

**For Preventing the Children of Poor People in Ireland from  
Being a Burden to Their Parents or Country, and for  
Making Them Beneficial to the Public**

It is a melancholy object to those who walk through this great town or travel in the country, when they see the streets, the roads, and cabin doors, crowded with beggars of the female sex, followed by three, four, or six children, all in rags and importuning every passenger for an alms. These  
5 mothers, instead of being able to work for their honest livelihood, are forced to employ all their time in strolling to beg sustenance for their helpless infants: who as they grow up either turn thieves for want of work, or leave their dear native country to fight for the *Pretender* in Spain, or sell themselves to the Barbadoes.

*Pretender*—  
James Stuart

*prodigious*—  
extraordinary

10 I think it is agreed by all parties that this *prodigious* number of children in the arms, or on the backs, or at the heels of their mothers, and frequently of their fathers, is in the present deplorable state of the kingdom a very great additional grievance; and, therefore, whoever could find out a fair, cheap, and easy method of making these children sound, useful members  
15 of the commonwealth, would deserve so well of the public as to have his statue set up for a preserver of the nation.

But my intention is very far from being confined to provide only for the children of professed beggars; it is of a much greater extent, and shall take in the whole number of infants at a certain age who are born of parents  
20 in effect as little able to support them as those who demand our charity in the streets.

*dam*—  
mother, usually of a domesticated animal

As to my own part, having turned my thoughts for many years upon this important subject, and maturely weighed the several schemes of other projectors, I have always found them grossly mistaken in the computation. It is  
25 true, a child just dropped from its *dam* may be supported by her milk for a solar year, with little other nourishment; at most not above the value of 2 shillings, which the mother may certainly get, or the value in scraps, by her lawful occupation of begging; and it is exactly at one year old that I propose to provide for them in such a manner as instead of being a charge upon their parents or the parish, or wanting food and *raiment* for the rest of their lives, they shall on the contrary contribute to the feeding, and partly to the clothing, of many thousands.

*raiment*—  
clothing

*continued on following page*

35 There is likewise another great advantage in my scheme, that it will prevent those voluntary abortions, and that horrid practice of women murdering their bastard children, alas! too frequent among us! sacrificing the poor innocent babes I doubt more to avoid the expense than the shame, which would move tears and pity in the most savage and inhuman breast.

40 The number of souls in this kingdom being usually reckoned one million and a half, of these I calculate there may be about two hundred thousand couple whose wives are breeders; from which number I subtract thirty thousand couples who are able to maintain their own children, although I apprehend there cannot be so many, under the present distresses of the kingdom; but this being granted, there will remain an hundred and seventy thousand breeders. I again subtract fifty thousand for those women who  
45 miscarry, or whose children die by accident or disease within the year. There only remains one hundred and twenty thousand children of poor parents annually born. The question therefore is, how this number shall be reared and provided for, which, as I have already said, under the present situation of affairs, is utterly impossible by all the methods hitherto pro-  
50 posed. For we can neither employ them in handicraft or agriculture; we neither build houses (I mean in the country) nor cultivate land: they can very seldom pick up a livelihood by stealing, till they arrive at six years old, except where they are of towardly parts, although I confess they learn the rudiments much earlier, during which time, they can however be properly  
55 looked upon only as probationers, as I have been informed by a principal gentleman in the county of *Cavan*, who protested to me that he never knew above one or two instances under the age of six, even in a part of the kingdom so renowned for the quickest proficiency in that art.

*Cavan*—  
county in northeast Ireland

60 I am assured by our merchants, that a boy or a girl before twelve years old is no salable commodity; and even when they come to this age they will not yield above three pounds, or three pounds and half-a-crown at most on the exchange; which cannot turn to account either to the parents or kingdom, the charge of nutriment and rags having been at least four times that value.

65 I shall now therefore humbly propose my own thoughts, which I hope will not be liable to the least objection.

I have been assured by a very knowing American of my acquaintance in London, that a young healthy child well nursed is at a year old a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked,  
70 or boiled; and I make no doubt that it will equally serve in a fricassee or a ragout.

75 I do therefore humbly offer it to public consideration that of the hundred  
and twenty thousand children already computed, twenty thousand may be  
reserved for breed, whereof only one-fourth part to be males; which is  
more than we allow to sheep, black cattle or swine; and my reason is, that  
these children are seldom the fruits of marriage, a circumstance not much  
regarded by our savages, therefore one male will be sufficient to serve four  
females. That the remaining hundred thousand may, at a year old, be  
80 offered in the sale to the persons of quality and fortune through the king-  
dom; always advising the mother to let them suck plentifully in the last  
month, so as to render them plump and fat for a good table. A child will  
make two dishes at an entertainment for friends; and when the family  
dines alone, the fore or hind quarter will make a reasonable dish, and sea-  
soned with a little pepper or salt will be very good boiled on the fourth day,  
85 especially in winter.

I have reckoned upon a medium that a child just born will weigh 12  
pounds, and in a solar year, if tolerably nursed, increaseth to 28 pounds.

I grant this food will be somewhat dear, and therefore very proper for land-  
lords, who, as they have already devoured most of the parents, seem to  
90 have the best title to the children.

