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REPORT

To the Committee of the Association for the Relief of the Manufacturing and Labouring Poor, referred to the Committee of the House of Commons on the Poor Laws. March, 1817.*

TO THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE POOR LAWS

SIR,

In obedience to the recommendation of the Committee of the Association for the Relief of the Manufacturing and Labouring Poor, I present the accompanying Report to the Committee on the Poor Law.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your most obedient Servant.

ROBERT OWEN

49, Bedford Square, 12th March, 1817

MY LORDS AND GENTLEMEN,

Having been requested by you to draw up a detailed Report of a Plan for the general Relief of the Manufacturing and Labouring Poor, I have the honour to submit the following.

In order to do justice to this interesting subject, it is necessary to trace the operation of those leading causes to which the distress now existing to an unprecedented extent in this country, and in other countries in no very slight degree, is to be ascribed. The evil will be found to flow from a state of things to which society has given birth: a development of this will, therefore, suggest the means of counteracting it.

The immediate cause of the present distress is the depreciation of human labour. This has been occasioned by the general introduction of mechanism into the manufactures of Europe and America, but principally into those of Britain, where the change was greatly accelerated by the inventions of Arkwright and Watt.

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The introduction of mechanism into the manufacture of objects of desire in society reduced their price; the reduction of price increased the demand for them, and generally to so great an extent as to occasion more human labour to be employed after the introduction of machinery than had been employed before.

The first effects of these new mechanical combinations were to increase individual wealth, and to give a new stimulus to further inventions.

Thus one mechanical improvement gave rise to another in rapid succession; and in a few years they were not only generally introduced into the manufactures of

these kingdoms, but were eagerly adopted by other nations of Europe, and by America.

Individual wealth soon advanced to national prosperity, as that term is generally understood; and the country, during a war of twenty-five years, demanding exertion and an amount of expenditure unknown at any former period, attained to a height of political power which confounded its foes and astonished its friends. Both were alike unable to assign the real cause. So steadily, yet rapidly, did our country advance to this envied state, that there appeared to be no limit to its acquirement of riches, and the kind of power which wealth creates. The war itself, when it had extended its ravages over Europe, to Asia, and to America, seemed but a new stimulus to draw forth our exhaustless resources; and in its effects the war did so operate. The destruction of human life in its prime, which it caused throughout the world; and the waste of all the materials necessary for war on so large a scale - perhaps unparalleled in ancient or modem times - created a demand for various productions, which the overstrained industry of British manufacturers, aided by all the mechanism they could invent and bring into action, was hardly competent to supply.

But peace at length followed, and found Great Britain in possession of a new power in constant action, which, it may be safely stated, exceeded the labour of *one hundred millions* of the most industrious human beings, in the full strength of manhood.

(To give an instance of this power, there is machinery at work in one establishment in this country, aided by a population not exceeding 2,500 souls, which produces as much as the existing population of Scotland could manufacture after the mode in common practice fifty years ago! And Great Britain contains several such establishments!)

Thus our country possessed, at the conclusion of the war, a productive power, which operated to the same effect as if her population had been actually increased fifteen or twenty fold; and this had been chiefly created within the preceding twenty-five years. The rapid progress made by Great Britain, during the war, in wealth and political influence, can therefore no longer astonish; the cause was quite adequate to the effect.

Now, however, new circumstances have arisen. The war demand for the productions of labour having ceased, markets could no longer be found for them; and the revenues of the world were inadequate to purchase that which a power so enormous in its effects did produce: a diminished demand consequently followed. When, therefore, it became necessary to contract the sources of supply, it soon proved that mechanical power was much cheaper than human labour; the former, in consequence, was continued at work, while the latter was superseded; and human labour may now be obtained at a price far less than is absolutely necessary for the subsistence of the individual in ordinary comfort.

