



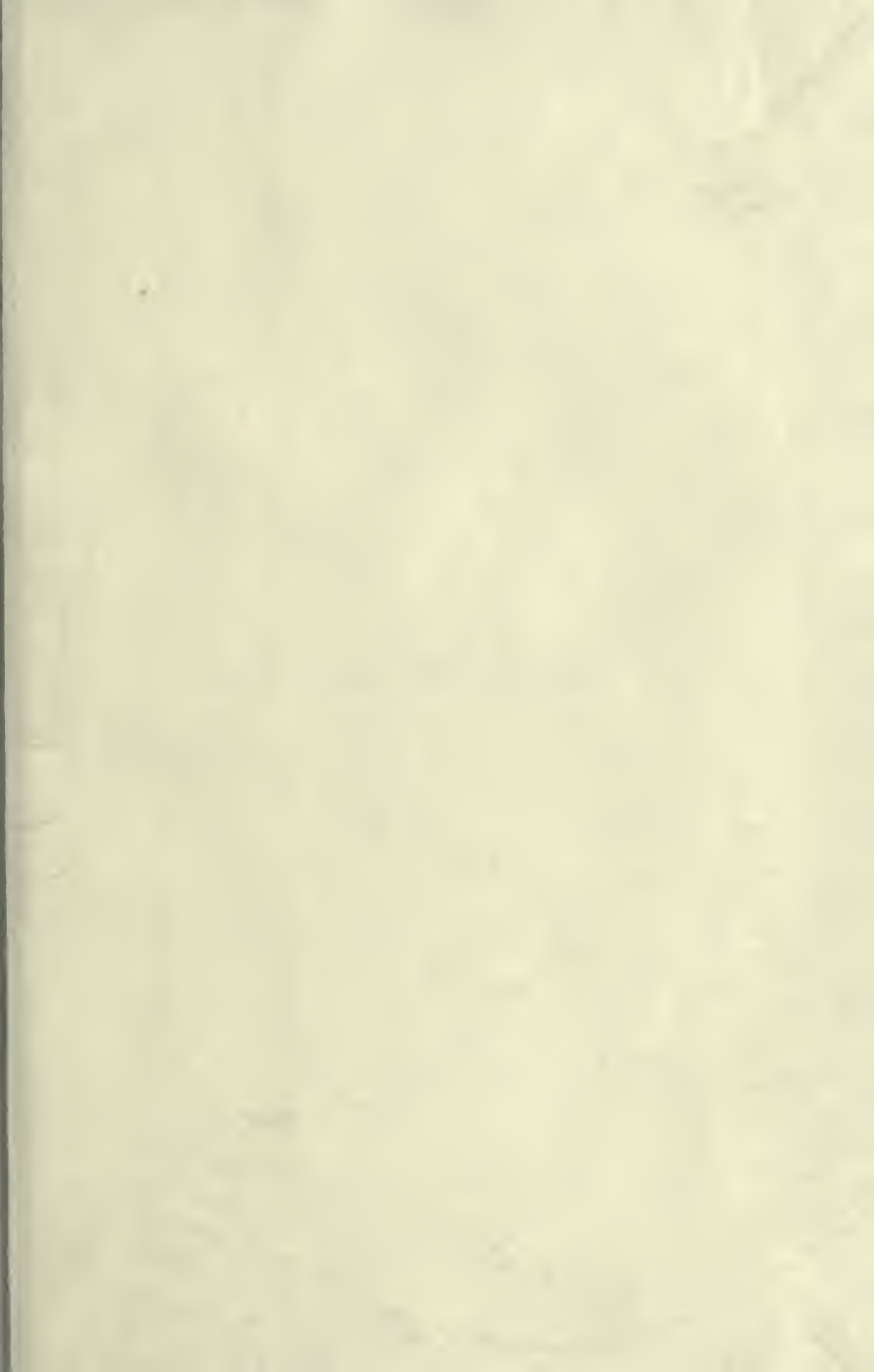
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PARSON MALTHUS.

*Published by*  
JAMES MACLEHOSE, GLASGOW.  
*Publisher to the University.*

LONDON: MACMILLAN AND CO.

*London, . . . . Hamilton, Adams & Co.*  
*Cambridge, . . . . Macmillan & Co.*  
*Oxford, . . . . James Parker & Co.*  
*Edinburgh, . . . . Douglas & Foulis.*

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MDCCLXXXI.

Parson Malthus.

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GLASGOW:

JAMES MACLEHOSE, ST. VINCENT STREET,

Publisher to the University.

1881.

A FULL study of the works of Malthus would need a larger Volume, of which these pages would be only the Introductory Chapter.

They contain little more than the early history of a controversy once very famous, now nearly forgotten, but almost without a parallel for the permanence of its effects. The eve of a Census is a fit time to remember the man who first taught us how to judge the results of the Census.

LONDON, 26th Jan., 1881.



## PARSON MALTHUS.

HE was "the best-abused man of the age." <sup>By Mr.</sup> Bonaparte himself was not a greater enemy of his species. Here was a man who defended small-pox, slavery, and child-murder,—a man who denounced soup-kitchens, early marriage, and parish allowances, — a man who "had the impudence to marry" after preaching against the evils of a family,—a man who thought the world so badly governed that the best actions have the worst consequences,—a man who took all romance out of life and preached a thankless sermon on a thread-bare text: "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." Surely that was true of him which was written of men with whom he disowned relationship: "Nothing can be conceived more hard than the heart of a thorough-bred metaphysician. It comes nearer to the cold malignity of a wicked spirit than to the frailty and passion of a man. It is remarkable that they never see any way to their projected

good but by the road of some evil. Their imagination is not fatigued with the contemplation of human suffering through the wild waste of centuries added to centuries of misery and desolation. Their humanity is at their horizon, and, like the horizon, it always flies before them. Those philosophers consider men in their experiments no more than they do mice in the air-pump, or in a recipient of <sup>poison</sup> mephitic gases." The rhetoric poured out by Godwin, Grahame, Sadler, Alison, Scrope, and scores of others against Malthus and the Political Economists was not less false, though it was less eloquent.

If an angry man is probably in the wrong, an abusive man is certainly so; and, when not one or two, but one or two thousand are engaged in the abuse, the certainty amounts to a demonstration. We can almost gauge the resistlessness of the victim's logic by the violence of the attacks made upon him. If he had not the ear of the public, and if he were not addressing it persuasively, no opponent would waste words on him. For most worldly purposes, to be ignored and to be refuted are the same thing.

Malthus from the very first was not ignored. For thirty years it rained refutations. The question, as he stated it, was thoroughly threshed out. The "Essay on Population" passed in the author's lifetime through six editions, in the second of which it was completely amended, and in the successive later ones continually expanded. Between the first edition in 1798, and the second in 1803, there had appeared

more than a score of replies; and the discussion had been carried on in private correspondence, as well as in public journals and parliamentary speeches. The pros and cons were fully argued; and no one who fairly considers the extent of the discussion, and the ability of the disputants, can fail to believe that we have, in the records of this controversy, ample materials for forming our own judgment on the question.

Such a privilege is seldom used. [The world has no time to consult authorities, though it would be uneasy if they were not within reach of consultation. When an author becomes an authority, he often ceases to be read, and becomes a mere book of reference. His opinions have taken hold of the public; and the public, in making them their own, have altered the meaning that was his. In becoming current coin, they have run the risk of losing the clear image and superscription of the issuer. An author's name comes to suggest, not his own book, but the current version of his doctrines. His book itself lies on the upper shelves of standard libraries, to date an epoch rather than teach a science. Malthus becomes Malthusianism,—Darwin, Darwinism; and, if Adam Smith's name had been a little more flexible, he, too, would have become an epithet. As it is, Adam Smith has left a book which "every one praises and nobody reads," Malthus a book which nobody reads but every one abuses.

The abuse is, fortunately, not unanimous; and we know

how few are really included by the common words "everybody" and "nobody." But it is certain that Malthus always had an experience like Cassandra's. It was even worse than Cassandra's, for her prophecies were at least heard and understood though they were disbelieved, while the warnings of Malthus were disbelieved by those who would not take the pains to hear or understand him. Miss Martineau, in her girlhood, heard him denounced "very eloquently and forcibly by persons who never saw so much as the outside" of his book. This was in 1816; and, when at a later time she came to inquire about him for herself, she could never find any one who had read his book, but scores who could argue "about it and about," or write sentimental pamphlets on so-called Malthusian subjects. But this carelessness was not confined to the non-professional public; it infected the savans. Nothing more clearly shows how political economy (or at least one question of it) had descended into the streets and become a common recreation. Even Nassau William Senior, professor of Political Economy, and an able professor of it, trusted more to his ears than to his eyes for a report of the teachings of Malthus, and confessed his fault very penitently. He had written a learned criticism, not of the opinion of Mr. Malthus, but of that which "the multitudes who have followed and the few who have endeavoured to oppose" Mr. Malthus, have assumed to be his opinion (Appendix to *Two Lectures on Population*, 1829, p. 56).

