

Thesis: for Graduation in August 1879.

The Residuum :

An Enquiry into the Sanitary condition of

The London Poor.

by
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Geo. H. Otter's Thesis

A somewhat ambitious but well
written paper strongly pleading for
government action in providing
homes for the poor

It would be more suited for
a journal than a medical periodical
but ~~in fact~~ has sufficient bearing on
Public Health & make it acceptable as
a Thesis - and it ought to receive
one star

A. D. W.

"Salus Populi Suprema Lex"!!

It is proposed in this paper to discuss an aspect of Sanitation. By Sanitation is here meant the establishment of all those conditions of life which most-encourage the perfect-development of man in his physical, mental and moral nature. The particular question now to be considered is the condition of the London poor. There are not wanting those who consider the elevation of the poor a hopeless task. The opinion of these persons may be laid out of the case. Nothing of this kind is hopeless so long as there is a public Conscience, and an Executive Government which can be moved by that conscience. We are told that for many years public attention has been called to this question, and we are asked - with what result? To this it may be replied that the result is not so insignificant as is often supposed - some knowledge of the subject has been diffused, and practical improvements have been commenced and in many cases carried to some degree of completeness. As an example of these may be mentioned the healthy and well-managed schools which have been built by the London School Board in all parts of the Metropolis, and which in many cases have superseded buildings that were little better than pesthouses.

In all proposed changes of any magnitude the first step is to convince the persons concerned of the fact that a change is necessary, and then to persuade them to set-about-making it. The first step has been accomplished. No one will now assert that the condition of the poor is such that it cannot be improved. No one who knows anything

of the facts

Will deny that the necessity for improvement is great and urgent. From whatever point of view the question is looked at - whether from that of the moralist, the philanthropist, the politician or the Sanitarian, the conclusion must be the same - that thorough reforms are absolutely imperative if the poor are to be raised to such a level as will meet the demands of advancing civilisation.

It is admitted on all hands that something must be done. It is also true that certain initial steps have been taken. These have been to some extent of the nature of experiments, and in almost every case the result has justified the change.

Attention is now called to three points. (i) The present condition of the poor will be indicated: (ii) A comparison will be made between this and former conditions: (iii) Suggestions will be offered for still further change.

With regard to the first of these points it may be premised that enquiry has been pursued chiefly in districts in the East-end of London. Not that these districts present features worse than those of some other parts of the metropolis, such for example as Pentonville, Soho, parts of Westminster, Marylebone and Kensington; but because in them the area of population is so great that any changes which could be applied to them could with greater facility be applied to other neighbourhoods.

Taking the Commercial Road as the main artery of traffic between the city and its Eastern suburbs, the districts lying between it and the Thames were visited and inspected. It is of importance to note the general appearance of the streets and their frequenters. Some of the streets are comparatively broad, and, if the houses were well built and clean, would look by no means despicable. But the houses, even in the better streets,

are small and illbuilt; and most of them disgracefully dirty. In not a few there is an attempt at display, which consists chiefly in variegated paint and tawdry, unwashed window curtains. The whole aspect of things in these streets is suggestive of idleness, vanity and dirt on the part of the housekeepers. As for the people, the most enthusiastic apostle of sanitation could not say that they look encouraging. The true East-Indier is well seen in the Ratchiffe Highway (now dignified with the name of St. George Street). The men of the district are here in numbers, at almost any time of the day, during the present season of depressed trade. As a rule there is no want of physical vigour about them, though some of them look as if hunger and they were not strangers. They are not tall, but fairly wellbuilt and squareshouldered. (The sickly portion of the male population of London are to be looked for in the crowded workshops of tailors and those who pursue indoor occupations.) The frequenters of Ratchiffe Highway are chiefly docklabourers, sailors and others of a similar class. Though no great fault is to be found with their physique, their physiognomy is not generally inviting. There is a hard, defiant look about many of them; as if they were quite conscious of being kept-at-bay for the present, though only for the present. They look as if they would be glad of an opportunity of letting those above them know that they are fully alive to the inequalities of human life, and to their own condition as outcasts of society.

If the appearance of the men offers little encouragement to the reformer that of the women offers still less. Many of them look bold and impudent beyond measure. Standing at the doors of the numerous publichouses, or walking up and down ~~the~~^{with} dress unfastened and

4

half drunk gait, they present a picture which is unspeakably saddening. My companions, some of the neighbouring clergy, informed me that most of these women were prostitutes, and that they were always to be seen in large numbers plying their occupation in the open day. In the neighbourhood of Ratchiffe Highway not only whole courts but whole streets are inhabited by these miserable creatures. Entering a girls' school of two hundred children, I was told by the headmistress that fifty of the two hundred were the children of known prostitutes. Yet this school was only like many others.

Such is the general aspect of the broader and better streets. Right and left of these run the smaller and narrower ones; and off these again are the different Courts and Alleys. The narrow, illbuilt and squalid looking streets are sufficiently depressing; but the Courts and alleys are a standing disgrace to a civilized community. I am anxious to avoid writing a sensational paper, but it is impossible for any rightminded person to visit these Courts and alleys without a feeling of indignation and shame.

The Courts, at some time, have evidently been the yards and gardens belonging to the houses in the streets; but want of space has caused them to be built upon. We looked into numbers of them, and entered several for the purpose of inspecting the dwellings. The average width of these Courts is from six to twelve feet. They are sometimes entered by a narrow passage open to the sky, but more frequently by a mere archway between two neighbouring houses. This is generally the only means of ingress and egress, because they are for the most part terminated by a blind extremity. It is hardly necessary to say that good ventilation, under such circumstances, is impossible. In the East of London there are hundreds of such Courts occupied by tens of thousands of people. Even in such places as these

if the houses ^{were} clean and of moderate size, and if the inhabitants were not too numerous, many of the conditions of health might be observed. But what is the state of the case? Each house consists of two, or in some cases four, rooms: and very generally each room is occupied by a whole family. That is to say the father and mother and all their children live, eat, and sleep in one and the same apartment.

I am informed by the Rev. J. P. Jay M.A. Cantab., the Rev. R. W. Hadden B.A. Oxon., the Rev. W. W. Woodward B.A. Oxon. and other clergymen who live and work among these people, that the families who occupy more than one room are the exceptions. That on an average there are at least three families to every four rooms.

