WALKS

AMONG THE POOR OF BELFAST,

AND

SUGGESTIONS FOR THEIR IMPROVEMENT.

BY THE REV. W. M. O'LANLON,

AUTHOR OF "THE OPERATIVE CLASSES OF GREAT BRITAIN,"
A PRIZE ESSAY.

BELFAST:
HENRY GREER, HIGH-STREET; WILLIAM M'COMB, HIGH-
STREET; GEORGE PHILLIPS, BRIDGE-STREET; ALEX.
S. MAYNE, DONEGALL-SQUARE.

DUBLIN: P. D. HARDY; J. ROBERTSON.

1853.
CONTENTS.

LETTER I. WALKS AMONG THE POOR, 1
" II. WALKS AMONG THE POOR, 13
" III. WALKS AMONG THE POOR, 25
" IV. WALKS AMONG THE POOR, 37
" V. SANITARY IMPROVEMENT, 53
" VI. SANITARY IMPROVEMENT, 66
" VII. PUBLIC BATHS, WASH HOUSES AND PARKS, 79
" VIII. PAUPER SUPPORT AND PENITENTIARIES, 89
" IX. EDUCATION, 101
" X. TEMPERANCE REFORM, 123
" XI. TEMPERANCE REFORM, 133
" XII. RELIGIOUS IMPROVEMENT, 148
PREFACE.

When the following Letters first appeared in the columns of one of our public journals, the Writer had no intention of assigning them a more permanent existence than that which generally belongs to the passing communications of the day. But the repeated and urgent requests of various individuals, who had honoured them with a perusal, induced him to republish them in their present form. Had he not thought, however, that the views which they advocate are deserving of some attention, he would not have felt justified, notwithstanding all such solicitations, in again intruding them on the public eye.

These Letters explain themselves; the Writer, therefore, deems a lengthened and formal introduction unnecessary. Far from contemning criticism, he will rejoice, if anything he has advanced should lead to candid examination and wiser suggestions. Without any personal or selfish object in their preparation, they
will best fulfil his purpose, when all minor considerations are lost sight of, in the moral grandeur of the enterprise which he has ventured to recommend. So far as he is conscious, they are free from sectarian and party bias of any description, such as would repel Christians of any denomination, or politicians of any order; while they advocate reforms, in which the whole community are alike and profoundly interested. This is an age in which every philanthropic eye is directed mainly to the condition of the working and lower classes; and if this little volume should serve, in however humble a degree, to help forward the cause of enlightenment and progress in that quarter, the time and labour spent upon it will have been well and profitably expended.

The Author has not materially altered any sentiment, though the progress of events and increased light have led to a few modifications, and the adoption of a few postscripts; while it has been thought advisable to change, in some instances, the sequence of the Letters. It may tend to explain and justify the direction, at times taken by the Writer, to remark, that, having already, in another work, discussed the condition of the working orders at large, these pages are more especially devoted by him to that lowest social stratum which comprises what have been emphatically called "the dangerous and perishing classes." He joyfully admits the great importance of the meas-

Belfast, May 31, 1853.
LETTER I.

Sir,—Permit me to call the earnest attention of the more affluent, respectable, and especially the Christian public of Belfast, to the deplorable condition of the poor who inhabit the back streets, courts, and alleys, of our rapidly extending and populous town. Amid the perhaps unavoidable conflicts of party and opinion, it is somewhat refreshing to feel, that this is a subject, which, while second to none in its bearing upon our welfare as a community, may yet be pursued apart altogether from sectarian principles, either in religion or politics.

It has often struck me, how little either the idle or the busy, as they move along the great thoroughfares of our cities and towns, seem to know or think of the social misery, vice, and squalid poverty, which lurk in obscure dens, within, it may be, a few hundred yards of these more open ways. And it is extraordinary, how many years we may inhabit a particular locality, and yet never once penetrate the dark and noisome haunts which lie in our immediate neighbourhood. My conviction is, that there is enough of benevolence in most minds to lead them to set on foot some methods
to relieve and elevate their more wretched brethren and sisters, if they could only be made actually to witness the spectacle of their suffering and degradation. This is what we want; and I feel that something valuable would be achieved in the service of God and of humanity, if even a few of the active and energetic spirits of this community could be induced to examine for themselves the scenes in the midst of which I have been moving for some time. I lay no claim to more compassion than my neighbours; but my soul has been sickened and oppressed, beyond the power of words to tell, by what I have seen even in this first part of my survey.

It is my intention, by the Divine blessing, to extend my walks and inquiries to several quarters of the town; and, if the public will listen, to note and describe some of the evils which exist in our midst—hoping that the attempt may issue in the origination of some further schemes of amelioration, or in the more vigorous working of those already in existence. I understand that some portraiture of these things have already appeared in the newspaper press of Belfast. These I have not seen, and it may be, perhaps, better to proceed without any reference to forerunners in this work. There is employment for a hundred hands, and no one can be desirous of monopoly in a task, which all who try it will find to involve no ordinary strain upon their self-denial and sensibility. I wish it, however, to be distinctly understood, at the outset, that it is not my object to write for what is called eject. There are popular works afloat which paint the miseries of the poor in the lights of the imagination, converting these miseries into the means of stimulus and gratification to the jaded novel-reader. My design is of a widely different, and, allow me to add, of a far superior order, however much the execution of it may fall beneath its true importance and dignity.