(Human labour, hitherto the great source of wealth in nations, being thus diminished in value at the rate of not less than from two to three millions sterling per week in Great Britain alone, that sum, or whatever more or less it may be, has consequently been withdrawn from the circulation of the country, and this has necessarily been the means by which the farmer, tradesman, manufacturer, and merchant, have been so greatly impoverished.) A little reflection will show that the working classes have now no adequate means of contending with mechanical power; one of three results must therefore ensue:

1. The use of mechanism must be greatly diminished; or,
2. Millions of human beings must be starved, to permit its existence to the present extent; or,
3. Advantageous occupation must be found for the poor and unemployed working classes, to whose labour mechanism must be rendered subservient, instead of being applied, as at present, to supersede it.

But under the existing commercial system, mechanical power could not in one country be discontinued, and in others remain in action, without ruin to that country in which it should be discontinued. No one nation, therefore, will discontinue it; and although such an act were possible, it would be a sure sign of barbarism in those who should make the attempt. It would, however, be a far more evident sign of barbarism, and an act of gross tyranny, were any government to permit mechanical power to starve millions of human beings. The thought will not admit of one moment's contemplation; it would inevitably create unheard-of misery to all ranks. The last result therefore alone deserves to be considered, which is, `that advantageous occupation must be found for the unemployed working classes, to whose labour mechanism must be rendered subservient, instead of being applied, as at present, to supersede it.'

To conduct a change so important and of such vital necessity to our wellbeing, demands a comprehensive view and an accurate knowledge of the real state of society.

The measure should be well considered with respect to its present bearings and connections, and its consequences traced by minds uninfluenced by prejudices of party or of class.

The circumstances of the times render a change in our internal policy respecting the poor and working classes absolutely necessary; and the first question to be decided by every man of all ranks is, Shall the alteration be made under the guidance of moderation and wisdom, foreseeing, and gradually preparing each step, one regularly after another, thereby preventing a single premature advance - or shall the change be effected by ignorance and prejudice, under the baneful influence of the angry and violent passions? Should these prevail, then will the truly disinterested, those whose ardent wish is to ameliorate the condition of mankind, withdraw from the contest, and society be involved in confusion. But, surely, the experience of past ages, and particularly of the last twenty-five years, will have taught men wisdom, and prepared the minds of all for a calm and dispassionate inquiry - how the evils which at present afflict society can best be remedied.

I proceed, therefore, with the subject, and shall endeavour to show in what manner advantageous employment can be found for all the poor and working classes, under an arrangement which will permit mechanical improvements to be carried to any extent.

Under the existing laws, the unemployed working classes are maintained by, and consume part of, the property and produce of the wealthy and industrious, while their powers of the body and mind remain unproductive. They frequently acquire the bad habits which ignorance and idleness never fail to produce; they amalgamate with the regular poor, and become a nuisance to society.

Most of the poor have received bad and vicious habits from their parents; and so long as their present treatment continues, those bad and vicious habits will be transmitted to their children, and, through them, to succeeding generations.

Any plan, then, to ameliorate their condition, must prevent bad and vicious habits from being taught to their children, and provide the means by which only good and useful ones may be given to them.

The labour of some individuals is far more valuable than that of others; and this arises principally from the training and instruction they receive.

Means should therefore be devised to give the most useful training and instruction to the children of the poor.

The same quantity and quality of labour, under one direction, will produce a much more valuable result than under another.

It is necessary, then, that the labour of the poor should be exerted under the best.

One mode of management as to their expenditure will create many more advantages and comforts than another.

Such arrangements should, therefore, be made in this department, as would produce the largest benefits at the smallest expense.

Most of the vices and misery of the poor arise from their being placed under circumstances in which their apparent interest and their apparent duty are opposed to each other, and in consequence of their being surrounded by unnecessary temptations which they had not been trained to overcome.
It would, therefore, be a material improvement in the management of the poor, to place them under such circumstances as would obviously unite their real interest and duty, and remove them from unnecessary temptation.

