SCARCELY any thing can be imagined more likely to supply us with just views respecting the past history of population, and of consequence to suggest to us
sound anticipations as to its future progress, than the comparing some tract of
country and period of time in which its increase appears to have gone on with
highest vigor and health on the one hand, with all that is known, as to its general
aspect over the face of the earth, on the other.

Mr. Malthus has had recourse to certain wild conjectures and gratuitous assertions
respecting the United States of North America, concerning whose population, and
the effect of the power of procreation among them, I may safely affirm nothing is
known, and has here taken his stand, for the purpose of issuing his dogmatical
speculations. Upon this ground he erects his monstrous proposition, that "the
population of the earth, wherever it is unchecked, will go on doubling itself every
twenty-five years, or will increase in a geometrical ratio." Hence he sets

out on the hopeful task, the main business of all his pages, of showing why this
proposition of his has never been realized, or, I may rather say, why no approach
has ever been made to it, in any settled country throughout the annals of the
world.

I have chosen a different standard from that of Mr. Mai thus. I have found that a
very exemplary and elaborate account has been taken of the population of Sweden,
in all those points most calculated to afford knowledge on the subject, for more
than half a century. Here I grasp something real, and by which I can hardly fear to
be misled. Here I find that the population of this division of Europe has gone on for
fifty-Tour years, at a rate which, if in reality this subject would admit of any precise
or mathematical measurement, would seem to promise a doubling in something
more than one hundred years. The question therefore that is left me, is to consider
why, in no country of the earth, the progress of population has advanced at this
rate, perhaps for a single century- or, to take the question upon a larger scale, and
where our evidence is more satisfactory, why the population of the earth,
collectively taken, has experienced no increase, from the earliest records of
authentic profane history to the present hour.

It is by looking at the subject in a comprehensive view, that I think we shall stand the best

chance of attaining some sound principles concerning it.
For this purpose it may perhaps be worth while to direct our reflections to two points.

First, there are certain countries, which were once in an eminent degree populous and flourishing, that are now sunk into a state of comparative solitude and desolation. Such are Syria, Egypt, Greece, Italy, Sicily, that part of Asia which in ancient times was subject to the Great King, and the whole coast of Africa bordering on the Mediterranean. To these we may add the extensive empires of Mexico and Peru in the New World, together with the islands of the American Archipelago. What has reduced them to their present state of desolation?

Secondly, we may turn our attention to those countries, which for centuries past have not been subject to such violent convulsions, the countries which form what may be called the commonwealth of Europe, particularly England, Germany and France. Our thoughts will not then be of desolation, of vast and fruitful provinces rendered naked of inhabitants, but they will be turned to an inquiry not less interesting and useful, why, in none of these countries, population has advanced with that steady and uniform progress, of which, when regarded in the abstract, it seems to be capable?

Population, if we consider it historically, appears to be a fitful principle, operating intermittedly and by starts. This is the great mystery of the subject; and patiently to investigate the causes of its irregular progress seems to be a business highly worthy of the philosopher.

One of the first ideas that will occur to a reflecting mind is, that the cause of these irregularities cannot be itself of regular and uniform operation. It cannot be "the numbers of man kind at all times pressing hard against the limits of the means of subsistence."

Let us first look at those causes which may obviously account for a great and sudden diminution of the numbers of mankind. Those which are in every one's recollection, "familiar in our mouths as household words," are war, pestilence and famine. But there are other causes, more powerful and tremendous in their operation than war, pestilence and famine, at least than those calamities in their more ordinary and softened visitations. These are conquest, such as we find it recorded in certain periods of the history of mankind, and bad government, when
carried to a certain degree of corruption and oppression. I say bad government, in the teeth of one of Mr. Malthus's most extravagant paradoxes, where he lays it down that "Human institutions, however they may appear to be the causes of much mischief to society, are in reality light and superficial, mere feathers that float on the surface, in comparison with those deeper seated causes of evil, which result from the laws of nature and the passions of man."a

The truths I have here delivered, have in reality no novelty in them, but have been dwelt upon by every former political writer who has had much at heart the welfare and happiness of mankind. But there are truths, however obvious, that need to be from time to time revived in the minds of men. Human memory is a repository of so uncertain a tenacity, that the most important principles, the great land-marks of political and moral science, if not occasionally brought to our recollection, are in danger of being let go and forgotten.