The district to which attention is solicited in the present letter is bounded, for the most part, by Donegall, Academy, Great Patrick, Corporation, and Waring-
Brady’s-row lies off Grattan-street, and I can assure you, that the aspect and odour of this place will quickly put to flight all mere sentimental benevolence. Here my companion and myself fixed upon two houses as specimens of the whole. In one of these we found that seven persons live and sleep in the same room—their beds, if such they may be called, lying upon the floor. The desolation and wretchedness of this apartment—without windows, and open in all directions—it is utterly impossible to describe. Four of the persons huddled thus together are females, the other three males. And among these females, two, a mother and her grown-up daughter, have no affinity with the other inmates. In the other house in the same “row,” we discovered that a family of seven sleep not only in the same room, but in the same bed. This information we had from the poor half-naked mother herself. Here the eldest daughter is nineteen years of age, and the eldest son twelve. The revolting, disgusting, and heart-rending spectacle presented by the interior of this hovel, and by its inmates, is impossible to forget. It haunts one like a loathsome and odious spectre, from which the eye and the thoughts cannot escape.

We entered Johnny’s-entry, which lies off Talbot-street, and here we found the same degrading and demoralizing practice prevailing. In the very first house we visited in this place, the husband, wife, and six children all sleep together, the eldest son being fourteen and the eldest daughter twelve years of age. Morrow’s-entry runs between Hill and Grattan-streets; and here, also, in the very first house we entered, we learned that the father (the mother is dead) and all his children occupy but one sleeping apartment, the eldest daughter being twenty-six and another daughter seventeen years of age.

I might multiply instances of this kind, ad nauseam, but these must for the present suffice. I should add, however, that my companion, whose walk, as a town missionary, lies among people of the same social grade, informs me that he often finds two, and even three, families all occupying the same room—fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters, all sleeping indiscriminately upon the floor.

Now, Sir, let me ask what can be expected as the fruit of such domestic regimen—such total absence of all the decencies of life? Do not this, and similar foul blots upon our artificial civilization, cause the thoughts sometimes to revert to the happier condition of the children of the wilderness? How can a particle of self-respect, or any sense of the becoming, live in such a region, and amid such circumstances? All the safeguards of morality are thrown down, and a coarse brutality produced, forming the rank and fertile seed-plot of every imaginable vice and crime. If incest, that most loathsome of all the ulcers which have ever appeared in the social body, be avoided, (and who can hope that it is?) the descent from such a state of domestic life to the degradation of the street-walker and the prostitute is so easy and natural, that we may cease to wonder at the number of those forlorn wretches who swarm in our alleys and lanes by night, or at the number of the houses of ill fame to be found in the lower streets of our town—the worst description of brothels—for even here “within the lowest depth, a lower deep still opens,” a hell below a hell.

It might hardly be credited, that in one street within the district mentioned, there are at least five houses of this order. This we learned upon the spot. When I expressed doubts of the truth of the statement, it was repeated by our informant in the most positive manner. Since then, I sent to the locality to obtain ampler evidence, and the intelligence just received is, that other individuals confirmed the declaration of our first informant, pointed out these several abodes of uncleanness and vice, and said that in addition to these five, which are notorious, there are, in the same street, two others less known, of the same description. This locality, then, is a very sink of iniquity, a gate to perdition, both a fountain and a focus of the crime and brutality of the whole neighbourhood.
As might have been anticipated, we discovered in these haunts the most glaring and shameless violation of the laws of purity. Divine and human laws, in this respect, are alike set at defiance. Cases of concubinage, and some of these of the most aggravated and atrocious character, were disclosed to us. These we understood to be very far from uncommon; and they excite little remark around—an additional proof, if any were needed, of the fearfully low standard of social morality among this wretched and neglected portion of the community.

I am anxious to bring these things near the public eye, that at whatever expense of feeling, we might be led to understand something of what exists around—even within a stone’s throw of our holy domestic hearths. The relation of the sexes is a matter which no enlightened Christian philanthropist will overlook, seeing that upon it the welfare of the individual, and of society, so largely depends.

Much has been said respecting the conduct of the Board of Guardians, on a recent occasion, in dismissing from the Union workhouse some unfortunate and guilty females. I am not in a situation to express any decided opinion as to the propriety or impropriety of the course adopted. But it is surely high time that some more active and enlarged efforts were put forth to reclaim and redeem this miserable class. I am far from seeking to palliate human guilt, but who can deny that these creatures are, to a large extent, the victims of circumstances? Without education, without regular employment, or any which can remunerate or support them, steeped in poverty and filth, breathing a fetid atmosphere, crowded together in narrow and unhealthy rooms, without the semblance of social or domestic decency, where in human nature shall we find any principle which is likely to withstand the force of these numerous and combined inducements to immorality and crime? Assuredly, guilty as they are, we are tenfold more guilty, in sitting supinely and at our ease, while it is in our power to remove, or, at all events, greatly to mitigate, the causes of such foul distempers.

The sanitary condition of this district is, in most respects, deplorable. The want of all accommodations connected with the houses, combined with the fact of two and often three families being crowded under the same roof, are things to be greatly deprecated, as sources of disease both physical and moral. There is, as might be expected, for the most part, a total absence of all cleanliness and order in these miserable dwellings. I say for the most part, because we met with some pleasing exceptions; and where these exceptions occurred, we were sure to find that, however poor the people might be, they were of a superior grade of thought and feeling—the whole economy of the inner life corresponding with, and finding its exponent in, these outward decencies. I am not disposed, without good grounds, to find fault with public Authorities, but it is to be hoped, that those whose business it is to attend to the cleansing of the town, see that the scavengers perform their duties strictly and thoroughly in those quarters of the town where so much depends on their services. I must point out two places which demand their immediate attention—nuisances which are enough to breed pestilence and death. The one is in Lynas-court, near Lynas-lane, the other is in Dickey’s-entry, off Little Patrick-street. Effectually to remedy the latter, the officers must look to the domestic arrangements of those who inhabit Patterson’s-place, in the immediate vicinity.

