

Blot in the 'Scutcheon,' which is the best of them, might with just as much of probability have ended happily. All of them are interesting as revelations of the poet's way of thinking on the problem of life, but they are not dramas, though they may be, if I may coin a word, dramatical. They are also poetical enough, but they are not half so poetical as the undramatized poems, where everything, it would seem, in earth and heaven is brought, and with extraordinary brilliancy, keenness, and swiftness,—flash after flash of lightning,—into his one subject, till its farthest recesses are lighted up, then left in darkness, and then lighted up again. In that way also we are made to see Nature in his poetry. A long essay might be written on Browning's treatment and description of natural scenery, and on the way it is always modified by the character in the poem which sees it, and even by the movement of passion in

which that character is placed. There is nothing in which Browning's art is better and more instinctive than in this.

I wish I could speak as fully as I feel of some of the lyrics and of many of the lyrical poems; but to do this, or to expand the brief statements I have made, or to enter into the vast wealth of thought with which the simple main lines of his view of this life and the life to come are developed, illustrated, supported, and completed, would be beyond the sphere of this brief paper; nor do I think, as I said at the beginning, that the time for this has yet come. But still I hold fast to one thing—that the best work of our poet, that by which he will always live, is not in his intellectual analysis, or in his preachings, or in his difficult thinkings, but in the simple, sensuous, and passionate things he wrote out of the overflowing of his heart.

Stopford A. Brooke.

PRESENT-DAY PAPERS.

CONTRIBUTED BY THE SOCIOLOGICAL GROUP.

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It is understood that each writer has had the benefit of suggestions from the group, but is himself alone responsible for opinions expressed in a paper to which his name is subscribed.

THE PROBLEM OF POVERTY.

STUDIES OF POVERTY.



It might be difficult to agree upon a definition of poverty; but it ought to be possible, without disputing over definitions, to ascertain pretty accurately the conditions under which our neighbors of the less

fortunate classes are living.

Such is the conclusion to which a few wise men in this generation have lately come; and we have, as the result, several studies of poverty by which our judgment of this difficult subject may be greatly assisted. Mr. Jacob A. Riis has undertaken to tell us "How the Other Half Lives" in the city of New York. The book is not strong on the statistical side, but it gives us in a series of vivid pictures a good idea of the sinking circles of that Inferno whose gates stand open every day before the eyes of the dwellers in New York. It would be a simple

matter for any intelligent citizen to find out these facts for himself; but it is not probable that one in ten of the well-to-do denizens of the metropolis has any adequate conception of the depth of the degradation in which some hundreds of thousands of his neighbors live. Mr. Riis has performed a valuable service in publishing his reporter's sketches; his essay ought to incite some one with ample leisure and abundant resources to make a scientific study of the conditions of life among the poor of New York.

Mrs. Helen Campbell's "Prisoners of Poverty" is another series of sketches of life among the working-women of New York by which much light is thrown upon this dark problem. Certain phases of the subject reveal themselves most clearly to a woman's insight. The Rev. Louis Albert Banks, in a number of popular discourses delivered in Boston, and lately published, has made rather a startling picture of the condition of the "white slaves" of the metropolis of New England. And we are told that a much more careful and thorough

investigation of the tenement-houses of that city is now in progress under the direction of the Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics. Such are some of the attempts that have been made or are being made in this country to get at the facts concerning the poverty of the cities. Still there is very little definite and reliable information, and the popular ignorance upon the whole subject is profound and universal. The facts are far worse than most intelligent Americans suspect, and there is need of thorough investigation.

AN ILLUSTRIOUS EXAMPLE.

If the pattern for such an investigation were wanting, it is admirably supplied in the monumental work of Mr. Charles Booth, entitled "Labor and Life of the People." For the great English metropolis Mr. Booth (who must never be confounded with the head of the Salvation Army) has done what needs to be done for every great city. He has caused to be made a thorough house-to-house and street-to-street investigation of that whole vast metropolitan area; he has gathered his facts from various sources, and has diligently compared and compiled them; he has given to the world a statement the fullness and colorless accuracy of which must impress every intelligent reader. Mr. Booth's work is not yet complete. His first volume, published in 1888, dealt with East London, then supposed to be the darkest section of the metropolis; his second volume, issued during the summer of 1891, extends the census to the whole city, and treats of many phases of life in the northern and the southern districts; in the third volume he promises to give us some further account of the industrial conditions, and also to make a full report upon the various methods of relief which have been in operation, and of their results, so far as they can be ascertained. The magnitude of this undertaking can be imagined. To explore and lay bare this trackless wilderness of want calls for heroic enterprise and perseverance. Yet all may see that the work has been done, not only with thoroughness, but with tact and judgment. So far as Mr. Booth has gone, philanthropists and legislators may feel that they have sure ground to go upon; the facts are in their possession; they know what the poverty of London is, and where it is; and although they may not be clear as to its causes or confident as to its cure, the disease has been located, and the extent of its injuries pretty clearly described.

In illustration of the thoroughness with which his work has been done, it may be noted that he has given us the statistics of no less than 13,722 streets and parts of streets which have been visited, and the character of their population carefully ascertained. In these

13,722 streets dwell 3,500,000 persons belonging to the lower and the lower middle classes. The streets and squares inhabited by the upper and higher middle classes were not counted: these classes are supposed to include about 750,000, making a population of something less than four and a quarter millions, which occupies the central districts of the metropolis covered by this investigation. The colored sectional maps accompanying these volumes set before us graphically the location of the various classes, revealing to the eye the character of the population in every street and square of central London.

HOW THE WORK WAS DONE.

