

V.—*The Decrease of Pauperism, how far the work of the Poor.* By the Rev. Thomas Jordan.

[Read, April 28th, 1857.]

THAT paupism—by which we mean the amount of the poor supported by the state—has decreased in this kingdom within the last few years, admits of no doubt. Since the year 1850, the returns of the poor-law expenditure show a regular decrease on the aggregate of the unions in Ireland. The total cost, for instance, in the North Dublin Union for 1855 was £26,475; while for last year it was less than this by a sum of nearly £5,000. The number of paupers in Ireland receiving relief in 1852 was 115,810, while in 1854 the return is given as 68,121.

That the increase of pauperism is owing to the poor themselves, we readily grant. None deny that imprudence, indolence and profligacy are among the principal sources of such a condition. I question much whether it will be as readily admitted that the mitigation of the evil may proceed from the people themselves, and whether we are disposed to give them as much credit as they deserve for their efforts after self-support and independence. The reality of these efforts cannot, we believe, be denied, if we look closely into the condition of the poor. They are, however, liable to be overlooked or at least undervalued. A course of open profligacy, of indecency, or indolence produces far more effect upon us than quiet industry or unobtrusive exertion. The one is before our eyes—is heard of and spoken of—while the other calls no attention to itself; and therefore, while we are loud in our denunciation of the poor for having covered our land with pauperism, we may not give their meed of praise to those who, silent, unknown, and unbenefitted, have labored as far as in them lay not to add to the evil.

That efforts great and almost incredible are made by the poor to better their condition, has been proved by the vast sums sent home by emigrants to bring out relatives and connexions to lands where a better field is opened to industry.* In a large city the earnings of many are very precarious, and consequently they are in great distress in the intervals of idleness. You all remember that Adam Smith gives us a reason why the street porter should be better paid than the common labourer is, that he should receive somewhat for those anxious and desponding moments between one job and a second. This we fear is not always carried out in the case of those whose employment is only occasional. Servants who go out by the day, jobbing gardeners, working jewellers, corkcutters, often undergo great hardship, and require the greatest determination to keep out of the workhouse.

With regard to others, the room where objects are made for the amusement and diversion of the more fortunate is often the scene of great self-denial; midst the pinings of hunger and the imploring

* In 1853, no less a sum than £1,439,000 was sent home by Irish emigrants to pay the passage of their friends to the United States and elsewhere.

looks of pale faces, the fancy adorns light and frivolous objects, and ingenuity devises what may produce amusement without bearing a trace of the tear shed over it. The same authority whom I have quoted before states that the remuneration for such fancy articles should be somewhat higher than for common things, as their fashion is always changing. The advice is too often neglected, not indeed because the purchasers are insensible to the misery under which the article is produced, but simply because they are totally ignorant of it. Meanwhile the workhouse door stands open for these classes, but it is steadily and resolutely avoided.

The poverty of a class of scholars engaged in education, has long been proverbial. An individual of this class, aged and decayed, gives lessons in music in one of our suburbs. She walks out—she gives a long lesson for which she receives sixpence, out of which she supports two children. The seasons of joy in a Christian land, the festivals of the Christian year, are periods of trial to her, for at such times her services are dispensed with and her earnings stopped. Through all, the effort at independence is continued, the struggle after self-support maintained, in spite of age, weakness, length of journey, and severity of weather.

