all be starved; for the food could never be raised. The mechanics are half ruined by them.' In the Report on the Poor presented to the Hants Quarter Sessions in 1795,(27*) the use of tea is described as 'a vain present attempt to supply to the spirits of the mind what is wanting to the strength of the body; but in its lasting effects impairing the nerves, and therein equally injuring both the body and the mind.' Davies retorted on the rich who found fault with the extravagance of the poor in tea-drinking, by pointing out that it was their 'last resource.' 'The topic on which the declaimers against the extravagance of the poor display their eloquence with most success, is tea-drinking. Why should such people, it is asked, indulge in a luxury which is only proper for their betters; and not rather content themselves with milk, which is in every form wholesome and nourishing? Were it true that poor people could every where procure so excellent an article as milk, there would be then just reason to reproach them for giving the preference to the miserable infusion of which they are so fond. But it is not so. Wherever the poor can get milk, do they not gladly use it? And where they cannot get it, would they not gladly exchange their tea for it?(28*)... Still you exclaim, Tea is a luxury. If you mean fine hyson tea, sweetened with refined, sugar, and softened with cream, I readily admit it to be so. But this is not the tea of the poor. Spring water, just coloured with a few leaves of the lowest-priced tea, and sweetened with the brownest sugar, is the luxury for which you reproach them. To this they have recourse from mere necessity: and were they now to be deprived of this, they would immediately be reduced to bread and water. Tea-drinking is not the cause, but the consequence, of the distresses of the poor.'(29*) We learn from the *Annals of Agriculture* that at Sedgfield in Durham(30*) many of the poor declared that they had been driven to drinking tea from not being able to procure milk.(31*)

No doubt the scarcity of milk helped to encourage a taste that was very quickly acquired by all classes in England, and not in England only, for, before the middle of the eighteenth century, the rapid growth of tea-drinking among the poor in the Lowlands of Scotland was affecting the revenue very. The English poor liked tea for the same reason seriously(32*) that Dr. Johnson liked it, as a stimulant, and the fact that their food was monotonous and insipid made it particularly attractive. Eden shows that by the end of the eighteenth century it was in general use among poor families, taking the place both of beer and of milk, and excluding the substitutes that Eden wished to make popular. It seems perhaps less surprising to us than it did to him, that when the rich, who could eat or drink what they liked, enjoyed tea, the poor thought bread and tea a more interesting diet than bread and barley water.

A few isolated attempts were made to remedy the scarcity of milk,(33*) which had been caused by enclosure and the consolidation of farms. Lord Winchilsea's projects have already been described. In the Reports of the Society for bettering the Condition of the Poor, there are two accounts of plans for supplying milk cheap, one in Staffordshire, where a respectable tradesman undertook to keep a certain number of cows for the purpose in a parish where 'the principal number of the poorer inhabitants were destitute of all means of procuring milk for their families,'(34*) another at Stockton in Durham, where the bishop made it a condition of the lease of a certain farm, that the tenant should keep fifteen cows whose milk was to be sold at 1/2d. a pint to the poor.(35*) Mr. Curwen again, the Whig M.P. for Carlisle, had a plan for feeding cows in the winter with a view to providing the poor with milk.(36*)

There was another way in which the enclosures had created an insuperable obstacle to the popularising of 'cheap and agreeable substitutes' for expensive wheaten bread. The Cumberland housewife could bake her own barley bread in her oven 'heated with heath, furze or brush-wood, the expence of which is inconsiderable;'(37*) she had stretches of waste land at her door where the children could be sent to fetch fuel. 'There is no comparison to the community,' wrote a contributor to the *Annals of Agriculture*,(38*) 'whether good wheat, rye, turnips, etc., are not better than brakes, goss, furz, broom, and heath,' but as acre after acre in the midlands and south was enclosed, the fuel of the poor grew ever scantier. When the

common where he had gleaned his firing was fenced off, the poor man could only trust for his fuel to pilferings from the hedgerows. To the spectator, furze from the common might seem 'gathered with more loss of time than it appears to be worth;'(39*) to the labourer whose scanty earnings left little margin over the expense of bread alone, the loss of firing was not balanced by the economy of time.(40*)

Insufficient firing added to the miseries caused by insufficient clothes and food. An ingenious writer in the *Annals of Agriculture*(41*) suggested that the poor should resort to the stables for warmth, as was the practice in the duchy of Milan. Fewer would suffer death from want of fire in winter, he argued, and also it would be a cheap way of helping them, as it cost no fuel, for cattle were so obliging as to dispense warmth from their persons for nothing. But even this plan (which was not adopted) would not have solved the problem of cooking. The labourer might be blamed for his diet of fine wheaten bread and for having his meat (when he had any) roasted instead of made into soup, but how could cooking be done at home without fuel? 'No doubt, a labourer,' says Eden,(42*) 'whose income was only £20 a year, would, in general, act wisely in substituting hasty-pudding, barley bread, boiled milk, and potatoes, for bread and beer; but in most parts of this county, he is debarred not more by prejudice, than by local difficulties, from using a diet that requires cooking at home. The extreme dearness of fuel in Oxfordshire, compels him to purchase his dinner at the baker's; and, from his unavoidable consumption of bread, he has little left for cloaths, in a country where warm cloathing is most essentially wanted.' In Davies' more racy and direct language, 'it is but little that in the present state of things the belly can spare for the back.'(43*) Davies also pointed out the connection between dear fuel and the baker. 'Where fuel is scarce and dear, poor people find it cheaper to buy their bread of the baker than to bake for themselves.... But where fuel abounds, and costs only the trouble of cutting and carrying home, there they may save something by baking their own bread.'(44*) Complaints of the pilfering of hedgerows were very common. 'Falstaff says " his soldiers found linen on every hedge;" and I fear it is but too often the case, that labourers' children procure fuel from the same quarter.'(45*) There were probably many families like the two described in Davies(46*) who spent nothing on fuel, which they procured 'by gathering cow-dung, and breaking their neighbours' hedges.'(47*)

In some few cases, the benevolent rich did not content themselves with attempting to enforce the eighth commandment, but went to the root of the matter, helping to provide a substitute for their hedgerows. An interesting account of such an experiment is given in the *Reports on the Poor*(48*) by Scrope Bernard. 'There having been several prosecutions at the Aylesbury Quarter Sessions, for stealing fuel last winter, I was led to make particular inquiries, respecting the means which the poor at Lower Winchendon had of providing fuel. I found that there was no fuel then to be sold within several miles of the place; and that, amid the distress occasioned by the long frost, a party of cottagers had joined in hiring a person, to fetch a load of pit-coal from Oxford, for their supply. In order to encourage this disposition to acquire fuel in an honest manner,' a present was made to all this party of as much coal again as they had already purchased carriage free. Next year the vestry determined to help, and with the aid of private donations coal was distributed at 1s. 4d. the cwt. (its cost at the Oxford wharf), and kindling faggots at 1d. each. 'It had been said that the poor would not find money to purchase them, when they were brought: instead of which out of 35 poor families belonging to the parish, 29 came with ready money, husbanded out of their scanty means, to profit with eagerness of this attention to their wants; and among them a person who had been lately imprisoned by his master for stealing wood from his hedges.' Mr. Bernard concludes his account with some apt remarks on the difficulties of combining honesty with grinding poverty.(49*)

MINIMUM WAGE

The attempts to reduce cottage expenditure were thus a failure. We must now describe the attempts to increase the cottage income. There were two ways in which the wages of the labourers might have been raised. One way, the way of combination, was forbidden by law. The other way was the fixing of a legal minimum wage in relation to the price of food. This was no new idea, for the regulation of wages by law was a venerable English institution, as old as the Statute of Edward III. The most recent laws on the subject were the famous Act of Elizabeth, an Act of James I, and an Act of George II (1747). The Act of Elizabeth provided that the Justices of the Peace should meet annually and assess the wages of labourers in husbandry and of certain other workmen. Penalties were imposed on all who gave or took a wage in excess of this assessment. The Act of James I was passed to remove certain ambiguities that were believed to have embarrassed the operation of the Act of Elizabeth, and among other provisions imposed a penalty on all who gave a wage below the wage fixed by the magistrates. The Act of 1747(50*) was passed because the existing laws were 'insufficient and defective,' and it provided that disputes between masters and men could be referred to the magistrates, 'although no rate or assessment of wages has been made that year by the Justices of the shire, where such complaint shall be made.'

Two questions arise on the subject of this legislation, Was it operative? In whose interests was it administered, the interests of the employers or the interests of the employed? As to the first question there is a good deal of negative evidence to show that during the eighteenth century these laws were rarely applied. An example of an assessment (an assessment declaring a maximum) made by the Lancashire magistrates in 1725, was published in the Annals of Agriculture in 1795(51*) as an interesting curiosity, and the writer remarks: 'It appears from Mr. Ruggles' excellent History of the Poor that such orders must in general be searched for in earlier periods, and a friend of ours was much surprised to hear that any magistrates in the present century would venture on so bold a measure.'(52*)

As to the second question, at the time we are discussing it was certainly taken for granted that this legislation was designed to keep wages down. So implicitly was this believed that the Act of James I which provided penalties in cases where wages were given below the fixed rate was generally ignored, and speakers and writers mentioned only the Act of Elizabeth, treating it as an Act for fixing a maximum. Whitbread, for example, when introducing a Bill in 1795 to fix a minimum wage, with which we deal later, argued that the Elizabethan Act ought to be repealed because it fixed a maximum. This view of the earlier legislation was taken by Fox, who supported Whitbread's Bill, and by Pitt who opposed it. Fox said of the Act of Elizabeth that 'it secured the master from a risk which could but seldom occur, of being charged exorbitantly for the quantity of service; but it did not authorise the magistrate to protect the poor from the injustice of a grinding and avaricious master, who might be disposed to take advantage of their necessities, and undervalue the rate of their services.'(53*) Pitt said that Whitbread 'imagined that he had on his side of the question the support of experience in this country, and appealed to certain laws upon the statute-book in confirmation of his proposition. He did not find himself called upon to defend the principle of these statutes, but they were certainly introduced for purposes widely different from the object of the present bill. They were enacted to guard the industry of the country from being checked by a general combination among labourers; and the bill now under consideration was introduced solely for the purpose of remedying the inconveniences which labourers sustain from the disproportion existing between the price of labour and the price of living.'(54*) Only one speaker in the debates, Vansittart, afterwards Chancellor of the Exchequer, took the view that legislation was not needed because the Act of James I gave the magistrates the powers with which Whitbread sought to arm them.