ONE naturally wishes to know how it was possible for any man to gain information so precise and so extensive of so vast a population. Mr. Booth has had a numerous staff of helpers under his own direction. But in addition to these he has been able to make use of the whole body of School Board visitors. The entire metropolitan area is subdivided by the London School Board into districts, over each of which is set a visitor. Of these Mr. Booth says:

The School Board visitors perform amongst them a house-to-house visitation; every house in every street is in their books, and details are given of every family with children of school age. They begin their scheduling two or three years before the children attain school age, and a record remains in their books of children who have left school. The occupation of the head of the family is noted down. Most of the visitors have been working in the same district for several years, and these have an extensive knowledge of the people. It is their business to re-schedule for the Board once a year; but intermediate revisions are made in addition, and it is their duty to make themselves acquainted, so far as possible, with newcomers into their districts. They are in daily contact with the people, and have a very considerable knowledge of the parents of the poor children, especially of the poorest among them, and of the conditions under which they live. No one can go, as I have done, over the description of the inhabitants of street after street in these huge districts, taken house by house and family by family,—full as it is of picturesque details noted down from the lips of the visitor to whose mind they have been recalled by the open pages of his own schedules,—and doubt the genuine character of the information and its birth. Of the wealth of my material I have no doubt. I am indeed embarrassed by its mass, and by my resolution to make use of no fact to which I cannot give a quantitative value.

This trained and capable force of visitors has been permitted by the authorities to assist in this investigation. In these two volumes many pages from their note-books are pub-

lished, and we may easily see for ourselves how minute and painstaking their work has been. Besides these, the Local Government Board, the Board of Guardians of the Poor, the relieving officers, the police, the Charity Organization Society, the clergy, and the many bodies of lay workers among the poor, have aided him effectively.

SOCIAL CLASSES.

ONE salient feature of this discussion is the classification of the population. In his first volume Mr. Booth divided the people into eight classes; in the second he combines some of these, in the interests of simplicity, and gives us really but five principal classes. The class represented by A in his schedules are the very lowest—occasional laborers, loafers, and semi-criminals. Class B are “the very poor”—those who subsist by casual labor and charity, who are in chronic want, and who maintain a hand-to-mouth existence. Classes C and D are the poor,—the irregularly employed, and those of small regular earnings,—those who barely manage to keep the wolf from the door. Classes E and F are the regularly employed and fairly paid working-class of all grades. Classes G and H are the middle class, and all above its level—the servant-keeping class. The four lowest grades of his first classification are, broadly, the poor. Class A is something worse than poor; it is the disorderly and dangerous class. Class B, “the very poor,” needs a little further description:

The laborers of Class B do not, on the average, get as much as three days’ work a week, but it is doubtful if many of them could or would work full time for long together if they had the opportunity. From whatever section Class B is drawn, except the sections of poor women, there will be found many of them who, from shiftlessness, helplessness, idleness, or drink, are inevitably poor. The ideal of such persons is to work when they like and play when they like; these it is who are rightly called the “leisure class” amongst the poor—leisure bounded very closely by the pressure of want, but habitual to the extent of second nature. They cannot stand the regularity and dullness of civilized existence, and find the excitement they need in the life of the streets, or at home as spectators of or participators in some highly colored domestic scene. There is drunkenness among them, especially amongst the women; but drink is not their special luxury, as with the lowest class, nor is it their passion, as with a portion of those with higher wages and irregular but severe work. The earnings of the men vary with the state of trade, and drop to a few shillings a week or nothing at all in bad times. . . . The wives in this class mostly do some work, and those who are sober, perhaps, work more steadily than the men; but their work is mostly of a rough kind,

or is done for others almost as poor as themselves. It is in all cases wretchedly paid, so that if they earn the rent they do very well.

Classes C and D, the irregularly employed and those of small regular earnings, are laborers whose average weekly income would not be above five dollars for a moderate family. Between these and the class below them this distinction is made:

My “poor” may be described as living under a struggle to obtain the necessities of life, and make both ends meet; while the “very poor” are in a state of chronic want. It may be their own fault that this is so; that is another question.

What, now, are the proportions in which these classes are found in the population? That part of London covered by this investigation is represented by the following table:

A (lowest)	37,610 or	.9%	} In poverty
B (very poor)	316,834 or	7.5%	
C and D (poor)	938,293 or	22.3%	} 30.7%
E and F (working-class, comfortable)	2,166,593 or	51.5%	
G and H (middle class and above)	749,930 or	17.8%	} 69.3%
	4,209,170	100%	

Concerning the number of the lowest class, we have little more than a rough estimate. But we are assured that the figures err, if at all, on the side of safety; that is, by overestimating rather than by underestimating the evils with which he is dealing. It is some relief to believe that this disorderly and dangerous class,—or those members of it at large,—in a city like London, constitutes only nine tenths of one per cent. of the population—nine persons in a thousand.

The fact that thirty persons in every hundred of that vast population are living below the line of comfort may well furnish food for meditation to those who live far above that line. The admission that 30 per cent. of our neighbors are in poverty is one that none of us is willing to make. Would this be true of New York or Boston? It is impossible to say. Some of the experts who are thoroughly familiar with the worst portions of London tell us that they have found worse conditions in some of our American cities than any they have seen at home. If it be true, as all investigations indicate, that the greatest poverty is apt to be found in the densest populations, then the bad eminence must be assigned to New York; for while the most populous acre of London holds only 307 inhabitants, we have, according to the census, in the Eleventh Ward of New York 386 to the acre; in the Thirteenth Ward 428, and in the Tenth Ward 522. The death-rate of the two cities is also greatly in favor of London;

for while in 1889 there were in that city 17.4 deaths to every thousand of the population, in New York the rate was 25.19. One statement of Mr. Riis throws a lurid light upon this inquiry: one tenth of all the burials from New York, he tells us, are in the Potter's Field. It is not, however, necessary to assume that the ratio of poverty to the population is greater in New York than in London. Thirty per cent. is sufficiently alarming. We might admit that the rate in New York and Boston is considerably less than in London, and still have cause enough for anxiety. Such a state of things in Christian countries where the aggregate wealth is increasing with such phenomenal rapidity will not be witnessed with complacency.