Infant's flesh will be in season throughout the year, but more plentiful in  
March, and a little before and after; for we are told by a grave author, an  
eminent French physician, that fish being a prolific diet, there are more  
children born in Roman Catholic countries about nine months after Lent  
95 than at any other season; therefore, reckoning a year after Lent, the mar-  
kets will be more glutted than usual, because the number of popish infants  
is at least three to one in this kingdom: and therefore it will have one other  
collateral advantage, by lessening the number of *papists* among us.

*papists*—  
Catholics

I have already computed the charge of nursing a beggar's child (in which  
100 list I reckon all cottagers, laborers, and four-fifths of the farmers) to be  
about two shillings per annum, rags included; and I believe no gentleman  
would *repine* to give ten shillings for the carcass of a good fat child, which,  
as I have said, will make four dishes of excellent nutritive meat, when he  
hath only some particular friend or his own family to dine with him. Thus  
105 the squire will learn to be a good landlord, and grow popular among his  
tenants; the mother will have eight shillings net profit, and be fit for work  
till she produces another child.

*repine*—  
complain

Those who are more thrifty (as I must confess the times require) may flay  
the carcass; the skin of which artificially dressed will make admirable  
110 gloves for ladies, and summer boots for fine gentlemen. . . .

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*tithes*—

donation of 10 percent of  
income to the church

115 I have too long digressed, and therefore shall return to my subject. I think  
the advantages by the proposal which I have made are obvious and many,  
as well as of the highest importance. For first, as I have already observed, it  
would greatly lessen the number of papists, with whom we are yearly over-  
run, being the principal breeders of the nation as well as our most danger-  
ous enemies; and who stay at home on purpose with a design to deliver  
the kingdom to the Pretender, hoping to take their advantage by the  
absence of so many good protestants, who have chosen rather to leave  
their country than stay at home and pay *tithes* against their conscience  
120 to an episcopal curate.

Secondly, The poorer tenants will have something valuable of their own,  
which by law may be made liable to distress and help to pay their land-  
lord's rent, their corn and cattle being already seized, and money a thing  
unknown.

125 Thirdly, Whereas the maintenance of an hundred thousand children, from  
two years old and upward, cannot be computed at less than ten shillings  
a-piece per annum, the nation's stock will be thereby increased fifty thou-  
sand pounds per annum, beside the profit of a new dish introduced to the  
tables of all gentlemen of fortune in the kingdom who have any refinement  
130 in taste. And the money will circulate among ourselves, the goods being  
entirely of our own growth and manufacture.

Fourthly, The constant breeders, beside the gain of eight shillings sterling  
per annum by the sale of their children, will be rid of the charge of main-  
taining them after the first year.

135 Fifthly, This food would likewise bring great custom to taverns; where the  
vintners will certainly be so prudent as to procure the best receipts for  
dressing it to perfection, and consequently have their houses frequented  
by all the fine gentlemen, who justly value themselves upon their knowl-  
edge in good eating: and a skilful cook, who understands how to oblige  
140 his guests, will contrive to make it as expensive as they please.

Sixthly, This would be a great inducement to marriage, which all wise  
nations have either encouraged by rewards or enforced by laws and penal-  
ties. It would increase the care and tenderness of mothers toward their  
children, when they were sure of a settlement for life to the poor babes,  
145 provided in some sort by the public, to their annual profit instead of  
expense. We should see an honest emulation among the married women,  
which of them could bring the fattest child to the market. Men would  
become as fond of their wives during the time of their pregnancy as they  
are now of their mares in foal, their cows in calf, their sows when they are

*propagation*—  
reproduction

*expedients*—  
drastic measures

150 ready to farrow; nor offer to beat or kick them (as is too frequent a practice) for fear of a miscarriage.

Many other advantages might be enumerated. For instance, the addition of some thousand carcasses in our exportation of barreled beef, the *propagation* of swine's flesh, and improvement in the art of making good bacon, so  
155 much wanted among us by the great destruction of pigs, too frequent at our tables; which are no way comparable in taste or magnificence to a well-grown, fat, yearling child, which roasted whole will make a considerable figure at a lord mayor's feast or any other public entertainment. But this and many others I omit, being studious of brevity. . . .

160 Therefore let no man talk to me of other *expedients*: of taxing our absentees at five shillings a pound: of using neither clothes, nor household furniture, except what is of our own growth and manufacture: of utterly rejecting the materials and instruments that promote foreign luxury: of curing the expensiveness of pride, vanity, idleness, and gaming in our women: of  
165 introducing a vein of parsimony, prudence and temperance: of learning to love our country, wherein we differ even from Laplanders, and the inhabitants of Topinamboo: of quitting our animosities, and factions, nor act any longer like the Jews, who were murdering one another at the very moment their city was taken: of being a little cautious not to sell our country and consciences for nothing: of teaching our landlords to have at least one  
170 degree of mercy towards their tenants. Lastly, of putting a spirit of honesty, industry, and skill into our shop-keepers, who, if a resolution could now be taken to buy only our native goods, would immediately unite to cheat and exact upon us in the price, the measure and the goodness, nor could ever yet be brought to make one fair proposal of just dealing, though often and  
175 earnestly invited to it. . . .

I profess, in the sincerity of my heart, that I have not the least personal interest in endeavoring to promote this necessary work, having no other  
180 motive than the public good of my country, by advancing our trade, providing for infants, relieving the poor, and giving some pleasure to the rich. I have no children by which I can propose to get a single penny; the youngest being nine years old, and my wife past child-bearing.