

PATRICK COLQUHOUN
1745-1820

A Treatise on Indigence; exhibiting a general view of the national resources for productive labour, with propositions for ameliorating the condition of the poor, and improving the moral habits and increasing the comforts of the labouring people, particularly the rising generation London 1806. 8°.

Published Jan 1807 (*EC*)

Victoria College Library (Coleridge Collection)

Two notes from this book were pub in *CM (CC)* 197-8 on the basis of prior publication by Richard Herne Shepherd in *Philobiblion* 1 (1862) 65-6, where the volume was described as having the name of C's friend Thomas Poole on the cover. The covers are still there but the name is not—presumably erased by a later owner or user.

This copy has had a hard life. The spine has been replaced. Typescript notes and transcriptions related to the marginalia have been pasted or slipped in, together with an engraved portrait of C tipped in before the title-page. The library stamp of the New York Public Library and its “withdrawn” stamp are on the title-page verso. There are a few notes in an unknown hand, making minor revisions on pp 9 and 11.

DATE. Probably the summer of 1807, when C was staying with Poole at Nether Stowey and—at Poole's request—wrote notes in a few of his books.

[1 p 1, frontispiece recto](#)

There appear to me many and important exceptions to several of the doctrines & proposals advanced in this Treatise; yet it is an excellent Book spite of these exceptions. S. T. C.—

[2 pp 8-9 | Preliminary Elucidations](#)

Poverty is . . . the state of every one who must labour for subsistence. Poverty is therefore a most necessary and indispensable ingredient in society, without which nations and communities could not exist in a state of civilization. It is the lot of man—it is the source of *wealth*, since without poverty there would be *no labour*,

and without labour there could be no *riches*,* no *refinement*, no *comfort*, and no *benefit* to those who may be possessed of wealth—inasmuch as without a large proportion of poverty surplus labour could never be rendered productive in procuring either the conveniences or luxuries of life.

*Certainly! if the present state of general Intellect and morals be supposed a fair average of the capabilities of society. Otherwise, I cannot see why without this Pov-erty (even as here contra-distinguished from Indigence) A might not agree to make Shoes, B. Cloth, C. Bricks—&c: and the whole Alphabet of Labor carry on a similar Barter to the present, even tho' one third of Society were not devoted to <the production of> useless & debasing luxuries for those who are privileged to live in Idleness—. For mark, the Definition of Poverty is insidious—he is not a poor^a, whose subsistence depends on constant Industry, but he whose bare wants cannot be prod supplied without such unceasing <bodily> Labor from the hour of waking to that of sleeping, as precludes all improvement of mind—& makes the intellectual Faculties to the majority of mankind as useless a boon as Pictures to the Blind.¹ Such a man is poor indeed: for he has been robbed by his unnatural Guardians of the very house-loom of his human nature, stripped of the furniture of his Soul. S. T. C.

See Milton's *Comus*. line 765 to 779.²

[3 p 15](#)

The more frugal habits which prevail in the northern counties, joined to a superior knowledge of the culinary art, enable the cottagers to live better, and to enjoy the comforts arising from a greater variety of food, on much *lower wages than their southern fellow-subjects receive

2^a For “he is not poor” or “he is not a poor man”

2¹ In 1795 C had expressed himself strongly on the distribution of labour: see *Lects 1795 (CC)* 11-12, 223, and cf 235. In those days he believed that no one needed to work more than two hours a day. With “pictures to the Blind” cf WW *Tint-ern Abbey* line 24: *WPW* II 260.

2² *Comus* lines 765-79: “Means her provision only to the good/ That live according to her sober Laws,/ And holy dictate of spare Temperance:/ If every just man that now pines with want/ Had but a moderate and beseeching share/ Of that

which lewdly-pamper'd Luxury/ Now heaps upon som few with vast excess,/ Natures full blessings would be well dispenc't,/ In un-
perfluous eeven proportion,/ And she no whit encomber'd with her store,/ And then the giver would be better thank't,/ His praise due paid, for swinish gluttony/ Ne're looks to Heav'n amidst his gorgeous feast,/ But with besotted base in-gratitude/ Cramms, and blasphemes his feeder.” C wrote six marginal notes on *Comus* in MILTON *Poems upon Several Occasions* (1791).

* in those Counties of the N. of England, with which I am best acquainted, the wages are much higher than in the South, & the labourers do not work nearly so hard.

S. T. C.

[4 p 103 | Ch 3](#)

*As these papers [“Police Gazettes”] will contain nothing of what is denominated *news*, although much that will be infinitely more beneficial in disseminating useful information, calculated to improve the morals of the people, no stamp will be required, and they may be afforded at an expense of not more than one penny half-penny weekly for each paper.

* Surely, if no other news were published in this Paper, than what had been in the Government Gazette, & this one paper exempted from the Duty, it would be a great inducement to the people to read & be thankful for it.¹ How can you keep up patriotism in those without property, if you remove all interest, all excitement of feeling and imagination, from them in the various events of their Country? S. T. C.

[5 p 111 | Ch 4](#)

[C’s note is written next to the beginning of a paragraph about “friendly societies” but appears to respond to the more general remarks in the paragraph above.] It has been shewn, in the progress of this work, that the virtuous poor are subject to numerous casualties incident to a state of civilization, by which they may retrograde into indigence, without any culpable cause. A national system, which would enable this valuable part of the community, from their own resources, *effectually* to provide against such a degradation, producing unmerited misery and distress, would be a *godlike* work.—To this class, contingent aids are peculiarly applicable, and it is through this medium, under a well-constructed *national institution*, that security is to be afforded against the calamity of indigence, either in the progress of human life, while labour remains in their possession, or in old age, when it ceases to be productive.

On this paragraph I venture to remark, that it may be taken as an axiom that no man

⁴ A succession of Stamp Acts, starting in 1712 and most recently amended (with an increase in the tax rate) in 1797, designed to raise funds for the government and to reduce the publication of cheap anti-government newspapers, required that newspapers pay a flat rate per sheet and be

printed on stamped paper. A publication could be exempted if the Tax Office were persuaded that it did not conform to the definition of a newspaper or, in some cases, if the proprietors were able to assure the government that it would be on its side.

is capable of legislating wisely, whose heart is not filled with the love & his head with the understanding, of Liberty, & who is not capable of perceiving the vast importance of indirect as well as general consequences, and of balancing them against particular & immediate conveniences & inconveniences. S. T. C.