After the preceding remarks, it is almost needless to say that we found deep poverty prevailing in this district. The men occasionally labour, but are often days and weeks unemployed. The women and girls—some of them—are employed in veining, a department of the sewed muslin manufacture. For this but little remuneration is obtained—according to their own account, 7d or 8d a week. I find, however, from inquiry among employers, that skilled workers, even in this lower description of employment, may earn 1s 6d a week, while in the higher departments of the manufacture, the weekly wages may range from 4s to 6s
WALKS AMONG THE POOR.

in good times. The truth is, that not only work is needed, but the spirit and disposition to do it. Idleness is, after all, one of the fearfully besetting sins of the Irish poor. Let no one, however, excuse himself on this ground from the attempt to elevate and better their condition. The Irish poor are perfectly capable of being redeemed from this, as from other vices, by the application of a proper regimen, and by the stimulants and training which are found effectual in other lands—a fact which has been amply demonstrated.

I might give you here such pictures of poverty as would hardly be credited by your readers. We entered one wretched hovel occupied by three families. The windows of the lower part of the house were blocked up. We had not the most remote idea that such a den of darkness and squalor could be the abode of human beings, until we heard a voice issuing from the further corner of it. It was some time before our eyes could so adapt themselves to the gloom as to detect any object; but at length we discovered a woman sitting upon a bundle of straw, without a particle of furniture, and amidst a scene of desolation which it would wholly baffle my pen to describe. She has been living here for upwards of two years; yet, destitute and miserable as this woman is, she seemed unwilling to go to the workhouse. She thinks liberty a "thrice glorious goddess," though in such a shrine. All we could do was to relieve her immediate wants, for she was starving. I suppose she will still be found in Dickey's-entry.

To one source of poverty, wretchedness, and crime, I shall have frequent occasion to refer in my communications—namely, the drinking habits of the people. This love of strong drink is the "unclean spirit" which seems as if it could not be bound. The "fetters and chains" which conscience and judgment would at times impose upon it are "plucked asunder," and the degraded demoniac victim is led onwards, as if by a power which he cannot resist, to utter destruction. It were easy to multiply the examples of its dread sway which came under observation in our walks. In one "court,"
bodies and souls of men—of blasting character and reputation—and of tearing up by the very roots all that is noble in our nature—all which, being rightly directed, would issue in the production of happy homes and prosperous communities.

Before closing this letter, I must be allowed to refer to the religious condition of the people in this neighbourhood. You will be prepared for the statement that but few of them attend any place of worship. Indeed, among all we visited, we found but one or two families that do so. And the missionary has reckoned up, in his comparatively limited walks, within a portion of this district, 307 families who are connected with no denomination of Christians, and never enjoy the ministrations of the Sabbath or the Sanctuary. Of course, there is an almost total ignorance of those great and Divine truths which most intimately affect the higher interests and destinies of man; while the people are sunk and embittered by the miseries or the mad sensualities of the animal life. Indeed, the want of decent clothing would form an almost insuperable barrier, even if there existed the inclination to attend any of the regularly established Churches of the city. Never was I more thoroughly convinced that, in order to reform the religious habits and spirit of the people, we must also set on foot some plans to better their temporal condition, and to elevate them in the social scale.

The lowest poor of this quarter may receive the occasional visits of some Ministers. In one instance, honourable and grateful mention was made of one whose extensive and multifarious duties of another kind, in this city and province, might seem to render it impossible that he should be found engaged in services of this order. But with this exception, we did not find that either Protestant or Roman Catholic Clergy penetrate these haunts, except when the Priest is sent for on special occasions. I say we did not find, for of course our inquiries could not exhaust all the possibilities of the case. And, after all, this state of things is not to be wondered at. Speaking of Protestant Ministers—how is it likely, except in very rare instances, that even the most zealous of them, amid their numerous public engagements, and the insatiable craving of their people for pastoral visitation, can find leisure to invade this outer region of darkness and sin? Even the indefatigable Dr. Morgan will, I imagine, find more than enough to do, to meet the wants of his own immediate congregation, without often extending his labours into such a field.

Under existing circumstances, this branch of the work must be done chiefly by Town Missionaries, specially set apart to it, and free from the care of regular congregations. We found a preaching station of the Presbyterian Town Mission in Lynas-lane. It is a commodious room, capable of accommodating 80 or 100 persons. And, beside a Sabbath-school and a Monday evening Bible-class, there is a religious service held on Thursday evening, and, if my memorandum be correct, on the Sabbath day also. I hope I am correct in this latter particular, for assuredly Sabbath services should be connected with all our Town Missionary stations. To this opinion I am now a decided convert. Here is a class of our population who in a sense cannot, and certainly will not, enter our regular Sanctuaries; and are they to be left destitute of religious instruction on the very day when they are most at leisure to hear it? The objection as to dress, which prevents their appearing among the better clad in our Churches, can have little force where they are all pretty much alike in this respect. And gratifying and useful as it may be to the estimable men employed in our Missions, to have the opportunity of hearing the eminent preachers of the town, on the Sabbath, they will be among the first to acknowledge the paramount claims of the poor and outcast who are “destroyed for lack of knowledge.” Surely, one service at least might be conducted at each central station of the “Missions,” for the benefit of those who will, otherwise, spend the hours in indolence or vice. I am glad that the other Town Mission, also, is awaking to the necessity of such provisions, and establishing stations for Sabbath
ministrations in various quarters. But much remains to be accomplished in this department. If our machinery were augmented tenfold, it would not meet the necessities of the people.

