

MEASURE OF VALUE.*

(December, 1823.)

To the reader.—This article was written and printed before the author heard of the lamented death of Mr. Ricardo.

It is remarkable at first sight that Mr. Malthus, to whom Political Economy is so much indebted in one chapter (viz. the chapter of Population), should in every other chapter have stumbled at every step. On a nearer view, however, the wonder ceases. His failures and his errors have arisen in all cases from the illogical structure of his understanding; his success was in a path which required no logic. What is the brief abstract of his success? It is this: *he took an obvious and familiar truth, which until his time had been a barren truism, and showed that it teemed with consequences.* Out of this position—*That in the ground which limited human food lay the ground which limited human increase*—united with this other position—*That there is a perpetual nisus in the principle*

* MR. JOHN STUART MILL in his *Principles of Political Economy*, Book III chaps. i. and ii., makes some interesting and appreciative remarks on De Quincey's settlement of 'the phraseology of value;' also, concerning his illustrations of 'demand and supply, in their relation to value.'

of population to pass that limit, he unfolded a body of most important corollaries. I have remarked in another article on this subject—how entirely these corollaries had escaped all Mr. Malthus's* predecessors in the same track. Perhaps the most striking instance of this, which I could have alleged, is that of the celebrated French work—*L'Ami des Hommes, ou Traité de la Population* (written about the middle of the last century), which sets out deliberately from this principle, expressed almost in the very words of Mr. Malthus,—‘*Que la mesure de la Subsistance est celle de la Population ;*’—beats the bushes in every direction about it ; and yet (with the exception of one corollary on the supposed depopulating

* In a slight article on Mr. Malthus, lately published, I omitted to take any notice of the recent controversy between this gentleman—Mr. Godwin—and Mr. Booth ; my reason for which was—that I have not yet found time to read it. But, if Mr. Lowe has rightly represented this principle of Mr. Booth's argument in his late work on the Statistics of England, it is a most erroneous one : for Mr. Booth is there described as alleging against Mr. Malthus that, in his view of the tendencies of the principle of population, he has relied too much on the case of the United States—which Mr. Booth will have to be an extreme case, and not according to the general rule. But of what consequence is this to Mr. Malthus ? And how is he interested in relying on the case of America rather than that of the oldest European country ? Because he assumes a perpetual *nisus* in the principle of human increase to pass a certain limit, he does not therefore hold that this limit ever *is* passed either in the new countries or in old (or only for a moment, and inevitably to be thrown back within it). Let this limit be placed where it may, it can no more be passed in America than in Europe ; and America is not at all more favourable to Mr. Malthus's theory than Europe. Births, it must be remembered, are more in excess in Europe than in America : though they do not make so much positive addition to the population.

tendency of war and famine) deduces from it none but erroneous and Anti-Malthusian doctrines. That from a truth apparently so barren any corollaries were deducible—was reserved for Mr. Malthus to show. As corollaries, it may be supposed that they imply a logical act of the understanding. In some small degree, no doubt; but no more than necessarily accompanies every exercise of reason. Though inferences, they are not remote inferences, but immediate and proximate; and not dependent upon each other, but collateral. Not logic but a judicious choice of his ground placed Mr. Malthus at once in a station from which he commanded the whole truth at a glance—with a lucky dispensation from all necessity of continuous logical processes. But such a dispensation is a privilege indulged to few other parts of Political Economy, and least of all to that which is the foundation of all Political Economy, viz. the doctrine of value. Having therefore repeatedly chosen to tamper with this difficult subject, Mr. Malthus has just made so many exposures of his intellectual infirmities—which, but for this volunteer display, we might never have known. Of all the men of talents, whose writings I have read up to this hour, Mr. Malthus has the most perplexed understanding. He is not only confused himself, but is the cause that confusion is in other men. Logical perplexity is shockingly contagious: and he, who takes Mr. Malthus for his guide through any tangled question, ought to be able to box the compass very well; or before he has read ten pages he will find himself (as the Westmorland guides express it) ‘maffled,’—and disposed to sit down and fall a

crying with his guide at the sad bewilderment into which they have both strayed. It tends much to heighten the sense of Mr. Malthus's helplessness in this particular point—that of late years he has given himself the air too much of teasing Mr. Ricardo, one of the 'ugliest customers' in point of logic that ever entered the ring. Mr. Ricardo is a most 'dangerous' man; and Mr. Malthus would do well not to meddle with so 'vicious' a subject, whose arm (like Neate's) gives a blow like the kick of a horse. He has hitherto contented himself very good-naturedly with gently laying Mr. Malthus on his back; but, if he should once turn round with a serious determination to 'take the conceit' out of him, Mr. Malthus would assuredly be 'put into chancery,' and suffer a 'punishment' that must distress his friends.—Amongst those whom Mr. Malthus has perplexed by his logic, I am not one: in matter of logic, I hold myself impeccable; and, to say nothing of my sober days, I defy the devil and all the powers of darkness to get any advantage over me, even on those days when I am drunk, in relation to 'Barbara, Celarent, Darii, or Ferio.'

