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strong, it is obvious that, on any system of morals, the claims of primary and actual parenthood are immeasurably stronger still. If, therefore, man be only secondarily the child of man, but primarily the child of God, then ethically man's first thought, first duty, first love, is due to God. By degrees this larger conception of morals as beginning with duty towards God is slowly leavening modern Unitarianism. It manifests itself in a profounder reverence, a richer and warmer worship, a less analytical and more synthetic treatment of the Bible, and a more sympathetic attitude towards spiritual religion.

In the past, Unitarianism has done glorious service to the Church in claiming for reason an honoured place in religion; it remains for the Church in the future to show Unitarianism that the sweetest of all forms of reasonableness is an intelligent reverence for Revelation. Unitarianism has also done grand service to the Church in emphasizing and bringing into prominence the humanitarian aspects and duties of Christianity; the great importance of righteousness in religion, of the claims of personal liberty as a moderating influence upon central authority, of the rights of conscience to be heard in the discussion of creeds, of the necessity of morals to the life of faith. It now remains for the Church to extend among Unitarians the primary claims of Godwardness in religion, to show that true Christian morals begin with duties to God, that the best way to serve man is first to serve God, that holiness is the highest form of righteousness, that he worketh best who prayeth best, that they who most love God also most love man, that where the Spirit of God is, there, and there only, is perfect liberty, and that all true dogmas, even the dogma of the Blessed Trinity, when vitally incorporated into human consciousness, are not mere functionless opinions, but the most effectual of all instruments for exalting and redeeming and hallowing humanity. JOHN W. DIGGLE.

ART. II.—MY "CHRONICLES OF MISERY."

SOME OLD RATE-BOOKS.

RATE-BOOKS are not generally considered interesting reading—in fact, we view them with disdain or ill-concealed dislike. The rate-collector is not a person whose acquaintance we wish to cultivate, at any rate in an official sense. We look upon rates as a necessary evil incident to our manners and customs, but not at all as affording us any

amusement or out of the way information. This may be true of the carefully ruled, lettered and indexed rate-books of to-day, but it was not always so; as you may find the loveliest flowers upon a bare and barren moor, or the sweetest of landscapes in some unfrequented valley, so there are some rare and curious facts inscribed in our old country rate-books—facts not to be learnt elsewhere and not to be ignored. Those old volumes have heard many a sigh, been bedewed by many a tear, and listened to many a good joke which made the Vestry join in uproarious merriment and signify unqualified assent. Character and custom are alike visible upon their pages, and there the generous and the niggardly, the rich and poor, the laborious and the idle, the successful and the unfortunate, present themselves without disguise to the public eye.

The ponderous volume that lies before me, and which no one would wish to carry further than they could help—for a massive family Bible is a plaything to it—bears upon the *outside* cover, which is of thick cardboard covered with thin yellow skin, the words, "Watton Overseers' Book, July, 1769," but *within* a far more suggestive appellation appears, "Town Book, alias *The Chronicles of Misery*, F. Hicks, 1769"; and no truer name could be found for the contents, for all manner of woes and misfortunes meet our eyes as we turn over the aged pages. Nevertheless, there is also a goodly flavour of parochial fun and caustic wit that makes the local hodge-podge by no means an unsavoury dish. At the very commencement of the book in carefully ruled columns is a "roll of honour" of the overseers who have served the parish from 1744 to 1802—men who have been brought in daily contact with the wants and sorrows and anxieties of their fellow-men in a very practical way—men by no means destitute of kindness and generosity, far beyond the majority of poor-law officers to-day if deeds and annals go for anything.