Now let us see the size and character of these rooms which lodge whole families day and night! Here is one in Perseverance Court: a Court rather wide and better in appearance than many others. The room is occupied by Mrs. Munay, who has a husband and four children. Her eldest boy, seven years of age, is blind and has been so from infancy. The room is about 12 ft. long, 9 ft. wide, and a little over 7 ft. high. Across the end furthest from the door is a bed. The bed is too dirty and filthy for description. A decent dog would decline to sleep in it. The woman was asked her age. It was twentyfour. How long had she been married? Eight years. She had had six children of whom two were dead. Can any one tell how much misery had been pressed into those eight years of the married life of this girl of twentyfour? But this is surely an exceptional case! Not at all. In Perseverance Court there are twenty houses, occupied by upwards of sixty families, and the rooms of the houses are of the same size and character as that of Mrs. Munay. All the houses are built on the same plan, evidently by the same philanthropic proprietor. Several of them were inspected and all with similar results.

From Perseverance Court to New Court is but a few paces.

New Court is a classical region. It is the abode of the China-man made famous by Dickens in his last novel. The distinguished Celestial has quite a mansion in the secluded recesses of the Court. He has two rooms, one upstairs and one on the ground-floor. On the lower story was his wife - an Englishwoman. She graciously accorded permission to see her lord, and we ascended the stair. It is hardly necessary to say that the stair was rickety, for in all the wretched homes visited during my investigations I never ascended a single stair that was not rickety. It is equally unnecessary to say that it was low and narrow - so low that one's head was in perpetual danger, and so narrow that a crablike motion had to be resorted to in going up and down. The room, when reached, was of the usual dimensions, that is nearly eleven feet square. It contained two beds, as did also the downstairs room, for the follower of Confucius, though he has no children, keeps an hotel for his fellow-countrymen who sail to the port of London. At the time of our visit he was indulging in that philosophic calm with which all great minds love to recreate themselves. He was comfortably ~~coiled~~ coiled up on a bed, the sheets of which had probably been washed when new, and had perhaps been new about the time of the first Punic war. Under his head was a comparatively clean pillow, and in his mouth a very dirty pipe. His mouth itself was not particularly clean, nor did it exhale the odours of Araby the Blest: neither could it be called small or neat, for the stem of the pipe, which seemed to grow from the orifice, was of wood, and at least an inch in diameter. He was, of course, smoking Opium. In answer to questions he said he smoked about a ^{quarter of a} pound of the drug every week; that he had smoked it in large quantities for twenty five years; that he always tried to avoid smoking too much because that spoilt his pleasure; that he was quite happy and had not the least intention of returning to the Celestial Empire. He further informed

us that he supplied his brother Clinchew with opium when they visited him: that he paid eighteen shillings a pound for it, and sold it to them at the rate of eighty; and that on the modest profits made by this means and by the letting of his beds, he managed to live as happily as he could. ^{wish} In fine if the Utilitarian philosophy be sound the illustrious possessor of the pigtail is a most happy and a most virtuous man. It is ~~probable~~ however that he is the only happy person in the New Court. The other inhabitants, having less philosophy and no opium, seemed all miserable enough. Shut up in their small dirty rooms, and stifled with the poisonous atmosphere around them, how could they be other than wretched?

These are samples of the Courts which abound in the poorer parts of London. Many of the streets are little, if it all, better. Essex St. Mile End, may be taken as an example of the latter. It is about three hundred yards long and not more than ten feet wide; too narrow indeed for wheeled vehicles. One side is occupied by houses exclusively, the other side by houses and stables. I was told by the Rev. W. H. Woodward, who accompanied me, that in hot weather the stench in this street is ~~so~~ so horrible that it is almost impossible to walk from one end to the other. Yet there are more than a hundred and twenty families living there, numbering upwards of five hundred people. Mr. Woodward, speaking from personal knowledge, says there are not more than four sober families in the whole street. And who can wonder? We called at No. 15. The house consisted of four rooms and was tenanted ^{by} four families, one to each room. The first room was the best. It was 11 ft. long, 8 ft. broad, and a little more than 7 ft. high. It possessed one ~~room~~ ^{bed} and one only. This room was the living and the sleeping place of six people: a father, a mother and four children, three of whom were suffering from whooping cough. The baby was shown to me in the last stage of emaciation. I could not help feeling thankful that it at any rate would soon be restored to its mother Earth.

No. 38 in the same Street was also visited. Two rooms in this house were occupied by a Cooper named Human, and his family. Human was ill in bed of Phthisis, and waiting for a letter of recommendation to the London Hospital. In his room there were two beds, one occupied by himself and wife, the other by his two boys aged respectively eleven and seven years. The room was 8 ft. square and ~~and~~ 7 ft. high: allowing therefore 112 Cub. ft. of air for each person. There was absolutely no ventilation, the window not having been made to open: and if it could have been opened the sick man could not have borne the draught. The other room in this house was of the same dimensions, and was the sleeping place of the two female children, one of whom was a girl of thirteen. The mother had the boys to sleep in the Parents room because she insisted on the separation of the sexes. Mr. Woodward said the Human's were a thoroughly respectable family and had been reduced to these circumstances, entirely through the man's illness. The rent of this house was five shillings a week. Several houses in the Street were visited. The same story everywhere: "poverty, hunger, and dirt" - and crime. The Mile End Union, in which Essex St. is situated, contains more than a hundred thousand inhabitants, mostly poor; in many cases as bad and worse than these. And yet the Mile End Union forms but a small fraction of the poor districts of London.

It is not necessary to multiply instances. These cases are not exceptional. They were chosen merely because they happened to be on the visiting list of the Clergy at the time. Thousands of such cases may be seen any day and every day. Take the following from "The Times" of April 2nd. of the present year. "Dens in Whitechapel. at the meeting of the Whitechapel Board of works yesterday, Mr. Wrack, Sanitary Inspector, brought up a report which stated that upon visiting several houses in Goulston St. Whitechapel that afternoon, he found an extraordinary state of affairs in a back room on the first floor

of No. 40. The apartment was occupied by a foreigner, his wife and two children, and also 12 fowls which were feeding under the bed; and in a room adjoining occupied by the same person there were 127 fowls. Last week there were as many as 212 fowls kept in the ~~same~~ two rooms. The smell arising from this collection of fowls pervaded the whole house, which is the residence of 20 persons. In the market adjoining a large quantity of poultry is dealt in by the Colony of foreigners, and these in common with all kinds of animal and vegetable food are usually stored in the rooms where the families reside".