It was natural that many minds searching after a way of escape from the growing distress of the labourers, at a time when wages had not kept pace with prices, should have turned to the device of assessing wages by law in accordance with the price of provisions. If prices could not be assimilated to wages, could not wages be assimilated to prices? Nathaniel Kent, no wild visionary, had urged employers to raise wages in proportion to the increase of their profits, but his appeal had been without effect. But the policy of regulating wages according to the price of food was recommended in several quarters, and it provoked a great deal of discussion. Burke, whose days were closing in, was tempted to take part in it, and he put an advertisement into the papers announcing that he was about to publish a series of letters on the subject. The letters never appeared, but Arthur Young has described the visit he paid to Beaconsfield at this time and Burke's rambling thunder about 'the absurdity of regulating labour and the mischief of our poor laws,' and Burke's published works include a paper Thoughts and details on Scarcity, presented to Pitt in November 1795. In this paper Burke argued that the farmer was the true guardian of the labourer's interest, in that it would never be profitable to him to underpay the labourer: an uncompromising application of the theory of the economic man, which was not less superficial than the Jacobins' application of the theory of the natural man.

In October 1795 Arthur Young sent out to the various correspondents of the Board of Agriculture a circular letter containing this question among others: 'It having been recommended by various quarter-sessions, that the price of labour should be regulated by that of bread corn, have the goodness to state what you conceive to be the advantages or disadvantages of such a system?'(55*) Arthur Young was himself in favour of the proposal, and the Suffolk magistrates, at a meeting which he attended on the 12th of October, ordered: 'That the Members for this county be requested by the chairman to bring a bill into parliament, so to regulate the price of labour, that it may fluctuate with the average price of bread corn.'(56*) Most of the replies were adverse, but the proposal found a warm friend in Mr. Howlett, the Vicar of Dunmow, who put into his answer some of the arguments which he in reply to afterwards developed in a pamphlet published. Pitt's criticisms of Whitbread's Bill.(57*) Howlett argued that Parliament had legislated with success to prevent combinations of workmen, and as an example he quoted the Acts of 8 George III, which had made the wages of tailors and silkweavers subject to the regulations of the magistrates. It was just as necessary and just as practicable to prevent a combination of a different kind, that of masters. 'Not a combination indeed formally drawn up in writing and sanctioned under hand and seal, a combination, however, as certain (the result of contingencies or providential events) and as fatally efficacious as if in writing it had filled five hundred skins of parchment: a combination which has operated for many years with a force rapidly increasing, a combination which has kept back the hire of our labourers who have reaped down our fields, and has at length torn the clothes from their backs, snatched the food from their mouths, and ground the flesh from their bones.' Howlett, it will be seen, took the same view as Thelwall, that the position of the labourers was deteriorating absolutely and relatively. He estimated from a survey taken at Dunmow that the average family should be taken as five; if wages had been regulated on this basis, and the labourer had been given per head no more than the cost of a pauper's keep in the workhouse sixty years ago, he would have been very much better off in 1795. He would himself take a higher standard. In reply to the argument that the policy of the minimum wage would deprive the labourers of all spur and incentive he pointed to the case of the London tailors; they at any rate displayed plenty of life and ingenuity, and nobody could say that the London fashions did not change fast enough. Employers would no more raise wages without compulsion than they would make good roads without the aid of turnpikes or the prescription of statutes enforced by the magistrates. His most original contribution to the discussion was the argument that the legal regulation should not be left to the unassisted judgment of the magistrates: 'it should be the result of the clearest, fullest, and most accurate information, and at length be judiciously adapted to each county, hundred, or district in every quarter of the kingdom.' Howlett differed

from some of the supporters of a minimum wage, in thinking that wages should be regulated by the prices of the necessaries of life, not merely by that of bread corn.

The same policy was advocated by Davies in *The Case of Labourers in Husbandry*.^(58*) Davies argued that if the minimum only were fixed, emulation would not be discouraged, for better workmen would both be more sure of employment and also obtain higher wages. He suggested that the minimum wage should be fixed by calculating the sum necessary to maintain a family of five, or by settling the scale of day wages by the price of bread alone, treating the other expenses as tolerably steady. He did not propose to regulate the wages of any but day labourers, nor did he propose to deal with piecework, although piecework had been included in the Act of Elizabeth. He further suggested that the regulation should be in force only for half the year, from November to May, when the labourers' difficulties pressed hardest upon them. Unfortunately he coupled with his minimum wage policy a proposal to give help from the rates to families with more than five members, if the children were unable to earn.

But the most interesting of all the declarations in favour of a minimum wage was a declaration from labourers. A correspondent sent the following advertisement to the *Annals of Agriculture*:

"The following is an advertisement which I cut out of a Norwich newspaper: --

"DAY LABOURERS"

At a numerous meeting of the day labourers of the little parishes of Heacham, Snettisham, and Sedgford, this day, 5th November, in the parish church of Heacham, in the county of Norfolk, in order to take into consideration the best and most peaceable mode of obtaining a redress of all the severe and peculiar hardships under which they have for many years so patiently suffered, the following resolutions were unanimously agreed to: -- 1st, That -- The labourer is worthy of his hire, and that the mode of lessening his distresses, as hath been lately the fashion, by selling him flour under the market price, and thereby rendering him an object of a parish rate, is not only an indecent insult on his lowly and humble situation (in itself sufficiently mortifying from his degrading dependence on the caprice of his employer) but a fallacious mode of relief, and every way inadequate to a radical redress of the manifold distresses of his calamitous state. 2nd, That the price of labour should, at all times, be proportioned to the price of wheat, which should invariably be regulated by the average price of that necessary article of life; and that the price of labour, as specified in the annexed plan, is not only well calculated to make the labourer happy without being injurious to the farmer, but it appears to us the only rational means of securing the permanent happiness of this valuable and useful class of men, and, if adopted in its full extent, will have an immediate and powerful effect in reducing, if it does not entirely annihilate, that disgraceful and enormous tax on the public -- the POOR RATE.

"Plan of the Price of Labour proportionate to the Price of Wheat
per last. per day.

When wheat shall be 14 l. the price of labour shall be 1s. 2d.

"" 16"" 1s. 4d.

"" 18"" 1s. 6d.

"" 20"" 1s. 8d.

"" 22"" 1s. 10d.

"" 24"" 2s. 0d.

"" 26"" 2s. 2d.

"" 28"" 2s. 4d.

"" 30"" 2s. 6d.

"" 32"" 2s. 8d.

"" 34"" 2s. 10d.

"" 36"" 3s. 0d.

And so on, according to this proportion.

"3rd, That a petition to parliament to regulate the price of labour, conformable to the above plan, be immediately adopted; and that the day labourers throughout the county be invited to associate and co-operate in this necessary application to parliament, as a peaceable, legal, and probable mode of obtaining relief; and, in doing this, no time should be lost, as the petition must be presented before the 29th January 1796.

"4th, That one shilling shall be paid into the hands of the treasurer by every labourer, in order to defray the expences of advertising, attending on meetings, and paying counsel to support their petition in parliament.

"5th, That as soon as the sense of the day labourers of this county, or a majority of them, shall be made known to the clerk of the meeting, a general meeting shall be appointed, in some central town, in order to agree upon the best and easiest mode of getting the petition signed: when it will be requested that one labourer, properly instructed, may be deputed to represent two or three contiguous parishes, and to attend the above intended meeting with a list of all the labourers in the parishes he shall represent, and pay their respective subscriptions; and that the labourer, so deputed, shall be allowed two shillings and six pence a day for his time, and two shillings and six pence a day for his expences.

"6th, That Adam Moore, clerk of the meeting, be directed to have the above resolutions, with the names of the farmers and labourers who have subscribed to and approved them, advertised in one Norwich and one London Raper; when it is hoped that the above plan of a petition to parliament will not only be approved and immediately adopted by the day labourers of this county, but by the day labourers of every county in the kingdom.

"7th, That all letters, post paid, addressed to Adam Moore, labourer, at Heacham, near Lynn, Norfolk, will be duly noticed."(59*)

This is one of the most interesting and instructive documents of the time. It shows that the labourers, whose steady decline during the next thirty years we are about to trace, were animated by a sense of dignity and independence. Something of the old spirit of the commoners still survived. But there is no sequel to this incident. This great scheme of a labourers' organisation vanishes: it passes like a flash of summer lightning. What is the explanation? The answer is to be found, we suspect, in the Treason and Sedition Acts that Pitt was carrying through Parliament in this very month. Under those Acts no language of criticism was safe, and fifty persons could not meet except in the presence of a magistrate, who had power to extinguish the meeting and arrest the speaker. Those measures inflicted even wider injury upon the nation than Fox and Sheridan and Erskine themselves believed.

The policy of a minimum wage was brought before Parliament in the winter of 1795, in a Bill introduced by Samuel Whitbread, one of the small band of brave Liberals who had stood by Fox through the revolutionary panic. Whitbread is a politician to whom history has done less than justice, and he is generally known only as an implacable opponent of the Peninsular War. That opposition he contrived to conduct, as we know from the Creevey Papers, in such a way as to win and keep the respect of Wellington. Whitbread's disapproval of that war, of which Liberals like Holland and Lord John Russell, who took Fox's view of the difference of fighting revolutions by the aid of kings and fighting Napoleon by the aid of peoples, were strong supporters, sprang from his compassion for the miseries of the English poor. His most notable

quality was his vivid and energetic sympathy; he spent his life in hopeless battles, and he died by his own hand of public despair. The Bill he now introduced was the first of a series of proposals designed for the rescue of the agricultural labourers. It was backed by Sheridan and Grey, (60*) and the members for Suffolk.