Should any one be disposed to ask: What remedy do you recommend for this complicated mass of evils? I must just beg, for the present, to retort the question: Are not you equally responsible in this matter? Will you insinuate, with the fratricide Cain, that you are not your brother’s keeper? Do you suppose yourself at liberty to sit down and fold your hands until some ready-devised specifics are brought to view, and then, perhaps, criticise and reject them, because they do not exactly coincide with your vague and floating expectations? This to the indolent and callous. There are others—and, I hope, many—who will conscientiously study this great social problem for themselves, in the full view of their personal obligations. I expect to say something more special on this subject, when we have gone further in pointing out the symptoms and workings of the disease. Let us have, first, the pathology of this matter, and then we may proceed, with greater certainty, to its therapeutics.

Meanwhile, let me add, that if a tithe of the energy which is spent in theological warfares were expended in this species of practical religion—in the improvement of the domestic circumstances and relations of the poor—in bettering their sanitary and social condition—in promoting the means of their remunerative employment—in redeeming them from gross ignorance, and in instilling into their hearts the lessons of our holy and divine faith—we should be better men and happier Christians ourselves; our good works would demonstrate the soundness of our faith more clearly than the most admirable formulas can do, and we should enjoy an ample reward, in the elevation of the abject, and the blessings of those who are ready to perish.

Belfast, July, 1852.

LETTER II.

Sir,—An absence of some weeks from home, several engagements since my return, and the crowded condition of your columns, during the sittings of the British Association, have all contributed to delay my second letter upon the state of the poor. I regret this delay the more, as several intimations reached me, proving that my former communication awakened sympathy in many minds. It is to be hoped, however, that as this does not rank among ephemeral subjects, but is likely, alas! to retain its melancholy interest for many days and years to come, no serious injury has been sustained by the cause, from this unavoidable postponement.

I was able to mark, by something like a definite boundary line, the localities described in my former communication. It will be impossible to do so in relation to those to be now introduced. All that can or need be done is, to point out the streets and lanes in such a manner, that all who feel desirous to pursue the investigation may readily place themselves amid the exact scenes depicted.

Let me first direct your eye to some of the purlieus of North Queen-street. Every one must have noticed the close affinity existing between intemperance and the grosser forms of sensuality; and this quarter exhibits, in immediate juxtaposition, facilities for the indulgence of both these classes of vice. How far the idle, and, in general, dissolute habits of the soldier life in barracks may have to do specially with the case, I must leave your readers to judge. But it is a fact, that no region of the town seems to be more fully furnished with the elements and means of immorality than this.
In that very limited space of North Queen-street, which lies between the head of Great George and Frederick-streets, we reckoned about twenty-two public-houses, including a few at the angles formed by these latter streets with the former one. In fact, nearly all the shops here are of this description, as if the people in the neighbourhood needed only intoxicating liquors for their support—as if this formed the very pabulum of life. What must be the amount of demand which enables so many publicans to open and sustain these places, stretching all along in continuous line, with hardly any intermission or exception? And what can the Authorities of the town intend, by granting licenses in such abundance, and so far beyond what any plea of real necessity or of public convenience, rightly understood, will be found to warrant? Our civic functionaries, I doubt not, are personally among the most estimable of our townsfolk; but the cause of humanity and of social weal must be pleaded, at whatever risk, and this cause imperatively demands that this reckless system of licensing should be fully understood. I am well aware that the individual who has the hardihood to assail a public corruption must, just in proportion to his success, expect the hate of those whose selfish interests he endangers. Far, of course, from applying this remark to our Magistrates, it would give me little pain to know that I had incurred the censure of those who live and fatten upon the vices and miseries of society. And truly, when one beholds the wretches who stagger in and stagger out of these spirit-shops—meagre, starving, squalid caricatures of men—aye, and of women, too—mothers, with their naked infants in their arms—and then looks at the flourishing appearance of these sinks of iniquity, he cannot check the righteous indignation which swells the heart, or help asking, in agony, and with vehemence—Cannot and will not the arm of law interfere to suppress these sources of social ruin—of moral degradation? How long shall the ministers and high priests of these foul dens be permitted, under the sanction of Magistracy (whose business it is to punish and prevent crime), to employ, in the full face of day, the most effectual means of creating and spreading it all around? Where is the wisdom—the consistency—to say nothing of the benevolence—of such a course?

We learned that some of the public-houses referred to are used as music-saloons, where vice, under the garb of pleasure, is so cheapened down that, in the expressive words of Dr. Cooke, at a recent meeting, the young of both sexes can purchase even "a pennyworth of blackguardism." Whether the same remark applies to the six or seven spirit-shops which we found vigorously plying their profitable trade in the upper part of Lancaster-street, in the immediate vicinity, or to the three which bless that miserable lane called Alexander-street, I am unable to determine.