I will produce therefore one specimen of the nature of conquest from the writings of Mr. Burke. I might have found as striking examples in fifty other authors, ancient and modern; but there is something in his language that enshrines truth, and imparts to it the immortality of the genius by which it is recorded.

"He drew," says he, speaking of the invasion of Hyder Ali in the Carnatic, "from every quarter, whatever a savage ferocity could add to his new rudiments in the arts of destruction; and compounding all the materials of fury, havoc and desolation, into one black cloud, he hung for a while on the declivities of the mountains.

While the authors of all these evils were idly and stupidly gazing on this menacing meteor which blackened all their horizon, it suddenly burst, and poured down the whole of its contents upon the plains of the Carnatic. Then ensued a scene of woe, the like of which no eye had seen, no heart conceived, and which no tongue can adequately tell. A storm of universal fire blasted every field, consumed every house, destroyed every temple. The miserable inhabitants flying from their flaming villages, in part were slaughtered; others, without regard to sex, to age, to the respect of rank, or sacredness of function; fathers torn from children, husbands
from wives, enveloped in a whirlwind of cavalry, and amid the goading spears of drivers, and the trampling of pursuing horses, were swept into captivity in an unknown and hostile land. Those who were able to evade this tempest, fled to the walled cities. But escaping from fire, sword and exile, they fell into the jaws of famine."

But, lest the exaggeration of the orator in this passage should be suspected, I will subjoin an extract from the authentic pen of the phlegmatic Gibbon.

"In all their invasions of the civilized empires of the South, the Scythian shepherds have been uniformly actuated by a savage and destructive spirit. The laws of war, that restrain the exercise of national rapine and murder, are founded on two principles of substantial interest; the knowledge of the permanent benefits which may be obtained by a moderate use of conquest; and a just apprehension, lest the desolation which we inflict on the enemy's country, may be retaliated on our own. But these considerations of hope and fear are almost unknown in the pastoral state of nations. After the Moguls had subdued the northern provinces of China, it was seriously proposed, not in the hour of victory and passion, but in calm and deliberate council, to exterminate all the inhabitants of that populous country, that the vacant land might be converted to the pasture of cattle. The firmness of a Chinese mandarin, who insinuated some principles of rational policy into the mind of Zingis, diverted him from the execution of this horrid design. But in the cities of Asia, which yielded to the Moguls, the inhuman abuse of the rights of war was exercised with a regular form of discipline. Such was the behavior of the conquerors, when they were not conscious of any extraordinary rigor. But the most casual provocation, the slightest motive of caprice or convenience, often provoked them to involve a whole people in indiscriminate massacre: and the ruin of some flourishing cities was executed with such unrelenting perseverance, that, according to their own expression, horses might run, without stumbling,
forty-seven thousand persons. Timur, or Tamerlane, was educated in a less barbarous age, and in the profession of the Mahometan religion; yet, if Attila equaled the hostile ravages of Tamerlane, either the Hun or the Tartar might deserve the epithet of the Scourge of God. Cherefeddin AH, the servile panegyrist of the latter, would afford us many horrid examples. In his camp before Delhi, Timur massacred 100,000 Indian prisoners, who had smiled when the army of their countrymen appeared in sight. The people of Ispahan supplied 70,000 human sculls for the structure of several lofty towers; and a similar tax was levied on the revolt of Bagdad."

These are a few of the most memorable examples of the achievements of savage conquerors. But we must not suppose that the desolation produced by conquests was confined to such as these. Cesar, the elegant and accomplished Cesar, whose humanity has furnished a topic to so many panegyrists, is computed to have conquered three hundred nations, taken eight hundred cities, and to have defeated three millions of men, one million of which was left dead on the field of battle. "Observe," exclaims Gibbon, "with how much indifference Ceasar relates in his Commentaries of the Gallic war, that he put to death the senate of the Veneti who had yielded lo his mercy (iii, 16); that he labored to extirpate the whole nation of the Eburones (vi, 31); and that forty thousand persons were massacred at Bourges, by the just revenge of his soldiers who spared neither age nor sex (vii, 27)."

The expressive style of Tacitus sums up the whole of this subject in a very few words. "Proximus dies Jaciem xrictorice latins aperuit. Vastum ubique silentium, secreti colles, fumantia procvl tecta, nemo exploratoribus obvius ."

