

house for any person out of employment, and to add to his wages from the parish funds if he had not quite sufficient to maintain himself. This was followed fourteen years later by a far more disastrous piece of misplaced philanthropy. In the early days of the great French war distress was rife everywhere, and one

**Disastrous  
changes in  
the Poor  
Law, 1795.**

of the methods taken to alleviate it was to establish a system of giving a regular system of "grants in aid of wages" for all poor labourers. A sliding-scale was fixed, by which, as the price of the loaf rose, more and more money was to be given to distressed parishioners: the larger the family the larger was to be the grant, in strict arithmetical progression. The idea was to establish a minimum wage for the labourer which he should not fail to get; but, unfortunately, the device tended rather to fix a maximum for him, and that a very low one. For the farmers began at once to cut down the pay of the men they employed, in order that they might save their own money at the expense of the parish—every shilling that they took off being replaced by another which came out of the parish funds. This, of course, had still further bad effects, for the labourer who was not drawing relief-money found himself receiving less than his neighbour who was. Very soon this compelled him to put in his claim for a similar dole, till the vast majority of rural population was receiving poor-relief, and the free labourer became a rare exception.

This disastrous system, tried first in Berkshire in 1795, gradually spread over the whole country. Its main result was that the farmers and their landlords pocketed all the immense profits which came from the high price of corn in the years of the French war; the rural poor got no share of it. Moreover, the system tended to general unthrift and improvidence among the country folk, because the sum of the dole received by each family was in proportion to its numbers; the more children a man had, the more poor-relief was paid him. Hence he wished to have as many children as possible; though he