The "opinion" so imagined by Senior and the multitude

is still the current Malthusianism. A Malthusian is a man who says to all about to marry "Don't." Mr. Malthus was supposed to believe that "the desire of marriage, which tends to increase population, is a stronger principle than the desire of bettering our condition, which tends to increase subsistence" (Senior, l.c.) This meant, as Southey said, that "God makes men and women faster than He can feed them." The old adage was wrong then;—Providence does not send meat where He sends mouths; on the contrary, He sends mouths wherever He sends meat, so that the poor can never cease out of the land, for, however great the abundance of Food, marriage will soon make the People equally abundant. It is a question of simple division. A fortune that is wealth for One will not give comfort to Ten, or bare life to Fifty. The moral is, for all citizens separately, "Don't marry," and for all statesmen, "Don't encourage the citizens to marry."

This caricature had enough truth in it to save it from instant detection; and its vitality is due to the superior ease of understanding a blank denial or a blank affirmation as compared with the necessary qualifications of a scientific statement. True, the Essay of Malthus was largely an inquiry into the nature and causes of Poverty, even as Adam Smith's book was an inquiry into the nature and causes of Wealth. But it is not fair to regard the first as a counterblast to the second. Malthus did not approach the subject from a purely scientific side. He had not devoted long

years of travel and reflection to the preparation of an economical treatise. Adam Smith had written his "Moral Sentiments" seventeen years before his greater work. He had behind him an academical and literary reputation; and he satisfied the just expectations of the public by giving them, in the two quarto volumes of the "Wealth of Nations," his full-formed and completely digested conclusions and reasonings definitively expressed (1776). It was otherwise with Malthus. Quiet man as he was, he gained his reputation by a bold and sudden stroke, well followed up. His Essay was an anonymous pamphlet in a political controversy, and was meant to turn the light of political economy upon the politics of the day. Whatever the Essay contained over and above politics, and however far a-field the author eventually travelled, there is no manner of doubt about the origin of the first Essay itself. It was not that "Malthus, a kind-hearted clergyman, set himself to work to inquire whether after all it was right to promote the increase of the population without caring for the quality" (Marshall's "Economics of Industry," p. 30). In 1798, Malthus was no doubt in holy orders; but he seems never to have held a living, and we should be very far astray if we supposed his book to record "The Experiences of a Country Parson." "Parson" was in his case a title without a rôle; and Cobbett's immortal nickname is very unhappy. In 1798, Pitt's Bill for extending relief to large families, and thereby encouraging population, was no doubt before the country; but we owe the Essay not to William Pitt

but to William Godwin. The changed aspect of the book in its later editions need not blind us to the "efficient cause" of its first appearance.

Thomas Robert Malthus had graduated in Cambridge as ninth wrangler in the year 1788, in the twenty-second year of his age. In 1797, after gaining a fellowship at Jesus College, he happened to spend some time at his father's house near Dorking, in Surrey. Father and son discussed the questions of the day, the younger man attacking Jacobinism, the elder defending it. Daniel Malthus had been a friend and executor of Rousseau, and was an ardent believer in human progress. Robert had written a Whig tract, which he called "The Crisis" (1796); but he did not publish it, and his views were yet in solution. We may be sure the two men did not spare each other in argument. The elder Malthus used to complain that at such times Robert loved "to throw little stones" into his garden. Indeed, an old man must have the patience of Job if he can look with calmness on a young man breaking his ideals. But in this case he at least recognised the strength of the slinger; and he bore him no grudge, though he did not live to be won by the concessions of the second *Essay* (1803). That Robert, on his part, was not wanting in respect, is shown by an indignant letter written in 1800 on his father's death, in reply to what he conceived to be the slight of a newspaper paragraph.

The fireside debates had in that year (1797) received new

matter. William Godwin, quondam parson, journalist, politician, and novelist, whose "Political Justice" was avowedly a "child of the Revolution," had written a new book, the "Enquirer," in which many of his old positions were set in a new light. The father made it a point of honour to defend the "Enquirer;" the son played devil's advocate, partly from conviction, partly for the sake of argument; and, as often happens in such a case, Robert found his case stronger than he had thought. Hard pressed by an able opponent, he was led, on the spur of the moment, to use arguments which had not occurred to him before and of which the "Crisis" knows nothing. In calmer moments he followed them up to their conclusions. "The discussion," he tells us (Preface to first edition of *Essay*, 1798), "started the general question of the future improvement of society, and the author at first sat down with an intention of merely stating his thoughts to his friend upon paper in a clearer manner than he thought he could do in conversation." But the subject opened upon him, and he determined to publish. This is the plain story of the publication of the *Essay*, reduced to its simplest terms. At the very time when the best men in both worlds were talking only of progress, Cassandra cried out, "There are rocks ahead." French and English reformers were looking forward to a golden age of perfect equality and happiness. Malthus saw an irremovable difficulty in the way, and he would not put the telescope to his blind eye to continue a hopeless battle.



It was not properly a new cry. There had been *Cassandras* before Malthus, and even in the same century. Dr. Robert Wallace, writing in 1761 of the "Various Prospects of Mankind, Nature, and Providence," had talked of community of goods as a cure for the ills of humanity; and then said, very reluctantly, that he found one fatal objection—"the excessive population that would ensue." Men are always inclined to marry and multiply their numbers till the food is barely enough to support them all. This objection had even, since Wallace's time, become a stock objection, to be answered by every maker of Utopias. It was left for Malthus to show the near approach which this difficulty makes to absolute hopelessness, and to throw the burden of proof on the other side. As the "Wealth of Nations" altered the standing presumption in favour of interference to a standing presumption in favour of liberty in matters of trade, so the "Essay on Population" altered the presumption in favour of the advocates of Progress to a presumption in favour of its assailants. This may not describe the final result of the Essay, but it is a true account of its immediate effect. People had heard of the objection before; it was only now that they began to look on it as conclusive.

How had Godwin tried to meet it, when it was still in the hands of weaker men, and therefore not at all conclusive? He could not ignore it. In his "Political Justice" (1793) he had given the outlines of a "simple form of society, without government," on the principle of Tom Paine, which

was also a received Jacobin motto, "Society is produced by our wants, government by our wickedness" (Common Sense, p. 1). He says, with the ruling philosophy, that man is born a blank, and his outward circumstances make him good or evil. Thanks to human institutions, especially lawyers, sovereigns and statesmen, the outward circumstances, he says, are as bad as they can be. Everywhere there is inequality. There is great poverty alongside of great riches, and great tyranny beside great slavery. In the same way he tells us, in the best of his novels, "Caleb Williams" (1794), how "things as they are" enable the rich sinner to persecute the poor righteous man. But he is no pessimist. The "Political Justice" does not end with a statement of evils. It goes on to show that in the end truth will conquer; men will in the end listen to reason; and, forsaking their present laws, they will form a society without law or government or any kind of force, for no such things are needed when every man listens to reason and contents himself with plain living and high thinking. [In our present society, says Godwin, it is distribution and not production that is at fault. There is more than enough of wealth for all, but unluckily it is not equally shared amongst all. One man has too much, another little or nothing. In the new society reason will change all that. Reason tells us that, if we make an equal division, not only of the good things of this life but of the labour of making them, then we shall secure a production quite sufficient for the needs of plain livers, at the cost of perhaps half-an-hour's

labour in a day from each of them. Each of them will, therefore, have leisure, which is the true riches; and he will use the time for his own moral and intellectual improvement. In this way, by the omnipotence of truth and the power of persuasion, not by the power of the sword or by violent revolutions, perfection and happiness will in time be established on the earth.]

Godwin made no essential change in these views either in the later edition of the "Political Justice" (1796), or in the "Enquirer" (1797). "Among the faithless, faithful only he," when the excesses of the Terror made even Sir James Mackintosh a lukewarm reformer. Nothing in Godwin's life is more admirable than the perfect confidence with which he holds fast to his old faith in democratic principles and in the perfectibility of man. If it is obstinacy, it is very like devotion; and perhaps the only author who shows an equal constancy is Condorcet, the Girondist, marked out for death, and writing in his hiding-place, almost under the eyes of the Convention, his eager book on the "Progress of the Species." Nothing but intense sincerity and sheer depth of conviction could have enabled these men to continue the defence of a dishonoured cause. They had not "the martyr's greatest trial," the doubt whether he is right. The great impression made by their works was a sign that, as they felt strongly, they wrote powerfully. Malthus, who refuted both of them, thought it necessary to apologise for giving serious criticism to Condorcet's palpable extrava-

gances ; and he does so by saying that Condorcet has many followers who will hold him unanswerable unless he is specially answered (1st ed. 161-2, footnote). Of Godwin, Dr. Sumner, writing in 1816, says that, though his book (the "Political Justice") was becoming out of date, it was still "the ablest and best known statement" of the doctrines of equality that had ever appeared in England ("Records of the Creation," vol. i. 54, note). It was "the first text-book of the philosophical radicals." The actual effect of it cannot be measured by the number of copies sold on its first appearance. Godwin had placed it far beyond the reach of ordinary democrats by fixing the price at three guineas. In 1793 many who would have been his keenest readers could not have paid three shillings for it. But the event proved him wise in his generation. The Privy Council decided they might safely tolerate so dear a book ; and a small audience even of plutocrats was better to Godwin than prosecution, which might mean exile and no audience at all (Life by Kegan Paul, vol. i. 77). Few writers of our own day have so good an excuse for making themselves inaccessible to the poor. Godwin, however, like Ruskin, reached the poor in spite of his arrangements for avoiding them. He filtered down among the masses ; and his writings became a political as well as a literary power in England, long before he had a son-in-law to give him reflected glory. If a species is to be judged by its best individual, then Godwin represents better than Paine the class to which they both

belong; and many fell down with Godwin when he fell down before Malthus.