It will be observed, however, that out of the thirty persons in every hundred here placed in the category of poverty, twenty-two are only a little below the English standard of comfort. Classes C and D of this analysis are persons who are struggling to keep their heads above water, and who, for the most part, succeed. If the social medium were a little more buoyant, or if their own powers were slightly reinforced, or if some of the weight that they are carrying could be lifted off, most of them would easily sustain themselves, and be found dwelling in comparative comfort. Surely here is a problem which is not beyond the reach of wise philanthropy and enlightened statesmanship. It must be possible to furnish, out of the abundance which our lands are bringing forth, some effective aid to this large class of our fellow-citizens.

The real difficulty is with Class B, "the very poor." The description of this class which I have quoted above shows us the nature of this difficulty. Whether any remedy can be found for this state of things is a question to be considered by and by; for the present let us note that this most discouraging element constitutes in London only $7\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. of the population. It is to be hoped that the proportion is no greater in our American cities.

CAUSES OF POVERTY.

WHAT, now, are the causes of this poverty? Upon this point we have the results of some very careful studies. Of Classes A, B, C, and D there were taken 4076 families well known to the School Board visitors, and their cases were analyzed with a view of ascertaining the reasons why they are in poverty. Of the very poor, classes A and B, there were 1610 families. Of these 60 were reported as "loafers"—persons who will not work. The poverty of 878 of them was due to casual or irregular work, low pay, and "small profits"—the last being the condition of hucksters and other hawkers, probably. Drink was the cause of

the poverty of 231. Illness or infirmity, and the great number of mouths to feed, combined with irregularity of employment, accounted for the poverty of 441. In Classes C and D there were 2466 families; of these 1668 were in poverty because of low pay, irregular work, and small profits; 322 because of drink, and 476 because of ill health and family burdens. In all these cases the causes assigned are supposed to be the *principal* causes; in most of them, doubtless, the poverty was due to more than one cause.

It will be a surprise to many that out of these 4076 cases of destitution only 553, or $13\frac{1}{2}$ per cent., are reported as chiefly due to drink. I suppose that the great majority of those who attempt to account for poverty would say that 80 or 90 per cent. of it could be traced to this cause. Doubtless it is true, as Mr. Booth reminds us, that drink is a contributory cause of poverty in many of those cases which are not directly assigned to it; but the fact that this careful investigation makes it the principal cause in less than 14 per cent. of the cases may well lessen somewhat the feeling of complacency with which the well-to-do citizen is often inclined to look upon the spectacle of poverty. The common saying is that the poverty of the multitude is the fruit of their own vices. To a great degree this is true—to a greater degree than these figures indicate. For irregularity of work, and low wages, and physical infirmity, which figure in these statistics as principal causes, are themselves, in many cases, the effects of intemperate habits. Nevertheless, it is quite true that intemperance as a cause of poverty has been greatly overworked both by temperance reformers and by optimistic economists. It is a great cause, but it is not at all certain that it is the chief cause. Indeed, in a great multitude of cases it is the effect rather than the cause of poverty. There are many who are destitute because they drink, and there are many also who drink because they are destitute, and hopeless, and forlorn—because the burdens of life are crushing them, and the potent draught makes them forget, for a season, their misery.

THE ENVIRONMENT.

THE other causes of poverty need to be carefully studied. Ill health and physical debility are sometimes due to vice, but they are also due in very large measure to the conditions under which these poor people are compelled to live. Any one who will traverse the narrow and filthy alleys in the neighborhood of Petticoat Lane in the east of London, or those just south of Holborn in the very heart of the great metropolis, noting the dark, forlorn, miserable apartments which serve as human habi-

tations; or who will follow Mr. Riis in his explorations through Baxter street and Mulberry street in New York, will understand why the people who live in such quarters should be irregularly employed, and why their wages should be low. It is simply impossible that laborers who get so little daylight in their dwellings, and who have so little pure air to breathe, should have the physical vigor to work continuously and to earn good wages. And the moral as well as the physical qualifications of the efficient workers are sure to be wanting. How can men and women who are huddled together in such horrible propinquity in such dreadful dens possess the self-respect, the hope, the courage, the enterprise which are the best part of the equipment for every kind of work? The lowering of the physical and the moral tone of the denizens of such dwellings is as inevitable as fate. Much of the time they will not be fit to work; when they do work they will be languid and slow; they will be the last hands taken on in the busy times, and the first ones discharged in the slack times: that their wages will be low needs no demonstration.

Now it may be said that these people are to blame for being in these tenements; that it is their own vice or improvidence that has brought them down to this level. In some cases this is true, no doubt, but by no means in all. Sickness, misfortune, failure of employment, calamities which they could neither have foreseen nor averted, have brought many of them hither. But the point to be noted is that, once down to this level, the conditions under which they live become the causes of poverty. If failure of employment, or sickness, or accident thrusts a family into these squalid, unsanitary, crowded quarters, the environment itself tends powerfully to keep them here; forms a barrier, in fact, over which it is well nigh impossible to climb. If some of these people are here because they are poor, all of them are poor because they are here. Whatever it was that brought them here, the fact that they are here is one main cause of their present poverty, one main reason why they cannot rise into better circumstances. They are under that fatal law of action and reaction which, in the social world, not only forbids progress but tends to degradation.

These people, as we have seen, work for the lowest wages. It might be supposed that they would therefore be the more likely to obtain employment. In some conditions of the labor market this is true, as we shall see, but not as a general rule. For although they work for less money than stronger and more efficient laborers will accept, they are, as a rule, the dearest laborers that the employer can hire, simply because of their untrustworthiness and inefficiency. Low-paid labor is often the most

expensive to the employer. The economic laws are therefore against them. Because they are what they are they must stay where they are; and every day that they remain in their present condition makes it less probable that they will ever escape from it by any effort of their own.

INDOLENCE AND IMPROVIDENCE.

