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NO one can wonder, and no one can regret, that a thrill of shame and sorrow should have passed throughout the whole body of the Christian Church in this country on account of the startling revelations recently made as to the condition in which multitudes of our fellow-citizens are compelled to live. No one can doubt that the problems which still await solution are sufficiently large and important to tax to the utmost the skill and the energy of the philanthropist and the statesman. We are sometimes inclined to think that even yet the conditions of the problem to be solved have not been fully appreciated and clearly recognised; otherwise people would not be so ready to expect that some one simple remedy could be found to meet the requirements of a complex and terrible disease. It is very easy to draw pictures of the condition of "Outcast London," and to trace the origin of every social disease to the insanitary dwellings of the poor; but it would be a grave mistake to place all our hopes for the future upon the working of a Royal Commission, or to stay all efforts at amelioration in the expectation that some new and sufficient remedy will be discovered.

In looking at the condition of the London poor, it ought to be remembered that the metropolis attracts to it the surplus and unemployed labour, not only of the agricultural districts, but also of smaller towns. London has to provide not merely for the natural increase of its population, but for an enormous immigration every year into its poorer districts. And not only so, but, by reason of its very size, it affords a convenient hiding-place for those who, for any reasons whatever, desire to withdraw themselves from the observation of those to whom they are known. It is easy to see that London is thus likely to receive an undue proportion of the least hopeful elements in the population. It is true of course that the enterprising and the ambitious will always find their way to the metropolis, because they still believe that its streets are paved with gold; but even these too often sink from sheer disappointment to despair into the ranks of the hopeless and helpless poor. And the pressure caused by this continual influx of population is felt most keenly in the districts which are already poorest and most overcrowded. Hence it is that houses and streets, once inhabited by well-to-do families, are given over to the occupa-

tion of those who can only afford a single room, in which every operation of life has to be carried on.

The marvellously rapid increase of the number of these one-roomed families is one of the most painful and most astonishing of the features of life in East London. We are speaking now of course, not of the utterly vicious and abandoned, but of the normal condition of thousands of the respectable amongst the working-classes. It is difficult for anyone to realize what this means. Let us try to set out one or two familiar scenes. A mechanic who in former years has been in good employment at the West End, through misfortune has become gradually reduced, and is no longer equal to the work which once he did. He occupies one miserable little room, in which he carries on his trade, and works when work is to be had. In the same small room his wife passes the long hours of the day upon a sick-bed, from which she will now never rise again. To the same room a grown-up son and daughter, together with a second girl twelve years of age, all come to sleep. Sickness under such circumstances must be hard indeed to bear; and how can it be expected that morality and virtue, to say nothing of religion, should abound under these conditions? Or, again, a respectable working-man, who has been blessed with nine children, occupies two tiny rooms. One of the children is taken ill, and of course is in constant contact with the other members of the family, all of whom are in attendance at a neighbouring Board-school. After a time, the illness turns out to be small-pox; but this makes no difference, the child continues to mix with the rest; and the rest go as usual to the Board-school, and no one appears to think it strange. Or again, in another family, living in a single room, a young man, after long illness, dies. In such cases, as we know, every effort is made by the poor to avoid the disgrace, as it is thought, of having a relation buried by the parish. As a rule, the undertaker provides the coffin, but will not conduct the funeral arrangements until a considerable portion of the expense is paid. At such times there is a large amount of liberality towards one another amongst the poor. But whilst friends are being canvassed and the necessary funds are being raised, the corpse is kept unburied in the same room in which all the surviving members of the family are living. The natural awe and reverence which the presence of death inspires must in such cases be driven away; and we have known ten and even twelve days to pass before the body was removed. It needs no words to paint and no imagination to fancy the condition of the family meanwhile. Or yet again, in another such room, a poor woman, with a family which already numbers six children, is

about to become a mother. The husband, disabled by illness, has had no work for weeks. It is already evening, and no one out of this family of eight has tasted even a piece of bread all day. Can we imagine the miserable position of the mother in her trial, herself almost fainting for want of food, and all her family around her in the like condition?

