

**CONSIDERATIONS  
ON THE  
POOR LAWS**

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Considerations on the poor laws by John Davison

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ON

**THE POOR LAWS.**

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BY

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TO THE  
RIGHT HONOURABLE  
WILLIAM STURGES BOURNE M. P.  
CHAIRMAN  
OF  
THE SELECT COMMITTEE  
OF  
THE HOUSE OF COMMONS,  
APPOINTED IN THE LAST SESSION OF PARLIAMENT,  
ON THE  
POOR LAWS;  
THESE FEW PAGES  
ARE INSCRIBED,  
WITH A GREAT AND SINCERE RESPECT,  
BY HIS OBEDIENT HUMBLE SERVANT,  
*Oxford,*  
Oct. 10, 1817. THE AUTHOR.

## P R E F A C E.

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THE author of the following pages is well aware of the difficulty of the subject of the Poor Laws, when it is to be taken up with a view to any practical amendment of them. If therefore he should seem, in the course of stating what he has wished to say upon them, to have expressed himself any where with less hesitation and mistrust of judgment, than a question of such acknowledged intricacy requires, he has done so only to save some tediousness in the form of putting his opinions, and begs, by declaring his sense of that difficulty once for all, to be acquitted of the indiscretion of speaking confidently to others, where he himself would be glad to see his way with more certainty.

The very crowd of publications which have already appeared in this same line of inquiry, may serve in some measure perhaps to excuse



one more. In fact, in the promiscuous speculation which commonly falls upon a public question, there is a service which even ordinary men are capable of; as it comes within the reach of very moderate sense soberly applied, to pitch upon particular parts of a system, and canvass the reason of them, or ascertain their effect, with tolerable exactness: and this is something done, though the stress of duty for the practical statesman is still behind. He has to make up his mind upon the effect of the whole in its combined result; and taking one step further, has to connect plans of proposed improvement with interests not always easy to be ascertained, before the experiment upon them has been risked. Still the more confined sketches of argument, which attempt to work out any of the details of the mixt question, may assist in giving some one element or other towards the more comprehensive practical arrangement. And the chance of doing so much, is the real apology for those who may wish to throw in their share to the speculations of the day, but who neither ima-

gine they have any thing of much consequence to offer, nor yet would choose to put three sentences together in print with a certainty of their being useless.

All reasoning on such a subject as the Poor Laws must be idle, that is not supported by a real knowledge of the state of things in the country as it stands under these laws; and existing facts must shape the anticipated experience by which any given alteration of them is to be judged of. Instances and particular cases therefore commonly make a figure in most of the publications, which either describe what is, or recommend what should be. The author of these remarks has of course his facts and examples in view, such as his opportunities of observation (it has been very limited) have afforded: but he has not brought them forward to justify his notions by them. He has declined doing it, as well because particular cases, unless they are strong and aggravated, make little impression in the recital, and in proportion as they are aggravated beyond the common average, though they catch

exceedingly the popular understanding, they are of the less real value in general reasoning; and also because his assumptions will either be justified by the experience of those who may happen to read them; or if they are not so justified, the facts from which they have been drawn would be equally met and opposed by the reader's own contrary experience.

It may be necessary to mention, that the substance of these Considerations was reduced to writing in the month of June last, in order to explain why the allusion made in them to the plan of a fund of parochial contribution among the Poor themselves, is expressed under a doubt whether any such plan would actually be proposed or recommended. That doubt is now removed, by the distinct recommendation, which the plan has subsequently received.