The "Enquirer" was less popular than the "Political Justice." Part of the charm of the latter undoubtedly lay in the elaborate completeness and systematic order of the whole discussion. The foundations were laid in the psychology of Locke; and then the building was raised, stone by stone, until the whole was finished. But in the "Enquirer" Godwin's dislike of law had extended even to the form of composition. He had been wrong, he said, in trying to write a systematic treatise on Society; and he would now confine himself to detached essays, wholly experimental and not necessarily in harmony with one another. The contrast between these two styles is the contrast between a whole oratorio and a miscellaneous concert, or between a complete poem and a volume of extracts.

The thoughts were the same, though they had lost their attractive expression. The essay on "Avarice and Profusion" (Part II., Essay II.) tells us, among other things, that "a state of cultivated equality is that state which in speculation and theory appears most consonant to the nature of man and most conducive to the extensive diffusion of felicity." This was the essay which led Malthus and his father into their fruitful argument. The essay on "Riches and Poverty" and the one on "Beggars" (Part II., Essays I. and III.) contain other applications of the same idea, with many moralising digressions. Godwin has not lost

his sweet Utopian vision ; he has not yielded to the objections that baffled Dr. Robert Wallace ; he thinks he has removed all objections.

He meets them first by saying that the earth is wide and the evil day is far off. It may take myriads of centuries to till the untilled acres and to replenish the empty earth with people ; and much may happen before then. In fact, he views the subject as many of us view the question of our coal supply. Before it is exhausted, we may be beyond the need of it. The earth itself may have collapsed, with all its inhabitants (Political Justice, Book VIII. chap. ix.) Don't let us refuse a present blessing from fear of a remote future danger. Besides, it is not very hard to imagine a safeguard. Franklin says that "Mind will one day become omnipotent over matter ;"—why not over the matter of our own bodies ? Does not the bodily health depend largely on the mind ?

" A merry heart goes all the day ;  
Your sad tires in a mile, O ! "

The time may come when we shall be so full of liveliness that we shall not sleep, and so full of life that we shall not die. The *need* for marriage will be superseded by earthly immortality ; and the *desire* for it by the development of intellect. On the renewed earth of the future there will be neither marrying nor giving in marriage, but we shall be as the angels of God.

This sweet strain had been enchanting the public for four or five years, when Malthus ventured to interrupt it with his modest anonymous "Essay on the Principle of Population as it affects the Future Improvement of Society." The writer claims to be as hearty a philanthropist as Mr. Godwin, but he cannot allow the wish to be father to the thought, and believe in future perfection against evidence. If you told me, he says, that man was becoming a winged creature like the ostrich, I should have no doubt he would find wings exceedingly useful, but I could hardly believe your prophecy without some kind of proof beyond the mere praises of flying. I should ask you to show palpable signs in his body and in his habits that such a metamorphosis was going on. In the same way, when you tell me that man is becoming a purely intellectual being, content with plain living and high thinking, I ask for signs of the change. I see none; but, on the contrary, I see strong reasons for believing in its impossibility. Grant me two postulates, and I disprove your millennium. The first is, that food is necessary, the second that the instinct for marriage is permanent. No one denies the first; and Godwin's denial of the second is purely dogmatic. He has given us no proofs. Men have no doubt made progress in other respects; they have passed from barbarism to civilisation. But in respect of the second postulate they are the same as they were 4000 years ago. Individual exceptions are individual exceptions still. There is no sign that the body is becoming subjugated to the mind.

Even philosophers cannot endure the toothache patiently ; and even a merry heart will not enable a weak man to walk as fast and far as a strong man. There is no change in the human body, and little or no change in the relation of the mind to it. I am therefore bound to believe in my postulates, and I infer from them the impossibility of your millennium.

You speak of a society, he continues, where the members are all equally comfortable and at leisure. Suppose it established, it could not last ; it would go to pieces through the principle of population alone. The seven years of plenty would be at once devoured by seven years of want. The proof of this is short and decisive :—" Population, when unchecked, increases in a geometrical ratio ; subsistence increases only in an arithmetical ratio. A slight acquaintance with numbers will show the immensity of the first power in comparison of the second " (1st ed. Essay, p. 14). Now, in the old countries of Europe, population never is unchecked. It is checked by want of room and food. Vice and misery, and the *fear* of them, are always " equalising " the numbers of the people with the food of the people. In the New World, " the cynosure of neighbouring eyes," there are fewer hindrances to early marriage ; there is more room and there is more food ; hard work is the only condition of a happy life. But, even there, population is not entirely unchecked ; the hard work will at least interfere with the rearing of children ; and the people, however comfortable, are not at the very highest pitch



of comfort, or at the highest pitch of purity and simplicity of life. Whereas, by assumption, Godwin's imaginary society is all these. If, therefore, the people of old Europe double their numbers once a century, and the people of new America (at least in the United States) once in twenty-five years, we may be sure that in the millennial society of Godwin,—

"Where all are proper and well behaved,  
And all are free from sorrow and pain,"

the increase would be much faster. The "leisure" he talks of would soon disappear, and the old scramble for bread, the old inequality of rank and property would again become the order of the day. We should have our own kind of society back again, with its masters and servants, landlords and tenants, rich and poor (1st ed. pp. 20, 173, &c.).

Therefore (so argues the writer of the Essay) if Godwin's society were once made, it could not last. But we grant too much in supposing it could ever be made. We cannot believe this and believe in the second postulate at the same time; and the second postulate is so scientifically certain that we can *predict* by it. The same causes, then, that would have destroyed Godwin's newly-formed society, will prevent it from ever being formed at all. "The passion between the sexes has appeared in every age to be so nearly the same that it may always be considered, in algebraic language, as a given quantity" (1st ed. p. 128, cf. 210). In spite of the whimpering of old men

and *roués*, "the pleasures of pure love will bear the contemplation of the most improved reason and the most exalted virtue" (1st ed. p. 211). Godwin views the matter in a dry, intellectual light, and asks us to abstract from all accessories before we form an estimate of the passion in question. One man or one woman will then be as good as another. But he might as well tell us to strip off all the leaves before we estimate our liking for trees. We do not admire the bare pole, but the whole tree, the tree with all the "attendant circumstances" of branches and foliage. As well deprive a magnet of its chief powers of attraction, and then ask us to confess it is no better than other minerals (1st ed. p. 215). The fact is, that man's "large discourse," which marks him out from the brutes, makes him hide the marriage instinct under a mass of "attendant circumstances," before he lets himself be drawn by it. He will not obey the instinct simply "*more feræ*," because he feels it. But it is not destroyed, only disguised. The love is not purely intellectual. A wife chosen on abstract principles will fit as badly as Swift's famous suit of clothes. The "looking before and after" includes fancy as well as thought. Take this passion, then, as it is, an adoration it may be of an assemblage of accessories; it can never die out of the world.

From this cheerful premise, what conclusion follows? One not altogether cheerful: "Wherever Providence sends meat He will send mouths." Wherever the people have room and food, they will marry and multiply their num-

bers, till they press against the limits of both, and begin a fierce "struggle for existence," in which death is the punishment of defeat. Godwin and the whole French school are sadly wrong in attributing all inequality to human Institutions; human Nature is to blame, and with out any artificial aid, this one passion of human nature will be the standing cause of inequality, the most serious obstacle to the removal of it (1st ed. 17, cf. 47-8). Dr. Robert Wallace had more wisdom than he wot of.

Analyse the meaning of this argument and its conclusion. It involves an answer to Godwin's first defence against Wallace. Here is a truth past, present, and future; or, in other words, a truth which, being scientific, ought not to be stated in terms of time at all: "Where goods increase, they are increased that eat them." The "struggle for existence" (Malthus uses the very phrase) is a present fact, as it has been a past fact, and will be a future. No good is gained then by rhetorical references to the wideness of the world and the possibilities of the ages. In our own day and land we see people multiplying up to the limit of the food, and a "great restrictive law" preventing them, as it prevents all other animals, from multiplying beyond that limit (1st ed. 15, 16). In our own day and land men marry when they cannot support a family; the children whom they cannot support die of hunger or sickness, if the charity of the public does not interfere;—or else the fear of misery makes men avoid a marriage for

which they have not the means, and their celibacy, whether pure or impure, keeps the numbers of the people on a level with the food (1st ed. 19, 62-66). Godwin himself had written in so many words: "There is a principle in human society by which population is perpetually kept down to the level of the means of subsistence." Why did he not take one step more, and discover what that principle is?