But, plunging into the alleys and entries of this neighbourhood, what indescribable scenes of poverty, filth, and wretchedness everywhere meet the eye! Barrack-lane was surely built when it was imagined the world would soon prove too strait for the number of its inhabitants. About five or six feet is the space here allotted for the passage of the dwellers, and for the pure breath of heaven to find access to their miserable abodes. But, in truth, no pure breath of heaven ever enters here; it is tainted and loaded by the most noisome, reeking feculence, as it struggles to reach these loathsome hovels. These are, in general, tenanted by two families in each, and truly it is a marvel and a mystery how human beings can, in such a position, escape disease in its most aggravated and pestilential forms. I know not whether it would serve any valuable purpose to reveal the names of the proprietors of such horrid homesteads. But, surely, they must be comparatively ignorant of the sanitary condition of the tenements from which their agents extract their weekly rents. That property has its duties as well as its rights, is a sentiment not less applicable on a small scale than upon one of the widest dimensions; but the principle seems to be lost sight of in such squalid rotten nooks as the one now described. If, however, proprietors
are content, surely the public Authorities of the town owe it to their position—it falls within their province as the guardians of the social weal—to employ every lawful means to cleanse and ventilate these by-paths—to throw them open to that light and air so indispensable to health and comfort. While new streets are lifting their noble fronts in various directions of our town—proofs of advancing opulence and commercial prosperity—let us clear away the relics of a barbarous era, when men seem to have been in profound ignorance of all the laws of health, or to have held them in utter contempt. We were given to understand that this Barrack-lane was formerly the resort of some of the most abandoned women in the town, but it seems they have been banished thence, by the proprietor's orders. There is, however, another entry in the neighbourhood, still more narrow and wretched, containing, I think, nine houses, seven of which, as we learned, are the abodes of guilt. Two proprietors share between them this locality—certainly one in aspect not unworthy of the moral corruption that inhabits it. Whether the proprietor or proprietors are aware of the character of their tenants, I will not take upon me to affirm. But here every kind of profligacy and crime is carried on, despite the police, who seem to be little terror to evil-doers in this quarter. Passers of base coin, thieves, and prostitutes, all herd together in this place as in a common hell, and sounds of blasphemy, shouts of mad debauch, and cries of quarrel and blood, are frequently heard here through the livelong night, to the annoy-ance and terror of the neighbourhood. Nor can redress, it appears, be obtained, nor this cage of unclean things cleansed. It is the practice, as we were informed, of these miscreants to frequent the docks, and, having caught sailors, like unwary birds, in their toils, to allure them into these pitfalls, where they are soon peeled and plundered. How is it that such things are tolerated in a civilized community?

But let us now proceed to Carrick-hill, and its adjuncts. Campbell-court, named after the proprietress, contains as thick a population as can be packed into its twenty-one houses, and is left in such a state of neglect that, as we were told by persons on the spot, its accumulated refuse, especially in warm weather, is enough to poison the whole of its inhabitants. Plunket's-court, also named after one of the owners, is the resort of miserable women and pickpockets, who find a fit asylum amid its dark and filthy receptacles. Drummond's-court, which is visited, as we learned, by the scavengers but once a-week, has two or three families, in the usual style, in each house, and sleeping often in the same apartment—parents and children, of all ages and both sexes—strangers and relatives—all huddled together, without the slightest regard to decency or order. To compare their condition with that of the beasts of the field would be paying but an indifferent compliment to the lower animals, which assuredly are, in this respect, in far more enviable circumstances. Pepper-hill-court presents a somewhat similar aspect, and affords similar revelations as to domestic arrangements, while whiskey-drinking and lewd singing relieve the monotony of the scene, and the lazy and laden atmosphere is duly stirred at times by the frantic shouts of low bacchanalian orgies. It was from one of the doors in this vicinity that the fever-car had just departed on our arrival, bearing away to the hospital some wretched victim of miasma and foulness. When told this fact, I could not help thinking that hospitals, like jails—magnificent buildings, raised and supported by large public funds—would be in little request, if half the money expended upon them were well and wisely employed in the work of prevention—proverbially easier than cure. Even the common maxims of worldly prudence, a due regard to our selfish interests, and to the laws of political economy—to say nothing of far higher and holier principles—should teach us to adopt a different course.

The hovels on one side of Upper Kent-street, in this vicinity, will not fail to remind one of the description which Dickens gives, in Bleak House, of that respecta-
ble quarter called "Tom All-alone's." I should not wonder if here, also, there will soon be "a crash, and a cloud of dust, like the springing of a mine," and "the accident will make a paragraph in the newspapers, and fill a bed or two in the nearest hospital," but "the gaps will remain, and the rubbish form not unpopular lodgings." Whether "this desirable property" is "in Chancery," like the tenements occupied by the "crossing-sweeper" and his compatriots, who "crowded in and out of gaps, and walls, and boards, and coiled themselves to sleep, in maggot numbers," in "Tom All-alone's," I have not ascertained. But whereas the vagrants who seized upon those domiciles "took to letting them out in lodgings," for their own special benefit, the occupiers of the tumble-down buildings in Upper Kent-street are compelled to act more honestly, by paying a weekly rent of two shillings for each hovel—and certainly it is ample enough, when one considers the character of the accommodation, and the admirable state of repair in which the mansions are kept—to say nothing of the perfect safety as to life and limb of the favoured inmates.

Stewart's-court also lies off Carrick-hill. But of the interior of this place I can give no account, having been wholly unable to enter it, because of the effluvium which met us on the very threshold. Judging, however, of the invisible from the visible, our conclusions were not, it may easily be supposed, of the most favourable character. But, of all the appalling spectacles which we witnessed in this region, by far the most so was that furnished by Morrison's-court. It is the abode of wretched and abandoned women. But what struck me in their case was the air and manner of hopeless, speechless dejection, which sat upon their downcast countenances and crouching forms. Each seemed to say, "I am outcast from society, branded, scorned—beyond recovery or sympathy." Abject despair appeared to brood over this foul, leprous den. Had any marks of indecency been visible, or had they exhibited the shameless, brazen front, so common among persons of their class, indignation rather than pity might have been felt, and their guilt rather than their misery would have fixed our attention. But, as it was, they seemed, as they sat there in that moral pest-house, to form a blasting indictment against society, for having first allowed them to adopt their evil courses, and now for ever abandoning them to their fate. Oh, for the spirit which animated the Saviour of the World! The God of infinite purity did not scorn to take by the hand, to lift from the dust, and restore to true life and dignity, the most wretched outcast! What efforts are His professed followers making in this field of practical and self-denying benevolence?