Can we wonder if those whose lot calls upon them to come into daily contact with experiences like these, amongst the respectable and the industrious, do feel the warmest sympathy with "the comfortless trouble of the needy and the deep sighing of the poor," and make their voices heard in loud and strong complaint? Alas for the poor children, brought up under privations such as these, compelled to go to school, as we have known again and again, without even a crust to break their fast with!

A good deal has been said, and truly said, with reference to the starvation-prices to which the payment for labour, and especially women's labour, has been reduced by the fierceness of the competition. Matchbox-making at 2½d. a gross, shirt-finishing at 1½d. a dozen, trousers-finishing at 2½d. or 3d. a pair. It would seem indeed as if it were impossible to carry on the awful struggle for bare life on such terms as these. How many hours must be spent in order to earn a single shilling! But even at these prices work is not easily obtained. Indeed it almost seems as if the worst-paid work were the most fluctuating. How many a weary tramp is made to shop or factory only to find that no work can be had, and that for another day the whole family must try to solve the awful experiment of sustaining life without the means of living. And be it remembered that, however poor and wretched may be the miserable room,¹ which is called a home, the rent-collector calls with unfailing regularity and his demand must be met. And so, one after another, all the little luxuries gathered in happier days find the way by degrees to the pawn-shop, until everything has disappeared, and the family, kept alive just at starvation-point, sinks down into a condition from which it seems as if there were no release or rescue but in the grave.

Whether the Royal Commission on the dwellings of the poor, which has commenced its work, will be able to suggest a remedy for difficulties like these we are unable to conjecture; but the most serious question which that Commission has to face is, not how to improve the dwellings of those classes who can afford to pay a rent sufficiently remunerative, but what is

¹ The rent of some of these room-homes (three shillings a week for a small room without any conveniences) makes a large hole in such earnings as these.

to be done for the still poorer classes, whose rent has to be paid at the expense of their stomachs, and who are utterly unable to provide themselves with any decent accommodation on a purely commercial basis. Everyone admits that it is contrary to public policy that a whole family, which includes sons and daughters approaching adolescence, should occupy the same room night and day; but how are matters to be arranged, what legislation can be adopted so as to enable such families to occupy two rooms when they can barely pay for one? If the Royal Commission can solve this problem, it will earn the gratitude of the whole nation.

But it will be asked, Is not this miserable condition of the poorer classes largely due to drunkenness and improvidence and immorality?—and no doubt this is perfectly true. Yet surely this is no reason why Christian people should relax their efforts to withhold their sympathy. If in spite of the influence of civilization and religion in this favoured country, and in this her greatest city, persons are compelled to live in circumstances such as we have described; if children are condemned to grow up, and, when grown up, to exist under these conditions, is it any wonder that drink and crime and immorality and improvidence abound? Is it fair to force people to live in circumstances in which religion and virtue are well-nigh impossible, and then to turn round upon them and say that their wretchedness is due to their sin?

Certainly, if we believe in the power of the Gospel to reform the character and to change the heart, we cannot argue thus; or if we do, at any rate, we dare not relax our efforts to discover and apply the remedy whilst we are investigating the causes which led to the disease. We do not indeed deprecate this inquiry and discussion and investigation, but we do feel the danger of adopting any such tone in the discussion as would tend to destroy zeal and to discourage effort. When the fire is raging fiercely and threatening the whole nation with devastation and ruin, it is hardly wise to waste time in discussing how it arose. In God's Name and for the sake of His people let us unite all efforts to put it out.

We believe that there is a danger to the State and to the Church, more urgent and more pressing than any which exists amongst the poor, and that is, the careless indifference of so many amongst the wealthy classes, who see and know the want, and, like the Priest and the Levite in our Lord's parable, pass by on the other side. If any words or any action can arouse the richer classes to realize their own personal responsibility, then at least some good result will have been achieved. It is very easy to sweep away the whole subject with the too obvious remark, which we so often hear, that in every com-

munity we must expect to find a residuum of the helpless, the vicious, and the abandoned. This may be true, yet not the less is Christian philanthropy bound to use every exertion to confine that inevitable residuum within the narrowest limits. If ever the time should arrive when the Church became indifferent to the cry of the outcast and the needs of the ungodly, then, indeed, the period of decay would have commenced, and we could only expect her speedy dissolution and destruction.