The object of the Bill (61*) was to explain and amend the Act of Elizabeth, which empowered Justices of the Peace at or within six weeks of every General Quarter Sessions held at Easter to regulate the wages of labourers in husbandry. The provisions of the Bill were briefly as follows. At any Quarter Sessions the justices could agree, if they thought fit, to hold a General Sessions for carrying into execution the powers given them by the Act. If they thought good to hold such a General Sessions, the majority of them could 'rate and appoint the wages and fix and declare the hours of working of all labourers in husbandry, by the day, week, month or year, and with beer or cyder or without, respect being had to the value of money and the plenty or scarcity of the time.' This rate was to be printed and posted on the church doors, and was to hold good till superseded by another made in the same way. The rate was not to apply to any tradesman or artificer, nor to any labourer whose diet was wholly provided by his employer, not to any labourer bona fide employed on piecework, nor to any labourer employed by the parish. The young, the old, and the infirm were also exempted from the provisions of the Act. It was to be lawful 'to contract with and pay to any male person, under the age of ---- (62*) years, or to any man who from age or infirmity or any other incapacity shall be unable to do the ordinary work of a labouring man, so much as he shall reasonably deserve for the work which he shall be able to do and shall do.' In case of complaint the decision as to the ability of the labourer rested with the justices.

With the above exceptions no labourer was to be hired under the appointed rates, and any contract for lower wages was void. If convicted of breaking the law, an employer was to be fined; if he refused to pay the fine, his goods were to be distrained on, and if this failed to produce enough to pay the expenses, he could be committed to the common gaol or House of Correction. A labourer with whom an illegal contract was made was to be a competent witness.

The first discussions of the Bill were friendly in tone. On 25th November Whitbread asked for leave to bring it in. Sir William Young, Lechmere, Charles Dundas, and Sir John Rous all spoke with sympathy and approval. The first reading debate took place on 9th December, and though Whitbread had on that occasion the powerful support of Fox, who, while not concealing his misgivings about the Bill, thought the alternative of leaving the great body of the people to depend on the charity of the rich intolerable, an ominous note was struck by Pitt and Henry Dundas on the other side. The Bill came up for second reading on 12th February 1796. (63*) Whitbread's opening speech showed that he was well aware that he would have to face a formidable opposition. Pitt rose at once after the motion had been formally seconded by one of the Suffolk members, and assailed the Bill in a speech that made an immediate and overwhelming impression. He challenged Whitbread's argument that wages had not kept pace with prices; he admitted the hardships of the poor, but he thought the picture overdrawn, for their hardships had been relieved by 'a display of beneficence never surpassed at any period,' and he argued that it was a false remedy to use legislative interference, and to give the justices the power to regulate the price of labour, and to endeavour 'to establish by authority what would be much better accomplished by the unassisted operation of principles.' This led naturally to an attack on the restrictions on labour imposed by the Law of Settlement, and a discussion of the operation of the Poor Laws, and the speech ended, after a glance at the great possibilities of child employment, with the promise of measures which should restore the original purity of the Poor Laws, and make them a blessing instead of the curse they had become. The speech seems to have dazzled the House of Commons, and few stood up against the general opinion that Whitbread's proposal was dangerous, and that the whole question had better be left to Pitt. Lechmere, a Worcestershire member, was one of them, and he made an

admirable little speech in which he tried to destroy the general illusion that the poor could not be unhappy in a country where the rich were so kind. Whitbread himself defended his Bill with spirit and ability, showing that Pitt had not really found any substantial argument against it, and that Pitt's own remedies were all hypothetical and distant. Fox reaffirmed his dislike of compulsion, but restated at the same time his opinion that Whitbread's Bill, though not an ideal solution, was the best solution available of evils which pressed very hardly on the poor and demanded attention. General Smith pointed out that one of Pitt's remedies was the employment of children, and warned him that he had himself seen some of the consequences of the unregulated labour of children 'whose wan and pale complexions bespoke that their constitutions were already undermined, and afforded but little promise of a robust manhood, or of future usefulness to the community.' But the general sense of the House was reflected in the speeches of Buxton, Coxhead and Burdon, whose main argument was that the poor were not in so desperate a plight as Whitbread supposed, and that whatever their condition might be, Pitt was the most likely person to find such remedies as were practicable and effective. The motion for second reading was negatived without a division. The verdict of the House was a verdict of confidence in Pitt.

Four years later (11th February 1800) Whitbread repeated his attempt.(64*) He asked for leave to bring in a Bill to explain and amend the Act of Elizabeth, and said that he had waited for Pitt to carry out his promises. He was aware of the danger of overpaying the poor, but artificers and labourers should be so paid as to be able to keep themselves and their families in comfort. He saw no way of securing this result in a time of distress except the way he had suggested. Pitt rose at once to reply. He had in the interval brought in and abandoned his scheme of Poor Law Reform. He had spent his only idea, and he was now confessedly without any policy at all. All that he could contribute was a general criticism of legislative interference, and another discourse on the importance of letting labour find its own level. He admitted the fact of scarcity, but he believed the labouring class seldom felt fewer privations. History scarcely provides a more striking spectacle of a statesman paying himself with soothing phrases in the midst of a social cyclone. The House was more than ever on his side. All the interests and instincts of class were disguised under the gold dust of Adam Smith's philosophy. Sir William Young, Buxton, Wilberforce, Ellison, and Perceval attacked the Bill. Whitbread replied that charity as a substitute for adequate wages had mischievous effects, for it took away the independence of the poor, 'a consideration as valuable to the labourer as to the man of high rank,' and as for the argument that labour should be left to find its own level, the truth surely was that labour found its level by combinations, and that this had been found to be so great an evil that Acts of Parliament had been passed against it.

The date of the second reading of the Bill was hotly disputed(65*) the friends of the measure wanted it to be fixed for 28th April, so that Quarter Sessions might have time to deliberate on the proposals; the opponents of the measure suggested 25th February, on the grounds that it was dangerous to keep the Bill in suspense so long: 'the eyes of all the labouring poor,' said Mr. Ellison, 'must in that interval be turned upon it.' The opponents won their point, and when the Bill came up for second reading its fate was a foregone conclusion. Whitbread made one last appeal, pleading the cause of the labourers bound to practical serfdom in parishes where the landowner was an absentee, employed at starvation wages by farmers, living in cottages let to them by farmers. But his appeal was unheeded: Lord Belgrave retorted with the argument that legislative interference with agriculture could not be needed, seeing that five hundred Enclosure Bills had passed the House during a period of war, and the Bill was rejected.

So died the policy of the minimum wage. Even later it had its adherents, for, in 1805, Sir Thomas Bernard criticised it(66*) as the 'favourite idea of some very intelligent and benevolent men.' He mentioned as a *reductio ad absurdum* of the scheme, that had the rate of wages been fixed by the standard of 1780 when the quartern loaf was 6d. and the labourer's pay 9s. a

week, the result in 1800 when the quartern loaf cost 1s. 9d. would have been a wage of £1, 11s. 6d.

When Whitbread introduced his large and comprehensive Poor Law Bill in 1807,(67*) the proposal for a minimum wage was not included.

From an examination of the speeches of the time and of the answers to Arthur Young's circular printed in the *Annals of Agriculture*, it is evident that there was a genuine fear among the opponents of the measure that if once wages were raised to meet the rise in prices it would not be easy to reduce them when the famine was over. This was put candidly by one of Arthur Young's correspondents: 'it is here judged more prudent to indulge the poor with bread corn at a reduced price than to raise the price of wages.'(68*)

The policy of a minimum wage was revived later by a society called 'The General Association established for the Purpose of bettering the Condition of the Agricultural and Manufacturing Labourers.' Three representatives of this society gave evidence before the Select Committee on Emigration in 1827, and one of them pointed out as an frustration of the injustice with which the labourers were treated, that in 1825 the wages of agricultural labourers were generally 9s. a week, and the price of wheat 9s. a bushel, whereas in 1732 the wages of agricultural labour were fixed by the magistrates at 6s. a week, and the price of wheat was 2s. 9d. the bushel. In support of this comparison he produced a table from *The Gentleman's Magazine* of 1732: --

Wheat in February 1732, 23s. to 25s. per quarter.

Wheat in March 1732, 20s. to 22s. per quarter.

Yearly wages appointed by the Justices to be taken by the servants in the county of Kent, not exceeding the following sums:

Head ploughman waggoner or seedsman..	£8 0 0
His mate	4 0 0
Best woman.....	3 0 0
Second sort of woman.....	2 0 0
Second ploughman.....	6 0 0
His mate.....	3 0 0
Labourers by day in summer....	1 2
In winter.....	1 0

JUSTICES OF GLOUCESTER

Head servant in husbandry....	5 0 0
Second servant in husbandry....	4 0 0
Driving boy under fourteen....	1 0 0
Head maid servant or dairy servant...	2 10 0
Mower in harvest without drink per day..	1 2
With drink.....	1 0
Other day labourers with drink....	1 0
From corn to hay harvest with drink...	0 8
Mowers and reapers in corn harvest with drink.	1 0
Labourers with diet.....	0 4
Without diet or drink.....	0 10
Carpenter wheelwright or mason without drink.	1 2
With drink.....	1 0

One of the witnesses pointed out that there were five millions of labourers making with their families eight millions, and that if the effect of raising their wages was to increase their expenditure by a penny a day, there would be an increase of consumption amounting to twelve millions a year. These arguments made little impression on the Committee, and the representations of the society were dismissed with contempt: 'It is from an entire ignorance of the universal operation of the principle of Supply and demand regulating the rate of wages that all these extravagant propositions are advanced, and recommendations spread over the country which are so calculated to excite false hopes, and consequently discontent, in the minds of the labouring classes. Among the most extravagant are those brought forward by the Society established for the purpose of bettering the condition of the manufacturing and agricultural labourers.'