Emerging out of the courts and alleys adjoining Carrick-hill, we enter the region of North-street, Peter's-hill, Millfield, and Lodge-road. But, before exploring the scenes of misery to be found in close proximity with some of these crowded thoroughfares, it might be well for the observer to make a general survey of this quarter. He cannot fail to be struck with the vast number of "spirit-shops" which lie all along his route, and with the prosperous aspect which they wear. If one may judge of the profits of any trade by the number disposed to invest their capital in it, surely, this trade of whiskey-selling must be among the very best in this rising and opulent city. But, like most pictures, this, also, has another side, and that one of the darkest. With this we were sufficiently impressed when we learned the extent to which fathers and even mothers of families spend their pittance of weekly wages in these haunts of dissipation, leaving their offspring to thrive as they may, amidst hunger, nakedness, and squalor. If any one be curious to know in what strange and filthy dens human beings can manage to herd, live, eat, and sleep, his curiosity will be amply gratified by turning aside out of the streets just mentioned into the by-ways connected with them. Let such a person penetrate into Hamilton's-place if he can, or McTier's-court, or Suffern's-entry, or Round-entry, all of which branch off from North-street. If one wished to find materials to work
up in the most fantastic shapes of social life, just to illustrate the grotesque miseries which lie upon the outskirts of our modern civilization, he would find them here, almost ready to his hand—so nearly complete as to demand but little plastic genius to fit them to his purpose. But to us the whole wore too melancholy an air to allow of any play of the imagination. We wondered if any beside the "Agent" ever entered these recesses, and whether, if the affluent of our community could be brought to look, with their own eyes, upon the shifts which wretchedness will make to lengthen out its days, they could enjoy their wealth and luxury with as strong a gusto as ever, unscared by the spectres of want and destitution that tenant these neglected and unknown receptacles of the lowest grade of our population.

After returning from some of these explorations, and seating myself alone, I have really felt as though all were only an ugly dream—as if I had been the victim of nightmare, and that a diseased fancy had conjured up all these loathsome and abominable things. Even after the evidence of the senses—retiring from the scenes, an effort is needed to convince oneself that it is all real; and I am persuaded that this will be the experience of all who pursue the same course—not satisfying themselves with visiting one or two of these localities, but endeavouring to form some just estimate of the extent of the evil—to the accomplishment of which, time, labour, and resolution will be necessary.

In M'Tier's-court we found fever doing its work; the husband of a poor woman had just gone to the hospital, leaving her, meanwhile, to starve or beg, or what seems to such persons, for some reason or other, the worst of all expedients, to knock at the poorhouse gate. The breaking and preparation of freestone, for domestic purposes, is the business of this court, and from all accounts it yields but a miserable subsistence. We found young men and women employed in this work, living together—and, as they told us, sleeping in the same miserable corners at night, without the semblance of decency, and without the safeguard of relationship to preserve them from the consequences of such a course. The stupid animality visible in the countenances of these young people prepared us for the intelligence that they had never received even the lowest elements of education. Of such stuff, thought we, are our jail-birds made. Hulks, penal colonies, and the gallows will never ask in vain for their prey so long as society nurtures such cockatrices' dens as these. We first make our victims, or permit them to be made in our sight, when but an ordinary measure of exertion would suffice to anticipate the evil; and then, when full-blown, matured, and too strong for ordinary effort to manage and control, we are compelled in self-defence to bring the whole cumbrous and expensive apparatus of punishment to bear upon the evil thus engendered and nursed in our very bosom. We first warm and cherish the serpent, and when it plays the serpent we crush it; we first manufacture our criminals, or sit still while they are manufactured, and then we hang them. Is there not a more excellent way—one which would illustrate more benevolence, more sound discretion—one which would cost the country less, and be more in harmony with our boast as a Christian people?

To detail the half of what we saw and learned of the condition of the people in these alleys, would be to trespass most unreasonably upon your columns. But I cannot pass onward without calling public attention to the moral nuisance of Round-entry—a place celebrated for its iniquity. In my first letter, I felt some delicacy in naming these inlets to perdition, but they must be particularized if the power of public opinion and the eye of authority are to be brought to bear upon them in any form. This entry harbours the most loathsome corruptions; and in these bawdy-houses, under the cover of darkness, deeds of villainy are perpetrated which never come to light in our Police-courts. Unwary youth are entrapped and drawn into these places as flies into a spider's web—inebriated, robbed, and then turned out guilty, ruined, stricken, with a sting
in their conscience and a stain upon their character; which is seldom, if ever, removed—a curse to themselves and to their friends—and ready, now that the first step is taken, to plunge headlong on in their career of vice and degradation. Parents and guardians of youth—all who have to do, either as employers or in any other relation, with the rising generation, are deeply interested in such matters, and solemnly bound to use every lawful exertion to extirpate such foul sources of pollution and crime.