'Avoid, old Satanas!' I exclaim, if any man attempts to fling dust in my eyes by false syllogism, or any mode of dialectic sophism. And in relation to this particular subject of value, I flatter myself that in a paper expressly applied to the exposure of Mr. Malthus's blunders in his Political Economy, I have made it impossible for Mr. Malthus, even though he should take to his assistance seven worse logicians than himself, to put down my light with their darkness. Meantime, as a labour of shorter

compass, I will call the reader's attention to the following blunder, in a later work of Mr. Malthus's—viz. a pamphlet of eighty pages, entitled, *The Measure of Value, stated and applied* (published in the spring of the present year). The question proposed in this work is the same as that already discussed in his *Political Economy*—viz. What is the measure of value? But the answer to it is different: in the *Political Economy*, the measure of value was determined to be a mean between corn and labour; in this pamphlet, Mr. Malthus retracts that opinion, and (finally, let us hope) settles it to his own satisfaction that the true measure is labour; not the quantity of labour, observe, which will produce X, but the quantity which X will command. Upon these two answers, and the delusions which lie at their root, I shall here forbear to comment; because I am now chasing Mr. Malthus's *logical* blunders; and these delusions are not so much logical as economic: what I now wish the reader to attend to—is the blunder involved in the question itself; because that blunder is not economic, but logical. The question is—what is the measure of value? I say then that the phrase—'measure of value' is an equivocal phrase; and, in Mr. Malthus's use of it, means indifferently that which determines value, in relation to the *principium essendi*, and that which determines value, in relation to the *principium cognoscendi*. Here, perhaps, the reader will exclaim—'Avoid, Satanas!' to me, falsely supposing that I have some design upon his eyes, and wish to blind them with learned dust. But, if he thinks *that*, he is in the wrong box: I must and will express scho-

lastic phrases ; but, having once done this, I am then ready to descend into the arena with no other weapons than plain English can furnish. Let us therefore translate '*measure of value*' into '*that which determines value*;' and, in this shape, we shall detect the ambiguity of which I complain. For I say, that the word *determines* may be taken subjectively for what determines X in relation to our knowledge, or objectively for what determines X in relation to itself. Thus, if I were to ask—'What determined the length of the racecourse?' and the answer were—'The convenience of the spectators who could not have seen the horses at a greater distance,' or 'The choice of the subscribers,' then it is plain that by the word 'determined,' I was understood to mean 'determined objectively,' *i. e.* in relation to the existence of the object; in other words, what *caused* the racecourse to be this length rather than another length: but, if the answer were—'An actual admeasurement,' it would then be plain that by the word 'determined,' I had been understood to mean 'determined subjectively,' *i. e.* in relation to our knowledge;—what ascertained it?—Now, in the objective sense of the phrase, '*determiner of value*,' the measure of value will mean *the ground of value*: in the subjective sense, it will mean *the criterion of value*. Mr. Malthus will allege that he is at liberty to use it in which sense he pleases. Grant that he is, but not therefore in both. Has he then used it in both? He will, perhaps, deny that he has, and will contend that he has used it in the latter sense as equivalent to the *ascertainer* or *criterion of value*. I answer—No: for, omitting a more particular

examination of his use in this place, I say that his use of any word is peremptorily and in defiance of his private explanation to be extorted from the use of the corresponding term in him whom he is opposing. Now he is opposing Mr. Ricardo: his *labour which X commands*—is opposed to Mr. Ricardo's *quantity of labour which will produce X*. Call the first A, the last B. Now, in making B the determiner of value, Mr. Ricardo means that B is the ground of value: i. e. that B is the answer to the question—what makes this hat of more value than this pair of shoes? But, if Mr. Malthus means by A the same thing, when by his own confession he has used the term *measure of value* in two senses: on the other hand, if he does not mean the same thing, but simply the *criterion* of value, then he has not used the word in any sense which opposes him to Mr. Ricardo. And yet he advances the whole on that footing. On either ground, therefore, he is guilty of a logical error, which implies that, so far from answering his own question, he did not know what his own question was.