Now, the chief interest of these old books is that they tell us how country people managed their local affairs long before Poor Laws and Parish Councils, etc., were ever dreamt of. They represent to us a state of things which, although only a little more than a century old, yet is as utterly distinct from our present notions of local government as that of Russia or some other foreign State. If the locomotion, medical science, and social customs of our ancestors fill us with amazement and amusement, so must also their modes of conducting their parish affairs. Vestry meetings in those days must have been lively times, very different from the dry, formal affairs they afterwards became; everybody was profoundly interested in the amount of the rate to be levied, and no doubt everyone closely criticised the way the last had been spent. The most

sacred privacies of domestic life sometimes appear in a quite unseemly publicity in these parish accounts, and I fear that the poor women often suffered much in those days when "bags," and Dorcas meetings and mothers' meetings were unknown.

As the Church vestry was too small for the parishioners to gather in, they met at some inn in the town, and possibly the landlord was none the worse off for their company, not that we dare to surmise that the constantly recurring item of "beer," "small beer," in the overseers' accounts had reference to these occasions; still the fact is significant, for while the expenditure is a constant one, it is not large, and there is not the slightest indication of who ordered it or who drank it. But no one seems to have objected to it. So as the charges vary from 6s. to 8s., perhaps it was a parochial custom to drink the health of the overseers—a reminiscence of the older "drynkyns" of which we read in the "Town Book" in Queen Elizabeth's days. I fear the C.E.T.S. would not have been a popular institution with the Church people of those times, for they seem to have been unable either to cart coal or stack wood without the addition of "beer." But perhaps there is a reason for this: the life of the agricultural labourer then was indeed a hard one. It was all he could do by the hardest toil to earn enough to keep body and soul together, and the home-brewed beer was very different to what they get now. But what was the wine like? For in 1782 we find: "Paid for wine for Rich^{d}. Boreham, 6½d."!

There is nothing sadder to read than the evidences of desperate poverty which these old ledgers contain; the smallest help was most welcome. The words "in need," "no work," occur with awful frequency; and we can imagine what wages were paid them when we see under date 1778: "Paid Boreman and Chapman 9 days digging clay, 11s. 3d."

This just proves what an old woman in this parish, aged ninety-four years, has often told me—how her father slaved till he literally broke his heart and died suddenly at sixty, and yet they never had bread enough to eat, though the mother and children did all they could to help. It was quite usual then for children to go and earn their living at seven or eight, tending sheep, scaring crows, etc. Yet trouble and sickness evoked a great deal of kindness. Month after month do we find the same people receiving parish aid, though the amount was very small, never more than 2s. to 2s. 6d. a week. Small-pox, that constant scourge, made a vast difference to the rates. In 1781 it was so bad that a house was taken for the sufferers—what we should now call a temporary hospital; and we note, "To Phillys Major's wife attending

sm.-pox, £1 4s. 0d." "To small-pox house things sent, £1 0s. 6d." "To Ann Flatfoot and Mr. White for ditto, £2 18s. 0d." While the other additional expenses came to over £50, not including the rent of the "small-pox house," which was £2 10s., for the half year; and the rate was raised from the usual 2s. or 2s. 6d. to 6s. for the next half year. This was evidently a year of plague, but at other times the disease was only in abeyance, for nearly every half year sees some allusion to it. In 1774: "Paid for John Brame and family in y^e^ small-pox (more than I rec^d^.) for cleaning and whiting the house, £1 6s. 10d." In 1788: "Jessup's family for small-pox, £13 15s. 0d." These and similar pregnant facts which appear in wearisome reiteration in the pages of Church registers and rate-books of the last century, I commend to the unbiassed contemplation of our friends the anti-vaccinationists!

But we will now turn to a very different aspect of country life—not the sanitary, but the moral side of rural character and custom. These pages bear sad and continuous witness to the very low moral tone then prevalent in these places. The notes of sums of money paid to the overseers for the maintenance of illegitimate children are considerable and frequent. Let us take the following extracts as specimens from many similar ones.

May 16, 1774: "We do hereby acknowledge to have hereby rec^d^ of (3 men) the sum of one Hundred and sixteen Pounds and sixteen shillings as and for a compensation for the maintenance of their several bastard children, which said sum we hereby promise to pay and Dispose of as the majority of the parishioners of the parish of the Watton shall direct and appoint."