In the "Times" of the following Wednesday a worse state of things was reported by the same Inspector. In his second report he says that "At No. 66 in the same street he found 300 fowls on the second floor. The atmosphere was stifling". I suppose if a state of things half as bad as this had been discovered in the South Sea Islands most of the physiologists and chemists in Europe would have rushed thither to test the atmosphere and examine the blood of the ^{people} ~~patients~~ who breathed it.

Such are the houses and such the Courts and Alleys in which the principal part of the London poor live. Yet bad as these places are they are better in some respects than they were forty years ago. The houses then were similar to what they are now; but at the present time much more attention is paid to what may be called public, as contrasted with domestic, sanitation. Each court and alley is now furnished with a tap and there is a constant supply of fresh water. In each Court also there is a water closet, and in some of the larger ones there are two. The closets are common to all the inhabitants, male or female; old or young. There are no dungheaps or open drains as there ^{were} formerly. ~~were~~ In these respects some improvement has taken place. But admitting all this it still remains true that the homes of the poor are indescribably wretched and ought to be

considered intolerable.

Turning from the homes to the habits of the people we are brought face to face with the results of the general disregard of their condition by the public. Here the facts are too well known to need to be proved, and attention has been so frequently called to them that many people despair of exciting interest in what is considered so threadbare a subject. The poor are often miserable drunkards: but everybody knows that. The men drink, and the women drink, and the children drink: but what of that? They bring themselves to deeper depths of poverty, to coarser and more brutal manners, and to degradation more abject than before. But what of that? Although it be true it is not new: we have heard it all repeatedly.

It is taken for granted that the immoral habits of the poor indicate a greater amount of natural depravity than is possessed by the more fortunate classes. This position is not warranted by facts. It is certain, of course, that if every poor man had the wisdom of Solomon, the energy of Cromwell, and the patience of Job, he might in course of time improve his condition very considerably, even though he were a denizen of an East London slum, and the possessor of a wife and six children. It is not denied that the poor creatures under consideration have often themselves to thank for their miseries; and it may be admitted that if their lot is to be much improved they themselves must play no inconsiderable part in the change. But in the meantime it may be safely asserted that the sorrows of the London poor are greater than their sins; and that their ^{sins} ~~sins~~ in many cases are the natural results of their sorrows. Given such conditions of birth, home, training and surroundings the wonder is - not that they are so degraded as they are, but that they are not more degraded still. It is a well known philosophical axiom that development is influenced by surroundings. What must be the tendency of development - especially of moral development - in the London poor? We

have crammed them by tens of thousands into dens of squalor and dirt: we have bullied them ^{one day} ~~to-day~~ and superciliously pitied them the next: we have bid them come out into the market and sell themselves for what they would fetch (in strict accordance with the principles of political economy, no doubt): we have used them for our convenience, and despised them, also for our convenience; we have surrounded them on all sides with gorgeous buildings in which a temporary oblivion may be brought for expense. And yet we raise our hands in pious horror when we hear that the seed has borne fruit. If development be determined to any extent by surroundings then according to all the laws of all the sciences the London poor, if left to themselves, are bound to become more and more vicious, more and more criminal, more and more dangerous to the state. They cannot help it. They are miserable. misery leads them to drink; drink drives them to poverty; and poverty to crime. 'One of the best known, and perhaps the most practical clergyman in East-London declares that if he were compelled to live in such a den as is occupied by most of his parishioners he would spend all the time he possibly could in the public house, and in fact would be drunk always if he had the money. This gentleman is upwards of fifty years of age, and speaks from a lengthened experience of an East-London Parish. In all soberness I say that I consider death preferable to the life led by multitudes of the people. The struggle for existence is so severe: the conditions of life are so joyless, so squalid, so degrading and so hopeless that death would be happiness compared with such a life. When we think of a human being we have in our mind a reasonable person with a

The Rev. Harry Jones - Rector of the Parish of St. George's in the East.

moral faculty and a devout soul. But in such circumstances as I have described the moral faculty is blotted out and devotion killed; and men are only distinguished from the brutes by their superior cunning and their baser selfishness.

Drunkenness is only one of the many evils engendered by the conditions under which the poor find themselves. Prostitution prevails to an alarming extent. I have already said that in a girls' school of two hundred one fourth were the children of known prostitutes. The prostitutes of these districts are the most degraded members of a degraded class. They are so numerous and so bold that public opinion in the neighbourhood seems to be thoroughly vitiated on this point, and prostitution is hardly regarded as a crime. On asking, among other questions, at what age these women commenced their career of sin I was told by the clergy that they could ~~hardly~~ ^{scarcely} be said ever to commence it at all; that from their earliest childhood they had been familiar with the unrestrained illicit intercourse of the sexes; and that in the larger proportion of cases the women themselves could probably not remember a time when they were chaste. It is said to be a well known fact that the brutal men use the female children for purposes one cannot name, even in a paper like the present. Incest is too common to be thought at all remarkable. Grown up ~~brothers~~ ^{brothers} and sisters sleep together, not only in the same room but in the same bed. Grown up daughters sleep in the same bed with fathers, and grown up sons with mothers. The clergy say that the most unnatural crimes are not only perpetrated, but are so frequent as not to be thought strange!