Under this view of the subject, any plan for the amelioration of the poor should combine means to prevent their children from acquiring bad habits, and to give them good ones - to provide useful training and instruction for them - to provide proper labour for the adults -to direct their labour and expenditure so as to produce the greatest benefit to themselves and to society; and to place them under such circumstances as shall remove them from unnecessary temptations, and closely unite their interest and duty.

These advantages cannot be given either to individuals or to families separately, or to large congregated numbers.

They can be effectually introduced into practice only under arrangements that would unite in one establishment a population of from 500 to 1,500 persons, averaging about 1,000.

I now submit to the Committee the following plan, founded on the foregoing principles, which, it is presumed, will combine all the advantages that have been enumerated, and, in progress of time, lead to many others of equal importance.

As the seeming novelty of the plan might possibly induce a hasty or premature decision respecting it on the part of those who have not had much practical experience among the poor, or who may be under the influence of some favourite theory of political economy, to which it might appear to be opposed, I beg to submit it as the result of daily experience among the poor and working classes, on an extensive scale, for twenty-five years; and during which the most unceasing attention has been directed to discover the primary causes of their poverty and misery, and the best means of providing a remedy for both.

A casual or superficial consideration of the plan now proposed cannot be expected to impart a sufficient knowledge of the various beneficial results of such a combination, or to form the ground of a reasonable opinion as to its practicability.

I now beg leave to solicit the attention of the Committee to the drawings and explanations which accompany this Report.

The drawing exhibits, in the foreground, an establishment, with its appendages and appropriate quantity of land; and at due distances, other villages of a similar description.

Squares of buildings are here represented sufficient to accommodate about 1,200 persons each; and surrounded by a quantity of land, from 1000 to 1500 acres.

Within the squares are public buildings, which divide them into parallelograms.

The central building contains a public kitchen, mess-rooms, and all the accommodation necessary to economical and comfortable cooking and eating.

To the right of this is a building, of which the ground-floor will form the infant school, and the other a lecture-room and a place of worship.

The building to the left contains a school for the elder children, and a committee-room on the ground floor; above, a library and a room for adults.

In the vacant space within the squares, are enclosed grounds for exercise and recreation: these enclosures are supposed to have trees planted in them.

It is intended that three sides of each square shall be lodging houses, chiefly for the married, consisting of four rooms in each; each room to be sufficiently large to accommodate a man, his wife, and two children.

The fourth side is designed for dormitories for all the children exceeding two in a family, or above three years of age.

In the centre of this side of the square are apartments for those who superintend the dormitories: at one extremity of it the infirmary; and at the other a building for the accommodation of strangers who may come from a distance to see their friends and relatives.

In the centres of two sides of the squares are apartments for general superintendents, clergyman, schoolmasters, surgeon &c.; and in the third are storerooms for all the articles required for the use of the establishment.

On the outside, and at the back of the houses around the squares, are gardens, bounded by roads.

Immediately beyond these, on one side, are buildings for mechanical and manufacturing purposes. The slaughter-house, stabling, &c., to be separated from the establishment by plantations.

At the other side are offices for washing, bleaching, &c.; and at a still greater distance from the squares, are some of the farming establishments, with conveniences for malting, brewing, and corn-mills, &c.: around these are cultivated enclosures, pasture-land, &c., the hedge-rows of which are planted with fruit-trees.

The plan represented is on a scale considered to be sufficient to accommodate about 1,200 persons.

And these are to be supposed men, women, and children, of all ages, capacities, and dispositions; most of them very ignorant; many with bad and vicious habits, possessing only the ordinary bodily and mental faculties of human beings, and who require to be supported out of the funds appropriated to the maintenance of the poor - individuals who are at present not only useless and a direct burthen on the public, but whose moral influence is highly pernicious, since they are the medium by which ignorance and certain classes of vicious habits and crimes are fostered and perpetuated in society.