September 1, 1774: There is £60 acknowledged for the same purpose, and to be applied in the same way. Now, the way the good people of Watton decided to spend this money is of exceptional interest. They resolved, at a duly summoned vestry meeting, to apply this money "towards the *Building a Workhouse*, and it is agreed to borrow a further sum so as to make it up £200, which sum so borrowed is to be paid by a surplus in the rate at £10 each half year with the interest, until the whole sum so borrowed shall be discharged; and it is further agreed that every person that have a team and every farmer that have a team and £30 a year shall do towards the building the said house a day's work in carriage with their said teams *gratis*, and those whose teams are greater to do a day's work for every £30; and it is further agreed to have plans drawn by the workmen in the parish for the inspection of the parishioners at a future meeting, when

other regulations are to be agreed upon." This historic resolution is signed by a goodly band of "civic fathers," and gives us a most delightful glimpse of the prudence and forethought and generosity and shrewdness of these worthy townsfolk.

It would be profitless to take my readers all through the ups and downs of this workhouse scheme. I do not think it worked smoothly—at any rate, it moved slowly. Perhaps it was not convenient to lend the teams when wanted, or local jealousies and spites interfered with harmonious working; possibly Farmer Giles thought it "one o' them new-fangled notions." What did they want a workhouse for, when their parents did without it? And Farmer Jones "didn't believe his rating was fair, and he wouldn't lend his team till he was righted." Well, anyhow things progressed with great deliberation, and if it was not that in 1781 the parish paid 16s. for sweeping the workhouse chimneys, and £1 3s. to two persons for taking care of the establishment for one month, I should doubt if it was built till later, for it is only in 1785 we find £48 paid to the builder "on account"; so evidently the proposal did not excite much enthusiasm. Yet here we have the germ of the Poor Law, the outline of the present Local Government theory.

But although the parish did its best to meet its just debts and keep pace with local requirements, it was tremendously careful not to pay one penny that was needless, or that could be rightly demanded elsewhere. A very considerable sum was expended every year in getting and serving warrants for the maintenance of paupers belonging to other parishes; carriage hire, refreshments, clerks and lawyer's fees were dispensed with no niggardly hand, if some other person or parish could be made to "pay the piper." In October, 1775, I find a parish meeting solemnly orders the removal of a certain "Thomas Bryant, his father and family;" but apparently it was easier said than done. No other parish seemed to welcome them, so on November 4 the two overseers were ordered to go to Dereham, and lay the order for removal before two J.P.'s, and consult "a counsel learned in the law." I only hope they got rid of this unfortunate family, for the legal expenses of going to Dereham, etc., came to £3 5s. 10d. Financial arrangements then were sometimes quite formidable affairs; quite large sums of money were left in the overseers' hands at 3 per cent., and the accounts are most carefully kept and inspected. The explanations and discussions each half-year must have been most exciting, and the Committees of Ways and Means were largely attended (judging by the number of signatures) and anxiously expected. There were

disputes about stone and lime and timber, and how they should be sold and the proceeds divided between the tenants and the parish, and very wisely were they generally settled "to avoid litigation." The vestry quite realized law was expensive, if they had to pay for it and would gain nothing.

But if law was dear, medicine was apparently cheap. The parish doctor had for very many years his stated fee of £5 5s. per annum, "midwifery and fractures excepted," and to this is added the privilege (whatever that might be) of "hadging the poor who take a collection." As this "hadging" constantly appears in these books, it must have been similar to being on the pay-lists of the relieving officer. If, however, the medical man was hardly treated by the vestry, he made up for it, as far as he could, by charging liberally for the "exceptions," and births and accidents made no inconsiderable addition to his official honorarium. Insanity also, which was then not treated with any too much consideration, gave the doctor a little help as well, for we find in 1778: "Paid Dr. Reymer for attending Mary Avis at Bedlam, £3 14s. 2d." But beyond these necessary disbursements, there are many delightful indications of kindness and thoughtfulness, far too numerous for mention, such as: "Sitting up at night, 6d.;" "Rug for Freeman's wife, 6 shillings;" "Removing and setting up bed for Freeman, 2d." (this overseer is very particular not to give one penny of his own); "Fire in long illness, £1 13s. 6d.;" "To a woman for a scolt head, 5 shillings;" "Relieved a man taken ill in town, 6d." Countless are the alleviations to suffering and need, but a very keen eye was kept on the doctor; for in 1771 "it is agreed never to pay any Doctor's Bill which is not brought in within the year," and half a guinea is evidently paid under protest; and in 1786 it was decided to pay the doctor monthly, and not give any yearly salary.