In addition to these grosser evils other customs are found which are not only foolish but often highly dangerous. Among these may be mentioned the general practice of keeping the dead unburied for periods varying from seven to twelve or even more days. Numerous facts were given to me by the clergy shewing the almost universal prevalence of this custom. When a person dies there is no thought of burying

him for at least a week or more. Several stories bearing on this question, some ludicrous and all sad, are omitted for the sake of brevity. When it is remembered that most families have only one room which is used both as a day and sleeping apartment, and that the dead person is kept in this room during the whole period from death to burial, the discomfort and danger to the living may be imagined. Removal to a Mortuary or Compulsory burial within a reasonably short time should be insisted upon without delay. Many other practices dangerous alike to morality and health call for authoritative interference. These also must be omitted in the present paper. The general conclusion arrived at from an investigation of the state of the London poor is - that we have at our doors several colonies of creatures so wretched and degraded that no words can adequately describe their condition, creatures whose whole life is one long struggle against overwhelming odds: that these people are quite powerless of themselves to bring about any effectual change in their circumstances: And that in every respect they are a source of loss, evil, and danger to the Commonwealth.

The question may now be asked Is this state of things a necessary product of civilisation and of the massing together of people in large towns? There are not wanting those who think it is. I am of opinion that it is not. It is not only not necessary - it is disgraceful to any community calling itself civilised; and doubly disgraceful to a people like that of Great Britain who have all the resources of science and wealth at command. We flatter ourselves that we are in the front rank of civilisation: that we are leaders in political freedom and scientific discovery: that we shew to the whole world an example of generous and noble deeds. Would it not be well if more of our science

and ^{more} ~~of~~ our generosity were spent on our own people?

That the condition of the poor may be ameliorated is evidenced by the fact that considerable improvement has taken place during the last thirty years. If the necessary reforms can be made in one direction why not in another? There cannot be any doubt that under favourable circumstances the poor would quickly learn to practice habits of decency, and become as moral and well behaved as any other class. No doubt this is to oppose all the facts of experience.

It will be instructive here to glance at the state of the labouring population of thirty or forty years ago. With regard to overcrowding it is to be feared that little or no improvement has taken place, and in the metropolis at any rate there can be little doubt that the contrary is true. ^a Mr. McCullagh Jones M.P. in an article in the April number of Macmillan's Magazine states that overcrowding is greater now in London than at any previous time. Large numbers of houses have been demolished by government authority, but hardly any others have been built in their places. The consequence is that the former inhabitants of those ~~residences~~ ~~of those~~ tenements have been obliged to seek shelter in other houses which were already crowded to the doors. This is a most lamentable state of things and demands immediate relief. In other respects however we shall see that bad as the state of things is now it was still worse forty years ago. ^b Mr. Joseph Doynbee F.R.S. giving evidence before the "Health of Towns Commission", at the time of which I speak, said that in the parish of St. George's Hanover Square there were 1465 families who had for their residence only 2175 rooms and 2510 beds.

^a Macmillan's Magazine: April 1879. "What is to be done with the Slums"?

^b Gairdner's Public Health p. 81

That of these there were 929 families who had only one room each; and 623 families who had only one bed each. So quote Mr. Jorntee. "The state of things in respect to morals, as well as health I find to be terrible. I am now attending one family, where the father, about 50, the mother about the same age, a grown up son of about 20, in a consumption, and a daughter about 17, who has a scrofulous affection of the jaw and throat, for which I am attending her, and a child all sleep in the same bed in a room where the father and three or four other men work during the day as tailors, and they frequently work there late at night with candles". "In another case" said Mr. Jorntee "which I am attending in one room there are a man and his wife, a grown up daughter, a boy of 16 and a girl of thirteen". Being asked "What do you find generally the state of the rooms which are so crowded?" Mr. Jorntee said "wretched, extremely close, so close, that for self protection, I am obliged to have the windows open during the visit; they are not only close apparently from overcrowding, but they contain noxious odours; the usual source of such odours, so far as it can be detected, is sulphuretted hydrogen arising apparently from the fire and from neglected drains. Odours from these sources are frequently to be traced to the top of the house. In certain states of the weather they are intolerable even to the inmates, who are scarcely conscious of the existence of the ordinary odours". An important point to be noted then, as now, was that the people thus crowded together were not in the depths of poverty. In many cases they could have afforded to pay for better accommodation But they could not get it; nor can they get it now. Mr. Jorntee continues "A man in receipt of 30s. per week wages, considering his amount of rent, which was 5s. 6d. for one room for himself, wife

and three children; having had four deaths after lingering consumptions and a wife and children never well, I felt that he also was a proper object of charity. At the time I visited these 100 families, no less than 212 of the members were suffering under disease, manifest in various stages; they had already had no less than 251 deaths and funerals, and a considerable amount of sickness. It was only in a late stage of my investigations that I began to see the very serious amount of miscarriages they have had, and which in many instances exceed the deaths. Three hundred and fifty of the members of these 100 families were dependent children whose average age was little more than ten years."

To the same purport is the evidence of Mr. John Liddle, then Medical Officer of the Whitechapel Union. When examined before the "Health of Towns Commission" with respect to overcrowding Mr. Liddle said "he knew of few instances where there was more than one room to a family. Being asked "What is the common size of the rooms"? He answered - "About 12 ft. by 8 would give a fair average size of the floors of the rooms; the ceilings rarely exceed 8 feet in height. In many of the garrets I saw unable to stand upright. The number of persons living in a room may average about 5. This would average about 153 cubic feet of air for each person".

Bearing on this question may be quoted the evidence of Dr. Deane then Medical Officer of Health for Liverpool. At that time there was in Liverpool a population of between two and three hundred thousand, of whom about 160,000, or more than half, were working people; and of these about 76,000 lived in Courts and Cellars. The courts and Cellars are thus described ^{to} "The courts were sometimes new constructions, but more often they were based upon old constructions. Let us suppose that a street of houses

^a "Gairdner's Public Health" p. 86

^b "Gairdner's Public Health" p. 98 etc. etc.

has been built, each house having a little bit of ground at the back, containing a little court, or perhaps a bit of green a cesspool and a privy. Well.... it came about that they built over the open space at the back, leaving a passage communicating with the back door of the original house: thus they made what was originally a vestibule to only one house, a passage to a block of houses, which were built on the ground at the back; these houses were often built back to back with the houses of adjoining courts, so that there was literally no ventilation but what was obtained through the narrow passage left as a mere access to the doors of those separate tenements;