It is evident that while the poor are suffered to remain under the circumstances in which they have hitherto existed, they and their children, with very few exceptions, will continue unaltered in succeeding generations.
In order to effect any radically beneficial change in their character, they must be removed from the influence of such circumstances, and placed under those which, being congenial to the natural constitution of man and the wellbeing of society, cannot fail to produce that amelioration in their condition which all classes have so great an interest in promoting.

Such circumstances, after incessant application to the subject, I have endeavoured to combine in the arrangement of the establishment represented in the drawings, so far as the present state of society will permit. These I will now attempt to explain more particularly.

Each lodging-room within the squares is to accommodate a man, his wife, and two children under three years of age; and to be such as will permit them to have much more comforts than the dwellings of the poor usually afford.

It is intended that the children above three years of age should attend the school, eat in the mess room, and sleep in the dormitories; the parents being of course permitted to see and converse with them at meals and all other proper times; - that before they leave school they shall be well instructed in all necessary and useful knowledge; - that every possible means shall be adopted to prevent the acquirement of bad habits from their parents or otherwise; that no pains shall be spared to impress upon them such habits and dispositions as may be most conducive to their happiness through life, as well as render them useful and valuable members of the community to which they belong.

It is proposed that the women should be employed,

lst. - In the care of their infants, and in keeping their dwellings in the best order.

2ndly. - In cultivating the gardens to raise vegetables for the supply of the public kitchen.

3rdly. - In attending to such of the branches of the various manufactures as women can well undertake; but not to be employed in them more than four or five hours in the day.

4thly. - In making up clothing for the inmates of the establishment.

5thly. - In attending occasionally, and in rotation, in the public kitchen, mess-rooms, and dormitories; and, when properly instructed, in superintending

some parts of the education of the children in the schools.

It is proposed that the elder children should be trained to assist in gardening and manufacturing for a portion of the day, according to their strength; and that the men should be employed, all of them, in agriculture, and also in manufactures, or in some other occupation for the benefit of the establishment.

The ignorance of the poor, their ill-training, and their want of a rational education, make it necessary that those of the present generation should be actively and regularly occupied through the day in some essentially useful work; yet in such a manner as that their employment should be healthy and productive. The plan which has been described will most amply admit of this.

In order to offer some practical idea of the expenses that would be incurred such an establishment of 1200 souls, that following items are submitted.

SCHEDULE *of EXPENSES for forming an Establishment for*
1,200 MEN, WOMEN, AND CHILDREN.
If the land be purchased,

1,200 acres of land, at 301. per acre	£36,000
Lodging apartments for 1,200 persons	17,000
Three public buildings within the square	11,000
Manufactory, slaughter-house, and washing-house	8,000
Furnishing 300 lodging-rooms, at 81. each	2,400
Furnishing kitchen, schools, and dormitories	3,000
Two farming establishments, with corn-mill, and malting and brewing appendages	5 000
Making the interior of the square and roads	3, 000
Stock for the farm under spade cultivation	4,000
Contingencies and extras	6,060
	£96,000a*

[* The total is £95,460, which Owen has rounded upwards.]

This sum, being divided by 1,200, gives a capital to be advanced of 801. per head; or, at 5 per cent. per annum, 41. each per year.

Thus, at so small an expense as a rental of 41. per head, may the unemployed poor be put in a condition to maintain themselves; and, as may be easily conceived, quickly to repay the capital advanced, if thought necessary.

But, if the land be rented, only 60,0001. capital would be required.

There are several modes by which this plan may be effected.

It may be accomplished by individuals, - by parishes, - by counties, - by districts, &c. comprising more counties than one, - and by the nation at large, through its Government. Some may prefer one mode, some another; and it would be advantageous certainly to have the experience of the greatest variety of particular modes, in order that the plan which such diversified practice should prove to be the best might afterwards be generally adopted. It may therefore be put into execution by any parties according to their own localities and views.

The first thing necessary is, to raise a sum of money adequate to purchase the land (or it may be rented) - to build the square, manufactories, farm-houses, and their appendages - to stock the farm - and to provide everything to put the whole in motion.