With reference to the condition of London, we feel that the statements which have been so widely spread require some qualification. We do not believe that the individual cases of poverty and immorality which have been painted, are in any way exaggerated. We do not think that it would be possible to exaggerate the evils which are found to exist in this metropolis; but it ought not to be supposed that isolated pictures of extreme cases will give a fair representation of the actual condition of the working-classes of the metropolis. Our long experience of these classes leads us to believe that an erroneous estimate has been formed in the public mind of their real condition, and that the whole of the East End is regarded as though it were absolutely given over to indifference, drunkenness, and immorality. Things are bad enough amongst us, we know, but, thank God, we are not altogether so black as we have been painted; and there is some comfort and consolation in the thought, that the condition of the poor is much better than it was. On this point we cannot do better than quote the words recently uttered by the Earl of Shaftesbury, who declared that "We whose experience and memories travel back forty or fifty years, know perfectly well that the condition then, as compared with the condition of things now, was infinitely worse." And again, speaking of the "Bitter Cry of Outcast London," he says, "that this expression is precisely the reverse of just. There is not in London a nook, a hole, a corner, or a door, however remote, that has not been examined, explored, and reported upon. We know all these evils, and we have endeavoured to provide the remedy. I maintain that the words ought to be 'Sought-out London,' and you would then have a far better expression."

In the "Report on the Welfare of Young Men," recently presented to the London Diocesan Conference, there is very striking and very valuable evidence as to the condition of London, given in a series of reports from the Superintendents of the various Divisions of Police. We have not space to quote at length, but these reports will well repay a careful perusal; and the general impression which they convey is that there is a considerable improvement throughout the metropolis, and

that this improvement is due in no small measure to the larger efforts which have been made in recent years, especially in the cause of temperance. To this general testimony we may add the experience of one of the Inspectors in the East End, who has been acquainted with its condition for many years past. This Inspector spoke to us in the strongest possible way of the improvement during the time for which he had known it, and unhesitatingly attributed the change to the work of Christian people, who had done so much to influence the poor.

Now, if all this testimony is true, it will easily be seen in what direction further and larger efforts are to be made. To quote the words of "The Harvest of the City," "Lost London wants living men and living women, who, in love to Christ and love to their fallen fellows, will brave the untold and unthought horror of uncleansed rooms and unwashed persons, to speak, in simple, straightforward language, words of warning and messages of mercy. The remedy lies in the daily and incessant house-to-house labours of the faithful missionary, and in the simple services held in little mission-rooms in the heart of the neighbourhoods in which misery abounds."

These words we heartily and thoroughly endorse. After all, it is personal influence—the influence of real Christian love and Christian sympathy—which tells. This is the pressing need of our time, and especially in the East End of London, where so many thousands are living in extreme poverty, almost shut out from the power of such influence. And we are the more urgent to insist upon this point, because of the danger we foresee lest all the interest which has been awakened throughout the country should evaporate in mere talk and discussion. There is so great a tendency in these days to trust to plans and committees and organizations, to the mere machinery of service, and to leave out of sight the absolute necessity of individual effort and personal service.

It cannot be too often or too plainly stated, that what we really want is not more machinery, but more workers. Pour into this stagnant pool of hopeless lives the living stream of active sympathy and warm-hearted benevolence, and the corrupted waters will be purified.