IRREGULARITY of employment and low wages are chief among the causes here assigned to poverty. But these causes need explanation, and we have discovered some of these explanations. There are others, however, which must not be overlooked. The unemployed or the irregularly employed are often the victims of their own indolence or incapacity. Not only do we find among them those who by illness, or accident, or misfortune have been thrust down into these low conditions, and thus enfeebled and unfitted for effective labor, but we find also a goodly number of those whose indisposition is due to character more than to environment — persons who would not work if their health were perfect and all the conditions were favorable. The existence of this class is demonstrated whenever the work-test is effectively applied to the tramps perambulating our streets. The great majority of these gentry will shun the towns where lodging and breakfast may be earned by an hour or two of labor in the morning, in favor of the towns where they can sleep without charge on the floor of the station-house, and beg their food from door to door. Just how large this class is, what proportion of the whole destitute community it constitutes, it is impossible to say. The figures that we are studying throw little light upon it. Of the 4000 cases of poverty investigated, about 2500, or more than 60 percent., were poor because of insufficient work or insufficient wages; but how many of these were out of work because there was no work for them, and how many because they had become unfitted by their circumstances for efficient labor, and how many because they would rather beg than dig, it is not possible to determine. Especially difficult is it to discriminate between the last two classes. The line between "can't work" and "won't work" is very hard to draw, even by an expert who knows the cases fairly well. But it is important to remember that the line must be drawn. The sentimentalist, on the one hand, must not assume that all this poverty is the fruit of untoward circumstance; and the easy optimist, on the other, must not assume that it is all the consequence of moral depravity. Both causes are at work, and we shall not be able, until we know more than we do at present, accurately to discriminate between them, and to measure the effects which are due to each.

Family burdens are among the causes of poverty discovered in this analysis. Some of these households are in pinching want because of the number of small children. And one clear result of this census is to establish the fact that the families are largest in the poorest districts. Such is precisely the fact in our own country, as most of us are aware. Here, again, we have a cause of poverty which is also an effect of poverty. The improvidence which recklessly brings into the world children for whose maintenance there is no provision is one of the sources of poverty; but, on the other hand, the poverty which degrades and embitters life, and closes the door of hope upon its victims, is one of the reasons of this improvidence. People who are getting on in the world, and who have some hope of bettering their condition, are apt to be more prudent; it is the most ignorant and degraded who are farthest from the rule of reason.

ECONOMIC CONDITIONS.

CERTAIN causes of poverty not mentioned in the analysis now under consideration are brought to light in other portions of this study. Some of these are closely connected with the existing economic system. One remark, casually dropped, contains a world of meaning.

The modern system of industry will not work without some unemployed margin,—some reserve of labor,—but the margin in London to-day seems to be exaggerated in every department, and enormously so in the lowest class of labor. Some employers seem to think that this state of things is in their interest,—the argument has been used by dock officials,—but this view appears short-sighted, for labor deteriorates under casual employment more than its price falls.

“The modern system of industry will not work without some unemployed margin.” This is a fact which Karl Marx has emphasized. The industrial machinery moves with great irregularity. Cycles and crises seem to occur with a periodicity which can be roughly calculated; and in almost every branch of business there is a busy season, when all the machinery is driven at the top of its speed, and a dull season, when production is greatly reduced. Unless there is an industrial reserve on which they can call in the driving times, the capitalists cannot meet the spasmodic demand, and must fail to secure their customary profits. Therefore the modern industrial system contemplates irregularity of employment on the part of many. It expects to find, at any given moment, a small army of men standing idle in the market-place. It makes provision, therefore, in all its plans and estimates, for a certain amount of poverty.

It finds its account in keeping a portion of the population unemployed for a certain number of months in the year. This seems to be the inevitable fact. I do not know what can be done about it; but it is not a pleasant fact to contemplate.

THE GARRET MASTERS.

THE poverty of London has always been supposed to be most distressing at the East End, and this is the region where most of the manufacturing industries are located. The striking fact of this East London manufacture is the extent to which the work is done in the homes of the people. There are a few factories, but they are small compared with similar industries in America, or even in British provincial towns. In some cases only part of the work is done in the factory, and the rest is distributed among the home workers. Thus, among Jewish coat-makers employing hands other than their own family, we have the statistics of 901 workshops. Of these only 15 employ more than 25 hands, 201 employ from 10 to 25, and 685 employ less than 10. So also in the shoe-trade the writer says:

Most of the London manufacturers, instead of getting all the work (except the finishing) done in their own manufactories, give much of it to out-workers. . . . Even when the output is of considerable dimensions, the factory itself may be so minute that a few rooms in an ordinary dwelling-house suffice to accommodate staff, plant, and stock. As we descend the scale we rapidly leave behind the giants of the trade,—men who turn out ten thousand and more pairs in a week,—and find ourselves among manufacturers of Lilliputian proportions, whose weekly output is limited to a few gross, and whose tiny work-rooms contain little more than a sole-cutting press and a table for the clicker; until at last we reach the lowest level of all, the owner of a couple of rooms in a tenement-house, who buys his leather, cuts his uppers, gets his wife or daughter to close them, and lasts and finishes the boots himself, selling a gross, or a gross and a half, at a time to a large “manufacturer” or to a “factor.”

As a rule these “chamber masters,” or “garret masters,” are nearly as poor as the hands whom they employ; they work as hard and as many hours as their helpers do, and the profits which they make out of the labor are infinitesimal. This is supposed to be the realm of the sweater; and it must be admitted that these thorough investigations considerably reduce the dimensions of this ogre. Says Mr. Booth:

It is difficult, not to say impossible, to prove a negative—to prove that the monster sweating-master of the comic papers has no existence. I can only say that I have sought diligently and have not found him. If a specimen exists, he has

at any rate nothing to do with the troubles we are investigating. Among the large employers there are hard men, but the necessary conditions of their business compel them to keep on regularly a staff of competent work-people who must have fair wages, and can and do protect themselves from oppression. The sweating-master I *have* found, and who is connected with the troubles under investigation, works hard, makes often but little more, and at times somewhat less, than his most skilled and best-paid hands. He is seldom on bad terms, and often on very kindly terms, with those who work under him. There is here no class division between employer and employed; both, in fact, belong to the same class, and talk freely together, social amenities of all kinds going on naturally and easily between master and man.