The original cesspool, and other conveniences for making away with filth, which probably stood at the very end of the garden, was converted into a general cesspool, ashpit, and mass of nameless abominations common to the whole of these multiplied tenements; giving off, of course, its most concentrated and choicest effluvia to those which had been built upon it..... In the midst of this confusion, a crowd of human beings - probably six, eight or ten times the original number planned to live upon this amount of ground, were thrust into that overbuilt and undrained locality..... There was absolutely no outlet for this accumulation of refuse and filth into any covered drain or common sewer..... In some cases absolutely the sole access to these courts was through the small covered passage in the primary house. Most commonly one end only was blocked up; sometimes however both ends were blocked up (except, of course, the doorway, which might be closed at any time) so that there was literally almost no access of air except from above to any of these houses". To quote the words of Dr. Duveau ^a "The fluid contents therefore of the

overcharged ashpit too frequently find their way through the mouldering walls which confine them In some instances it (the sewage) even oozes through into the neighbouring cellars filling them with its pestilential vapours, and rendering it necessary to dig wells to secure it, in order to prevent the inhabitants being inundated. One of these wells, four feet deep, filled with this stinking fluid, was found in one cellar under the bed where the family slept." The cellars are thus described by Dr. Duncan: they "are ten or twelve feet square: generally flagged - but frequently having only the bare earth for a floor - and sometimes less than six feet in height. There is frequently no window, so that light and air can gain access to the cellar only by the door, the top of which is often not higher than the level of the street. In such cellars ventilation is out of the question. They are, of course, dark, and generally very damp".

In the year 1842, and even later, more than 20,000 people lived in these cellars, and 56,000 in the Courts, in Liverpool alone. Some of the former were used as common lodging houses, and then it not infrequently happened that as many as thirty persons passed the night in one cellar. Dr. Duncan says ^a "At night the floor of these cellars - often the bare earth - is covered with straw, and then the lodgers - all who can afford to pay a penny for the accommodation - arrange themselves as best they may, until scarcely an inch of available space is left unoccupied".

Such overcrowding then, as now, led to demoralisation of the most shocking kind. Then, as now, whole families slept in the same room and in the same bed.

Mr. Riddall Wood, among other cases gives the

^a Gairdner's Public Health p. 118.

following: ^a "In a cellar in Liverpool, I found a mother and her grown up daughters sleeping on a bed of chaff on the ground in one corner of the cellar, and in the other corner three sailors had their bed The two daughters I learned... from the mother's admission were common to the lodgers". "I have met with upwards of 40 persons sleeping in the same room, married and single, ~~in~~ including, of course, ~~little~~ children, and several young adult persons of either sex".

At the time now spoken of not only dwelling houses, but workshops and schools were overcrowded to such an extent as to be highly dangerous to the health of the inmates. In these respects considerable improvements have been effected.

It is unnecessary to add more evidence. I will therefore close this retrospect with one or two quotations from Dr. Southwood Smith. Dr. Smith says ^b "The Statistical Society of London some time ago appointed a Committee of its Council to make a house to house examination of the Parish of Marylebone, with a view to ascertain how many families in the parish occupied a single room as a living and sleeping room. In the course of this enquiry, one of the examiners came to a house in which there was one remarkable room. It was occupied, not by one family only but by five. A separate family ate, drank and slept in each of the four corners of the room: a fifth occupied the centre. "But how can you exist" said the visitor to a poor woman whom he found in the room (the other inmates being absent on their several avocations) "how can you possibly exist?" "Oh indeed, your honour", she replied, "we did very well until the gentleman in the middle took in a lodger".

Speaking of the poor creatures who are thus huddled together in crowds, and of their miserable abodes, Dr. Smith says ^c "It is this unhappy class of people that form the exception to

^a "Gardner's Public Health" p. 118

^b "Common nature of Epidemics" p. 12

the general prosperity of the Nation These wretched places and their inhabitants do not obtrude themselves on the public eye. They are not seen in our common thoroughfares, nor in our splendid streets and squares. They are not known. The medical man knows them, the relieving officer knows them, the minister of religion knows them, a few dispensers of voluntary charity know them. They are not known to any one else. Let me then describe one.

It is a small room, say twelve feet square; an vines room; no chimney, no window that will open, no inlet for fresh air, no outlet for foul air. There on a miserable bed lies a woman ill of typhus fever; a child at her side on the same bed is dying of the same fever; a child already dead of it is stretched out on a table at the bedside.

I could not breathe the air of that room. I could not remain in it long enough to write a prescription. As I was writing it at the street door I shivered and felt sick. I knew I had taken the fever. I passed through a very severe form of it. I could take you to hundreds of such houses in every part of London; to hundreds of courts and lanes wholly consisting of such houses". These words, though written more than twenty years ago, are as true now as they were then. Can nothing teach our national self-love a lesson?

The facts just quoted furnish an idea of the condition of the poor of towns before the middle of the present century. As I have said, certain improvements have taken place, of a very important character. Liverpool has purged itself greatly of its cellar population. There are still many people to be found in cellars in London, though here also the numbers are diminished as compared with former times. In the matter of drainage very great changes have been made. The courts of the metropolis are generally well drained and dry. There are no open dunghoops or leaking cesspools. The scavenger goes regularly round and clears away all accumulated dust and filth. In each court also there is a plentiful

supply of fresh water. There are waterclosets now instead of privies, and although several families have only a single closet in common, this is a vastly improved state of things as compared with the privies and cesspools of an earlier date. The common lodging houses of some parts of London, instead of being cellars, having the floors covered with straw for beds, and crowded to suffocation, are now under strict regulations, and are commodious and comparatively comfortable. Some of those which were visited leave little to be desired in point of cleanliness and order. An important fact in connection with the lodging houses is that those who have the best reputation for cleanliness and order, are always most patronised, even though not the lowest in price: thus proving that even the homeless birds of passage prefer decency to filth. The day schools too, where the poor are taught, have undergone a complete revolution. In various parts of the densely crowded districts, the London School Board has erected large, airy and well-appointed buildings. The children are taught by efficient masters and mistresses; and the utmost regard is paid to sanitation, and all the conditions of mental and bodily health. The sight of the happy faces of the children of one of the Board Schools, and the ringing sound of their merry laughter, as they rushed about the playground, was quite a relief after the miserable spectacles and depressing stories which had greeted us on every hand. This Board School, it should be said, was close to two large blocks of homes erected by the "Improved Industrial Dwellings Company"; and there was a marked contrast between the children there and those of the school I previously mentioned. One could not but feel that here at any rate were human beings, veritable English children; and that here, if anywhere, hope might be allowed to spring up for the future of the labouring population.

