

Durée de l'épreuve : 3 heures

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COMMENTARY

Comment on the document.

J.P. KAY, *THE MORAL AND PHYSICAL CONDITION OF THE WORKING CLASSES IN MANCHESTER* (1832)

The hand-loom weavers, existing in this state of transition, still constitute a very extensive class, and though they labour fourteen hours and upwards daily, earn only from five to seven or eight shillings per week. They consist chiefly of Irish, and are affected by all the causes of moral and physical depression which we have enumerated. Ill fed – ill clothed – half-sheltered and ignorant; – weaving in close damp cellars, or crowded workshops, it only remains that they should become, as is too frequently the case, demoralised and reckless, to render perfect the portraiture of savage life. Amongst men so situated, the moral check has no influence in preventing the rapid increase of the population. The existence of cheap and redundant labour in the market has, also, a constant tendency to lessen its general price, and hence the wages of the English operatives have been exceedingly reduced by this immigration of Irish – their comforts consequently diminished – their manners debased – and the natural influence of manufactures on the people thwarted. We are well convinced that without the numerical and moral influence of this class, on the means and on the character of the people who have had to enter into competition with them in the market of labour, we should have had less occasion to regret the physical and moral degradation of the operative population.

The poor-laws, as at present administered, retain all the evils of the gross and indiscriminate bounty of ancient monasteries. They also fail in exciting the gratitude of the people, and they extinguish the charity of the rich. The custom is not now demanded as the prop of any superstition; nor is it fit that institutions, well calculated to assuage the miseries which feudalism inflicted on its unemployed and unhappy serfs, should be allowed to perpetuate indigence, improvidence, idleness and vice, in a commercial community. The artificial structure of society, in providing security against existing evils, has too frequently neglected the remote moral influence of its arrangements on the community. Humanity rejoices in the consciousness that the poorest may obtain the advantages of skilful care in disease, and that there are asylums for infirmity, age and decrepitude; but the unlimited extension of benefits, devised by a wise intelligence for the relief of evils which no human prescience could elude, has a direct tendency to encourage amongst the poor apathy concerning present exigencies, and the neglect of a provision for the contingencies of the future.