As a specimen of another and a numerous class, take an instance. A needle-worker, who plies her task 14 and 16 hours daily, earns 8d. a day. In the winter season the price of candles reduces it to 7d. If she be engaged on a coarser sort of work, she may earn two pence a day more. A number of this class often work in one room, and, crowded together, pursue their weary task day by day and year by year, and yet amidst all their hardships and difficulties comparatively few of their number are found among the inmates of the workhouse. More of them, from their over-exertion at their work, are found round the doors of their parish dispensary or in the wards of the hospital. In a late article of the *British Medical Journal* it is stated, “all of our associates who have had any experience among the out-patients of hospitals and dispensaries, must be familiar with the dismal troop of poor young creatures, with an appearance and bearing far superior to the general class of patients, who apply at such places for relief. They flow on from year to year, with a steady, if not an increasing stream, and year by year the medical man sees scores of them drop into eternity, as Mirza, in the Eastern allegory, watches the travellers drop through the bridge, and disappear in the swiftly running stream.” There is another class one often meets with; strangers who have been drawn to the capital by various means and attractions. They often come with a view of bettering their condition, and either find no employment at all, or such that they are anxious to return to their own place. These friendless people often make the most determined efforts to avoid entering the workhouse. As you are aware, owing to the state of the law of settlement, there is no means of aiding such under the Poor Law. Many a one who, from a combination of circumstances, would be a pauper in this place, would not be so necessarily in a place where his character and conduct were better known. There is no means of aiding such except through private charity. I find that in 1855 the Night Asylum for houseless poor

spent £1 11s. 9d. in enabling such persons to reach their homes in different parts of our own country, and £3 6s. 11d. was spent in sending 39 persons back to England. The Strangers' Friend Society in this city does a good deal to mitigate the evil. It often aids a deserving person in his journey to a more prosperous place for his industry, when he is about to become a pauper here. It often enables Englishmen to return home, and of course in many cases to support themselves, who otherwise would be permanently a charge on the institutions of this place. The people of the class to whom I refer know well that if they once enter the door of a workhouse, it is very difficult indeed to escape from it, and to become self-supporting and independent, and therefore they make every exertion, even as strangers in a friendless condition, before they enter it. As an illustration of what I am stating, I may give you a case which occurred a very short time ago. An Englishwoman, who had two children in England with some connexion, and whose husband was dead, was unable to support herself here. She wished to get to her acquaintances in the hope of supporting herself. The union could not aid in any way in sending her to her friends. If she entered its doors, it would continue to support her for the natural term of her life—but its laws are such that it could not spend a few shillings in probably saving her from pauperism. There was a will, and therefore there was a way to escape this. The object was gained through the Night Asylum, the institution to which I have already referred.

These various classes to which I have referred show many such determined efforts to escape pauperism. Of course in a large city, where numbers of the abandoned, the undone, the characterless are crowded together, there is very much of the opposite of this, of recklessness and desperation. Cases such as I have mentioned are sufficient to show that the poor are not wanting to themselves, that there is effort and exertion among them, and that the duty of society is to aid, to stimulate, and encourage such. It is not enough to look on at the swelling stream till it becomes a vast torrent of destitution, threatening to sweep all away before it. It surely is the duty to go up the river, to examine its source, and to try to turn some of it aside into small but useful channels, before the flood becomes mighty and irresistible. Till society admits that it is its duty to explore those regions where the friendless man is wearing out life and sinking into a premature grave, and to prevent his being a burden on the state, the evil will never be really met. To view the poor as so many thousands whose support is to be deducted from the income of society is not performing the duty society owes to them. If prevention be better than cure—and if it be better to remove the causes which produce disease, than to endow an hospital for the mitigation of it; it must be better, and it must be the duty of society to aim at the decrease of pauperism through the poor themselves. The fancy of the Greeks placed on the delinquent's path *Até*, the goddess of revenge. She tracked him from land to land, and city to city, taking vengeance on him for the guilty act he had done.

It requires no fancy of Grecian bard to see the vengeful deity

following our footsteps. She points herself with the finger of scorn and the withering look of disdain to her works—a condition of the poor in our city and country shocking to contemplate—the enormous workhouses in our city, and similar institutions at the entrance to every considerable Irish town.