The fact is that Godwin was at once intellectually sanguine and emotionally cold. His ideal would have been a man "of large brain and no affections"; and when he wrote the "Political Justice," he was not aware of his own defect. At a later time he was not only aware of it, but anxious to remove it. In his Memoir of his wife Mary Wollstonecraft (1798), and in the story of "St. Leon" (1799), the man who found the Philosopher's Stone and became, to his own sorrow, immortal on earth, he confesses that he has hitherto ta'en too little thought of Feeling as an element in human action. If Mary had been too much of a Werther, her husband had been too little. Like Condorcet (and like Buckle), he had believed civilisation to be a purely intellectual movement. He had dogmatised on the omnipotence of truth and reason, and inferred the growth of a perfect society. He had dogmatised on the development of intellect and inferred an earthly immortality. Moreover, in the "Memoir," and in "St. Leon," if he had added a little to his doctrines, he had recanted little or nothing, even in regard to immortality. St. Leon is miser-

able only because his gift is peculiar to himself; an immortality that is common to all would be acceptable to all. A Methuselah would not be melancholy among antediluvians. Such was probably Godwin's position. The mere belief in the possibility of earthly immortality was not uncommon. Malthus was probably right in tracing it to the unconscious influence of Christianity (1st ed. *Essay*, pp. 240-1). It was held by Holcroft one of Godwin's most intimate friends (see *Godwin's Life* by Kegan Paul, i. 25), and it was an important part of Condorcet's "Sketch of the Progress of the Human Spirit." In the days of the Terror (1794) Condorcet from his hiding-place in the Rue Servandoni, had written of the "organic perfectibility of man." He looked to medicine, and to the arts and sciences in general, to banish disease and prolong human life "indefinitely." Godwin trusted to the inward development of mind, not to outward appliances. But by different ways they arrive at the same terminus; and they receive from their great critic very much the same reception there. Malthus simply points out that, while the arts have made the lengthening of life "indefinite," that does not mean "infinite." Gardeners can grow carnations "indefinitely" large; no man can say he has seen the largest carnation that will ever be grown; but this he can say—that a carnation will never be as large as a cabbage. The limit is there, though it is undefined; and there is a limit, also, to the lengthening of human life, though no one can fix it to a year. Condorcet, therefore, has proved an earthly

immortality only by a misuse of the word "indefinite." He has shown no organic change in man which would prove the possibility of perfection in this world. Neither has Condorcet repelled the objection which troubled Dr. Wallace. It is true that, like Godwin, he faces the difficulty, and admits the importance of it. The growth of population will always, he says, cause inequality; there will always be a rich leisured class and a poor industrial class; and to lighten the hardships of the latter there ought to be a State Insurance fund, which will make all the poorest citizens sure of support. But one cannot help thinking, if all are sure of support, all will marry, and if all marry, will not the difficulty be increased? (1st ed. Essay, pp. 146-150). Yes, Condorcet grants this; the numbers will soon be too great, and so throughout the ages there will be an "oscillation" between the blessings of progress and the evils of overcrowding, now the one predominating, now the other. In despair he clutches at the old fallacy, "the day is distant," but he himself has evidently little faith in it, for he must needs add a new and startling solution of his own, which Mr. Morley refuses to understand (*Fortnightly Review*, February, 1870), and Malthus freely denounces (Essay, 1st ed. 154; Condorcet, *Esquisse*, 338-9). It was probably free love, though it might easily have been something more recondite. In all editions of the *Essay on Population*, we have ample means of judging what Malthus would have said about the Neo-Malthusianism, which uses his name so

freely in our own day. It is inconsistent with his theological and metaphysical view of the "final cause" of population in the world, as he explains the same in the first edition of the *Essay*. But the inconsistency is not a mere matter of inference; it has actually been pointed out by the author himself. In more than one passage of the later editions he distinctly separates himself from the inventors of scientific checks. He speaks, for example, of Robert Owen, and how impossible that philanthropist had found it "to check the rate of increase in a state of equality without resorting to regulations that are unnatural, immoral, or cruel" (Book III. chap. iii.; see 7th ed. 286, cf. 266). There is, however, one circumstantial passage which puts the matter beyond doubt. It occurs in the appendix to the fourth edition (1817), and is written against Grahame and other opponents who accused Malthus of recommending free love as a cure for over-population: "I have never adverted to the check suggested by Condorcet without the most marked disapprobation. Indeed, I should always particularly reprobate any artificial and unnatural modes of checking population, both on account of their immorality and their tendency to remove a necessary stimulus to industry. If it were possible for each married couple to limit by a wish the number of their children, there is certainly reason to fear that the indolence of the human race would be very greatly increased, and that neither the population of individual countries nor of the whole earth would ever reach its

natural and proper extent." (7th ed., p. 512). From this point of view, the small families of France will not appear an unmixed blessing, nor the large ones of England an unmixed evil. English enterprise, if not caused, is at least kept up by the very difficulty of gaining a livelihood. Moreover, as a man when he marries cannot tell how many children he will have, Malthus thinks it would do no harm to provide an allowance by law for every child above the sixth, not to reward a man for his large family, but merely "to relieve him from a species of distress which it would be unreasonable in us to expect that he should calculate upon; and with this view the relief should be merely such as to place him exactly in the same situation as if he had six children." (B. IV., xiii., 7th ed. p. 474). Logically or not logically, Malthus, instead of agreeing with Neo-Malthusianism, goes very nearly to the opposite extreme. His prophetic soul has set the Neo-Malthusians in the Malthusian pillory, whether they like it or not; and it is for them to decide whether they are entitled to wear his name after rejecting half of his teachings. Their position may be sound or unsound; this is not the place to discuss the question. But there is at least no doubt that they are the children not of Robert Malthus but of Robert Owen. Malthus was not Malthus because he said, "The people are too many; thin them down"—any misanthrope might have said that. Darwin is not Darwin because he said, "Species are not made, but grow;" any Aristotelian might have said



that. If Darwinians are to be judged by Darwin, Malthusians must be judged by Malthus; and the originality of neither Malthus nor Darwin can be explained by a single easy phrase. Writers who make an epoch also belong to an epoch; and we cannot understand the meaning of their words, far less of their work, till we know the context in which they are set. Once know the context and we understand the text. The devil, citing Scripture for his purpose, only succeeds because he never quotes in full.

[It follows, that to understand the full meaning of the Essay, we must go beyond its "efficient cause" and take a view of the whole circumstances in which it was written.] If the text of the sermon was Godwin and Condorcet, the application was to the poor of England and the philanthropists who were trying to relieve them.

The early life of Malthus, coinciding, as it nearly does, with the latter half of the eighteenth century, coincides of necessity with the accomplishment of England's greatest industrial revolution. Malthus was born in 1766, three years after the Peace of Paris. There was an end, for the time, to foreign wars; and trade was making a brave start. The discoveries of coal and iron in northern England, going hand in hand with the inventions in cotton-spinning and weaving, were beginning to convert the poorest counties into the richest, upsetting the political balance. The new science of chemistry had begun to prove its usefulness. Wedgwood was perfecting his earthenware, Brindley cutting

his canals, Telford laying out his roads, Watt building his steam-engines. England in Roman days had been a granary ; in later ages she had been a pasture-ground ; she was now becoming the land of machinery and manufacture, as well as the centre of foreign trade. In other words, she had begun the industrial change under the influence of which we are still living. It will not be the last ; but it was the greatest, till then, in her history, and it was rich in the most magical improvements. But in the early stages of the change, the evils of it were nearly as much felt as the blessings. The sufferings of displaced workmen, and the anarchy of the new factory system, supplanting home labour and making the word "manufacturer" forget its etymology, were real evils, however transient. Combined with the general democratic influence of an expansive manufacturing industry, they might easily have caused a social convulsion in these days of no extraordinary virtue ; and the country owed its escape in no small degree to the Evangelical movement under Whitefield and the Wesleys, which was fatal at once to religious torpor and to political excitement. The annoyances of a meddlesome tariff and the futile attempts to exclude foreign food were to vanish away before a hundred years had passed ; but in the boyhood of Malthus the voice of Adam Smith against them ("Wealth of Nations," 1776) was a "*vox clamantis in deserto*." There was a general agreement that, whether the high prices prevailing after the Peace of Paris were caused by the growth of the population, or

by the lessened value of silver, or by the troubles in Poland, the remedy was not to lie in a free corn-trade. The poor were not to have cheap corn; they were to have large allowances. Legislation had gone backwards in this matter. In 1723 a new law had introduced a wise workhouse test of destitution, which might have prevented wilful poverty; but the clause was repealed in 1782; and the new stringency gave place to the old laxity, with the usual results. The close of the century saw the troubles of a European war added to the list, and the tide of political reform ebbed for forty years (1792-1832). Because the French reform had gone too far, the English reform was not allowed to take its first steps.

It is a commonplace with historians that the French Revolution would have been very different without Voltaire and Rousseau to prepare the way for it. Hunger and new ideas are two advocates of change which always plead best in each other's company; hunger makes men willing to act, and the new ideas give them matter for enactment. In France, when the crisis came in 1789, the new ideas were not far to seek. Writers of Utopias, from Plato to More, and from Rousseau to Ruskin, have always adopted one simple plan; they have struck out the salient enormities of their own time and inserted the opposite, as when men imagine heaven they think of their dear native country with its discomforts left out. Inequality at home had made Frenchmen ready to dote on a vision of Equality when Rousseau

presented it to them ; and the "state of Nature" was the state of France reversed. Philosophically, the theorists of the Revolution traced their descent to Locke ; and their ideas were not long in recrossing the Channel to visit their birthplace.