We come now to speak of changes which still require

to be made: Changes which must be made if the poorer classes are to be saved from utter demoralisation, and from a life which is fast becoming intolerable. Many reforms are needed, but without going into lengthened details, there are two which are imperative. Homes must be provided for the people: — and the number of public-houses must be diminished. I wish to fix attention on these two points. If the requisite changes were made here many others would follow as a natural consequence.

The people must have homes! At present they live in dens! There is no need for exaggeration, or any attempt at sensational writing. The bare facts are too stern and terrible for hysterics. Whether other people are ashamed of them or not — I am. Is it nobody's business to see that these dens are demolished and the people provided with homes? It is the business of every man who has any feelings of humanity or any regard for the honour of his country. If there be some who sneer, or regard those who would raise the poor as amiable enthusiasts, let them be rewarded with the contempt they merit.

We are told of the difficulty of doing anything; of the magnitude of the work to be done. It is said that if the people are miserable it is their own fault, and that they can raise themselves if they choose to try. Now I admit the difficulty; but not the impossibility; I admit that the work is great but not too great to be accomplished. That the people can be blamed for being so thickly crowded together; or that they can help themselves out of their present difficulties — I deny.

The case stands thus — There are a certain number of people who must live in certain districts; and there are a certain number of houses for them to live in; so many and no more. These are the plain facts. Neither rhetoric, nor logic, nor arithmetic can change them. So many people for so many houses. Just that and nothing else.

You say that the people should live elsewhere! Where? They must live near their work. They cannot afford to live at a distance: and if they could there are no houses for them to live in. All the poorer districts of London and its suburbs are crowded to their utmost limits.

Then talk of political economy. They say that everything finds its own level: that so much work is worth so much wages: that wages must depend upon the amount of work and the number of workers: that if a man cannot earn more than a certain amount of money, he must fit himself to the surroundings which that amount will pay for; and so forth. To which I answer that this science is our servant not our master; that of all the sciences political economy is most under control. In certain other sciences the facts admit of being known, but not made. We make the facts of political economy. Must we be the slaves of our own customs and practices? Are we to be told that that which has been is that which always must be; that though men's thoughts ^{change} and human knowledge is increased there is to be no change in the conditions of human existence? What is the object of science: what is the value of its discoveries if the mass of mankind are to remain untouched by its beneficent hand? If we are never to change our modes of thought and action, why should those who are a degree less civilised change theirs; and by the same reasoning why should the most debased and ignorant savages learn or practice anything different from their fathers? Are we then at the very crown and summit of civilisation? Have we of all nations, ancient and modern, alone reached the point of finality? Alas for the ages to come if this is Utopia! Here in the metropolis, which proudly boasts itself the centre of freedom and advancement, are tens of thousands of men women and children in a state of

abject misery and degradation; and an important factor in the production of this condition is the wretched abode in which each of them is compelled to live. In such a place it is impossible to observe the common laws of decency. Every sense, physical mental and moral is blunted. To a man who lives in a place like this the possession of fine taste or delicate feeling is a great misfortune, and he should be considered the happiest who has the coarsest nature and the dullest mind.

No one will deny that it is desirable that good homes should be provided for the whole industrial people. So far all are agreed. When it comes to the question "Who is to provide them"? There is heard the clash of opposing weapons. But let the subject be patiently considered, and with a sincere desire that the requisite work should be done, and then it is probable that a working conclusion would be arrived at.

In considering the question Who should be responsible for the providing of homes — we must remove it from the region of abstract politics, and deal with the matter exactly as it stands. Several suggestions may be made in answer to the question. It will be said readily enough by some "let the workmen provide homes for themselves"; or the duty might be devolved upon employers; or failing these the parochial, municipal or Imperial authority might be asked to undertake it. It is urged that the matter should be left to speculative builders; or that associations of philanthropic individuals will in course of time effect the necessary reforms.

Now consider these suggestions one by one. And first with regard to the workmen themselves! It is quite certain that however much they may wish it they cannot provide their own homes in this country. There is no need for discussion on this point. They cannot do it. As for

The employers - they will not. Some few do; but the majority do not, and do not care to try. They can build factories for the protection of their machinery, and warehouses for the safekeeping of their goods, but homes for their workmen do not enter into their calculations. Private benevolence and Associations of philanthropic individuals have made attempts, and so far as they have gone, have been rewarded with most gratifying success. But their labours are as a drop in the ocean compared with the work to be done. Speculative builders have been trying their ~~plans~~^{plans} for centuries and we are witnessing the results of their greedy lust for gain. The small proprietor is like a horseleech, but if possible still more voracious.

We have then to fall back upon public authority, parochial, municipal, or Imperial. The parochial authority may be laid out of the case, because the mind of Bumbledom has not hitherto shown itself able to cope with great questions. Municipal authorities, in some isolated cases, have been anxious to deal with the subject, but they have been hampered and hindered by the state of the law. Two measures have been passed to facilitate the improvement of workmen's homes. They are both of a permissive character, and even their permissiveness seems too narrow to meet the needs of the case. But permissive legislation indeed is mere trifling with the question. Under this system large plots of ground, the sites of demolished houses are standing in various parts of the Metropolis - vacant and useless - whilst the poor are crowded more and more densely together in consequence of the loss of these wretched homes.

This kind of legislation is therefore totally inadequate. Reforms must be made compulsory. Every municipality should be compelled to ascertain the extent of overcrowding within its own limits, and to provide a

sufficient number of healthy homes for its needy population. Or this duty should be undertaken by a separate department. Inspection should be frequent, and should be carried out by State Inspectors. All existing houses should be examined, and the owners compelled to make them conform to a sanitary standard. Those which could not be improved should be pulled down and new ones built.