Proper persons must be procured to superintend the various departments, until others should be trained in the establishment to supply their places.

The labour of the persons admitted may then be applied to procure a comfortable support for themselves and their children, and to repay, as might be required, the capital expended on their establishment.

When their labour shall be thus properly and temperately directed, under an intelligent system, easy of practice, it will soon be found to be more than sufficient to supply every reasonable want of man. How vain and useless to acknowledge the truth of the principle that men may be trained to produce more than they will consume, unless the means shall be devised by which the principle may be carried into practice! The period is arrived when it may be most advantageously put into practice. And the period is also arrived when the state of society imperiously requires the adoption of some measures to relieve the wealthy and industrious from the increasing burdens of the poor's rate, and the poor from their increasing misery and degradation.

It is impossible to find language sufficiently strong to express the inconsistency, as well as the injustice, of our present proceedings towards the poor and working classes. They are left in gross ignorance; they are permitted to be trained up in habits of vice, and in the commission of crimes; and, as if purposely to keep them in ignorance and vice, and goad them on to commit criminal acts, they are perpetually surrounded with temptations which cannot fail to produce all those effects.

The system, or rather want of system, which exists with regard to the management of the poor, has been emphatically condemned by a long and painful experience.

The immense sums annually raised for their relief are lavished in utter disregard of every principle of public justice or economy. They offer greater rewards for idleness and vice than for industry and virtue; and thus directly operate to increase the degradation and misery of the classes whom they are designed to serve. No sum, however enormous, administered after this manner, could be productive of any other result; rather will pauperism and wretchedness increase along with the increase of an expenditure thus applied.

The poor and unemployed working classes, however, cannot, must not, be abandoned to their fate, lest the consequences entail misfortune on us all. Instead of being left, as they now are, to the dominion of ignorance, and to the influence of circumstances which are fatal to their industry and morals - a situation in which it is easy to perceive the inefficacy, or rather the injuriousness, of granting them a provision in a mere pecuniary shape - they should, on the contrary, be afforded the means of procuring a certain and comfortable subsistence by their labour, under a system which will not only direct that labour and its earnings to the best advantage, but, at the same time, place them under circumstances the most favourable to the growth of morals and of happiness. In short, instead of allowing their habits to proceed under the worst influence possible, or rather, as it were, to be left to chance, thus producing unintentionally crimes that render necessary the severities of our penal code, let a system for the prevention of pauperism and of crimes be

adopted, and the operation of our penal code will soon be restricted to very narrow limits.

The outlines of such a plan, it is presumed, have been, however imperfectly, suggested and sketched in this Report.

It may be hoped, that the Government of this country is now sufficiently alive to the necessity of abandoning the principle on which all our legislative measures on this subject have hitherto proceeded; for nothing short of this can place the Empire in permanent safety. Until the preventive principle shall become the basis of legislative proceedings, it will be vain to look for any measures beyond partial temporary expedients, which will leave society unimproved, or involve it in a much worse state.

If such should be the conviction of Government, the change proposed in the management of the poor and unemployed working classes will be much better directed nationally than privately.

In fact, many of the benefits to be derived to society at large will not be realised until the plan becomes national.

Should the practical outline which is now submitted be approved, and engage the attention of Parliament, the next consideration would be, in what manner it may be carried into effect with the least loss of time, and without immediate or future injury to the resources of the country.

The money necessary for founding establishments on the principle of the plan now proposed, may be obtained by consolidating the funds of some of the public charities; by equalising the poor rates and borrowing on their security. The poor, including those belonging to public charities, should be made national.

(Or the funds may be raised by borrowing of individuals who have now a surplus capital unemployed; by borrowing from the Sinking Fund; or by any other financial arrangement that may be deemed preferable. The establishments rapidly increasing in value by the labour of the individuals on the land, will soon become a sufficient security for a large proportion of the money that may be expended in this purchase.)