Even if Englishmen had not had in America a visible Utopia, or, at least, Arcadia, there was hunger enough in England to recommend the new ideas to every rank of society. This is the reason why, in 1793, Godwin's book, "a child of the Revolution," was so successful. It was not only a good English statement of the French doctrines of Equality, and therefore a book for the times ; but it had a vigour of its own, and was no mere translation. Rousseau and Raynal had thought it necessary to sacrifice universal improvement to universal equality ; they saw (or thought they saw) that the two could not subsist together, and they counted equality so desirable that they were willing to purchase it at the expense of barbarism. Now, they were perhaps more logical than Godwin ; equality may possibly involve barbarism. But Godwin's ideal was at least higher than theirs ; he thought of civilisation and equality as quite compatible, for he thought that when all men were truly civilised they would of their own accord restore equality. As he left everything to Reason and nothing to Force, his book was in theory quite harmless ; but the tendency of it was always regarded as dangerous, for it criticised the British constitution in a free way to which the British nation

was not accustomed. In England, moreover, the people have always confounded ideas with persons. They were not in love with liberty when it took the form of an American "War of Independence" with England, and, even if equality had pleased them in 1789, they would have nothing of it after the Terror. They forsook Fox for Burke, and went to war for a sentiment. At the very time when Malthus wrote, the bulk of the English people had lost their enthusiasm for the new ideas. It needed some fortitude to call oneself a Reformer, or even a Whig, when Napoleon had overrun Italy and was facing us in Egypt. Pitt counted all persons seditious who did not believe in the wisdom of the war.

But even Pitt, though he now ignored the need of reform, could not ignore the existence of distress. In 1795 there had been a serious scarcity; war prices had become famine prices. Mr. Whitbread and the rest thought Parliament ought to "do something;" and Pitt proposed (1796) to meet the difficulty by amending the Poor Laws. His Bill proposed "to restore the original purity of the Poor Laws" by modifying the law of settlement in the direction of greater freedom, and by assisting the working-man in other ways. One of these other ways was an attempt of a harmless kind to incorporate friendly societies and schools of industry with the Poor Law system of the day. But another proposed to encourage the growth of population by making the poor relief greater where the family was larger. "Let us make relief," in such cases, "a matter of right and honour, instead

of a ground for opprobrium and contempt, This will make a large family a blessing and not a curse ; and this will draw a proper line of distinction between those who are able to provide for themselves by their labour, and those who, after enriching their country with a number of children, have a claim upon its assistance for their support " (Hansard, Parl. Hist., vol. 33, pp. 703 *seq.*, Feb. 12, 1796 ; cf. vol. 32, 687 *seq.*)

Malthus in 1796 did not doubt the infallibility of Pitt in such a matter ; the " Crisis " gives no hint of objection. But in 1798, with his new light, he could no longer take the recruiting officer's view of population. If he had had a good case against Godwin and Condorcet, who had simply failed to show how population could be kept from growing too fast, he had still a better case against Pitt, who proposed to make it grow faster. Besides, their schemes were merely on paper ; they had no chance of realising them, whereas Pitt's large majority would carry any measure on which he set his heart. The danger from this third quarter was therefore the most imminent. But Malthus needed no new argument for it. He needed simply to shift round his old argument, and point the muzzle of it at the new enemy. There is no need, he said, to encourage marriage ; there is no need for government to make population grow faster. Wherever Providence has sent meat, He will soon send mouths to eat it ; and if by your artificial encouragements you increase the mouths without increasing the meat,

you will only bring the people one step nearer starvation. If stalwart numbers are strength, starving numbers are weakness.

These commonplaces were then a paradox. Even at the end of the eighteenth century there was no party in the English House of Commons identified with enlightened views on the position of the British workman. Whitbread had always some measure on hand for helping the labourer out of the rates, or by some other State interference; it was, in fact, in opposing one of Whitbread's Bills that the Prime Minister promised his own memorable measure. Fox was free to follow either, not professing to understand the new economical doctrines. Pitt, who admired Adam Smith,—Fox, Condorcet, and Godwin, who owed Smith no allegiance (Godwin, *Pol. Just.* VIII. viii. 508, ed. 1796), all were equally purblind in this matter. All Pitt's study of the fourth book of the *Wealth of Nations*, chapter fifth, had not shown him the fallacy of a bounty on children. Yet where had Malthus got his light? Simply from Adam Smith, Price, Wallace, and David Hume, who were, all, well-known authors of the day. "The populousness of ancient nations" had been a happy hunting-ground for learned antiquarian essay-writers over half-a-century. Montesquieu, Wallace, and Price claimed the advantage for the ancients, David Hume for the moderns, with his usual acute divination (*Essay on the Populousness of Ancient Nations*). This controversy itself might have been expected to bring men nearer to the truth

on the subject of population than it actually did. It was left to Malthus to convert Hume's probability into a certainty from a higher vantage-ground (*Essay*, later edd. I. xiv. ; first ed. chap. iv. 53 *seq.*); but the sifting of the pros and cons by the various writers before him must have simplified his task. Other aids and "anticipations" were not wanting. As early as 1786 Joseph Townsend, the Wiltshire rector, had written a "Dissertation on the Poor Laws," which gives an admirable statement of these wise views of charity and poor relief that are only in these latter days becoming current among us. Malthus records his opinion of Townsend's work in the best of all possible ways. In his careful inquiries into the population of the chief European countries, he omits Spain on the ground that Mr. Townsend's "Travels in Spain" has already done the work for him (*Essay*, later edd. II. vi. ; 7th, p. 184).

"The "Essay on Population" was therefore not original in the sense of being a creation out of nothing; but it was original as the "Wealth of Nations" was original. In both cases the author got most of his language and even many of his thoughts from his predecessors; but he treated them as his predecessors were not able to do; he saw them in their connection, their perspective, and their wide bearings. We must not assume "wonderful anticipation" in the case of a mere identity of language or partial identity of thought, for the same words do not convey the same meaning to two writers when the one is quoting the words of the other away



from their logical context and therefore not as part of an argument of which the writer sees the consecutive premises. This is true of Adam Smith when he is compared with Sir Dudley North or any other of the wonderful anticipators catalogued by M'Culloch and the historians. They talked free trade as Mons. Jourdain talked prose, without knowing it. They had not reasoned up to it, and are therefore unable to reason down from it. Precisely the same is true of Adam Smith himself when he is viewed as the anticipator of Malthus. Of his own generalisations he is complete master. Having reasoned up to them, he can reason down from them. But when he says "Every species of animals naturally multiplies in proportion to the means of their subsistence" (Wealth of Nations I. viii. 36, 2, MacCulloch's ed.), he has not "anticipated" Malthus. His phrase is nothing more than a phrase; he does not see its most important bearings, and not having reasoned up to it he makes hardly any attempt to reason down from it. Malthus, on the other hand, has taken fast hold of a general principle, and is able to solve a number of dependent questions by simple corollaries deduced from it. Others may have given right answers to the special questions about the Poor Law and the populousness of ancient nations. Malthus is the first to show one comprehensive reason why all these answers must be right.

This was the secret of his success. As Godwin's "Political Justice" was successful because systematic, the "Essay

on Population" was successful because it seemed to put chaos in order. No doubt the very sadness of his conclusion had a charm for some minds; but the bulk of his readers did not love him for taking their hopes away, they loved him for giving them new light. [Pestilence and famine begin to lose their vague terrors when we know whence they come and what they do for the world. Even if the desire of marriage is itself an evil, it is well to know the truth about it. Ignorance can only be blissful where it is total; and wilful ignorance, being of necessity partial, is a perpetual unrest, not even a Fool's Paradise (Essay Append., 7th ed. p. 507).

The truth in this case was not all sadness. In the last portion of the Essay (ed. 1798) Malthus expounds an argument which he afterwards reproduced in later editions with a more terrestrial application. He uses the style of Paley and the Apologists; and he tries to discover the "final cause" of the principle of population on metaphysical lines that were followed by Bishop Sumner nearly twenty years afterwards, when the discussion had taken a new turn ("Records of Creation," 1816). The question is how to reconcile the suffering produced by the principle of population with the goodness of God. Malthus answers that the difficulty is only one part of the general problem of Evil, the difference between this one and the rest being that in this case we see farther into the causes. It is therefore the easier for us to justify the ways of God to man. "Evil exists not to create despair but activity" (1st ed. 395). We ought not to reason

from God to Nature, but from Nature to God ; to know how God works, let us observe how Nature works. We shall then find that Nature sends all sentient creatures through a long and painful process, by which they gain new qualities and powers, presumably fitting them for a better place than they have in this world. This world and this life are therefore in all probability "the mighty process of God," not indeed for the mere "probation" of man, but "for the creation and formation" of the human mind out of the torpor and corruption of dead matter (1st ed. 353). Difficulties generate talents. "The first awakers of the mind are the wants of the body ;" it is these that rouse the intellect of the infant and sharpen the wits of the savage. Not Leisure but Necessity is the Mother of Invention :

*ἡ πείνα, Διόφαντε, μόνα τὰς τέχνας ἐγείρει.*

Locke was right ; the desire to avoid pain is even stronger than the desire to find pleasure. In this way evil leads to good, for pain—that is to say, evil—creates effort, and effort creates mind. This is the general rule. A particular example of it is, that the want of food, which is one of the most serious of all evils, leads to good. By contriving that the earth shall produce food only in small quantities, and in reward of labour, God has provided a perpetual spur to human progress. This is the key to the puzzle of population. By nature man is a lotos-eater till hunger makes him a Ulysses. Why should he toil, the roof and crown of things? Mainly because, if he does not toil, neither can he

live ; the lotos country will soon be overpeopled ; and he must push off his bark again. "The first awakeners of the mind are the wants of the body," though, once awakened, the mind soon finds out wants beyond the body, and the development of intellect and civilisation goes on in infinite variety. The people "tend to increase" more quickly than their food, not in order that men may suffer, but in order that they may be roused to save themselves from suffering. The partial evil of all such general laws is swallowed up in the general good ; and the general good is secured in two ways : Humanity is developed ; the resources of the World are developed. The constancy of nature is the foundation of reasoning, and human reason would never be drawn out unless men were obliged (as well as able) to make calculations on the basis of a constant law. In the second place, "the world must be peopled." If savages could have got all their food from one central spot of fertile ground, the earth at large would have remained a wilderness ; but, as it is, no one settlement can support an indefinite increase of numbers ; the numbers must spread out over the earth till they find room and food. If there was no "law of increase," a few such careers as Alexander's or Tamerlain's might unpeopel the whole world ; but the law exists, and the gaps made by any conqueror, or by any pestilence, are soon filled to overflowing, while the overflowing flood passes on to reclaim new countries (1st ed. 360-366).