How often has this scene been acted over on the face of the earth? It was thus that **"Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees* excellency, became as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch his tent there, neither shall the shepherds make their fold there: but wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures, and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there: and the wild
beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant places."f

Surely all this is not "light and superficial, mere feathers hat float on the surface of human affairs, in comparison with the evils which result from the laws of nature," and what Mr. Malthus deprecates by the name of" the passion between the sexes."

The next source of depopulation which I have mentioned is bad government. It is not consistent with the object of this inquiry, to exhibit any of the subjects of which it treats, under false colors. I have therefore said bad government; I have not said despotism. Despotism is worthy of our fixed reprobation;" but there have been despotisms so conducted, at least for a time, as not to produce the effects of depopulation. On the contrary, the nations among which they prevailed, have appeared prosperous and flourishing.

I will confine myself under this head to a single example, which shall be taken from the work of Mr. Malthus.

"The fundamental cause of the low state of population in Turkey, compared with its extent of territory, is undoubtedly the nature of the government. Its tyranny, its feebleness, its bad laws and worse administration of them, together with the consequent insecurity of property, throw such obstacles in the way of agriculture, that the means of subsistence are necessarily decreasing yearly, and with them, of course, the number of people. The miii, or general land-tax paid to the sultan, is in itself moderate; but by abuses inherent in the Turkish government, the pachas and their agents have found out the means of rendering it ruinous. Though they cannot absolutely alter the impost which has been established by the sultan, they have introduced a multitude of changes, which without the name produce all the effects of an augmentation. In Syria, according to Volney, having the greatest part of the land at their disposal, they clog their concessions [lettings, a* admissions to tenantry] with burdensome conditions, and exact the half, and sometimes even two-thirds, of the crop. When the harvest is over, they cavil about losses, and as they have the power in their hands, they carry off what they think proper. If the season fail, they still exact the same sum, and expose every thing that the poor_
peasant possesses to sale. To these constant oppressions are added a thousand accidental extortions. Sometimes a whole village is laid under contribution for some real or imaginary offense. Arbitrary presents are exacted on the accession of each governor; grass, barley and straw are demanded for his horses; and commissions are multiplied, that the soldiers who carry the orders may live upon the starving peasants whom they treat with the most brutal insolence and injustice.

"The consequence of these depredations is that the poorer classes of inhabitants, ruined, and unable any longer to pay the miri, become a burden to the village, or fly into the cities; but the miri is unalterable, and the sum to be levied must be found somewhere. The portion of those who are thus driven from their homes falls on the remaining inhabitants, whose burden, though at first light, now becomes insupportable. If they should be visited by two years of drought and famine the whole village is ruined and abandoned; and the tax which it should have paid, is levied on the neighboring lands.

"The same mode of proceeding takes place with regard to the tax on the Christians which has been raised by these means from three, five, and eleven piasters, at which it was first fixed, to thirty-five and forty, which absolutely impoverishes those on whom it is levied, and obliges them to leave the country. It has been remarked that these exactions have made a rapid progress during the last forty years; from which time are dated the decline of agriculture, the depopulation of the country and the diminution in the quantity of specie carried into Constantinople.

"The food of the peasants is almost everywhere reduced to a little flat cake of barley or dora, onions, lentils and water. Not to lose any part of their corn, they leave in it all sorts of wild grain, which often produce bad consequences. In the mountains of Lebanon and Nablous, in time of dearth, they gather the acorns from the oaks, which they eat after boiling or roasting them on the ashes.

"By a natural consequence of this misery, the art of cultivation is in the most deplorable state. The husbandman is almost without instruments, and those he has are very bad. His plow is frequently no more than the branch of a tree cut below a
fork, and used without wheels. The ground is tilled by asses and cows, rarely by oxen, which would bespeak too much riches. In the districts exposed to the Arabs, as in Palestine, the countryman must sow with his musket in his hand; and scarcely does the corn turn yellow, before it is reaped, and concealed in subterraneous caverns. As little as possible is employed for seed-corn, because the peasants sow no more than is barely necessary for their subsistence. Their whole industry is limited to a supply of their immediate wants; and to procure a little bread, a few onions, a blue shirt, and a bit of wool, much labor is not necessary. The peasant lives therefore in distress; but at least he does not enrich his tyrants, and the avarice of despotism is its own punishment.