There are many ways in which we might promote such an object as this. Many attempts have been made towards the attainment of it, and many more might be. In many parishes of our city there is an institution called a Christian Fellowship Society, in which each member pays a small sum by the week, and in return has the privilege of an allowance in sickness, and of medical attendance. The members are industrious people of good character, and in many cases are preserved by such an institution from sinking into absolute pauperism, and being driven into the workhouse in periods of sickness or trial. Such institutions, I have no doubt, would be more general than they are; but in some cases they are not self-supporting. They require the subscriptions of honorary members who do not expect any advantage from the society. One with which I am acquainted required such aid last year to the extent of £7. The principle of such an institution is the same as that of an insurance society. It is to encourage the poor, in health and prosperity, to provide against the time of sickness and disaster. It is well known that those who are nearest the brink of poverty think less of it than classes far removed from it, and therefore we are not to expect that such classes will value and enter into the utility of such institutions as much as the highly educated do the principle of insurance. That such institutions are not wholly self-supporting need not surprise us. They will, I have no doubt, come in time to be thoroughly and generally appreciated. When the poor make such vast efforts in other respects, I am convinced they will not be wanting to themselves in this, when their eyes are once opened to its advantages.

A plan has been mentioned to me by the Rev. E. S. Abbott of St. Mary's parish, for the advantage of room-keepers, and as a means of saving them from sinking into pauperism. It is that a respectable insurance company should have a branch in which humble people could insure, for 1s. a year, furniture and property, perhaps to the amount of £20. It is, of course, implied in any such plan that those insuring should be ascertained to be persons of good character, and that the company should have a higher premium in proportion, to indemnify them for the trouble and expense of keeping a separate account. The newspapers are constantly bringing before us very deplorable cases of room-keepers being burnt out and reduced to utter pauperism, if a charitable public will not interfere in their behalf, and save them from entering the doors of a workhouse. Such are frequently the cases of most deserving and worthy people, who must have public appeals made for them if they would not add to the burden of the poor-rate. If a plan of this kind would meet these cases, it would not merely preserve such persons in their honorable position, but also save the community from a continual burden. What sight can be more trying than an industrious and worthy family reduced to pauperism, losing their independent feel-

ing, and that principle of self-respect so very hard to be restored to them. That abyss, to which many are reduced by such casualties, may be compared to the one of which it was said, *facilis descensus Averni*.

As the principle of insurance is now very much better understood than formerly, and conducted on much more equitable terms, there seems no reason why such cases could not be met and provided for in this manner. The same person who suggested this plan would propose also that a branch should be engrafted on a good company for insurance for widows of professional men, clergymen and others, at a reduced rate of payment. If such an object could be accomplished by means of benevolent people being allowed to give contributions towards reducing the premiums for those in narrow circumstances, such persons would be effectually provided, and would be preserved from falling back on charities and institutions intended for a different class. Any advantage procured for such as those to whom I refer would indirectly relieve those below them. Society is like a cone, where any additional pressure on any of the upper parts of it must necessarily be felt by those underneath; and if a weight be removed from any, the advantage is felt even by those at the very base.

In conclusion, I have no doubt that many other such plans would occur to those who would carefully reflect on the subject. The poor, I think, generally are not wanting to themselves if properly aided and encouraged. There are, of course, many exceptions; but the exertions and efforts one generally witnesses among them show that such views as these are not unreasonable nor chimerical. That it is a duty no one can doubt; for surely society does not perform its duty to those maintaining a life-long struggle against pauperism, if it never look into their case, if it never examine, nor sympathise with, nor aid their efforts.

VI.—*On the system of deducting a "Per-centage" from the Purchase Money of Estates sold with Parliamentary Title, with a view to the abolition of fees in Chancery.*—By Henry Wrenfordsley, Esq.

[Read Tuesday, 28th April, 1857.]

A BILL was prepared in the early part of last year to alter the constitution, procedure, and practice, to increase the powers, and diminish the expense of proceeding in the Court of Chancery in Ireland, and to discontinue the Incumbered Estates' Court.* The bill also provided that a percentage on purchase money should be paid out of the proceeds of the estates or leases sold under the increased

* Prepared and brought in by Mr. Solicitor-General for Ireland (Mr. J. D. Fitzgerald), Mr. Attorney-General for Ireland (Mr. Keogh), and Mr. Horsman. 4th Feb., 1856.