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THE
LIFE AND TIMES
OF THE
REV. JOHN WESLEY, M.A.,
Founder of the Methodists.

BY THE
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all our wants before God in solemn prayer ; believing that He would sooner 'make windows in heaven' than suffer His truth to fail."

This reference to the poor requires further notice. The long continued war, a succession of inferior harvests, and other unfavourable events, had raised the price of provisions to such an extent, that the distress of the nation had become alarming. In the month of November, the court of common council of London agreed to petition parliament to open the ports of the kingdom for the free importation of all kinds of grain ; and one of the members proposed that, in order to prevent the unnecessary consumption of flour, the making of starch should be prohibited. Long letters on the starved condition of the country were published in the newspapers and magazines. Some of them entered into elaborate calculations, showing that, in London only, during the six winter months, twenty thousand sheep and two thousand oxen were used in making soup for taverns, and the tables of the great. When the king opened parliament, on November 26, he referred in his speech to the dearness of corn, and recommended "my lords and gentlemen" to consider a scheme "for alleviating the distresses of the poor." This was done, and bills were passed, which substantially permitted the importation of foreign grown grain duty free.

In the midst of all this, Wesley was far from being an indifferent spectator ; and, among the many letters which appeared in the periodicals of the day, one written by himself was not the least important. This letter, published, either by himself or others, in *Lloyd's Evening Post*, for December 21, and in the *Leeds Mercury* for December 29, and in other newspapers and magazines, is altogether too curious and characteristic to be omitted or abridged. It is as follows.

"To the Editor of '*Lloyd's Evening Post*.'

"SIR,—Many excellent things have been lately published concerning the *present scarcity of provisions*. And many causes have been assigned for it ; but is not something wanting in most of those publications ? One writer assigns one cause, another one or two more, and strongly insists upon them. But who has assigned all the causes that manifestly concur to produce this melancholy effect ? at the same time pointing out, how each particular cause affects the price of each particular sort of provision ?

“I would willingly offer to candid and benevolent men a few hints on this important subject, proposing a few questions, and adding to each what seems to be the plain and direct answer.

“1. 1. I ask first, Why are thousands of people starving, perishing for want, in every part of England? The fact I know: I have seen it with my eyes, in every corner of the land. I have known those who could only afford to eat a little coarse food every other day. I have known one picking up stinking sprats from a dunghill, and carrying them home for herself and her children. I have known another gathering the bones which the dogs had left in the streets, and making broth of them, to prolong a wretched life. Such is the case, at this day, of multitudes of people, in a land flowing, as it were, with milk and honey; abounding with all the necessaries, the conveniences, the superfluities of life!

“Now why is this? Why have all these nothing to eat? Because they have nothing to do. They have no meat, because they have no work.

“2. But why have they no work? Why are so many thousand people in London, in Bristol, in Norwich, in every county from one end of England to the other, utterly destitute of employment?

“Because the persons who used to employ them cannot afford to do it any longer. Many, who employed fifty men, now scarce employ ten. Those, who employed twenty, now employ one, or none at all. They cannot, as they have no vent for their goods; food now bearing so high a price, that the generality of people are hardly able to buy anything else.

“3. But to descend from generals to particulars. Why is breadcorn so dear? Because such immense quantities of it are continually consumed by *distilling*. Indeed, an eminent distiller, near London, hearing this, warmly replied: ‘Nay, my partner and I generally distil *but a thousand quarters* of corn a week.’ Perhaps so. Suppose five-and-twenty distillers, in and near the town, consume each only the same quantity. Here are five-and-twenty thousand quarters a week, that is, above twelve hundred and fifty thousand quarters a year, consumed in and about London! Add the distillers throughout England, and have we not reason to believe that half of the wheat produced in the kingdom is every year consumed, not by so harmless a way as throwing it into the sea; but by converting it into deadly poison—poison that naturally destroys, not only the strength and life, but also the morals of our countrymen!

“‘Well, but this brings in a large revenue to the king.’ Is this an equivalent for the lives of his subjects? Would his majesty sell a hundred thousand of his subjects yearly to Algiers for four hundred thousand pounds? Surely no. Will he then sell them for that sum, to be butchered by their own countrymen?—‘But otherwise the swine for the navy cannot be fed.’ Not unless they are fed with human flesh? not unless they are fatted with human blood? O tell it not in Constanti-nople, that the English raise the royal revenue by selling the blood and flesh of their countrymen!

“4. But why are oats so dear? Because there are four times the horses

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kept (to speak within compass), for coaches and chaises in particular, than were some years ago. Unless, therefore, four times the oats grew now as grew then, they cannot be at the same price. If only twice as much is produced, (which perhaps is near the truth,) the price will naturally be double to what it was.

“As the dearness of grain of one kind will always raise the price of another, so whatever causes the dearness of wheat and oats must raise the price of barley too. To account therefore for the dearness of this, we need only remember what has been observed above, although some particular causes may concur in producing the same effect.

“5. Why are beef and mutton so dear? Because most of the considerable farmers, particularly in the northern counties, who used to breed large numbers of sheep or horned cattle, and frequently both, no longer trouble themselves with either sheep, or cows, or oxen; as they can turn their land to far better account, by breeding horses alone. Such is the demand, not only for coach and chaise horses, which are bought and destroyed in incredible numbers; but much more for bred horses, which are yearly exported by hundreds, yea thousands, to France.