POOR LAW REFORM

Pitt, having secured the rejection of Whitbread's Minimum Wage Bill in 1796, produced his own alternative: Poor Law Reform. It is necessary to state briefly what were the Poor Law arrangements at the time of his proposals.

The Poor Law system reposed on the great Act of Elizabeth (1601), by which the State had acknowledged and organised the duty to the poor which it had taken over from the Church. The parish was constituted the unit, and overseers, unsalaried and nominated by the J.P.'s, were appointed for administering relief, the necessary funds being obtained by a poor rate. Before 1722 a candidate for relief could apply either to the overseers or to the magistrate. By an Act passed in that year, designed to make the administration stricter, application was to be made first to the overseer. If the overseer rejected the application the claimant could submit his case to a magistrate, and the magistrate, after hearing the overseer's objection, could order that relief should be given. There were, however, a number of parishes in which applications for relief were made to salaried guardians. These were the parishes that had adopted an Act known as Gilbert's Act, passed in 1782.(69*) In these parishes,(70*) joined in incorporations, the parish overseers were not abolished, for they still had the duty of collecting and accounting for the rates, but the distribution was in the hands of paid guardians, one for each parish, appointed by the justices out of a list of names submitted by the parishioners. In each set of incorporated parishes there was a 'Visitor' appointed by the justices, who had practically absolute power over the guardians. If the guardians refused relief, the claimant could still appeal, as in the case of the overseers, to the justices.

Such was the parish machinery. The method of giving relief varied greatly, but the main distinction to be drawn is between (1) out relief, or a weekly pension of a shilling or two at home; and (2) indoor relief, or relief in a workhouse, or poorhouse, or house of industry. Out relief was the earlier institution, and it held its own throughout the century, being the only form of relief in many parishes. Down to 1722 parishes that wished to build a workhouse had to get a special Act of Parliament. In that year a great impetus was given to the workhouse movement by an Act(71*) which authorised overseers, with the consent of the vestry, to start workhouses, or to farm out the poor, and also authorised parishes to join together for this purpose. If applicants for relief refused to go into the workhouse, they forfeited their title to any relief at all. A great many workhouses were built in consequence of this Act: in 1732 there were stated to be sixty in the country, and about fifty in the metropolis.(72*)

Even if the applicant for relief lived in a parish which had built or shared in a workhouse, it did not follow that he was forced into it. He lost his title to receive relief outside, but his fate would depend on the parish officers. In the parishes which had adopted Gilbert's Act the workhouse was reserved for the aged, for the infirm, and for young children. In most parishes there was out relief as well as indoor relief: in some parishes outdoor relief being allowed to applicants of

a certain age or in special circumstances. In some parishes all outdoor relief had stopped by 1795.(73*) There is no doubt that in most parishes the workhouse accommodation would have been quite inadequate for the needs of the parish in times of distress. It was quite common to put four persons into a single bed.

The workhouses were dreaded by the poor,(74*) not only for the dirt and disease and the devastating fevers that swept through them,(75*) but for reasons that are intelligible enough to any one who has read Eden's descriptions. Those descriptions show that Crabbe's picture is no exaggeration: --

'Theirs is yon House that holds the Parish-Poor,
Whose walls of mud scarce bear the broken door.
There, where the putrid vapours, flagging, play,
And the dull wheel hums doleful through the day;
There Children dwell who know no Parents' care;
Parents, who know no Children's love, dwell there!
Heart-broken Matrons on their joyless bed,
Forsaken Wives and Mothers never wed;
Dejected Widows with unheeded tears,
And crippled Age with more than childhood fears;
The Lame, the Blind, and, far the happiest they!
The moping idiot and the Madman gay.
Here too the Sick their final doom receive,
Here brought, amid the scenes of grief, to grieve,
Where the loud groans from some sad chamber flow,
Mixt with the clamours of the crowd below;
Here sorrowing, they each kindred sorrow scan,
And the cold charities of man to man:
Whose laws indeed for ruin'd Age provide,
And strong compulsion plucks the scrap from pride;
But still that scrap is bought with many a sigh,
And pride embitters what it can't deny.'(76*)

A good example of this mixture of young and old, virtuous and vicious, whole and sick, sane and mad, is given in Eden's catalogue of the inmates of Epsom Workhouse in January 1796.(77*) There were eleven men, sixteen women, and twenty-three children. We read of J. H., aged forty-three, 'always... somewhat of an idiot, he is now become quite a driveller;' of E. E., aged sixty-two, 'of a sluggish, stupid character;' of A. M., aged twenty-six, 'afflicted with a leprosy;' of R. M., aged seventy-seven, 'worn out and paralytic;' of J. R., aged seventeen, who has contracted so many disorderly habits that decent people will not employ him. It is interesting to notice that it was not till 1790 that the Justices of the Peace were given any power of inspecting workhouses.

In 1796, before Pitt's scheme was brought in, the Act of 1722, which had been introduced to stiffen the administration of the Poor Laws, was relaxed. An Act,(78*) of which Sir William Young was the author, abolished the restriction of right to relief to persons willing to enter the workhouse, and provided that claimants could apply for relief directly to a magistrate. The Act declares that the restrictions had been found 'inconvenient and oppressive.' It is evidence, of course, of the increasing pressure of poverty.

But to understand the arrangements in force at this time, and also the later developments, we must glance at another feature of the Poor Law system. The Poor Laws were a system of employment as well as a system of relief. The Acts before 1722 are all called Acts for the Relief of the Poor: the Act of 1722 speaks of 'the Settlement, Employment and Relief.' That Act empowered parishes to farm out the poor to an employer. Gilbert's Act of 1782 provided that in the parishes incorporated under that Act the guardians were not to send able-bodied poor to the poorhouse, but to find work for them or maintain them until work was found: the guardian was to take the wage and provide the labourer with a maintenance. Thus there grew up a variety of systems of public employment: direct employment of paupers on parish work: the labour rate system, or the sharing out of the paupers among the ratepayers: the roundsman system by which pauper labour was sold to the farmers.(79*)

This was the state of things that Pitt proposed to reform. His general ideas on the subject were put before the House of Commons in the debate on the second reading of Whitbread's Bill.(80*) He thought that persons with large families should be treated as entitled to relief, that persons without a settlement, falling into want, should not be liable to removal at the caprice of the parish officer, that Friendly Societies should be encouraged, and that Schools of Industry should be established. 'If any one would take the trouble to compute the amount of all the earnings of the children who are already educated in this manner, he would be surprised, when he came to consider the weight which their support by their own labours took off the country, and the addition which, by the fruits of their toil, and the habits to which they were formed, was made to its internal opulence.' On 22nd December of that year, in a new Parliament, he asked for leave to bring in a Bill for the better Support and Maintenance of the Poor. He said the subject was too extensive to be discussed at that stage, that he only proposed that the Bill should be read a first and second time and sent to a committee where the blanks could be filled up, and the Bill printed before the holidays, 'in order that during the interval of Parliament it might be circulated in the country and undergo the most serious investigation.'(81*) Sheridan hinted that it was unfortunate for the poor that Pitt had taken the question out of Whitbread's hands, to which Pitt replied that any delay in bringing forward his Bill was due to the time spent on taking advice. On 28th February of the next year (1797), while strangers were excluded from the Gallery, there occurred what the Parliamentary Register calls 'a conversation upon the farther consideration of the report of the Poor's Bill,' in which nobody but Pitt defended the Bill, and Sheridan and Joliffe attacked it. With this its Parliamentary history ends.

The main features of the Bill were these.(82*) Schools of Industry were to be established in every parish or group of parishes. These schools were to serve two purposes. First, the young were to be trained there (this idea came, of course, from Locke). Every poor man with more than two children who were not self-supporting, and every widow with more than one such child, was to be entitled to a weekly allowance in respect of each extra child. Every allowance child who was five years or over was to be sent to the School of Industry, unless his parent could instruct and employ him, and the proceeds of his work was to go towards the upkeep of the school. Secondly, grown-up people were to be employed there. The authorities were to provide 'a proper stock of hemp, flax, silk, cotton, wool, iron, leather or other materials, and also proper tools and implements for the employment of the poor,' and they were empowered to carry on all trades under this Act, 'any law or custom to the contrary notwithstanding.' Any person lawfully settled in a parish was entitled to be employed in the school; any person residing in a parish, able and willing to be employed at the usual rates, was entitled to be employed there when out of work. Poor persons refusing to be employed there were not to be entitled to relief. The authorities might either pay wages at a rate fixed by the magistrates, or they might let the employed sell their products and merely repay the school for the material, or they might contract to feed them and take a proportion of their receipts. If the wages paid in the school were insufficient, they were to be supplemented out of the rates.

The proposals for outside relief were briefly and chiefly these. A person unable to earn the full rate of wages usually given might contract with his employer to work at an inferior rate, and have the balance between his earnings and an adequate maintenance made up by the parish. Money might be advanced under certain circumstances for the purchase of a cow or other animal, if it seemed likely that such a course would enable the recipient to maintain himself without the help of the parish. The possession of property up to thirty pounds was not to disqualify a person for relief. A parochial insurance fund was to be created, partly from private subscriptions and partly from the rates. No person was to be removed from a parish on account of relief for temporary disability or sickness.