Endless other incidentals helped to add to the burdens of the ratepayers. Letters were a constant expense, varying from 2d. to 1s. 4d., the postage being fixed in a very arbitrary and meaningless way. Funerals and coffins were extraordinarily cheap. The making of garments and mending of shoes, though separately far too inexpensive (scarcely better than present-day "sweating," in fact), amounted in the aggregate to a goodly sum. Winding up the parish clock came to about £2 a year. "Making the Window Tax" cost 10s. each time. And what a horrible and insanitary regulation this atrocious window tax was! What an amount of illness this want of air and light must have cost! Then the parish stocks needed repairs; and we may be quite sure the guardians of public morality took very good care these

"danger signals" on the road to ruin were in excellent order, and strong enough to keep in durance vile the luckless miscreant. At this period of the nation's history sparrow clubs were probably not much known of, but sparrows were, and their destruction became a matter of general interest and expense. In 1782 the bill for killing sparrows came to £1 14s. 6d., and again in 1787 to £2 7s. What swarms of wretched birds this sum must represent!

But the good townsfolk were troubled not only with plagues in the form of birds, but also of beasts and insects. Moles made high festival on the common land, to the detriment thereof; so that half a guinea was adjudged a proper retaining fee for some individual who seems to have been a sort of parochial mole-catcher. Still, sparrows and moles are ordinary and commonplace forms of field vermin; but we are rather staggered when we find this entry in 1788, so clearly and sharply written as to defy mistake: "To killing 22 coombs 1½ bushels Locusts at 1s. per Bushel, £4 9s. 1½d." And again, in the same half-year: "To cash paid Mr. T. Younge for killing Locusts, 28 B. &c., £1 15s. 7¾d." Now, I have no idea what insect the Norfolk farmer dignifies by this Oriental title, but I am told that there is a gorgeous large-winged fly, something of a "first cousin once removed" to a dragon-fly, which rejoices in this appellation amongst East Anglian rustics. But it is evident its voracity is quite on a par with its beauty, or these careful old people would never have spent such sums on its destruction. This curious entry never occurs again, and White's "Selborne," which is contemporaneous, speaks of no special insect plague that year; so probably it was local.

There is one remarkable piece of parish property mentioned under date 1785, namely, some parochial shoes! It stands thus: "A pair of Boots for the use of the parish when the grasses are cut, 10s. 6d." The grass in churchyards is long and tangled, heavy with the dew, and of luxuriant growth, while the man employed to cut it is generally far advanced in years, and selected for his need, and inability to do a heavier job; so here we see a touch of kindly thought. The genial old rustic with his "rheumatiz" is not to suffer if the vestry can help it. Rid of his own leaky clodhoppers, and arrayed in the stout parish boots, he can fearlessly face all churchyard damps. To what extent speculation was rife in those days we dare scarcely surmise, but it is always present under some form; so we do not wonder to find these thrifty bodies very careful over the half-yearly accounts, and very particular always to make a note that the parish money or stock is left in the overseers' hands at "3 per cent." That