Proceeding along Millfield, we came to Samuel-street. Turning into this place—swarming with life—the first things which arrest the eye are two public-houses, of good dimensions and prosperous look, which stand, one at each side of the entrance, as if to swallow up and devour all who would set foot there. Here, as I beheld the dense population, and felt the atmosphere, like a leaden weight, and looked at wan mothers, and sickly, emaciated children all around, it occurred to me to ask if these poor creatures ever breathe God's pure air, or look at nature, out amid fields, and trees, and hedge-rows? The inquiries, though made in the least sentimental fashion, only extorted smiles—ghastly smiles, indeed. They never think of such things. If they could only satisfy their hunger, and get something in the shape of clothing for themselves and their children, they would be content to forget that nature consisted of anything else than those dark, dingy brick walls, built up there so close together that it might seem to have been the design of the architect to shut out both light and air; they know nothing of the pure breath of heaven which comes over hill and dale, redolent of health and fragrance; “they live where they are, and they are used to it”—yes; used, by day and by night, to inhale a putrid atmosphere, which is death—slow it may be, but certain death. “When,” said I, to a withered, sallow, sunken man, old in constitution, but as to years only in the prime of life, “when did you last see a green field?” “About six months ago, when I went to the railway,” was his reply. Is Belfast, with its one hundred and four thousand inhabitants, not able or willing to provide a park for its soiled and alley-living population—to which they might be won, and where they might learn the value of God's sunshine and air, and get a glimpse of nature in her genial and soul-reviving forms? Having lately spent some time at Glenarm, and my thoughts being much occupied about the condition of the poor of Belfast, I could not help feeling how much more happy is the lot of the peasants, whose cabins, however ill-furnished, stand out upon the hill-sides, and nestle in the quiet, healthy nooks of that neighbourhood. Many, no doubt, are the difficulties with which the agricultural labourer is doomed to battle, and often it is a life or death struggle; but, without any romance or sickly sentimentalism, is it not a mighty advantage he possesses over the suffocated artisan, and others still lower down in the social scale, in our densely crowded cities? I may be met by figures and statistics, but however dry, very dry, and hard and cold these may be, I cannot for the life of me be made to think, that Samuel-street and its environs, that Greg's-lane, the common surface sewer of the whole region, that Peel's-court, with its twelve families in six houses, and shut in—narrow and close—between two nuisance-yards, one for the front and another for the back, where the air is such that we could not stand a moment without a sense of deadly sickness and loathing warning us to flee from the foul spot—I cannot, Sir, persuade myself, with all the aid of learned statisticians, that these places can supply any advantages of a city life to counterbalance the noisome and noxious evils which they engender and diffuse.

The subject wears a very serious aspect, and it will make itself felt. Should the fearful pestilence, which has of late years periodically visited our shores, again come westward with deadly step, what may be expected, but that, by a righteous retribution, the population of our sumptuous streets and handsome town houses will be made to pay the penalty of neglecting
the sanitary and social condition of their less fortunate fellow-townsmen? There is yet time, but perhaps only time, to anticipate its ravages, and, by the purification of the homes of the poor—a work which will demand untiring energy and zeal—to leave as little material as possible for the operation of this malignant evil, should it come. Science has spoken out on this subject in terms which cannot be misunderstood. Religion and Humanity lift their voice in the same cause, adding all the sanctions which our common Christianity can supply. And even regard to the safety of our own households—of those who are dear to us as life itself—demands an immediate attention, on the part of all, to the claims and circumstances of the lower poor of this place of our habitation. To this, and kindred topics, I shall have, with your permission, further occasion to direct public notice.

Belfast, 15th Sept. 1852.

LETTER III.

Sir,—My last letter broke off at Millfield. Before passing away from this neighbourhood, it might be well to step into McGrady's-entry, which will supply a fair average specimen of the by-ways of that quarter. Here we behold, as usual, a large number crowded into a narrow and extremely filthy spot. The first house we entered was filled with sweeps—of various sizes, but of one hue. It is seldom that even one or two of these dusky ones cross our path without exciting in our minds a sensation not easily described, but in which pity for them, as among the semi-barbarous thralls of society, forms a strong element. But a conclave of some ten or twelve of them, all duly begrimed, and by no means ashamed to show their colours, is not an every-day sight, nor one which can be said to yield much positive pleasure. Certain mischievous associations will intrude—as, for example, a Pandemonium, only very completely shorn of its terrible sublimity, and partaking largely of the burlesque. Deep ignorance is, of course, the prevailing characteristic of this class. Inquiring of one, about eighteen years of age, if he had ever been at school, his reply was, that he had gone to school when a child, for a few days, but, not being able to make anything of it, he had given it up, and ever since he had looked upon "the larnin' as a mighty strange thing." In this singular group, however, we did find one lad able to read a little, and, having furnished him with the means, we set him to work, for his own benefit and that of his black brethren. We complain that the mere ability to read is not education—nor is it—but it is, nevertheless, a wondrous power, incomparably the greatest which man
can acquire—the basis and the starting-point of nearly all intellectual and moral distinctions. Could we only make it a general possession, and supply it with healthy stimulus, we should have gone far towards effecting an entire reformation of society. How much virtue and power may stream forth from a single page of a good and noble author! A single true, pure, divine thought, entering the mind of the lowly and the poor, may prove as life from the dead, awakening faculties before unfelt and undreamt of, and creating the first impulse to a career in all that is excellent and godlike. We complain that the ability to read is not education, and our prison statistics found important conclusions upon the distinction. But it would prove a saving and salutary power in a far greater number of cases, if the means of exercising it lay more within the reach of the poor. In the vast majority of instances, the benefit is lost, because literature of any kind is a luxury which they cannot, in their circumstances, secure. Our taxes on knowledge must be wholly abolished before education can produce its full measure of good—before we can become a truly great and enlightened people. Look at America, with its periodicals and newspapers circulating through every cottage, shedding their radiance downwards to the very lowest levels of society. It is surely time that Britain should, in this respect, emulate the sound wisdom and policy of her transatlantic daughter. Never could any nation boast a greater amount of mind and genius, ready to work for the benefit of the people, than we possess at this moment. To say nothing of regular authorship, the intellectual power displayed in our weekly and daily press, down from the thunderer of Printing-house-square to the humblest provincial journal, is incalculable—a marvel which, if it were not so common, would fill us with astonishment—but it is all lost upon a considerable portion of the populace, because, after all our self-laundations, knowledge is still, to a large extent, a chartered monopoly. To the education of a cheap school we must add the education of a cheap press, and then the work of enlightenment will advance to a satisfactory and speedy issue.