The most celebrated and deadly criticism came from Bentham, who is often supposed to have killed the Bill. Some of his objections are captious and eristical, and he is a good deal less than just to the good elements of the scheme. Pitt deserves credit for one statesmanlike discovery, the discovery that it is bad policy to refuse to help a man until he is ruined. His cow-money proposal was also conceived in the right spirit if its form was impracticable. But the scheme as a whole was confused and incoherent, and it deserved the treatment it received. It was in truth a huge patchwork, on which the ideas of living and dead reformers were thrown together without order or plan. As a consequence, its various parts did not agree. It is surprising that the politician who had attacked Whitbread's Bill as an interference with wages could have included in his scheme the proposal to pay wages in part out of rates. The whole scheme, though it would have involved a great expenditure, would have produced very much the same result as the Speenhamland system, by virtue of this clause. Pitt showed no more judgment or foresight than the least enlightened of County Justices in introducing into a scheme for prodding relief, and dealing with unemployment, a proposal that could only have the effect of reducing wages. The organisation of Schools of Industry as a means of dealing with unemployment has sometimes been represented as quite a new proposal, but it was probably based on the suggestion made by Fielding in 1753 in his paper, 'A proposal for making an effectual provision for the poor, for amending their morals, and for rendering them useful members of society.' Fielding proposed the erection of a county workhouse, which was to include a house of correction. He drew up a sharp and drastic code which would have authorised the committal to his County House, not only of vagrants, but of persons of low degree found harbouring in an ale-house after ten o'clock at night. But the workhouse was not merely to be used as a penal settlement, it was to find work for the unemployed. Any person who was unable to find employment in his parish could apply to the minister or churchwardens for a pass, and this pass was to give him the right to claim admission to the County House where he was to be employed. The County House was also to be prodded with instructors who could teach native and foreign manufactures to the inmates. Howlett, one of Pitt's critics, was probably right in thinking that Pitt was reviving this scheme.

The Bill excited general opposition. Bentham's analysis is the most famous of the criticisms that have survived, but in some senses his opposition was less serious than the dismay of magistrates and ratepayers. Hostile petitions poured into the House of Commons from London and from all parts of the country; among others there were petitions from Shrewsbury, Oswestry, Worcester, Bristol, Lincoln, Carmarthen, Bedford, Chester and Godalming.(83*) Howlett attacked the scheme on the ground of the danger of parish robbery and corruption. Pitt apparently made no attempt to defend his plan, and he surrendered it without a murmur. We are thus left in the curious and disappointing position of having before us a Bill on the most important subject of the day, introduced and abandoned by the Prime Minister without a word or syllable in its defence. Whitbread observed(84*) four years later that the Bill was brought in and printed, but never brought under the discussion of the House. Pitt's excuse is significant: 'He was, as formerly, convinced of its propriety; but many objections had been started to it by those whose opinion he was bound to respect. Inexperienced himself in country affairs, and in

the condition of the poor, he was diffident of his own opinion, and would not press the measure upon the attention of the House.'

Poor Law Reform was thus abandoned, but two attempts were made, at the instance of Pitt, one of them with success, to soften the brutalities of the Law of Settlement. Neither proposal made it any easier to gain a settlement, and Pitt very properly declared that they did not go nearly far enough. Pitt had all Adam Smith's just hatred of these restrictions, and in opposing Whitbread's Bill for a minimum wage he pointed to 'a radical amendment' of the Law of Settlement as the true remedy. He was not the formal author of the Act of 1795, but it may safely be assumed that he was the chief power behind it. This Act(85*) provided that nobody was to be removeable until he or she became actually chargeable to the parish. The preamble throws light on the working of the Settlement laws. It declares that 'Many industrious poor persons, chargeable to the parish, township, or place where they live, merely from want of work there, would in any other place where sufficient employment is to be had, maintain themselves and families without being burthensome to any parish, township, or place; and such poor persons are for the most part compelled to live in their own parishes, townships, or places, and are not permitted to inhabit elsewhere, under pretence that they are likely to become chargeable to the parish, township, or place into which they go for the purpose of getting employment, although the labour of such poor persons might, in many instances, be very beneficial to such parish, township, or place.' The granting of certificates is thus admitted to have been ineffectual. The same Act provided that orders of removal were to be suspended in cases where the pauper was dangerously ill, a provision that throws some light on the manner in which these orders had been executed, and that no person should gain a settlement by paying levies or taxes, in respect of any tenement of a yearly value of less than ten pounds .(86*)

From this time certificates were unnecessary, and if a labourer moved from Parish A to Parish B he was no longer liable to be sent back at the caprice of Parish B's officers until he became actually chargeable, but, of course, if from any cause he fell into temporary distress, for example, if he were out of work for a few weeks, unless he could get private aid from 'the opulent,' he had to return to his old parish. An attempt was made to remedy this state of things by Mr. Baker who, in March 1800, introduced a Bill(87*) to enable overseers to assist the deserving but unsettled poor in cases of temporary distress. He explained that the provisions of the Bill would apply only to men who could usually keep themselves, but from the high cost of provisions had to depend on parochial aid. He found a powerful supporter in Pitt, who argued that if people had enriched a parish with their industry, it was unfair that owing to temporary pressure they should be removed to a place where they were not wanted, and that it was better for a parish to suffer temporary inconvenience than for numbers of industrious men to be rendered unhappy and useless. But in spite of Pitt's unanswerable case, the Bill, which was denounced by Mr. Buxton as oppressive to the landed interest, by Lord Sheffield as 'subversive of the whole economy of the country,' by Mr. Ellison as submerging the middle ranks, and by Sir William Pulteney as being a 'premium for idleness and extravagance,' was rejected by thirty votes to twenty-three.(88*)

ALLOTMENTS.

Another policy that was pressed upon the governing class was the policy of restoring to the labourer some of the resources he had lost with enclosure, of putting him in such a position that he was not obliged to depend entirely on the purchasing power of his wages at the shop. This was the aim of the allotment movement. The propaganda failed, but it did not fail for the want of vigorous and authoritative support. We have seen in a previous chapter that Arthur Young awoke in 1801 to the social mischief of depriving the poor of their land and their cows, and that he wanted future Enclosure Acts to be juster and more humane. Cobbett suggested a large scheme of agrarian settlement to Windham in 1806. These proposals had been

anticipated by Davies, whose knowledge of the actual life of the poor made him understand the important difference between a total and a partial dependence on wages. 'Hope is a cordial, of which the poor man has especially much need, to cheer his heart in the toilsome journey through life. And the fatal consequence of that policy, which deprives labouring people of the expectation of possessing any property in the soil, must be the extinction of every generous principle in their minds.... No gentleman should be permitted to pull down a cottage, until he had first erected another, upon one of Mr. Kent's plans, either on some convenient part of the waste, or on his own estate, with a certain quantity of land annexed.' He praised the Act of Elizabeth which forbade the erection of cottages with less than four acres of land around them, 'that poor people might secure for themselves a maintenance, and not be obliged on the loss of a few days labour to come to the parish,'(89*) and urged that this prohibition, which had been repealed in 1775,(90*) should be set up again.

The general policy of providing allotments was never tried, but we know something of individual experiments from the Reports of the Society for Bettering the Condition and Increasing the Comforts of the Poor. This society took up the cause of allotments very zealously, and most of the examples of private benevolence seem to have found their way into the pages of its reports.

These experiments were not very numerous. Indeed, the name of Lord Winchilsea recurs so inevitably in every allusion to the subject as to create a suspicion that the movement and his estates were coextensive. This is not the truth, but it is not very wide of the truth, for though Lord Winchilsea had imitators, those imitators were few. The fullest account of his estate in Rutlandshire is given by Sir Thomas Bernard.(91*) The estate embraced four parishes Hambleton, Eggleton, Greetham, and Burley on the Hill. The tenants included eighty cottagers possessing one hundred and seventy-four cows. 'About a third part have all their land in severalty; the rest of them have the use of a cow-pasture in common with others; most of them possessing a small homestead, adjoining to their cottage; every one of them having a good garden, and keeping one pig at least, if not more.... Of all the rents of the estate, none are more punctually paid than those for the cottagers' land.' In this happy district if a man seemed likely to become a burden on the parish his landlord and neighbours saved the man's self-respect and their own pockets as ratepayers, by setting him up with land and a cow instead. So far from neglecting their work as labourers, these proprietors of cows are described as 'most steady and trusty.' We have a picture of this little community leading a hard but energetic and independent life, the men going out to daily work, but busy in their spare hours with their cows, sheep, pigs, and gardens; the women and children looking after the live stock, spinning, or working in the gardens: a very different picture from that of the landless and ill-fed labourers elsewhere.

Other landlords, who, acting on their own initiative, or at the instance of their agents, helped their cottagers by letting them land on which to keep cows were Lord Carrington and Lord Scarborough in Lincolnshire, and Lord Egremont on his Yorkshire estates (Kent was his agent). Some who were friendly to the allotments movement thought it a mistake to give allotments of arable land in districts where pasture land was not available. Mr. Thompson, who writes the account of Lord Carrington's cottagers with cows, thought that 'where cottagers occupy arable land, it is very rarely of advantage to them, and generally a prejudice to the estate.'(92*) He seems, however, to have been thinking more of small holdings than of allotments. 'The late Abel Smith, Esq., from motives of kindness to several cottagers on his estates in Nottinghamshire, let to each of them a small piece of arable land. I have rode over that estate with Lord Carrington several times since it descended to him, and I have invariably observed that the tenants upon it, who occupy only eight or ten acres of arable land, are poor, and their land in bad condition. They would thrive more and enjoy greater comfort with the means of keeping two or three cows each than with three times their present quantity of arable land; but it would

be a greater mortification to them to be deprived of it than their landlord is disposed to inflict.'(93*) On the other hand, a striking instance of successful arable allotments is described by a Mr. Estcourt in the Reports of the Society for Bettering the Condition of the Poor.(94*) The scene was the parish of Long Newnton in Wilts, which contained one hundred and forty poor persons, chiefly agricultural labourers, distributed in thirty-two families, and the year was 1800. The price of provisions was very high, and 'though all had a very liberal allowance from the poor rate, the whole village was plunged in debt and misery. From this hopeless plight the parish was rescued by an allotment scheme that Mr. Estcourt established and described. Each cottager who applied was allowed to rent a small quantity of land at the rate of £1, 12s. an acre(95*) on a fourteen years' lease: the quantity of land let to an applicant depended on the number in his family, with a maximum of one and a half acres: the tenant was to forfeit his holding if he received poor relief other than medical relief. The offer was greedily accepted, two widows with large families and four very old and infirm persons being the only persons who did not apply for a lease. A loan of £44 was divided among the tenants to free them from their debts and give them a fresh start. They were allowed a third of their plot on Lady Day 1801, a second third on Lady Day 1802, and the remainder on Lady Day 1803. The results as recorded in 1805 were astonishing. None of the tenants had received any poor relief: all the conditions had been observed: the loan of £44 had long been repaid and the poor rate had fallen from £212, 16s. to £12, 6s. 'They are so much beforehand with the world that it is supposed that it must be some calamity still more severe than any they have ever been afflicted with that could put them under the necessity of ever applying for relief to the parish again.... The farmers of this parish allow that they never had their work better done, their servants more able, willing, civil, and sober, and that their property was never so free from depredation as at present.'(96*)