This is the cosmology of Malthus. "The impressions and

excitements of this world are the instruments with which the Supreme Being forms matter into mind." The necessity of constant exertion to avoid evil and pursue good is the principal spring of these impressions, and is therefore a sufficient reason for the existence of natural and moral evil, including the difficulties which arise from the principle of population. All these are present difficulties, but they are not beyond remedy. They do not serve their purpose unless human exertion succeeds in diminishing them. Absolute removal Malthus does not promise ; but points us to a future life and another world for perfection and happiness (1st ed., pp. 394-6, cf. 241-6).

Perhaps the great economist went "beyond his last" in attacking the problem of evil. In the controversy that followed the *Essay*, there are few references to this part of it ; and after the appearance of the second edition, where this part is omitted altogether, people forgot the existence of the first edition. From the way in which Sumner speaks of the difference between his point of view and that of Malthus, it might fairly be suspected that he knew nothing of the first edition ; and yet the second of his two learned volumes is simply an expansion of the same ideas (*R. of Cr.*, vol ii. 103). The metaphysic itself might be deep or shallow ; it would be impossible to tell till we heard the sense in which the metaphysical phrases were used ; and that we have now no power to do. We might gladly believe them idealistic in a German sense, but we cannot forget how closely the ethical views of

Malthus are connected with those of the English moralists of his century, and there is no indication that he was a metaphysical genius. His researches in the heavier German literature did not perhaps extend much farther than to the quaint optimist Johann Peter Süssmilch, from whose "Göttliche Ordnung" he freely drew his statistics.

1 Malthus at one time intended to expound his metaphysical views at greater length (1st ed. 356 note). In other words, he meant to write a book in the manner of Price's Essays, half economical and half literary. We need not deeply regret the "accident," whatever it was, that nipped this intention in the bud, and delayed the publication of the Essay on Population. The metaphysical and theological passages, as they stand, have the look of an episode, though the thought of them is logically enough connected with the tenor of the book. The views of the author on the other world, the punishment of the wicked, and the use of miracles, have mainly a personal interest. Adam Smith, in the later editions of his "Moral Sentiments," had omitted at least one very marked expression of theological opinion (on the Atonement) that had appeared in the first edition (Part II. sect. ii., pp. 204-6); and perhaps his disciple did well to follow suit. At the same time, omission is not recantation; and we get light on an author's mind and character by discovering any views in which he once professed to believe. M'Culloch, who reached absolute truth at a very early stage of economical study, has patronised Adam Smith by editing his chief work, and has

What's that?

honoured the other economists by tabulating their conclusions in an historical introduction. He extends this favour to Malthus. The reasonings of Malthus, he finds, are valuable, but not free from error. He has "all but entirely overlooked" the beneficial effects of the principle of population as a stimulus to invention and progress! (Intro. to "Wealth of Nations," p. lii.) This was an odd mistake for any one to make who had conscientiously read the *Essay* in any form (e.g. pp. 437, 506); but, placed alongside of the Malthusian metaphysics, it seems unpardonable. Malthus is accused of ignoring the very phenomena which Malthus glorifies as the "final cause" of the principle of population. He thought he had explained, not only one of the chief Causes of Poverty, but one of the chief Effects; if Adam Smith had shown the power of Labour as a cause of Wealth, Malthus thought he had shown the power of Poverty as a cause of Labour. No doubt M'Culloch's mistake was a common one; and (to say nothing of the *Encyclopædias* and *Biographical Dictionaries*) there is perhaps not a single economical text-book which does justice to Malthus in this matter. But M'Culloch was not an ordinary layman; he always speaks as one that has authority; and he ought not to have been content with an ordinary layman's second-hand knowledge in a matter that so nearly touched the fame of the great English Economist. One mistake, however, prepares us for others. When the same oracle tells us that Mr. Malthus has "failed to give us

anything like a complete view of the department of the science which he treats" (l.c.), we may receive the statement with a proper incredulity. True, Malthus lays no claim to his critic's infallibility; like most pioneers he is more sure of his leading principles than of their details; and he is never ashamed to change his views (see *e.g.* the *Essay on the Standard of Value*). But, if his *Essay on Population*, gradually elaborated as it was by the criticisms of thirty years, has not gone over the whole ground or reached the heart of the matter, surely there is no profit in discussion.

✓ ✓ The fact is that, though the first *Essay*, the anonymous small 8vo of 1798, is a mere draught of the completed work of later years, its main fault is not incompleteness, but wrongness of emphasis. When a man is writing a controversial pamphlet, he does not try to bring all truths into the front equally; he sets the neglected ones in the foreground, and allows the familiar to fall behind, not as denied or even ignored, but simply as not emphasised. It is possible, however, that the neglected truths, though unworthy of neglect, are unworthy of pre-eminence; and must not be allowed to retain it. Science, seeking answers to its own questions, and not to questions of the eighteenth century, has no toleration for the false emphases of passing controversy. It puts the beginning first, the middle next, and the end last—not the end in the middle or the last first. It takes up the first *Essay* of Malthus on *Population*, and



requires the author to amend it. He must be less critical and more creative, if he is to give a satisfactory answer to the general problem, which he has chosen to take up. The times and the subject both demand a change of attitude, the times because political theories have now become less important than social difficulties, and the subject, because he has hitherto done little more than hint at the true means for overcoming the difficulties. True, no critic or iconoclast can ever prove an opponent false except by a truth of his own which takes us beyond the falsehood of the opponent; and it is to this he owes the enthusiasm of his followers. But he does not always expound the truth so fully as the error; and his friends follow him more by faith than by knowledge. This, then, was what Malthus had yet to do—to state what he himself believed to be the means of raising modern society, and what were the right as well as the wrong ways of relieving the poor.

The success of the *Essay*, so far, had been very remarkable. It had provoked replies by the dozen, and an unwilling witness tells us it had converted "friends of progress" by the hundred (Godwin's "Thoughts on Parr's Sermon," 1801, p. 54, cf. Godwin's "Population," i. 27). We find Godwin writing to the author in August, 1798 (Godwin's *Life*, by Kegan Paul, vol. i. 322); and we may fairly conclude that the veil of anonymousness was not very thick, though Malthus used it again in 1800 in the tract on High Prices. In a debate in the House of Commons on

11th February, 1800, Pitt took occasion to say that, though he still believed his new Poor Bill a good one, he had now dropped it in deference to the objections of "those whose opinions he was bound to respect" (Hansard, 1429). He meant Bentham and Malthus. We cannot tell which had the greater share of the credit; but we know that Malthus regarded Pitt and Paley as his most brilliant converts (Empson in *Edinburgh Review*, January, 1837, page 483, cf. Essay 473 n.). Pitt's declaration that he still believed his Bill to be a good one must only have meant that he still *wished* to believe it so. It must have been peculiarly galling to a statesman who affected the style of a political economist to find that not only the solemn criticisms of Malthus but the more jocose "Observations" of Bentham (Works, vol. viii., p. 440), which threshed the chaff out of the Bill clause by clause, had succeeded in turning his favourite science against himself.

But, while Malthus was making such converts as Pitt, Paley, and Parr, and when even Godwin had acknowledged that the "Writer of the Essay" had made a valuable addition to Political Economy (Thoughts on Parr's Sermon, p. 56), the Essay had not escaped censure-free. There were some familiar facts of which Malthus had taken too little account; and they were impressed on him by his critics from all sides. To use the language of philosophy, he had not been sufficiently concrete; he had gone far to commit Godwin's fault, and consider one feature of human nature

away from all the rest, when he ought to have looked at it in its setting along with the rest. The position and prospects of civilised society in our own day depend on a combination of political, intellectual, physical, and moral causes, of which the growth or decrease of population may be only an effect. If we *are* part-man, part-lion, and part-hog, it is not fair to assume the predominance of the hog any more than the predominance of the man. In a herd of animals, as distinguished from a society of men, the units are simply "the fittest" who have "survived in the struggle for existence." The principle of population is therefore in the foreground there; there is no check to it but famine, disease, and death. We can therefore understand how the study of the *Essay on Population* led Charles Darwin to explain the *Origin of Species* by a generalisation which Malthus had known and named, though he did not pursue it beyond man (*Essay*, 1st ed., pp. 17, 47, 48; *Origin of Species*, pop. ed. chap. iii. 50; cf. Hæckel, *Evolution of Man*, tr., vol. i. p. 97). The "general struggle" among animals for room and food means, among civilized men, something very like free trade, Adam Smith's panacea for economic evils; and it will be found that the *Essayist* coincides with Adam Smith in resisting legislative interference. Bad as are the effects of the irremovable causes of poverty, interference makes them still worse. But at least, when we come to man, the struggle is not so cruel. "Plague take the hindmost" is not the only, or the supreme rule. If the fear of starvation, the

most earthly and least intellectual of all motives, is needed to force us to work at first, it does not follow that it is necessary ever afterwards. The baser considerations are (almost *vi termini*) the lowest layers of our pile; we rise by means of them, but we tread them down, and the higher the pile the less their importance. Within civilised countries, in proportion to their civilisation, the "struggle" is abolished; the weakest are often saved, and the lowest raised, in spite of unfitness (cf. A. R. Wallace, "Contributions to Theory of Natural Selection," and the discussions raised thereupon, 1868). In other words, view man not as an animal, but as a civilised being, view the principle of population not as checked only by vice, misery, and the fear of them, but by all the mixed motives of human society, and you recognise that Malthus, with the best intentions, had treated the matter somewhat too abstractly. Godwin had overrated the power of reason, and Malthus had overrated the power of passion. "It is probable," he wrote at a later time, "that having found the bow bent too much one way, I was induced to bend it too much the other, in order to make it straight" (Appendix to edition 1817). The abstract principle of increase having got more than justice, and the concrete complications of human life having got less, the next step was naturally to deny the possibility of permanent improvement in this world, and to regard every partial improvement as a labour of Sisyphus (1st ed. p. 367, cf. Senior on Population).

