

**NORTHAMPTON MERCURY - 20<sup>TH</sup> February 1830**

*To the Editor of the Northampton Mercury*

Sir - As several letters have appeared in your paper of late respecting the poor laws, and the manner they are executed in several parishes, it is a great pity, if these plans are so beneficial, that other parishes do not adopt them; but I conceive those writers do not, to a very great extent, come under the operation of those plans: I should, therefore, like to be informed by those *who do*, whether the burdens in those parishes are diminished? To what extent? Whether the poor are better provided for? And whether the improvement is to be attributed to these plans? Various schemes have been formed in different parishes, and very much eulogised, some of which have been enforced by coercive measures, but the farmers, instead of being relieved, have had their burdens increased, and the poor have been reduced to a worse condition. It is easy for gentlemen who are happily exempt from these burdens, to preside at select vestries, and legislate for a parish; but it is often very difficult to submit to their commands, It require more than human skill to apply a *bad* law to remove evils which it has been the cause of producing. But Mr Flesher, in a letter which appeared in your paper of Jan 30, after mature consideration has come to the conclusion, that for all the times and circumstances, better laws could not have been enacted.

That these laws were well adapted for the times and circumstances of the country *when* enacted, I do not deny; but owing to great changes, they, as well as many others, have become very inefficient and very defective. The changes that have affected the poor laws are, the great increase in population, especially in some parishes where the land is of indifferent quality, which render those laws *unequal*, and very oppressive, the ruin of certain branches of trade in the agricultural districts, by machinery; the partial introduction of the free trading system, which has greatly depressed the agricultural interest; the present corn laws, which, however, expedient, have a tendency, during seasons of scarcity, to increase the poor rates; through which the farmer becomes a double sufferer, by the loss of his crops , and by increasing expenses.

From these changes, and a variety of other causes, the poor laws and other parochial assessments have become *unequal, oppressive, ruinous* to that class of persons on whom they are laid. We do not complain of a law to provide relief to the lame, impotent, old, blind etc., nor for providing employment for the industrious labourer ; but *we do complain*, and we think justly, that *one* class should be compelled to bear these burdens, whilst *others* are exempted; that *tenants, exclusively*, should become the victims of all parochial assessments: this is the root of the evil out of which the abuses in general proceed: the principle we wish to see changed; the “foundation” with which we wish to interfere.

Let all persons, according to their ability, take their share in bearing these burdens, and *were* willing to take our part. We are continually hearing and reading of immense wealth of individuals; and of numbers taking the revenue of this country to spend in others; why should *they* be exempt from these burdens? These sentiments may be termed “fanciful theories”, but we, who feel their *practical* consequences, know them to be *undeniable facts*. Mr. Flesher dislikes changes, and prefers the good old paths”. To this we have no objection, if he can prove that they are *good* ones; but if they lead to ruin, either” *temporal* or *spiritual*”, we consider it of the first importance to *change our course*. But to comfort our minds under the grievances, MR F. reminds us that the whole of the poor laws is a system of charity; “Charity was the basis, charity the means, and charity the end.” Then, Mr. Editor, publishes no more the charitable deeds of noblemen and gentlemen, who give coals and clothing, &c, to the poor; but inform the world of a certain class of persons called *tenants*,\_who contribute to the charitable purposes in some parishes, from £400 to £600, in others from £600, to £800, and in other from £800 to £1,000 *per annum*!!

But , sir, we detest hypocrisy, and therefore deprecate the idea of applying parochial assessments to acts of charity. Is that charity which is *compulsory*? Is it charity to demand of the honest and *industrious farmer* a part of his *earnings*, and *pass by* his opulent neighbour, who lives on *ease* and *luxury*. That farmers are charitable, I do not deny, but through *oppressive burdens of parochial assessments*, *their charity is greatly limited*.

Yours £c.

*Feb.* 4 1830

A. FARMER