Some philanthropists, full of the advantages to the poor of possessing live-stock, argued that it was a good thing for cottagers to keep cows even in arable districts. Sir Henry Vavasour wrote an account in 1801(97*) of one of his cottagers who managed to keep two cows and two pigs and make a profit of £30 a year on three acres three perches of arable with a summer's gait for one of his cows. The man, his wife, and his daughter of twelve worked on the land in their spare hours. The Board of Agriculture offered gold medals in 1801 for the best report of how to keep one or two cows on arable land, and Sir John Sinclair wrote an essay on the subject, reproduced in the account of 'Useful Projects' in the *Annual Register*.(98*) Sir John Sinclair urged that if the system was generally adopted it would remove the popular objections to enclosure.

Other advocates of the policy of giving the labourers land pleaded only for gardens in arable districts; 'a garden,' wrote Lord Winchilsea, 'may be allotted to them in almost every situation, and will be found of infinite use to them. In countries, where it has never been the custom for labourers to keep cows, it may be difficult to introduce it; but where no gardens have been annexed to the cottages, it is sufficient to give the ground, and the labourer is sure to know what to do with it, and will reap an immediate benefit from it. Of this I have had experience in several places, particularly in two parishes near Newport Pagnell, Bucks, where there never have been any gardens annexed to the labourers' houses, and where, upon land being allotted to them, they all, without a single exception, have cultivated their gardens extremely well, and profess receiving the greatest benefits from them.'(99*) 'A few roods of land, at a fair rent,' wrote a correspondent in the *Annals of Agriculture* in 1796,(100*) 'would do a labourer as much good as wages almost doubled: there would not, then, be an idle hand in his family, and the man himself would often go to work in his root yard instead of going to the ale house.'(101*) The interesting report on the 'Inquiry into the General State of the Poor' presented at the Epiphany General Quarter Sessions for Hampshire and published in the *Annals of Agriculture*.(102*) a document which does not display too much indulgence to the shortcomings of labourers, recommends the multiplication of cottages with small pieces of ground annexed, so that labourers might live nearer their work, and spend the time often wasted in going to and from

their work, in cultivating their plot of ground at home. 'As it is chiefly this practice which renders even the state of slavery in the West Indies tolerable, what an advantage would it be to the state of free service here!'(103*)

The experiments in the provision of allotments of any kind were few, and they are chiefly interesting for the light they reflect on the character of the labourer of the period. They show of what those men and women were capable whose degradation in the morass of the Speenhamland system is the last and blackest page in the history of the eighteenth century. Their rulers put a stone round their necks, and it was not their character but their circumstances that dragged them into the mire. In villages where allotments were tried the agricultural labourer is an upright and self-respecting figure. The immediate moral effects were visible enough at the time. Sir Thomas Bernard's account of the cottagers on Lord Winchilsea's estate contains the following reflections: 'I do not mean to assert that the English cottager, narrowed as he now is in the means and habits of life, may be immediately capable of taking that active and useful station in society, that is filled by those who are the subject of this paper. To produce so great an improvement in character and circumstances of life, will require time and attention. The cottager, however, of this part of the county of Rutland, is not of a different species from other English cottagers; and if he had not been protected and encouraged by his landlord, he would have been the same hopeless and comfortless creature that we see in some other parts of England. The farmer (with the assistance of the steward) would have taken his land; the creditor, his cow and pig; and the workhouse, his family.'(104*)

We have seen, in discussing enclosures, that the policy of securing allotments to the labourers in enclosure Acts was defeated by the class interests of the landlords. Why, it may be asked, were schemes such as those of Lord Winchilsea's adopted so rarely in villages already enclosed? These arrangements benefited all parties. There was no doubt about the demand; 'in the greatest part of this kingdom,' wrote one correspondent, 'the cottager would rejoice at being permitted to pay the utmost value given by the farmers, for as much land as would keep a cow, if he could obtain it at that price.'(105*) The steadiness and industry of the labourers, stimulated by this incentive, were an advantage both to the landlords and to the farmers. Further, it was well known that in the villages where the labourers had land, poor rates were light.(106*) Why was it that a policy with so many recommendations never took root? Perhaps the best answer is given in the following story. Cobbett proposed to the vestry of Bishops Walthams that they should 'ask the Bishop of Winchester to grant an acre of waste land to every married labourer. All, however, but the village schoolmaster voted against it, on the ground... that it would make the men "too saucy," that they would "breed more children" and "want higher wages."'(107*)

The truth is that enclosures and the new system of farming had set up two classes in antagonism to allotments, the large farmer, who disliked saucy labourers, and the shopkeeper, who knew that the more food the labourer raised on his little estate the less would he buy at the village store. It had been to the interest of a small farmer in the old common-field village to have a number of semi-labourers, semi-owners who could help at the harvest: the large farmer wanted a permanent supply of labour which was absolutely at his command. Moreover, the roundsman system maintained his labourers for him when he did not want them. The strength of the hostility of the farmers to allotments is seen in the language of those few landlords who were interested in this policy. Lord Winchilsea and his friends were always urging philanthropists to proceed with caution, and to try to reason the farmers out of their prejudices. The Report of the Poor Law Commission in 1834 showed that these prejudices were as strong as ever. 'We can do little or nothing to prevent pauperism; the farmers will have it: they prefer that the labourers should be slaves; they object to their having gardens, saying 'The more they work for themselves, the less they work for us.'(108*) This was the view of Boys, the writer in agricultural subjects, who, criticising Kent's declaration in favour of allotments,

remarks: 'If farmers in general were to accommodate their labourers with two acres of land, a cow and two or three pigs, they would probably have more difficulty in getting their hard work done -- as the cow, land, etc., would enable them to live with less earnings.'(109*) Arthur Young and Nathaniel Kent made a great appeal to landlords and to landlords' wives to interest themselves in their estates and the people who lived on them, but landlords' bailiffs did not like the trouble of collecting a number of small rents, and most landlords preferred to leave their labourers to the mercy of the farmers. There was, however, one form of allotment that the farmers themselves liked: they would let strips of potato ground to labourers, sometimes at four times the rent they paid themselves, getting the land manured and dug into the bargain.(110*)

The Select Vestry Act of 1819(111*) empowered parishes to buy or lease twenty acres of land, and to set the indigent poor to work on it, or to lease it out to any poor and industrious inhabitant. A later Act of 1831(112*) raised the limit from twenty to fifty acres, and empowered parishes to enclose fifty acres of waste (with the consent of those who had rights on it) and to lease it out for the same purposes. Little use was made of these Acts, and perhaps the clearest light is thrown on the extent of the allotment movement by a significant sentence that occurs in the Report of the Select Committee on Allotments in 1843. 'It was not until 1830, when discontent had been so painfully exhibited amongst the peasantry of the southern counties that this method of alleviating their situation was much resorted to.' In other words, little was done till labourers desperate with hunger had set the farmers' ricks blazing.

THE REMEDY ADOPTED. SPEENHAMLAND

The history has now been given of the several proposals made at this time that for one reason or another fell to the ground. A minimum wage was not fixed, allotments were only sprinkled with a sparing hand on an estate here and there, there was no revolution in diet, the problems of local supply and distribution were left untouched, the reconstruction of the Poor Law was abandoned. What means then did the governing class take to tranquillise a population made dangerous by hunger? The answer is, of course, the Speenhamland Act. The Berkshire J.P.'s and some discreet persons met at the Pelican Inn at Speenhamland(113*) on 6th May 1795, and there resolved on a momentous policy which was gradually adopted in almost every part of England.