It is not, then, the avarice or the cruelty of the sweater to which this misery is due: it is a case of economic disease, and the multiplication of small masters is, according to this authority, the tap-root of the disease. The diagnosis is as clear as daylight:

Of the tendencies common to all industry, on the one hand toward the increase of successful enterprises at the expense of unsuccessful ones, on the other toward disintegration and fresh beginnings in a small way, it is the second which has prevailed. The quite small workshop, which is, in truth, no workshop at all, but an ordinary room of an ordinary house, lived in as well as worked in, stands at some advantage over the properly appointed workshop of a larger size. The capital needed for a start is very small. A few pounds will suffice, and the man becomes a master. It is a natural ambition, and one that appeals with peculiar force to the Jews. The evils which follow are patent. Men are content, at least for a while, to make less as masters than they would receive in wages as journeymen. The wholesale houses can take advantage of the competition which arises, and prices are reduced — to the immediate loss of the sweaters and the ultimate detriment of those whom they employ.

This system of production works injury to the laborers in two ways. On the one hand, the outside workers are so divided and scattered that it is impossible for them to combine for the protection of their own interests; on the other hand, the fact that there is a vast multitude of outside workers, who are always ready to take work at the lowest prices, enables the factory masters to drive a very sharp bargain with their employees. It is easy to see that the industrial system which prevails in London must tend to the oppression of the poor. Isolated workers, in the existing state of the labor-market, will always work for starvation wages. The same state of things exists in American cities. The revelations recently made by the Rev. Mr. Banks of Boston of the rates at which women are working in garrets and cellars for wealthy firms in the New England

capital are quite as startling as anything in these portentous volumes.

WOMEN'S WORK.

THE relation of women's work to the general problem of poverty must also be well studied. The worst-paid work is always women's work; the reasons have already been given. And it is easy to see how the labor of women often tends directly to the depression of general wages. The wife or the daughter of the breadwinner frequently works for less than would sustain life. The main dependence is the wage of the husband and father; what is earned by the women merely adds something to the sum of comfort. It is out of his earnings that they derive the strength which they expend for the benefit of their employer. If they were compelled to subsist on what their employer pays them, they would starve. A vast amount of the labor of women is thus given for wages that will not sustain life. The vital energies by which this labor is performed are supplied from other sources. Many poor widows and deserted wives, who sew all day and most of the night for less than enough to feed themselves and their children, are kept from starving by the alms of some church or charitable association, or, perhaps, by the assistance of the overseer of the poor. Now it is evident that this kind of labor tends to poverty. Because there are so many who can work for less than enough to support life, those employers who recognize no law but competition are ready to reduce wages to this standard. Although, as we have seen, it is bad economy for the employer to pay less than will fairly support life, if his laborers are compelled to subsist upon the wages which he pays them, yet it may be good economy, from his point of view, to pay them this inadequate wage, if he can depend on somebody else to supplement it, and can thus consume the labor-force which somebody else daily replenishes. This is one of many ways in which the strong thrive at the expense of the weak.

Not only women's work, but much of the labor of young men and boys, is exploited after this fashion. Great firms and corporations employ young men at salaries far below the cost of their maintenance, because they can get them at that figure. The young men are living at home, and their fathers and mothers, many of whom are themselves poor, are made to contribute to the growing wealth of the great firms or companies by boarding and clothing their employees. The excuse for this is that the young men are receiving instruction. That is a good reason why they should not receive the full wages of trained hands, but it is not a good

reason why they should not receive enough to support life. For they are not only receiving instruction, they are performing labor—in many cases very severe and exhausting labor; and the labor of a full-grown able-bodied young man or woman ought to suffice for maintenance. It is also said that the loss which the employer suffers from the imperfect work of the learner is a reason why the learner's pay is small. These losses are greatly exaggerated. Making due allowance for them, there are few trades so technical that the apprentice does not, after a very few weeks, fairly earn for his employer enough to pay for his keeping. At any rate, the business which cannot honestly pay for the labor which it employs, but which is compelled to depend on outside contributions for the maintenance of its employees, is not, I dare assert, in a healthy condition. In former times it was not so. The apprentice, in any trade, was supported by his master. That ought to be the rule in every trade, in every business, and in every generation. The fact that it is not so is clear proof that our system of industry is radically out of joint. In all our cities there is an army of women, and not a few young men, who work for less than enough to sustain life; their labor, thrown into the scale, powerfully tends to depress the standard of wages, and to bring a great multitude down to the verge of poverty.

CHARITY AS A CAUSE OF POVERTY.

THE effect of indiscriminate charity in breeding poverty must also be taken into account. The Lord Mayor's fund of \$350,000, which was flung out, by a charitable impulse, to the poor of East London a few winters ago, caused far more poverty than it cured. Many who were getting on fairly well without it left their work to depend upon this fund, and not only forfeited their self-respect but sadly demoralized themselves by the deceit which they practised in getting it. "The tendency of the fund," wrote Mr. Barnett shortly after its distribution, "has been to create a trust in lies. Its organization of visitors and committee offered a show of resistance to lies, but over such resistance lies easily triumphed, and many notorious evil-livers got by a good story the relief denied to others. Anecdotes are common as to the way in which visitors were deceived, committees hoodwinked, and money wrongly gained."¹ The effect of this distribution upon the applicants at large, as one visitor sums it up, was this: "The foundation of such independence of character as they possessed has been shaken, and some of them have taken the first step in mendicancy, which is too often never retraced." Poverty which must be relieved is always with

¹ "Practicable Socialism."

us: the problem is to administer the relief in ways which will not tend to pauperize the recipient. That lesson has been very imperfectly learned, and the net result of a large share of our well-meant charities is the increase of pauperism.