Looking at the magnitude of the question, and considering it from all points of view it seems to me that it can only be dealt with satisfactorily by the Imperial Government. Whether power should be given to some existing department, such as the Local Government Board, or whether an entirely new Department should be created is a mere matter of convenience. The point is to fix the responsibility somewhere, and having fixed it, to urge the immediate necessity of the work.

Here however we are met with the watchwords of theorists! "Centralisation": "Paternal Government": "Interference with the liberty of the subject": "Interference with the operation of natural laws": and a host of other equally noisy and equally meaningless cries. What trifling is this! These are the questions! Have we tens of thousands of people who are worse than homeless? Have all means been tried for the remedy of their condition except the direct action of Imperial authority? Both these questions must be answered in the affirmative: and if so then we are shut up to one of two things: Either the ~~Government~~ Imperial Government must deal effectually with the subject: Or we must confess that we cannot find homes for our labouring population. That is to say we are content that the middle classes should live in luxury, and the upper classes in extravagant profusion; whilst those who toil for the country's wealth are worse housed than

the dogs and horses of their richer neighbours. Are we content that this should be so? Then let us not call ourselves a Christian nation! Let us no longer parody that divine religion which proclaims as one of its principal doctrines "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Let us at any rate strip off this hypocritical guise and confess that the first and last element of our creed is

"The good old rule, the simple plan"

"That he may take who has the power"

"And he may keep who can."

We pride ourselves on our blunt honesty. Let us honestly admit that we are too selfish to grapple with this great question.

Why should not the Imperial Government deal with the subject? I am aware of the thousand and one petty reasons urged against state action. I am not concerned ^{to discuss} those reasons here because very few of them are really worth discussion. It is more to the purpose to show that such action is quite practicable, and not even very difficult. We have already many examples of what may be called paternal government. Board schools, Union workhouses, the general administration of the poor law - what are these but cases in which the Imperial Government performs the functions of parents and others who fail in their just responsibility? The principle of paternal government is admitted; it is indeed a necessary concomitant of civilised institutions. It may be laid down as an axiom that in every case where all other means have failed for the right management of the affairs of any considerable part of the community - those affairs should be transferred to the domain of Imperial politics. The present, I maintain, is such a case. It may be true that the extension of paternal government is not desirable; that centralisation ought to be carefully watched; that too much interference with the liberty

of the subject is to be greatly deprecated; and that the free play of natural laws should not be interrupted without sufficient reason. Grant all this - but does it advance us a single step towards the solution of the difficulty? Does not the fact still remain that overcrowding has not diminished but increased of late years? Is not this the most fruitful source of drunkenness, pauperism, crime and innumerable other evils? Can we allow such a state of things to continue? Shall we not, at any rate, attempt something? If every other method has failed we are driven to this as a last resource. Desperate diseases sometimes require desperate remedies. No one will deny that this is a desperate disease? No one can assert that a desperate remedy is proposed. In making these suggestions it cannot be said that Government is asked to take a leap in the dark. Experiments of the kind proposed have been tried, and tried successfully. The "Peabody Trustees", and the "Improved Industrial Dwellings Company" have raised several handsome blocks of buildings in various parts of the overcrowded districts. Some of the blocks erected by the latter company were visited and inspected. In these homes there are the four requisites of space, cleanliness, order, and the means of decency. The houses are a modification of the Flat-system which prevails in Scotland, ^{with open stairs} and are of various sizes. The smallest have each two rooms, a scullery and a water-closet. The larger have three or four rooms each, with a scullery and water-closet. There is a common "shoot" for dust, reaching to the uppermost flat or storey. The dust is removed daily. The whole block of twenty, thirty, or more houses, has one common roof, which is flat, and is used as a drying place for washed clothes. It can also be used as a promenade. I could not help noticing that the air at the top of the buildings was perceptibly purer and more exhilarating than in the street below. The rooms of these

Tenements vary in size. The smallest are about 14 ft. square, and nearly 9 ft. high. No family is allowed to occupy a single room. Each house is tenanted by one family only. The number of inmates is strictly regulated by the capacity of the house, so that overcrowding is impossible. All the houses are annually inspected by one of the Company's paid Inspectors. The tenants are compelled to keep them clean. Every three years each house is thoroughly cleansed and purified by the Company's Officials. The papers are torn off the walls and renewed: every ceiling and unpapered wall is whitewashed with lime: every floor is scoured and made as fresh as new. If any tenant keeps his house persistently dirty he is discharged, and the whole scouring, cleansing and purifying is repeated before it is relet. If, in any house, a case of smallpox or other infectious disease should occur (which is a rare circumstance) the house is not only disinfected by the parochial authority, but also by the Company afterwards. There are ~~many~~ many other details of importance, but enough has been said to indicate the general character of the dwellings. I asked "Will the people submit to all these inspections and regulations"? The answer was "The houses are always let, and especially the smaller ones. Whenever one is empty it is run after by a number of people, and we can make our choice of a tenant. The larger houses, though always occupied, are not so much run after". The reason of this is clear, the larger houses being rented at from eight to ten shillings per week; whilst the smaller range from three and sixpence upwards. In the surrounding districts the price of a single room is often three and sixpence, or even five shillings. The cheapest I saw was half a crown and that was only eight feet square and seven feet high. After all expenses of buying ground

building, inspecting and doing everything required, have been met, it is found that there is a nett annual profit of five per cent on the outlay. In some cases a larger percentage is returned.