There is a strange irony in the story of this meeting which gave such a fatal impetus to the reduction of wages. It was summoned in order to raise wages, and so make the labourer independent of parish relief. At the General Quarter Sessions for Berkshire held at Newbury on the 14th April, Charles Dundas, M.P.,(114*) in his charge to the Grand Jury(115*) dwelt on the miserable state of the labourers and the necessity of increasing their wages to subsistence level, instead of leaving them to resort to the parish officers for support for their families, as was the case when they worked for a shilling a day. He quoted the Acts of Elizabeth and James with reference to the fixing of wages. The Court, impressed by his speech, decided to convene a meeting for the rating of wages. The advertisement of the meeting shows that this was the only object in view. 'At the General Quarter Sessions of the Peace for this county held at Newbury, on Tuesday, the 14th instant, the Court, having taken into consideration the great Inequality of Labourers' Wages, and the insufficiency of the same for the necessary support of an industrious man and his family; and it being the opinion of the Gentlemen assembled on the Grand Jury, that many parishes have not advanced their labourers' weekly pay in proportion to the high price of corn and provisions, do (in pursuance of the Acts of Parliament, enabling and requiring them so to do, either at the Easter Sessions, yearly, or within six weeks next after) earnestly request the attendance of the Sheriff, and all the Magistrates of this County, at a Meeting intended to be held at the Pelican Inn in Speenhamland, on Wednesday, the sixth day of May next, at ten o'clock in the forenoon, for the purpose of consulting together with such

discreet persons as they shall think meet, and they will then, having respect to the plenty and scarcity of the time, and other circumstances (if approved of) proceed to limit, direct, and appoint the wages of day labourers.'(116*)

The meeting was duly held on 6th May.(117*) Mr. Charles Dundas was in the chair, and there were seventeen other magistrates and discreet persons present, of whom seven were clergymen. It was resolved unanimously 'that the present state of the poor does require further assistance than has been generally given them.' Of the details of the discussion no records have come down to us, nor do we know by what majority the second and fatal resolution rejecting the rating of wages and substituting an allowance policy was adopted. According to Eden, the arguments in favour of adopting the rating of wages were 'that by enforcing a payment for labour, from the employers, in proportion to the price of bread, some encouragement would have been held out to the labourer, as what he would have received, would have been payment for labour. He would have considered it as his right, and not as charity.'(118*) But these arguments were rejected, and a pious recommendation to employers to raise wages, coupled with detailed directions for supplementing those wages from parish funds, adopted instead.(119*) The text of the second resolution runs thus: 'Resolved, that it is not expedient for the Magistrates to grant that assistance by regulating the wages of day Labourers according to the directions of the Statutes of the 5th Elizabeth and 1st James: But the Magistrates very earnestly recommend to the Farmers and others throughout the county to increase the Pay of their Labourers in proportion to the present Price of Provisions; and agreeable thereto the Magistrates now present have unanimously Resolved, That they will in their several divisions, make the following calculations and allowances for the relief of all poor and industrious men and their families, who, to the satisfaction of the Justices of their parish, shall endeavour (as far as they can), for their own support and maintenance, that is to say, when the gallon loaf of second flour, weighing 8 lbs. 11 oz. shall cost one shilling, then every poor and industrious man shall have for his own support 3s. weekly, either produced by his own or his family's labour or an allowance from the poor rates, and for the support of his wife and every other of his family 1s. 6d. When the gallon loaf shall cost 1s. 4d., then every poor and industrious man shall have 4s. weekly for his own, and 1s. 10d: for the support of every other of his family.

'And so in proportion as the price of bread rises or falls (that is to say), 3d. to the man and 1d. to every other of the family, on every penny which the loaf rises above a shilling.'

In other words, it was estimated that the man must have three gallon loaves a week, and his wife and each child one and a half.

It is interesting to notice that at this same famous Speenhamland meeting the justices 'wishing, as much as possible, to alleviate the distresses of the Poor with as little burthen on the occupiers of the Land as possible' recommended overseers to cultivate land for potatoes and to give the workers a quarter of the crop, selling the rest at one shilling a bushel; overseers were also recommended to purchase fuel and to retail it at a loss.

The Speenhamland policy was not a full-blown invention of that unhappy May morning in the Pelican Inn. The principle had already been adopted elsewhere. At the Oxford quarter Sessions on 13th January 1795, the justices had resolved that the following incomes were 'absolutely necessary for the support of the poor, industrious labourer, and that when the utmost industry of a family cannot produce the undermentioned sums, it must be made up by the overseer, exclusive of rent, viz.: --

'A single Man according to his labour.

'A Man and his Wife not less than 6s. a week.

'A Man and his Wife with one or two Small Children, not less than 7s. a week.

'And for every additional Child not less than 1s. a week.' This regulation was to be sent to all overseers within the county.(120*)

But the Speenhamland magistrates had drawn up a table which became a convenient standard, and other magistrates found it the simplest course to accept the table as it stood. The tables passed rapidly from county to county. The allowance system spread like a fever, for while it is true to say that the northern counties took it much later and in a milder form, there were only two counties still free from it in 1834 -- Northumberland and Durham.

To complete our picture of the new system we must remember the results of Gilbert's Act. It had been the practice in those parishes that adopted the Act to reserve the workhouse for the infirm and to find work outside for the unemployed, the parish receiving the wages of such employment and providing maintenance. This outside employment had spread to other parishes, and the way in which it had been worked may be illustrated by cases mentioned by Eden, writing in the summer and autumn of 1795. At Kibworth-Beauchamp in Leicestershire, 'in the winter, and at other times, when a man is out of work, he applies to the overseer, who sends him from house to house to get employ: the housekeeper, who employs him, is obliged to give him victuals, and 6d.; a day and the parish adds 4d.; (total 10d. a day;) for the support of his family: persons working in this manner are called rounds-men, from their going round the village or township for employ.'(121*) At Yardley Goben, in Northamptonshire, every person who paid more than £20 rent was bound in his turn to employ a man for a day and to pay him a shilling.(122*) At Maids Morton the roundsman got 6d. from the employer and 6d. or 9d. from the parish.(123*) At Winslow in Bucks the system was more fully developed. 'There seems to be here a great want of employment: most labourers are (as it is termed,) on the Rounds; that is, they go to work from one house to another round the parish. In winter, sometimes 40 persons are on the rounds. They are wholly paid by the parish, unless the householders choose to employ them; and from these circumstances, labourers often become very lazy, and imperious. Children, about ten years old, are put on the rounds, and receive from the parish from 1s. 6d. to 3s. a week.'(124*) The Speenhamland systematised scale was easily grafted on to these arrangements. 'During the late dear season, the Poor of the parish went in a body to the Justices, to complain of their want of bread. The Magistrates sent orders to the parish officers to raise the earnings of labourers, to certain weekly sums, according to the number of their children; a circumstance that should invariably be attended to in apportioning parochial relief. These sums were from 7s. to 19s.; and were to be reduced, proportionably with the price of bread.'(125*)

The Speenhamland system did not then spring Athene-like out of the heads of the justices and other discreet persons whose place of meeting has given the system its name. Neither was the unemployment policy thereafter adopted a sudden inspiration of the Parliament of 1796. The importance of these years is that though the governing classes did not then introduce a new principle, they applied to the normal case methods of relief and treatment that had hitherto been reserved for the exceptions. The Poor Law which had once been the hospital became now the prison of the poor. Designed to relieve his necessities, it was now his bondage. If a labourer was in private employment, the difference between the wage his master chose to give him and the recognised minimum was made up by the parish. Those labourers who could not find private employment were either shared out among the ratepayers, or else their labour was sold by the parish to employers, at a low rate, the parish contributing what was needed to bring the labourers' receipts up to scale. Crabbe has described the roundsman system:

'Alternate Masters now their Slave command,
Urge the weak efforts of his feeble hand,

And when his age attempts its task in vain,
With ruthless taunts, of lazy poor complain.'(126*)

The meshes of the Poor Law were spread over the entire labour system. The labourers, stripped of their ancient rights and their ancient possessions, refused a minimum wage and allotments, were given instead a universal system of pauperism. This was the basis on which the governing class rebuilt the English village. Many critics, Arthur Young and Malthus among them, assailed it, but it endured for forty years, and it was not disestablished until Parliament itself had passed through a revolution.

NOTES:

1. Eden, vol. i, p. 495.
2. Resolution of Privy Council, July 6, 1795, and Debate and Resolution in House of Commons. *Parliamentary Register*, December 11, 1795, and Lord Sheffield in *Annals of Agriculture*, vol. xxv, p. 31.
3. See *Senator* for March 1, 1796, p. 1147.
4. See Wilberforce's speech, *Parliamentary Register* and *Senator*, February 18, 1800.
5. Eden, vol. ii, pp. 104-6.
6. *Ibid*, p. 15.
7. *Ibid*, p. 280.
8. *Ibid*, p. 426.
9. See *Annals of Agriculture*, vol. xxiv, pp. 63, 171, 177, 204, 285, 316, etc.
10. *Annals of Agriculture*, vol. xxv, p. 678.
11. Eden, vol. i, p. 533.
12. Perhaps the unpopularity of soup is partly explained by a letter published in the *Annals of Agriculture* in December 1795, vol. xxvi, p. 215. The writer says it is the custom for most families in the country 'to give their poor neighbours the pot liquor, that is, the liquor in which any meat has been boiled, and to which they sometimes add the broken bread from the parlour and kitchen tables: this,' he adds, 'makes but an indifferent mess.' The publications of the time contain numerous recipes for cheap soups; 'the power of giving an increased effect to Christian benevolence by these soups' (*Reports on Poor*, vol i, p. 167) was eagerly welcomed. Cf. Mrs. Shore's account of stewed ox's head for the poor, according to which, at the cost of 2s. 6d. with the leavings of the family, a savoury mess for fifty-two persons could be prepared (*Ibid.*, p. 60).
13. Davies, pp. 31-2.
14. *Annals of Agriculture*, vol. xxv, p. 455.
15. *Parliamentary Register*, November 2, 1795.

16. Eden, vol. iii, p. 769.
17. Ibid, vol. ii, p. 97.
18. Ibid, p. 621.
19. Ibid, p. 645.
20. In many budgets no milk is included.
21. *Reports on Poor*, vol. iv, p. 151.
22. Davies, p. 104.
23. *Reports on Poor*, vol. ii, p. 178.
24. Vol. ii, p. 587.
25. *Reports on Poor*, vol. i, p. 134; another reason for the dearth of milk was the growing consumption of veal in the towns. Davies says (p. 19). 'Suckling is here so profitable (to furnish veal for London) that the poor can seldom either buy or beg milk.'
26. p. 27.
27. See *Annals of Agriculture*, vol. xxv, pp. 367-8.
28. Davies, p. 37.
29. Ibid, p. 39.
30. *Annals of Agriculture*, vol. xxvi, p. 121.
31. The dearness of malt was another fact which helped the introduction of tea. Cf. Davies, p. 38: 'Time was when small beer was reckoned one of the necessaries of life, even in poor families.'
32. Lecky, *History of England in Eighteenth Century*, vol. ii, p. 318.
33. In connection with the dearth of milk it is important to notice the rise in the price of cheese. 'Poor people,' says Davies (p. 19), 'reckon cheese the dearest article they can use' (cf. also p. 143), and in his comparison of prices in the middle of the eighteenth century with those of 1787-94 he gives the price of 112 lbs. of cheese at Reading Fair as from 17s. to 21s. in the first period, and 40s. to 46s. in the second. Retail cheese of an inferior sort had risen from 2 1/2 d. or 3d. a lb. to 4 1/2 d. or 5d. (p. 65); cf. also correspondent in *Annals of Agriculture*, vol. ii, p. 442. 'Every inhabitant of Bath must be sensible that butter and cheese have risen in price one-third, or more, within these twenty years.' (Written in 1784).
34. *Reports on Poor*, vol. i, p. 129.
35. Ibid, vol. iii, p. 78.
36. *Annual Register*, 1806, p. 974; 'My local situation afforded me ample means of knowing how greatly the lower orders suffered from being unable to procure a supply of milk; and I am

fully persuaded of the correctness of the statement that the labouring poor lose a number of their children from the want of food so pre-eminently adapted to the their support;' cf. also Curwen's *Hints*.