"This picture, which is drawn by Volney, in describing the state of the peasants in Syria, seems to be confirmed by all other travelers in these countries; and, according to Eton, it represents very nearly the condition of the peasants in the greatest part of the Turkish dominions. Universally, the offices of every denomination are set up to public sale; and in the intrigues of the seraglio, by which the disposal of all places is regulated, every thing is done by means of bribes. The pachas, in consequence, who are sent into the provinces, exert to the utmost their power of extortion; but are always outdone by the officers immediately below them, who, in their turn, leave room for their subordinate agents.

"The pacha must raise money to pay the tribute, and also to indemnify himself for the purchase of his office, support his dignity, and make a provision in case of accidents; and as all power, both military and civil, centers in his person from his representing the sultan, the means are at his discretion, and the quickest are invariably considered as the best. Uncertain of to-morrow, he treats his province as a mere transient possession, and endeavors to reap, if possible, in one day the fruit of many years, without the smallest regard to his successor, or the injury that he may do to the permanent revenue.

"The cultivator is necessarily more exposed to these extortions than the inhabitant of the towns. From the nature of his employment, he is fixed to one spot, and the productions of agriculture do not admit of being easily concealed.

The tenure of the land and the rights of succession are besides uncertain. When a
father dies, the inheritance reverts to the sultan, and the children can only redeem the succession by a considerable sum of money. These considerations naturally occasion an indifference to landed estates. The country is deserted; and each person is desirous of flying to the towns, where he will not only in general meet with better treatment, but may hope to acquire a species of wealth which he can more easily conceal from the eyes of his rapacious masters.

"To complete the ruin of agriculture, a maximum is in many cases established, and the peasants are obliged to furnish the towns with corn at a fixed price. It is a maxim of Turkish policy, originating in the feebleness of the government and the fear of popular tumults, to keep the price of corn low in all the considerable towns. In the case of a failure in the harvest, every person who possesses any corn is obliged to sell it at the price fixed under pain of death; and if there be none in the neighborhood, other districts are ransacked for it. When Constantinople is in want of provisions, ten provinces are perhaps famished for a supply. At Damascus, during the scarcity in 1784, the people paid only one penny farthing a pound for their bread, while the peasants in the villages were absolutely dying with hunger. —

"The effect of such a system of government need not be insisted upon. The causes of the decreasing means of subsistence are but too obvious; and the checks, which keep the population down to the level of these decreasing resources, may be traced with nearly equal certainty, and will appear to include almost every species of vice and misery that is known."g

I shall wind up these extracts with repeating Mr. Malthus's remark, that "Human institutions, however they may appear to be the causes of much mischief to society, are in reality light and superficial, mere feathers that float the surface, in comparison with those deeper-seated causes of evil, which result from the laws of nature, and the passion between the sexes."

The theories of the Essay on Population have owed a very great portion of their success in the world, to the ambiguity of the terms employed in it. The multiplication of the human species has been checked and counteracted "by vice and misery." Who denies it? Yes, conquest is vice. Yes, bad government is vice.
And, if these had been exiled from the face of the earth, we may reasonably believe that the human species and the globe on which we dwell would have worn a very different appearance from that which they actually present.

Having thus gained admission for his favorite terms, the author of the Essay on Population immediately proceeds to put the change upon us.

First he affirms, that the increase of mankind, at least in old settled countries, is subject to an uniform and ever-active check. This we have no reason to believe; unless by a check we are to understand the uncertain tenure of human life, and the inevitable law under which we are placed, All men must die. In any other sense it is expressly contrary to the fact.

Secondly he finds, that, in the most memorable instances in which the multiplication of mankind is counteracted, there is generally great vise, and always much misery.

Having set up these two propositions, he bends them towards each other, that upon them he may repose a theory. The increase of mankind is subject to an uniform and ever active check [so says Mr. Malthus]: the known and most notorious checks upon population are vise and misery: therefore vise and misery are incessantly at work to prevent the multiplication of mankind: therefore vise and misery are indispensable ingredients in the permanent composition of the body politic. The ground of his theory is a gratuitous assumption; and, finding that there must be a check where there is none, he precariously compounds it of the best materials that offer themselves to his hand. He shows a very shadowy and inadequate foundation

for his first proposition, the geometrical ratio. He shows none at all for his second, by which the stupendous multiplication of mankind by a doubling every twenty-five years is reduced at once, through the instrumentality of vise and misery, to a stand; but requires us to believe it, simply because (as he says) it must be so.

bSpeech o the Debts of the Nabob of Arcot.
cDecline and Fall of the Roman Empire, Chap. XXXIV.

Agricolæ Vita, cap. 38.

Isaiah, Chap. XIII.


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