The public owe a debt of gratitude to those companies for having practically solved the question as to the providing of homes for the people. They have shown how the thing is to be done; all that is now required is that their example be followed until a sufficient number of healthy abodes are ready to be occupied. If private companies can accomplish so much how much more might be done by Government Officials armed with all the powers of the law! In this season of depressed trade and stagnant industry what greater or more statesmanlike thing could the Imperial Parliament do than employ tens of thousands of the needy poor in pulling down the filthy dens in which they live and building up homes for themselves? I have conversed with the clergy of the districts in question, and with others who voluntarily spend much time and money in the attempt to lessen the miseries of the people, and they are universally of opinion that nothing short of Imperial authority is adequate for the task to be accomplished. They say that the evil is so great, so desperate even, that it must be removed. It is not a subject for the application of the abstract principles of political theorists; but for the sharp and decisive action of frightened practical statesmen. There cannot be the least doubt that if the bill were present the means would be comparatively easy. We hear so much of vested interests and insurmountable difficulties that the thought occurs - "Are we the sons of those who freed the West Indian negroes, and found large sums wherewith to compensate their owners? Are we the political descendants of those who disestablished the Irish Church at so great a cost to the nation? Have we hearts that beat

in sympathy for those who are distressed in a ^{far off} ~~foreign~~ country, and are we cold and indifferent to the miseries of those who suffer in our own? Have we roused ourselves to an effort to free the Irish nation from a grievance which was merely sentimental, and shall we fold our hands in indifference when thousands of our fellowcountrymen are - not homeless - but worse than homeless? I cannot believe it! The facts are surely not known, or being known are not understood! It is not possible that these things should continue if the people of this country but knew the truth. We are not a race of savages or of dried-up political philosophers. We are surely men with hearts and consciences: with manly feelings and a sense of duty. I am persuaded that if our countrymen could see how some of our fellowmen live, no government would be long in power that failed to deal with this urgent subject.

A few words about the regulation of the trade in strong drink may close this paper. I do not write from the standpoint of "Total Abstinence". On the contrary I hold that alcoholic stimulants have their uses. But there is guilt at somebody's door in regard to the present state of the liquor traffic. We may laugh at the posturings and extravagances of total abstinens, but we are not thereby absolved from any responsibility in the matter. If there be woe to the man that queth his neighbour the bottle, much more shall there be woe to the nation that not only puts temptation in the way of the people, but surrounds them with such circumstances that they cannot help yielding to the temptation. The question is asked "What can we do"? Can we not diminish the number of public houses? Is it impossible for us to do this? Of course I know the stories about the difficulty of dealing with those by whom the trade is carried on! But are our

statesmen such helpless politicians that they cannot surmount difficulties like these? We can surely enact that the number of public houses shall be regulated by the needs of the people; and if this entails loss upon Inkeepers can they not be compensated? We are proud of our skill and courage in war; but war is the state of those who are beginning the rudiments of civilisation and political science. The coarsest of savage nations can quarrel and fight. In this country we stand face to face with social difficulties of the greatest magnitude and we ask for men who can triumph over these.

It is admitted that many of the poor are drunkards; vulgar, coarse and brutal drunkards. Though they may not earn money enough to maintain their families in comfort and decency yet they seem to have no lack of money when it comes to buy drinks. Whether they are at work or on strike they always drink. If wages are high they drink, and they drink if wages are low. Nothing prevents them. Drinks they do, and drink they will. Now then, it is said, can we ask sympathy ^{and help} for them? If they waste their substance is it not just that they should want? Why should one man toil and save in order that another may squander with impunity? Is it not in accordance with all ~~our~~ religion and philosophy that if a man "sow the wind he shall reap the whirlwind"? What right has he to complain who "eats of the fruit of his own ways"? If the workman wants help let him help himself! Other men help themselves and why should not he?

To all of which I answer that there is a sense in which this reasoning is sound and applicable. When a man earns no more than a pittance for his family, and yet wastes a considerable portion of that pittance in wicked self-indulgence one cannot restrain a feeling

of natural indignation. We feel that the horse-whip, or the stocks or the jail would better agree with his merits than sympathy or help. But, unfortunately, the case does not stand thus. We have to deal with people who are demoralised. I use this as no clap-trap word. It is the expression of a sad truth. Many of the people are demoralised, and almost de-humanised. There is hardly anything of conscience or humanity in them to which you can appeal. Centuries of neglect and contempt have done their work. The people have fitted themselves to their surroundings. The laws of development, natural selection, and the survival of the fittest have had full play; and those who have survived are the hard, selfish, demoralised, and brutalised creatures we see.

If this be true and no exaggeration, what hope is there of any change; - why waste time and money in vain attempts? For many reasons: but - at any rate for these two: First because it is our duty; and secondly, because in their present condition the people are a source of loss, injury, and danger to the state.

If the people are determined to drink - and they are: If the conditions of life be such that they are driven to drink - and they are - Then those conditions must be removed! With such homes as they have the people cannot love home, and they cannot voluntarily spend much time in their own houses. With such temptations as they see at the corner of every street it is impossible that they should be sober. At home ^{they} have small rooms, a poisoned atmosphere, poverty, squalor and dirt: everything that is hateful and disgusting. At the public house they have space, light, brightness, laughter and merriment. It is not in human nature,

especially such human nature, to prefer the darker to the brighter place. When a man of high culture and strong religious convictions admits that if he were one of these poor wretches he would spend all the time he could in the public house - who can wonder at, or severely censure, those who have neither culture nor religion?

We come to this then that homes must be provided for the people, such as they can love; and that public houses must be rigorously limited in number and strictly controlled. I do not say how far this limitation should be carried, but it must be as far as the case requires. Counter attractions should also be supplied in the shape of amusements and innocent pleasures. Details cannot be entered ^{into} ~~upon~~ at this stage, but the principle is insisted upon. The people cannot give all their time to work and sleep. They are not mere beasts of burden. They must have recreations; periods of brightness and change during which they may forget their toil. They cannot supply these things for themselves. As I have said they are demoralised, and incapable of initiating or carrying out any improved state of things. They must be helped. The Imperial Government must be their friend. They must be treated to some extent like children, and as children must be subjected to the law of kindness as well as to the law of force. Diminish the number and power of their temptations; Increase the number and quality of their pleasures. Surround them with such conditions that they shall at any rate have it in their power to make life fairly virtuous and happy. In these respects let them be placed on a level with their more fortunate fellows. Do this for them and I maintain that you will have among them as large a proportion of healthy, contented and patriotic citizens as you find in any other class. I do not say that these results will be obtained in

one year, or in two, or even in ten: perhaps not in the present generation. For habits which are the growth of centuries cannot be uprooted in a moment. But when another generation shall arise who shall have been born under this ameliorated condition of things - then will be seen the fruits of this wise and Christian policy. Then the schoolmaster and the minister of religion will reap as well as sow; ^{then} the sanitarian will ~~also~~ see the reward of his toil. I am no optimist nor Utopian dreamer; but of this I am certain that if the good seed be sown wisely and well the harvest will be great and abundant.

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