It can hardly be otherwise if we begin, like Malthus, by

setting down the desire of food and the desire of marriage as two co-ordinate postulates (1st ed. p. 10). The truth is that they are not really co-ordinate. The first is true not merely of most men, but of all men without a single exception; no man can live without food. Even if he survive an abstinence from solid food for forty days, he cannot deny himself water; and he is for all useful purposes dead to the world during his fast. The second postulate is true only of most men, and even then under qualifications. It is not true of any till manhood; and it is not true of all men equally. Some are beyond its scope by an accident of birth; and a still larger number, whether priests or laymen, put themselves beyond its scope for moral reasons.

Malthus saw that he had been hasty; and he did not republish the Essay till he had given it five years of revision, and added to it the results of foreign travel and wider reading. In 1799 he went abroad with some college friends, and visited Germany, Sweden, Norway, Finland, and part of Russia, these being the only countries at that time open to English travellers. After his return he published his tract on the "High Price of Provisions" (1800), in which he attributes the excessiveness of the price to the practice of increasing the amount of the Outdoor Relief in direct proportion to the price. In the conclusion of this tract (p. 28), he promises a new edition of the Essay: "I have deferred giving another edition of it in the hope of being able to make it more worthy of the public attention, by applying

the principle directly and exclusively to the existing state of society, and endeavouring to illustrate the power and universality of its operation from the best authenticated accounts that we have of the state of other countries." But he was not satisfied with the accounts of other people. When the Peace of Amiens let loose thousands of pleasure-seekers on the Continent, Malthus went to France and Switzerland on no errand of mere pleasure ; and he was luckily at home again, and passing his proof-sheets through the press, before Napoleon's unpleasant interference with English travellers.

It was a happy coincidence that in the dark fighting days of 1798 Malthus should write only of Vice and Misery, while in the short gleam of peace in 1802 and 1803, when the tramp of armed men had ceased for the moment, he should recollect himself and write of a less ghastly Restraint on Population, a restraint which might perhaps, like the truce of Amiens, hold out some faint hope for the future. For the sake of the world let us hope that the parallel applies no further. The wonder is not that he forgot there was such a thing as civilisation, but that amidst wars and rumours of wars he should ever have remembered it.

In the Preface to the new edition (June, 1803), he says he has "so far differed in principle" from the old edition "as to suppose the action of another check to population which does not come under the head either of vice or misery ;" and he has "tried to soften some of the harshest

conclusions of the first *Essay*." There was in reality more change than this. The first *Essay* contained much of the imperfection of the sudden magazine article; and, if the writer had lived half-a-century later, he would very probably have adopted that means of conveying his opinions; he would have given a review of Godwin's political writings, with incidental remarks on the Poor Bill of Mr. Pitt. This was evidently the light in which he himself regarded his first *Essay*, or he would not have handled it so freely in republication. The new edition has new facts, new arrangements, and new emphasis. He had not written a book once for all, leaving the world to fight over it after his death. He had taken the public into partnership with him, and made every discussion a means of improving or enlarging his book. This gives the *Essay on Population* a unique character among economical writings. It is not, however, an unmixed benefit. Has not Kant perplexed all his commentators by converting a second edition into a new book? How far can we pronounce alterations of language to be or not to be corrections of thought? If Malthus is not very blameable in this respect, he is at least guilty of omitting and inserting instead of re-writing in full. Instead of making a new stocking, he darns the old till it almost ceases to be silk.

The very face of the book revealed a change. In 1798, it was "An *Essay on the Principle of Population as it affects the Future Improvement of Society*:" in 1803, it is "An *Essay on the Principle of Population; or, a View of*

its Past and Present Effects on Human Happiness." The dreams of the future are now in the background, the facts of the present in the foreground. In 1798, Malthus had given Godwin the lie:—

" Colouring 'he, dilating, magniloquent, glorying in picture,  
 He to a matter of fact still softening, paring, abating,  
 He to the great might-have-been upsoaring, sublime and ideal,  
 He to the merest it-was restricting, diminishing, dwarfing."

He must do more now, or his political economy is a dismal science. He must show how we can cling to the "matter of fact" without losing our ideal. It is not enough to refer us to the other world. How far may we have hope, in this world? Let Malthus answer.

The Second Essay is his answer; and, if the world has been right in believing with Euripides that second thoughts are the best, then we may rejoice over the Second Essay with a light heart, for it lifts the cloud from the First. It tells us that on the whole the power of civilization is greater than the power of population. The pressure of the people on the food is therefore less in modern than it was in ancient times or in the middle ages; there is now less disorder, more knowledge, and more self-restraint (2nd ed. Book IV., chap. xii., 7th, p. 477). The merely physical checks are falling into a subordinate position. What are the "checks" on population? There are two kinds of them. A check is (*a*) Positive, when it cuts down an existing population; (*b*) Preventive, when it keeps a new popula-



tion from growing up. Among animals the check is only misery, among savage men vice as well as misery, and, in civilised society, moral restraint as well as both vice and misery. Even in civilised society there are strata which moral restraint hardly reaches, simply because there are strata which are not civilised. On the whole, however, it is true that among animals there is no sign of any other check than the positive, while among men the positive is gradually subordinated to the preventive. Among men, misery may act both positively and preventively. In the form of war or disease, it may slay its tens of thousands, and cut down an existing population. By the fear of its own coming, it may prevent many a marriage, and keep a new population from growing up. Vice may also act in both ways, positively as in child murder, preventively as in the scheme of Condorcet. But in civilised society the forces of both order and progress are arrayed against their two common enemies; and, if we recognised no third check, surely the argument that was used against Godwin's society holds against all society; its very purification will ruin it, for it will not allow vice and misery to check the growth of population, and the people will therefore increase to excess. There is, however, a third check, which Malthus knows under the title of moral restraint.

Moral restraint is a distinct form of preventive check. It is not to be confused with an impure celibacy, which falls under the head of vice; and yet the adjective

“moral” does not imply that the motives are the highest possible (2nd ed. I. ii. 10, 11, cf. xiv. 180, 7th ed. 8 note, 262, &c.). The adjective is applied not so much to the motive of the action as to the action itself, from whatever motives proceeding; and in the mouth of a Utilitarian this language is not unphilosophical. “Moral restraint,” in the pages of Malthus, means simply an abstinence from marriage followed by no irregularities (2nd ed. p. 11). Professor Rogers need not complain of the epithet (Political Economy, p. 69). Malthus even speaks of the “moral stimulus” of the bounty on corn, meaning simply the expectations it produced in the minds of men, as distinguished from the variations it produced in the prices of grain (7th ed. 351); and the word “moral” is often, like “morale,” used in military matters to denote mental disposition, as distinguished from material resources. The vagueness of the word is an advantage, for nothing is vaguer than the mass of mixed motives which it is used to designate.

The mind of man cannot be “sawed into quantities;” and, even if it is possible to take to pieces the mixed motives that guide human action, the fact remains that they only operate when together. It is probable that no good man’s motives are ever absolutely noble, and no bad man’s ever absolutely bestial. Even the good man is strongest when he can make his very circumstances war against his power to do evil. Mixed from the first of time, human motives will, in this world, remain mixed unto the last,

whether in saint, sage, or savage. But civilisation, involving as it does a progressive change in the dominant ideas of society, will alter the character of the mixture and the proportion of its elements. The "laws of Malthus" will be obeyed, though the name of Malthus be not mentioned, and the "checks," physical or moral, be never brought to mind. Society, moving all together, if it move at all (and it is never at rest), will need no Morrison's pill to cure one social evil; and as little can it be content with self-denying ordinances, prohibitions, or refutations. It needs a positive truth, and an ideal, that is to say a religion, to give new life to the bodily members by giving new hope to the heart.

