

# The British American.

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## POLITICAL EXTRACTS FROM LATE PUBLICATIONS.

LONDON SPECTATOR.—*Distress of the labouring classes in England.*—Since the opening of Parliament, very contradictory statements have been made as to the condition of the labouring classes in the Northern and Midland counties. Mr. Atwood, of Birmingham, and Mr. Fielden of Oldham, who must have excellent opportunities of knowing the real condition of the population among whom they reside, have asserted in the most unqualified manner, that the distress of the operatives at the present time, is dire beyond all precedent. These assertions have been met by counter-statements. We doubt not that, by the revival in trade, which usually takes place about this season of the year, the manufacturing classes are better off than they were a short time ago; but when the Spring Orders are executed, the distress will certainly return; and two months hence, the periodical complaints of want of work and reduction of wages will again be heard. During eight or nine months of the year, the sufferings of the poor inhabitants of our mining and manufacturing districts are intense and unremitting. Now, that extreme poverty inevitably tends to produce crime, and that the utmost severity of the law is, for the most part, unavailing, when directed against *famishing* criminals, will not be denied by any one who is acquainted with the past history and present state of Ireland. The vice and turbulence of the Irish, are mainly owing to the extreme difficulty of obtaining the means of living. The Marquis of Westmeath indeed, maintains that it is not distress, but sheer wickedness, that prompts the Whitefeet to the commission of outrages against life and property: but until discerning personage can point out to a state of society, on an extended scale, where frequent crimes against property were not invariably been preceded and accompanied by intense suffering on the part of the poor—or where a respect for the law is not a sure indication of worldly comfort—we shall take leave to consider his opinion as the result of obstinate prejudice, and as evidence of a state of mind which utterly disqualifies him from legislating beneficially for his native country. It is not, however, to the state of Ireland, that we now wish to direct attention, but to the fact that one of the main causes of such suffering and crime is at work among

the laboring classes in our own country. In England, the labor-market is glutted; and except at particular and brief periods, wages are much reduced. The working-classes are yearly becoming more impoverished; and consequently less disposed to respect the rights of poverty, or dread the punishment of crime. The number of convictions in England and Wales, which for the seven years ending in 1817 was 35,250, and during the next seven years had increased to 62,412. during the seven years ending in 1831 rose to the fearful height of 85,257. The amount levied for poor rates in England and Wales during the year ending in March 1831, was 8,279,217. If the difference in the value of money is taken into account, it will be found that this sum is larger by some millions than was ever levied for the same purposes during the worst years of the war. It must be the aim and wish of every reflecting, every humane man, to apply a remedy to the evils which these returns prove to exist. Hitherto, however, little has been done, except, perhaps, by the diffusion of knowledge. Assuredly we do not mean to decry the advantages of education; but still we maintain, that in order to its having a due and permanent influence, it must be accompanied by an improvement in the worldly condition of the people. Education in England has not had fair play. It is proved by the reduction of the wages of labor, the augmentation of the poor rates, and the enormous sale of cheap publications, that poverty and information have gone on increasing together. This state of things Mr. Huskisson declared to be without a parallel in the history of nations. It accounts for the fact, that the diffusion of knowledge has not, apparently, caused a diminution of crime. A man with the fear of starvation before his eyes will not be restrained from satisfying his appetite by the precepts of morality, or even of religion. There are multitudes, moreover, who though not driven to this extremity, yet nourish a feeling of hostility towards the upper classes of society, which, however unreasonable it may be, they are in no want of arguments to justify to themselves. This discontented spirit among the labouring population—the natural consequence of their being under-fed, over-worked, and, in their circumstances, over-instructed—may lead to dangerous results. It may break forth into acts of open violence sooner than we anticipate. It must

be highly desirable if possible, by some evil to which there can be no relief of relieving the discontent of the operatives among the legislative much too: Corn-laws substituted being for their s Corn-l we fear son, b remed attempt remedi allude eign pro lings per cent a upon their. this duty rep flict no loss of nothing—there portant article c cheaper rate than reduction of wage take place as soon for our manufactures met by a corresponding price of butcher-meat. jection to this reduction o that it would interfere with trade carried on by the Ir annually to this country, bet fer, and live stock, to the amount two millions. No doubt, it would have that effect; but if it should gradually le to the conversion of pasture lands into f age in Ireland, and thus create a demand for labour, and induce more settled habits of life among the peasantry, the consequences would be in a high degree beneficial both to that country and to England. Without exaggerating the advantages which would follow the adoption of our suggestion, we think it cannot be denied that the relief which it would afford the laboring classes, would be immediately felt, and that it would be attended with great ultimate good to the Irish landholders and peasantry, against whose interest it might at first seem to militate.

The Standard has expressed itself glad, and we are sincerely sorry, to renounce