But surely, it will be thought, there can be no fear that this power will be wanting. Where interest is awakened, surely efforts will naturally follow. We wish that it were so; but, in spite of all that has been said and all that has been written upon this painful subject, during the past few months, we, who are living in the very heart of the masses of the people in East London, in charge of a parish containing a population of 22,000, are absolutely unconscious of any increased activity introduced amongst us as the result of this interest. No

doubt, there is a very general impression that visitors from the other parts of the metropolis are pouring in their money and their personal service for the help of the East End poor. If this were so, we could hardly be unconscious of the fact. We are indeed most thankful to acknowledge the valuable help which the poorest parts of London have received from a few noble-hearted men and women, who give most bountifully of that which we so sorely need. But we greatly fear that while fashionable London talks about us and discusses us, and finds grievous fault with those who have been toiling for years amongst the masses of the poor, the number of those who render the assistance which we need is a very small proportion of those who ought to be the first to help.

But perhaps it may be said that this lack of service is mainly due to the impression that the machinery of the Church has failed, and that the clergy of East London are incapable and inefficient. Where are the clergy? What has the Church been doing to mitigate the evil? These are the questions which many will ask. When a gigantic evil is discovered, there is a tendency, not perhaps altogether unnatural, to find some scapegoat on which to lay the blame. It must surely be on account of some distrust of the sufficiency of the Church of England to meet the need, that we find so general a tendency, even amongst Church people, to support only, or chiefly, those efforts which call themselves unsectarian and undenominational. It is notorious that some at least of these private and unauthorized adventures of an irregular and abnormal Christianity, are supported by the lavish expenditure of funds which might be far more wisely appropriated to strengthen the hands of the parochial clergy.

But it must be obvious that the clergy, provided at the rate of one to 4,500 of the population, could do very little towards meeting the gigantic needs, spiritual and temporal, of persons living in the condition we have attempted to describe. We wonder whether our readers have ever fully grasped the tremendous difficulty of the task assigned to the clergy of endeavouring to convey the message of the Gospel to the poor, without being provided with funds to meet in any way the pressure of temporal needs. It is hard work to preach to starving men and women of the tenderness of God's love. The scornful sarcasm of an Apostle teaches us that "if a brother or sister be naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace: be ye warmed and filled, notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body," there is little good done. Our wonder is, not that the clergy have effected so little, but that by God's help they have been enabled to accomplish so much. And we

firmly believe that the true solution of the problem will be found not so much in the invention of new machinery, as in increasing the number of workers, and strengthening the hands of those who have been labouring in the cause for years.

Time and space would fail to tell of the means which have been adopted by the Church to increase the workers amongst the East End poor. But it would be ungracious and ungenerous to ignore the valuable help which has been afforded by the London Diocesan Home Mission, the Bishop of London's Fund, the Church Pastoral Aid Society, the Additional Curates Society, and the Scripture Readers' Association, as well as by the London City Mission in this cause. But, apart from and in addition to the work done by all these societies, we may direct special attention to the latest effort of the Church of England to overtake the spiritual needs which lie around us amongst the poor. The East End London Church Fund, which was started less than four years ago under the guidance of the Bishop of Bedford (whose appointment marks a new era in the progress of Church work in East London), was founded for the express purpose of increasing the supply of labourers in this important part of God's great harvest-field. At the present moment this Fund is pledged to an annual expenditure of £10,000, and has added 130 to the number of persons who are wholly devoted to the work of the Church amongst the poor. No doubt this is a noble contribution to the cause, and already the results are sufficiently apparent in the quickened zeal and energy thrown into the working of many an East End parish.

God grant that the conscience of the Church of England may be awakened to realize the magnitude and the value of the work which is entrusted to her, as the messenger of Christ, to "preach the Gospel to the poor"! Much has been done for which we have abundant cause to render our grateful thanks to Him Who moves the hearts of men. But much remains to be done; and if the work of Christ in the world is to be accomplished, we believe that it must be done by the full recognition of an individual and personal responsibility, on the part of those to whom God has given the privilege of being stewards for Him, of all that they have. When this result has been produced, when Christian men and women, moved by love to Christ, will give themselves to the work, and cease to put their trust in systems and committees and organizations, then, and then only, as we believe, "the wilderness and the solitary places of the Church shall be glad, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose."

JOHN F. KITTO.