allowed them (the overseers themselves) to get a reasonable picking. Whatever they did with the money there is no evidence to show; but as there was a most extraordinary and lively trade in "flags," numbering sometimes 30,000 at a time, and there is a charge for "cleaning the Flag house" and "grinding the flag cutters," I imagine that the common afforded a sort of peat, and this furnished an article of commerce, and perhaps the money in the hands of the overseers was invested in this business for the general good. There is one very curious addition to this prudent arrangement under date "Aprill the 19th, 1776," which runs thus: "And the ballance of the money in hand for the maintenance of the Bastard children, being One Hundred and thirty seven pounds, eight shillings & one penny shall be equally rec^{d} by Mr. John Ward & Francis Hicks, and they shall allow at the rate of three p. cent. during the time of their executing their office." Illegitimacy seems to have been a rather profitable source of parish income in those days—not, however, to its credit. Before we pass from the financial aspect of the parish, it is of considerable interest to note what was considered a reasonable sum for the maintenance of a pauper, and what diet was thought sufficient to keep one alive. I think we shall agree that no one would trouble the workhouse for his board if he could manage anyhow else.

In October, 1796, an agreement was entered into with a certain William Jessup, by which he was to board the paupers in the workhouse, and be paid at so much a head by the parish. The price agreed upon was "Nine shillings per Head per calander month," or 2s. 3d. per week—just imagine, less than 4d. a day to board an able-bodied person! There must have been very limited rations, we fear, specially as a footnote is added expressing the willingness of Mr. Jessup to throw in the washing! No compulsory baths, etc., then, we opine, but the parish is to pay 5s. a month for "making and mending," whatever that may mean. When we ask with a very justifiable curiosity what Mr. Jessup was going to provide for this munificent sum of 4d. a day, we find it carefully laid down, so that there was no mistake. For breakfast on Sundays, "Bread, Cheese, and Beer"; on every other day of the week, "Broth"; for dinner on Sundays, "Beef and Pudding"; the same on Thursdays; on Tuesdays, "Dumplings"; on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, "Milk Broth" (whatever kind of muddled-up food and drink was this?); on Saturdays, "Bread and Cheese"; for supper, bread and cheese always. This must have made Saturday a most uninviting day for meals, nothing but broth and bread and cheese all day; perhaps this was intended to make the paupers look forward with all the

greater eagerness to the sumptuous fare of Sunday. Teetotalism was not recognised. In return for his handsome pay, Mr. Jessup had to provide beer in the following quantities: "The Days they have Meat ½ Pt. Beer each; 1 Pt. Daily each man when no meat." But then the paupers had to work for the caterer, and were almost his bondslaves: "no person to be permitted to leave the House without the leave of the officers, the said Wm. Jessup to be entitled to all the earnings of the Paupers." Very few lazy people in the workhouse we imagine, but a great many very hungry ones. Such was an English workhouse just a hundred years ago.

But we must conclude these meditations on the joys and sorrows of old-time ratepayers, taking only one more extract which shows how these secluded corners of the kingdom were affected by the storm and stress of outside politics. It is in 1794, when England was in the bitter throes of a great struggle with France, and the convulsed condition of the country had necessitated the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act, that "the powers that be" evidently thought that the demonstration on Guy Fawkes Day might tend to dangerous disturbance, so precautions were duly taken, and the sum of £4 6s. 2d. is paid for the expenses of constables to prevent the letting off of fireworks on that day, "By order of the Chief Constables, Churchwardens, and Magistrates," while at the same time the making of Militia lists is a perpetual source of expense. Thus we see how matters large and small, important or trivial, came alike to have their influence on the fortunes and prosperity of the country ratepayer. We see shining on these old pages many a bright light of kindness and generous thoughtfulness, while at the same time they are often stained by some very questionable and mean transactions. As we con them over we can see the character of the man reflected in his work, and the character of the period moulded by the nature of the man. We can see the germs of our present Local Government theories working in the national and parochial life, and developing into more active energy and power. We get a very clear picture of how our forefathers thought, and worked, and schemed in these bygone days, and we can but feel that if we have gained much in perfected organization and improved legislation, we have also lost somewhat in simplicity and self-reliance and individuality.

W. B. Russell-Caley.