37. Eden, vol. i, p. 510.

38. Vol. iii, p. 96.

39. Eden, vol. iii, p. 694.

40. Cf., *Reports on Poor*, vol. i, p. 43; 'Where there are commons, the ideal advantage of cutting flags, peat, or whins, often causes a poor man to spend more time in procuring such fuel, than, if he reckoned his labour, would purchase for him double the quantity of good firing.'

41. Vol. iv, p. 496.

42. Vol. ii, p. 587.

43. Davies, p. 28.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 118.

45. Eden, vol. iii, p. 805.

46. p. 179.

47. Cf. also Eden's description of a labourer's expenses, vol. iii, p. 797, where he says that whilst hedging and ditching, they are allowed to take home a faggot every evening, whilst the work lasts, 'but this is by no means sufficient for his consumption; his children, therefore, are sent into the fields, to collect wood where they can; and neither hedges nor trees are spared by the young marauders, who are thus, in some degree, educated in the art of thieving.'

48. Vol. ii, p. 231.

49. Cf. also for the difficulties of the poor in getting fuel, the account by the Rev. Dr. Glasse; *Reports on Poor*, vol. i, p. 58. 'Having long observed, that there is scarcely any article of life, in respect to which the poor are under greater difficulties, or for the supply of which they have stronger temptations to dishonest practices, than that of fuel,' he laid up in summer a store of coals in Greenford (Middlesex), and Wanstead, and sold them rather under original cost price, carriage free, in winter. 'The benefit arising from the relief afforded them in this article of coals, is obvious: they are habituated to pay for what they have; whereas at the shop they ran in debt. When their credit was at an end, they contrived to do without coals, by having recourse to wood-stealing; than which I know no practise which tends more effectually to introduce into young minds a habit of dishonesty; it is also very injurious to the farmer, and excites a degree of resentment in his breast, which, in many instances, renders him averse to affording relief to the poor, even when real necessity calls loudly for it.'

50. 20 George, II, c. 19.

51. *Annals of Agriculture*, vol. xxv, p. 305 ff.

52. *Annals of Agriculture*, vol. xxv, p. 298.

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53. *Parliamentary Register*, December 9, 1795.
 54. *Ibid*, February 12, 1796.
 55. *Annals of Agriculture*, vol. xxv. p. 345.
 56. *Ibid*, p. 316.
 57. *An Examination of Mr. Pitt's Speech in the House of Commons*, February 12, 1796.
 58. p. 106 ff.
 59. *Annals of Agriculture*, 1795, vol. xxv., p. 503.
 60. *Parliamentary Debates*.
 61. Printed in *Parliamentary Papers* for 1795-6.
 62. The age was not filled up.
 63. For report of debate see *Parliamentary Register* for that date.
 64. See *Parliamentary Register*.
 65. See *Parliamentary Register*, February 14, 1800.
 66. *Reports on Poor*, vol. v. p. 23.
 67. See p. 179.
 68. *Annals of Agriculture*, vol. xxvi, p. 178.
 69. 22 George III, c. 83.
 70. In 1834 there were 924 comprised in 67 incorporations (Nicholls, vol. ii, p. 91).
 71. 9 George I, c. 7.
 72. Eden, vol. i, p. 269.
 73. E.g., Oxford and Shrewsbury.
 74. There is a significant entry in the *Abstracts of Returns* to the 1775 Poor Relief Committee in reference to the building of that death-trap, the Bulcamp House of Industry. 'In the Expences for Building is included £500 for building a Part which was pulled down by a Mob.'
 75. An Heckingham in Norfolk a putrid fever, in 1774, killed 126 out of 220 inmates (Eden, vol. ii, p. 473, quoting Howlett); cf. also Ruggles, *History of the Poor*, vol. ii, p. 266.
 76. 'The Village,' pp. 16 and 17.
 77. Eden, vol. iii, p. 694 ff.

78. 36 George III, c. 23.

79. The last of these systems had been included in a Bill introduced by Sir William Young in 1788. 'In order to relieve agricultural labourers, who are often, during the winter, out of employment, the vestry in every parish is empowered, by notice affixed to the church door, to settle a rate of wages to be paid to labourers not of employ, from the 30th Nov to the 28th of Feb.; and to distribute and send them round in rotation to the parishioners, proportionally as they pay to the Rates; to be paid by the person employing them two-thirds of the wages so settled, and one-third by the parish-officers out of the Rates.' -- Eden, vol. i, p. 397.

80. *Parliamentary Register*, February 12, 1796.

81. *Ibid.*, December 22, 1796.

82. The Bill is printed in *House of Commons Papers*, 1796. The 'Heads of the Bill' as circulated appear in the *Annals of Agriculture*, vol. xxvi, pp. 260 ff. and 359 ff. Eden gives in the form of Appendices (1) the Heads of the Bill, (2) the Amendments introduced in Committee.

83. *House of Commons Journal*.

84. *Parliamentary Register*, February 11, 1800.

85. 35 George III, c. 101.

86. For Whitbread's proposals to amend the Law of Settlement in 1807 see next chapter. An attempt was made in 1819 (59 George II, c. 50) to define and simplify the conditions under which the hiring of a tenement of £10 annual value conferred the right to a settlement. The term of residence was extended to a year, the nature of the tenement was defined, and it was laid down that the rent must be £10 and paid for a whole year. But so unsuccessful was this piece of legislation that it was found necessary to pass a second Act six years later (1826, 6 George IV, c. 57), and a third Act in 1831 (1 William IV, c. 18).

87. *Senator*, March 1800.

88. See Debates in *Senator*, March 31 and April 3, 1800, and *Parliamentary Register*. Cf. for removals for temporary distress, Sir Thomas Bernard's Charge to Overseers in the Hundred of Stoke. Bucks. *Reports on Poor*, vol. i, p. 260. 'With regard to the removal of labourers belonging to other parishes, consider thoroughly what you may lose, and what the individual may suffer, by the removal, before you apply to us on the subject. Where you have had, for a long time, the benefit of their labour, and where all they want is a little temporary relief, reflect whether, after so many years spent in your service, this is the moment and the cause, for removing them from the scene of their daily labour to a distant parish, etc.' (1798).

89. Davies, pp. 102-4.

90. 15 George III c. 32.

91. *Reports on Poor*, vol. ii, p. 171.

92. *Reports on Poor*, vol. ii, p. 136.

93. *Ibid.*, p. 137.

94. *Ibid*, vol. v, p. 66.

95. Mr. Estcourt mentions that the land 'would let to a farmer at about 20s. per acre now.'

96. It is interesting to find that these allotments were still let out successfully in 1868. See p. 4145 of the *Report on the Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture*, 1868.

97. *Reports on Poor*, vol. iii, p. 329.

98. 1803, p. 850.

99. *Reports on Poor*, vol. i, p. 100.

100. Vol. xxvi, p. 4.

101. The most distinguished advocate of this policy was William Marshall, the agricultural writer who published a strong appeal for the labourers in his book *On the Management of Landed Estates*, 1806, p. 155; cf. also Curween's *Hints*, p. 239; 'A farther attention to the cottager's comfort is attended with little cost; I mean giving him a small garden, and planting that as well as the walls of his house with fruit trees.'

102. Vol. xxv. p. 349.

103. *Ibid.*, p. 358.

104. *Reports on Poor*, vol. ii, p. 184.

105. *Ibid.*, p. 134.

106. Cf. *Poor Law Report*, 1817, Appendix G. p. 4.

107. Capes, *Rural Life in Hampshire*, p. 282.

108. *Poor Law Reports*, 1834, p. 61; cf. *ibid*, p. 185.

109. Notes to Kent's *Norfolk*, p. 178.

110. See *Poor Law Report*, 1834, p. 181, and Allotments Committee, 1843, p. 108.

111. 59 George III, c. 12.

112. 1 and 2 William IV, c. 42.

113. Speenhamland is now part of Newbury. The Pelican Inn has disappeared, but the Pelican Posting House survives.

114. Charles Dundas, afterwards Lord Amesbury, 1751-1832; Liberal, M.P. for Berkshire 1794-1832, nominated by Sheridan for the Speakership in 1802 but withdrew.

115. *Reading Mercury*, April 20, 1795.

116. *Reading Mercury*, April 20, 1795.

117. See *Ibid.*, May 11, 1795.

118. *Eden*, vol. i, p. 578.

119. On the same day a 'respectable meeting' at Basingstoke, with the Mayor in the chair, was advocating the fixing of labourers' wages in accordance with the price of wheat without any reference to parish relief. -- *Reading Mercury*, May 11, 1795.

120. See *Ipswich Journal*, February 7, 1795, and *Reading Mercury*, July 6, 1795.

121. *Eden*, vol. ii, p. 384.

122. *Ibid.*, p. 548.

123. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

124. *Eden*, vol. ii, p. 29.

125. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

126. 'The Village,' Book I.