Hence will arise a superabundance of funds and labour.

The country should be surveyed, and the best situations for these agricultural and manufacturing establishments be ascertained.

Such as can be the most easily procured, in various parts of the kingdom, should be fairly valued, and purchased by the nation, on perpetual lease or otherwise, and be properly laid out by competent persons for the purposes required. The labour of the poor and unemployed may be most advantageously applied to the execution of every part of this work, under the direction of proper persons appointed to superintend the various departments.

Nothing new would be required; all that could be wanted is in daily practice all over the kingdom.
The land and houses would not only possess their original worth, but, as the plan advanced, both would materially increase in value; and all the districts in the neighbourhood of these communities would partake of the general amelioration which they could not fail to introduce in a very extensive degree.

When these arrangements shall be adopted and carried into execution, (and sooner or later they must be, in order to permanently relieve the national distress,) new and extraordinary consequences will follow. The real value of the land and labour will rise, while all the productions of land and labour will fall; mechanism will be of more extensive worth and benefit to society; every encouragement may be given to its extension; and its extension will go on ad infinitum, but only in aid of, and not in competition with, human labour.

A summary of the advantages to be derived from the execution of such a plan may be presented under the following heads:

1. Expensive as such a system for the unemployed poor may appear to a superficial observer, it will be found, on mature investigation by those who understand all the consequences of such a combination, to be by far the most economical that has yet been devised.

2. Many of the unemployed poor are now in a state of gross ignorance, and have been trained in bad habits; evils which, under the present system, are likely to continue for endless generations. The arrangements proposed offer the most certain means, in a manner gratifying to all the parties interested, and to every liberal mind, of overcoming both their ignorance and their bad habits in one generation.

3. The greatest evils in society arise from mankind being trained in principles of disunion. The proposed measures offer to unite men in the pursuit of common objects for their mutual benefit, by presenting an easy practicable plan for gradually withdrawing the causes of difference among individuals, and making their interest and duty very generally the same.

4. This system will also afford the most simple and effectual means of giving the best habits and sentiments to all the children of the unemployed poor, accordingly as society shall be able to determine what habits and sentiments, or what character, ought to be given to them.

5. It will likewise offer the most powerful means of improving the habits and conduct of the present unemployed adult poor, who have been grossly neglected by society from their infancy.

6. Owing to the peculiar arrangement of the plan, it will give to the poor, in return for their labour, more valuable, substantial, and permanent comfort, than they have ever yet been able to obtain.

7. In one generation it will supersede the necessity for poor-rates or any pecuniary gifts of charity, by preventing any one from being poor or subject to such unnecessary degradation.

8. It will offer the means of gradually increasing the population in unpopulous districts of Europe and America in which such increase may be deemed necessary, and of enabling a much greater population to subsist in comfort on a given spot, if requisite, than existed before; in short, of increasing the strength and political power of the country in which it shall be adopted, more than tenfold.

9. It is so easy, that it may be put into practice with less ability and exertion than are necessary to establish a new manufacture in a new situation. Many individuals of ordinary talent have formed establishments which possess combinations much more complex. In fact, there would not be anything required which is not daily performed in common society, and which, under the proposed arrangement, might

not be much more easily accomplished.

10. It will effectually relieve the manufacturing and labouring poor from their present deep distress, without violently or prematurely interfering with the existing institutions of society.

11. It will permit mechanical inventions and improvements to be carried to any extent; for by the proposed arrangement every improvement in mechanism would be rendered subservient to and in aid of human labour.

12. And lastly, every part of society would be essentially benefited by this change in the condition of the poor.

Some plan founded on such principles as have been developed herein, appears absolutely necessary, to secure the well-being of society, as well as to prevent the afflicting spectacle of thousands pining in want amidst a superabundance of means to well-train, educate, employ, and support in comfort, a population of at least four times our present numbers.

ROBERT OWEN