CITY AND COUNTRY.

POVERTY nests in the cities, and the influx of population from the country to the city is a phenomenon worth studying. This immigration can be accounted for in part by the superior attractiveness of town life. The movement and stir of the city, the sights and sensations of the streets, powerfully allure the young men and women of the rural districts, who find life on the farm monotonous and tame. "Nothing is going on in the country," they say; they prefer to live where things are happening all the while. But there are economic as well as sentimental reasons for this migration, reasons which affect the best and the worst elements of the country population. The higher wages of labor in London are the chief attraction to countrymen; a large share of those who come into the city expect to receive and actually do receive higher wages than they can earn in the country; the gain is not merely nominal but real. Healthy lads and men coming from the rural districts into the metropolis will be given the preference, in many employments, over city-bred laborers, because they are, as a rule, stronger and more trustworthy. The average city laborer has become so enfeebled by his irregular habits and his unsanitary surroundings that he cannot perform many of the heavier and better-paid kinds of city labor; and the rural laborer comes in and takes the work away from him, crowding him down to a lower point in the social scale. Says the witness:

The countrymen drawn in are mainly the cream of the villages, traveling not so often vaguely in search of work as definitely to seek a known economic advantage. So far from finding their position in London hopeless, as is often supposed, they usually get the pick of its posts, recruiting especially outdoor trades which have some affinity with those to which they have been accustomed in the country, and in general all employments requiring special steadiness and imposing special responsibility. The country immigrants do not, to any considerable extent, directly recruit the town unemployed, who are, in the main, the sediment deposited at the bottom of the scale, as the physique and power of application of a town population tend to deteriorate.

After a generation or two many of these robust laborers begin to drop down in the labor scale; their superiority is lost, and their places are filled by fresh levies upon the country. Some of them, of course, maintain their footing,

and even rise into independence and wealth; but the tendency with most of them is in the other direction.

To what extent this process may be going on in American cities it would be difficult to say. I am induced to think that, with the exception of New York and Boston, few of our American cities would reveal much of this kind of deterioration; but it is best not to be too confident. In the higher departments of urban industry the country-born workers do certainly supplant the city-born to a remarkable extent, and the same may be true of the wage-workers. Here, at any rate, is a question upon which we need light.

That the migration into London from the country consists mainly of the cream of the country-side seems to be established; but the dregs of the country-side also find their way into the city, lured by the hope of maintenance without labor. London offers less inducement to immigrants of this class than most of our American cities do, and therefore gets fewer of them. London distributes no public outdoor relief; it is only as inmates of workhouses or almshouses that the impecunious can obtain aid from the public treasury. Those who wish to live a dependent life, outside of the poorhouse, must therefore rely upon private charity. In our own cities the case is very different. Outdoor relief is freely given by the overseers of the poor in most of them; and even where the administration is conscientious, the number of applicants is so great that it is simply impossible to bestow this aid intelligently. Large numbers of those who are abundantly able to take care of themselves can and do receive aid from the public treasury. If, in addition to this public relief, there are known to be considerable funds in the hands of private benevolent associations, a powerful attraction is set up in the city which the ne'er-do-wells of the villages and hamlets round about will find it difficult to resist. To some considerable extent the rapid increase of American cities comes from this source. The family of low degree, whose claims upon charity are sharply scrutinized in the village where their history is familiar to all, know that they will be able to tell their story to the overseer of the poor or to the charitable visitor in the city with much better hope of credence. And if there is no concert of action among charitable organizations, so that the shrewd mendicant may hope to obtain aid from half a dozen different sources simultaneously, the increase of this element in the population is likely to be rapid. Of course all who come to the cities with these ends in view are added to the mass of its hopeless poverty; for those who start upon this road are very seldom turned from it.

IMMIGRATION.

WHATEVER may be true of London, it is probable that a large share of the poverty of our American cities is due to the influx of helpless and degraded people from other countries. London draws into its insatiate maw the vigor of the country and impoverishes it. New York and Boston are themselves largely impoverished by the immigration of multitudes whose standard of comfort is far below that of our own people, and who help to drag the natives down to their own level. The American policy seems to be to prevent the "pauper labor" of foreign countries from competing on its own ground with American labor, but to open the doors as widely as possible for this "pauper labor" to come to America and depress our own labor market by its desperate competition.

THE GREED OF THE LANDLORD.

I SHALL name but one other cause of poverty in the cities, and that is the exorbitance of rents. The need on the part of laborers of lodgings not too far from their work makes in many portions of the great cities such a demand for house-room that those who own tenements are able to obtain extortionate prices for them. The operation of this economic law has been checked to some extent by good-will and wise statesmanship in London; working-men's rents in that city are far lower than in New York and in Boston. Mr. Riis gives us many particulars respecting the rents of apartments in New York, and Mr. Banks furnishes the same information for Boston; and any one who will compare their figures with the full information upon this subject now before us will see that the cost of shelter is far less in the English metropolis. It is probable that the very poor of New York pay more per cubic yard for the squalid quarters they occupy than do the dwellers on the fashionable streets for their salubrious and attractive homes. At any rate, the revenues derived by the landlords from this kind of property are far greater than those received for the most costly buildings. A committee reporting to the New York Senate respecting this city stated that "more than one half of the tenements, with two thirds of their population, were held by owners who made the keeping of them a business, generally a speculation. The owner was seeking a certain percentage on his outlay, and that percentage very rarely fell below fifteen per cent. and frequently exceeded thirty." "Forty per cent.," says Mr. Riis, "was declared by witnesses before a Senate Committee to be a fair average interest on tenement property. Instances were given of its being one hundred

per cent. and over." When the landlord can get such returns as these upon his capital, he is not, of course, likely to refuse them; but the tribute takes the life-blood of the laborer, and hastens his descent into hopeless poverty.