Economists are often identified with the doctrine of "*laissez faire*." As the French Revolutionists were charged with believing that the death of the old rulers would of itself introduce happiness and good government, so the Economists have often seemed to teach that the removal of the existing obstacles to trade would of itself lead to the best possible production and distribution of the good things of this life, while the ideal State would be anarchy *plus* the police constable. Godwin would even dispense with the constable. "Give a State liberty enough," he says, "and vice cannot exist in it." But the change Economists have desired has not been a merely negative change. It is not simply the removal of mischiefs. No; the Political Reformation, like the Protestant, will only be successful if it goes

far beyond image-breaking. If we are not to obey the old laws, we must be a law to ourselves. The universal possession of the wise man's liberty, which Godwin desires, must come rather like the leaven than like the thunderbolt. The removal of mischievous legislation is as a matter of fact only accomplished, in a nation like ours, by a positive change of temper and thought, which fits the people for their new position. The repeal of the Corn Laws was only effected by an "agitation," *i.e.* a long series of public discussions, which made society more alive to the causes of wealth and poverty. The speeches of Cobden, read as a whole, will show how the movement he represented, so far from being merely negative, carried with it a whole body of positive doctrine. The removal of the Poor Laws will be effected, if at all, in the same way. We shall be able to dispense with them only when, as a people, we have learned to distinguish between wise and unwise, economical and wasteful charity, and are willing to confine ourselves to the former.

In other words, the Manchester School does not disregard morality. It wishes to make the State small only that it may make public opinion great. Now, Godwin was not far away from it here. If he was wrong in attributing too much evil to institutions, and too little to human nature, he has furnished his own correction. The "Political Justice" disclaimed all sympathy with violence; it taught that a political reform was worthless unless effected peacefully by reason;

and Malthus (B. IV., chap. vi.) has the same cure for social evils—argument and instruction. The difference between them is that Malthus takes into account the unreasonableness as well as the reasonableness of men ; but in essentials they are agreed. The thorough enlightenment of the people, which includes their moral purification as well as their intellectual instruction, is to complete the work of “mending all,” in which men must be fellow-workers with God ; so runs the teaching of Bright and Cobden. Whether the evils of competition are many or few, serious or trifling, depends wholly on the character of the competitors ; the more free, therefore, we make the competition, the more thoroughly we must educate the competitors. Adam Smith was well aware of this ; he recommended School Boards a hundred years before the Acts of 1870 and 1872 (“Wealth of Nations,” B. V. ch. i. Pt. III. Art. 2) ; and Malthus was not behind him (Essay, Book IV. chap. ix. of late edd.). They are aware that the more completely we exclude the interference of Government, the more necessary it will be to use every other moral and social agency, in order to purify and elevate the tastes and habits of the people.

The comparison of the two men, Malthus and Godwin, becomes the more fascinating the more one tries to realise it. Malthus was the student, of quiet settled life, sharing his domestic happiness with his friends in unobtrusive hospitality, and constantly using his pen for the good, as he believed, of the English poor, that in these wretched times

they might have a family life as happy as his own. There never was a more curious delusion than the traditional belief in the hard-heartedness of Malthus. Besides the unanimous voice of private friends, he has left testimony enough in his own books to absolve him. While Adam Smith and others owe their errors to mere intellectual fallibility, Malthus actually owes most of his to his tender heart. His motive for studying political economy was no doubt a mixed motive; it was partly the interest of an intelligent man in abstract questions. But it was chiefly the desire to advance the greatest happiness of the greatest number. In his eyes the elevation of human life was much more important than the solution of a scientific problem. Even when in 1820 he wrote a book on the "Principles of Political Economy" he took care to add on the title page, "considered with a view to their practical application"; in other words, he refused to consider as abstract what always exists in the concrete. It was Malthus, therefore, whose keen sympathy for the sufferings of displaced workmen led him to fight a losing battle with Say and Ricardo in favour of something like an embargo on inventions, and in protest against a fancied over-production. It was Malthus, too, whose private life showed the power of gentleness; it was he whose mild, sonorous vowels Miss Martineau could hear without her ear-trumpet, and whose few sentences were as welcome at her dinner table as the endless babble of cleverer tongues. It was Malthus who felt the pain of a thousand

*Summary*

slanders "only just at first," and never let them trouble his dreams after the first fortnight,—who could say with a higher than Stoical calmness, that they passed by him like the idle wind which he respected not. It was Malthus who outlived obloquy and saw the fruit of his labours in a wiser legislation and better public feeling.

With Godwin all is unlike. It was Godwin who had fightings within doors as well as tears without—Godwin, whose affection for human beings was as variable and eccentric as his devotion to ideas was steadfast and immovable—Godwin, who in his books was too little moved by emotion, and in his life too much moved, if not by the emotion, at least by the caprice of the moment,—quarrelling with his best friends twice a week, and quickly knitting up the broken ties again,—loving his wife well, but not allowing her to live in the same house with him lest they should embarrass each other,—the sworn enemy of superstition, and himself the arch-dreamer of dreams.

Yet, when we contrast the haphazard literary life of the one, ending his days ingloriously in a government pension, unsuccessful and almost forgotten, with the academical ease of the other, "centred in the sphere of common duties" and passing from the world with a fair consciousness of success, we feel a sympathy for Godwin that is of a better sort than the mere English liking for a loser. It is a sympathy not sad enough for pity. It is not wholly sad to find Godwin in his old age a lonely man, his friends drop-

ping off one by one into the darkness and leaving him solitary in a world that does not know him. The world that had begun to realise the ideas of Malthus had begun to realise the ideas of Godwin also. It was a world far more in harmony with political justice than the world into which Godwin had sent his book more than 40 years before. It was good that Malthus lived to see the New Poor Law of 1834; it was good that both Godwin and Malthus lived to see the Reform of 1832.

These two noble-minded men, so long contemporaries and opponents, who had differed so widely and had so much in common, passed away within a few months of each other, on the eve of the Corn League and a new era in England's progress. In their death they were still divided; but now—" *si quis piorum manibus locus*"—they are divided no longer; and they think no hard thoughts of each other any more.

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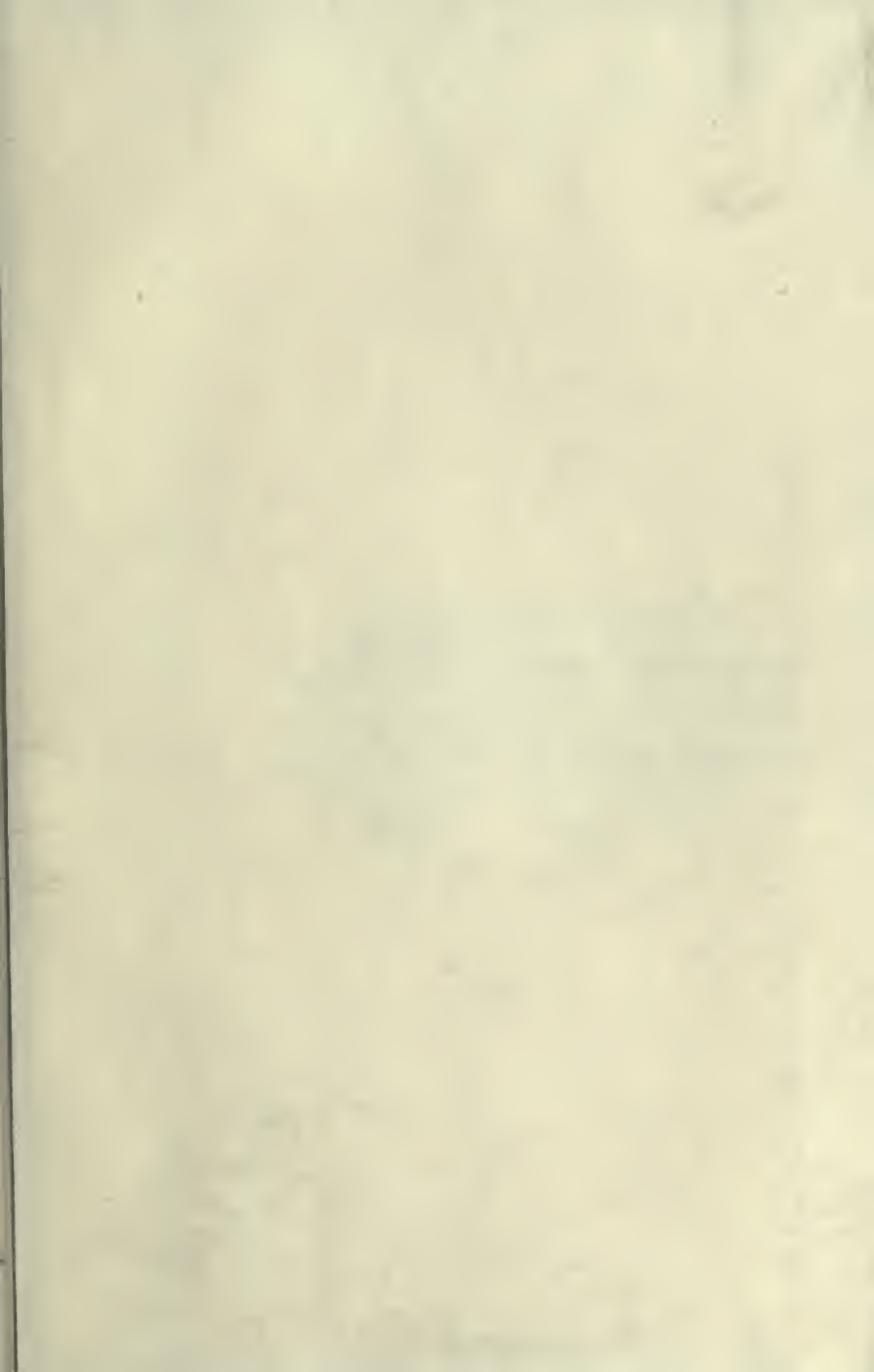
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