“6. But why are pork, poultry, and eggs so dear? Because of the monopolising of farms, as mischievous a monopoly as was ever yet introduced into these kingdoms. The land which was formerly divided among ten or twenty little farmers, and enabled them comfortably to provide for their families, is now generally engrossed by one great farmer. One man farms an estate of a thousand a year, which formerly maintained ten or twenty. Every one of these little farmers kept a few swine, with some quantity of poultry; and, having little money, was glad to send his bacon, or pork, or fowls and eggs, to market continually. Hence, the markets were plentifully served, and plenty created cheapness; but, at present, the great, the gentlemen farmers, are above attending to these little things. They breed no poultry or swine, unless for their own use; consequently they send none to market. Hence, it is not strange, if two or three of these living near a market town occasion such a scarcity of these things, by preventing the former supply, that the price of them will be double or treble to what it was before. Hence, (to instance in a small article,) in the same town where, within my memory, eggs were sold eight or ten a penny, they are now sold six or eight a groat.

Another cause why beef, mutton, pork, and all kind of victuals are so dear, is *luxury*. What can stand against this? Will it not waste and destroy all that nature and art can produce? If a person of quality will boil down three dozen of neat's tongues, to make two or three quarts of soup (and so proportionably in other things), what wonder if provisions fail? Only look into the kitchens of the great, the nobility, and gentry, almost without exception (considering withal that the toe of the peasant treads upon the heel of the courtier), and when you have observed the amazing waste which is made there, you will no longer wonder at the scarcity, and consequently dearness, of the things which they use so much art to destroy.

"7. But why is land so dear? Because, on all these accounts, gentlemen cannot live as they have been accustomed to do, without increasing their income, which most of them cannot do but by raising their rents. The farmer, paying a higher rent for his land, must have a higher price for the produce of it. This again tends to raise the price of land. And so the wheel runs round.

"8. But why is it, that not only provisions and land, but well-nigh everything else is so dear? Because of the enormous taxes which are laid on almost everything that can be named. Not only abundant taxes are raised from earth, and fire, and water; but, in England, the ingenious statesmen have found a way to tax the very light! Only one element remains, and surely some man of honour will, ere long, contrive to tax this also. For how long shall the saucy air blow in the face of a gentleman, nay, a lord, without paying for it?

"9. But why are the taxes so high? Because of the national debt. They must be, while this continues. I have heard that the national expense, in the time of peace, was, sixty years ago, three millions a year. Now the bare interest of the public debt amounts to above four millions. To raise which, with the other expenses of government, those taxes are absolutely necessary.

"II. Here is the evil. But where is the remedy? Perhaps it exceeds all the wisdom of man to tell. But it may not be amiss to offer a few hints, even on this delicate subject.

"1. What remedy is there for this sore evil? Many thousand poor people are starving. Find them work, and you will find them meat. They will then earn and eat their own bread.

"2. But how shall their masters give them work, without ruining themselves? Procure vent for it, and it will not hurt their masters to give them as much work as they can do; and this will be done by sinking the price of provisions; for then people will have money to buy other things too.

"3. But how can the price of *wheat* be reduced? By prohibiting for ever that bane of health, that destroyer of strength, of life, and of virtue, *distilling*. Perhaps this alone will answer the whole design. If anything more be needful, may not all starch be made of rice, and the importation of this, as well as of wheat, be encouraged?

"4. How can the price of *oats* be reduced? By reducing the number of horses. And may not this be effectually done—(1) by laying a tax of ten pounds on every horse exported to France; (2) by laying an additional tax on gentlemen's carriages. Not so much for every wheel, (bare-faced, shameless partiality!) but ten pounds yearly for every horse. And these two taxes alone would nearly supply as much as is now given for leave to poison his majesty's liege subjects.

"5. How can the price of *beef* and *mutton* be reduced? By increasing the breed of sheep and horned cattle. And this would be increased sevenfold, if the price of horses was reduced; which it surely would be half in half, by the method above mentioned.

"6. How can the price of *pork* and *poultry* be reduced? First, by

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letting no farms of above a hundred pounds a year. Secondly, by repressing luxury, either by example, by laws, or both.

"7. How may the price of *land* be reduced? By all the methods above named, all which tend to lessen the expense of housekeeping; but especially the last, restraining luxury, which is the grand source of poverty.

"8. How may the *taxes* be reduced? By discharging half the national debt, and so saving at least two millions a year.

"How this can be done the wisdom of the great council of the land can best determine.

"I am, sir, your humble servant,

"JOHN WESLEY.

"DOVER, *December 9, 1772.*"

This was not the only thing that Wesley and the Methodists did, to contribute to the happiness of the starving poor. It was now that there was organised a band of pious Methodists, who made it their duty and their pleasure to visit the inmates of London workhouses, and, by prayer, and reading, and exhortation, to lead them to Him who is alone the great Comforter. That organisation has uninterruptedly existed down to the present time; and though, for the last twenty years, it has ceased to be a purely Methodist society, its chief workers bear the Methodistic name.¹ From the ninety-fifth annual report of what is now called "The Christian Community," we learn that this society was "established under the patronage of the Rev. John Wesley, in 1772;" and that its agents, all labouring gratuitously, are regularly visiting the workhouses of Shoreditch, St. Luke's, Clerkenwell, St. George's in the East, and Bethnal Green, in eighty-eight halls and wards of which they hold religious services every week; and that, besides this, they have three services weekly in Cambridge Heath female refuge; visit between twenty and thirty low lodging houses, in Spitalfields, every Sunday night; and, during the year, hold about 463 services in the

¹ Mr. George Mackie has the credit of founding this society. He died in 1821, after being a member of the Methodist society more than fifty years, and a zealous and respected local preacher for forty.—(*Methodist Magazine*, 1821, p. 939.) The rules of the Christian Community, published in 1811, required, that, "in order to admission, every candidate must have been a member of the late Rev. John Wesley's society twelve months; a man of strict piety and irreproachable character; and having a gift for prayer and exhortation."