REMEDIES.

SOME of the causes of this chronic social malady have come to light in this discussion. That the analysis is exhaustive is not probable; let it be accepted as a contribution toward that complete statement of the problem for which we are waiting. Even its errors may be serviceable, if they awaken thought and challenge investigation.

And now, what can be said of remedies? Here it is becoming to speak with even greater caution. The suggestions which follow are set forth tentatively, as propositions worth thinking of rather than as prescriptions for the disease.

1. *Abolish the Garret Master.*—Where such a state of industrial affairs exists as that which is found in the east of London, it is evident that some economic readjustments need to be made. The best thing that could happen to that district would be the substitution of the factory system for the domestic system which still lingers there. We are prone to think that the factory brings evils enough in its train; but the worst evils of the larger system of industry prevail in East London, and all the compensating benefits are absent. If the workers who are now huddled in little groups in stifling garrets could be brought together in large factories, the sanitary conditions, being under State inspection, would be greatly improved, and the combination of the workers which would certainly follow would enable them to make better terms with their employers. No one who will make himself familiar with the condition of the London trades will ever be able to doubt that while the wage-system continues, the combination of laborers for mutual protection is an absolute necessity. Doubtless such combinations often behave unwisely and perversely; but they are the only defense against the degradation of the laborer.

2. *Help the Poorest Workers to Combine.*—The frightful revelations respecting the wages of working-women in New York and Boston, which are quite as startling as anything shown us in Stepney and Whitechapel, suggest the inquiry whether consumers of the goods produced by starvation wages have not some responsibilities. Ought a good Christian to buy a garment covered with blood-stains because it comes cheap? Might we not encourage and promote some organization of these poor laborers by which all work for which living prices are paid should bear some kind of stamp, certifying to

that fact? It is to be hoped that there are a great many purchasers who would refuse to purchase any goods that did not bear this certificate.

3. *Train the Children.*—Escape from the toils of penury might be offered to some, by furnishing a more practical education to the children of the poor. Some elementary industrial training would enlarge the resources of these boys and girls, and might prevent many of them from dropping down into the lowest grades of labor, where the struggle is severest. Especially would a little practical training in domestic economy be useful to the girls of this class. Most of them are destined to be wives and mothers, and the question whether the household shall live in pinching want or in comparative comfort often depends on the skill and thrift of the wife and mother. Here, for example, is a table with minute accounts of the expenditure for five weeks of thirty families in London; and the exhibit is a forcible illustration of the lack of thrift which accompanies poverty. One family, with an income of about five dollars a week, made seventy-two different purchases of tea during the five weeks. Inasmuch as this family never took more than two meals a day at home, it is evident that they never bought more than a single drawing of tea at a time; seventy-two purchases of tea in thirty-five days is two purchases a day (Sundays included), and two extra. Of these thirty families, it is evident that quite a number went to the grocery every day of their lives—not a few of them several times a day. This hand-to-mouth existence is at enmity with thrift; it is scarcely possible that any family should escape from poverty until it learns wiser methods of expenditure. That many of these helpless people are pitifully ignorant of the alphabet of domestic economy is plain enough; is it not possible to give the girls, in industrial schools, some practical instruction in this most important art?

4. *Organize and Humanize the Helpers.*—The fact that charity, as at present dispensed, is a great breeder of pauperism is not a reason for abandoning charitable effort, but a strong reason why it should be wisely organized. The charities of every city should be closely associated, and should be uniformly administered on rational principles. In several of our own cities this is done; in some the attempt has been made, and the work has been abandoned because it involves labor and self-sacrifice. But few of our social needs are more imperative than a careful administration of charitable relief. The conditions in many cities are such as to offer a bounty to mendicancy. The dependent class is growing, and the citizens have themselves to thank for it. It will continue to grow until they abandon their sectarian methods of administration, and unite to pro-

tect the needy against suffering, and the community against imposture.

The one truth which is hardest to learn, and which is yet the foundation of all really productive charitable work, is the truth that the deepest need of most of these poor households is not alms but friendship. Doubtless some of the sick and helpless ones need and must have material aid; but where there is one who requires food or medicine there are ten who need sympathy and companionship. "Not yours, but you" is the cry of these starved and hopeless lives. "The Life was," and always is, "the light of men." Those colonies of the children of good-will that have gone down to live in the poorest districts of London and New York and Boston and Chicago are administering charity in the most practical fashion. It has been said that the aim of the new charity is to provide every needy family with a friend. If, in this way, the strong and the weak can be brought together in personal relations, the best results must follow. Would it not be possible for every Christian minister, quietly, and with no public announcement or organization, to find for every needy family of his acquaintance one wise, patient, sympathetic friend, who would give no alms (the needful material aid should come from other sources), but would become the good providence of the household, bringing into it all manner of genial and stimulating influences?

The *rationale* of this new charity needs to be better understood. If it were possible to put into the hands of all the thoughtful and kind-hearted people of our churches the little book by Mr. and Mrs. Barnett of Toynbee Hall, entitled "Practicable Socialism," the quiet, unsensational methods there brought to light would commend themselves to many.

5. *Unite Public and Private Agencies.*—A closer alliance between public and private charities must be secured. If the public authorities continue to administer outdoor relief, they ought to be in constant communication with the private agencies engaged in the same work. There is no reason why there should not be hearty co-operation between the overseers of the poor and the agents and visitors of the benevolent societies. The lack of such co-operation is one of the gaps through which mendicancy creeps in.

6. *Abolish Official Outdoor Relief.*—Among students of this problem the abolition of public outdoor relief is, however, scarcely an open question. It is simply impossible that our overseers of the poor should intelligently administer relief to the multitude of applicants daily appearing before them. The State will not pay for the proper investigation of all these cases. Imposture flourishes under such a system, and the dependent classes are steadily recruited.

Much less can the State accompany its alms with the kind of personal ministry without which it is almost sure to be pernicious and demoralizing. Therefore it would be infinitely better if the State would give no relief except in its almshouses and children's homes, leaving all the outdoor relief to be dispensed by private charity. A few of our cities have tried this experiment with the most gratifying results.

7. *Reform and Reinforce Municipal Governments.*—When, by the greed of landlordism, any quarter of the city has become a nest of squalor, and the conditions of life are such as inevitably reduce the vigor and undermine the health of the inhabitants, it should be ruthlessly destroyed, and rebuilt under stringent sanitary regulation. No city can afford to tolerate these pest-holes of pauperism. *Salus populi suprema est lex.* No maxims of non-interference can stand in the way of this highest law. The drastic measures which have been employed in several of the British cities have abundantly justified themselves. Many acres of Birmingham, Glasgow, and London, which were once covered with the vilest habitations, are now the site of comfortable and healthy tenements, and the rents for the same amount of space are no higher in the new buildings than they were in the old. The character of whole districts has thus been regenerated. Large powers are given for such purposes to the municipalities of Great Britain, and they are trusted to use them for the public welfare.

Here, it must be confessed, we encounter our most serious difficulty in dealing with the problem of poverty. Our existing municipal governments are not, as a rule, bodies of men to whom such powers could be safely intrusted. It is to be feared that too many of these officials are more interested in the propagation than in the prevention of poverty; that their sympathies and affiliations are very often with the parasitic classes—the rum-sellers, and the gamblers, and the public plunderers by whose active co-operation the poverty of the cities is constantly increased. It is a hard saying; but who will deny it? And the fact may as well be confronted, once for all, that we shall never succeed in dealing effectively with the problem of poverty while our municipal governments are left in the hands to which we are now so generally willing to intrust them. It is simple fatuity to go on sowing the seeds of pauperism by the municipal machinery, thinking meanwhile to extirpate it by such voluntary forces as we can bring to bear. A very large share of the poverty now existing in our cities is due either to the inefficiency or to the corruption of the men in whose hands we have placed the municipal authority.

The first thing to do, then, is to stop propagating pauperism by political methods. And

then we must see to it that those who bear rule in our cities are men who are capable of dealing intelligently and vigorously with this stupendous problem. They must be men of clear mind, of firm character, of practical wisdom — men who have sufficient intelligence to be aware that their own offhand judgment upon a great question like this cannot be trusted, but that they need to avail themselves of the experience of the world, in forming their opinions and choosing their methods. For many reasons we need a great change in the *personnel* of our municipal governments, but no reason is more urgent than that which grows out of the problem of poverty. This problem cannot be solved by private benevolence. Its solution will require, in addition to all that can be done by charitable effort, the wise and energetic action of the local authorities, not in giving charitable aid, but in going to the root of the trouble. And the local authorities, to deal with it effectively, must be men who have some higher qualifications than the ability to pack a ward caucus, or to conciliate the support of publicans and gamblers.

8. *Summon the Philanthropic Landlord.*—The power to sweep from the face of the earth the rookeries where poverty breeds must belong to the municipal government of the future. Whether the better housing of the working-classes shall be directly cared for by the municipal government is an open question: doubtless it may be better, as a rule, to clear the ground, and leave private enterprise, under stringent regulation, to make this provision. Nor is this a purely philanthropic enterprise. Ample experience has shown that capital invested in model working-class dwellings, rented at rates far below those paid for the most wretched tenements in New York, will yield a good return. Competitive rents in our great American cities mean degradation and destruction to the poor; but those landlords who are willing to take a little less than they can get, to content themselves with five per cent. instead of fifteen or forty, are helping more effectively than any other class of philanthropists to solve the problem of poverty.

TWO OLD-FASHIONED VIRTUES.

LET me say, in closing, that the growth of pauperism, if not of poverty, seems to be due in part to the decay of two old-fashioned social virtues. One of these is family affection. The individualism of the last half-century has weakened the family bond. There has been so much talk of men's rights and women's rights and children's rights, that the mutual and reciprocal duties and obligations of the family have come to be undervalued. Families

do not cling together quite so closely as once they did; *esprit de famille* is wanting. For this reason many persons who ought to be cared for by their own kindred become a charge upon the public. This tendency ought in every way to be rebuked and resisted. The shame of permitting one's flesh and blood to become paupers ought to be brought home to every man and woman who thus casts off natural obligations. All public authorities and charitable visitors should enforce upon such delinquents the scriptural judgment: "If any provideth not for his own, and specially his own household, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever."

The other old-fashioned virtue to which I referred is the manly independence which is the substratum of all sound character. Why this virtue is decaying, there is no time now to inquire. But one or two causes are not remote. The first of these is the habit of regarding public office not as a service to be rendered, but as a bounty to be dispensed. The mental attitude of most office-seekers is the attitude of mendicancy. The spoils system is built upon this view of office. It is evident that there is a large class of influential persons who wish to be dependents upon the public. Dependence is thus made respectable. This sentiment diffused through society affects its lowest circles, and makes it a little easier, down there, for a man to become a dependent upon the public treasury.

There is another explanation which I would not venture to offer as based upon my own opinion. But I heard, not long ago, these words from the lips of a brave soldier of the Union army—a man whose patriotism and devotion to that army no one who knows him will venture to dispute: "The one great cause of the increase of able-bodied paupers during the past few years is the lavish bestowal of pensions. And this extravagance," he went on, "is not so much to be charged upon the old soldiers, as upon the demagogues and pension agents who have pushed these schemes for their own aggrandizement." I will add not one word of comment; I was not a soldier. Nor shall I reveal the name of my friend; I do not wish to expose him to a torrent of abuse.

To whatever cause the decay of independence may be attributed, the loss is a very serious one; and those who labor for the removal of the evils of poverty and pauperism may well remember that the foundation of all sound social structure is the sentiment of self-help, and the just pride that would rather live upon a crust honestly earned than feast, as a dependent, on any man's bounty.