Beatty's-entry and Hamill's-court, in the same neighbourhood, should be visited by the benevolent, who will find abundant occupation in seeking the elevation of the young that swarm there in all directions. But there is a court at the top of Hamill-street, in the rear of a very well-appointed street, and in the immediate vicinity of the Academical Institution, to which public attention ought to be directed without any delay. It bears no name, but may be easily identified from these notices. The houses are in a state of great dilapidation, though not quite so far gone as the houses in Upper Kent-street, celebrated in my last letter. But the point to which public notice should be called, especially at the present moment, is the total absence of all sewerage in the place. In this respect, it is in as bad a predicament as any of the localities hitherto described in these letters. It appears that some dispute respecting the property has prevented the Town Council from taking the place under their supervision; and the result of the whole is, that, being neglected by all parties, a sea of stagnant water, mingled with refuse of every description, stretches, not very sublimely, all along the front of the dwellings—I should say stagnant, except as it is ever and anon agitated by accumulations made to this horrible cesspool. Certainly, human life and health must be endowed with a wondrous tenacity, or they could not long resist the poisonous exhalations which must arise from such a spot. We found the moral and religious condition of the people here quite in keeping, as it generally is everywhere, with their external circumstances. We were given to understand that the face of a Christian instructor is never seen there, nor could we find that the people attend any place of worship on the day of rest. We inquired of a woman, who professes to be a Presbyterian, how long it was since she had been at her Meeting-house or Church, and she replied, it was twelve months. Her plea was the common one—the want of suitable clothes
to appear in among respectable people; and I suppose her case might be regarded as a fair sample of the ordinary state of things, in this respect, among all parties in this and similar districts.

Before passing out of this region, I must direct your eye to the houses lately erected in Anderson’s-row, by Mr. John Bain. They constitute one side of a square, and are every way worthy of a passing remark, forming, as they do, a pleasing contrast to so many of the dwellings of the lower classes of mill hands and labourers. These houses pay the proprietor a handsome per-centage, and this consideration should be kept in mind; for it is vain to expect that men will invest their capital in buildings of this description, unless the returns be such as to form an adequate remuneration for the outlay. This, however, is the case in the present instance; and one object I have in view in specifying these houses is, to shew how perfectly the advantage of the landlord and of the tenant may be made to harmonize. These tenements are let in flats—two rooms to each family—and they are so constructed that the inmates in the upper rooms have equal access as those below to the rear of the buildings—a flight of stairs descending from the higher story to the back door. Each house is furnished with due accommodations, and, by a sanitary regulation on the part of the proprietor, no noxious materials are permitted to accumulate. The houses are let as fast as they are built, and, I believe, before they are completed—a full proof that the poor know and appreciate the benefits of comfortable and healthy abodes, and are willing to labour hard to avail themselves of such, if they are provided, and placed at all within the reach of their weekly earnings. We learn that Mr. Bain is about to build another row within the square, upon the same model; and certainly the multiplication of such lodging-houses would be an incalculable advantage to the classes for whom they are designed.

But it is high time to emerge from these labyrinths of courts and alleys, and breathe a purer atmosphere, in the neighbourhhood of that Institution with which so many of the youthful associations of the now busy, enterprising men of Belfast, and of the Presbyterian Pastors of Ulster, are so closely linked. Some of the dearest friends of other days studied within these walls, and I cannot look at them without deep emotion. They remind one of the fervours of intellectual ambition which are now for ever extinguished—of warm hearts, now cold, in a foreign and untimely grave. Is it unmanly to indulge these mournful memories of the heart? Pardon the seeming egotism of the momentary digression. I am not about to speak of the higher cultus of the Royal Academical Institution; nor shall I be drawn into any discussion of the comparative merits and claims of different educational systems for the children of the poor. All that would be foreign to my present object. I trust that I am unsectarian enough to appreciate worth where it exists, although there may be some elements not altogether harmonious with my conscientious convictions. The educational establishment connected with Dr. Drew’s Church, in this quarter, is very complete, and modestly ornamental to the neighbourhood. This, while under the auspices, as we understood, of the Church Education Society, is supported wholly by funds raised by Dr. Drew’s congregation, and by the proceeds of the schools themselves. The number in attendance, we should suppose, is below what the commodious rooms are capable of accommodating. We were especially interested in the infant department, where the children remain—both males and females—until they are seven years of age, when they are advanced to the upper schools. Here we found upwards of one hundred little ones, all active, and listened to their hymn as they all blended their voices in harmony, certainly not much worse, but rather better, than we hear occasionally in our public religious services. As I beheld the order maintained, and the combination of amusement and work, in the management of these little creatures, I could not help reverting in my mind to the worthy
Wilderspin and his wife, the originators of infant schools. That was a grand event (who will say that it was not as important as the fall of Newton’s apple?) when, overwhelmed and exhausted in the vain attempt to arrest the horrid clamour of so many lawless throats as they had brought together in their benevolent project, they, in a moment almost of despair, hoisted Mrs. Wilderspin’s cap upon a pole, and, rushing forth among the noisy urchins, waved aloft this new flag-staff. Instantly, every throat was still, and every eye fixed, and the worthy couple had made in that moment a discovery, the value of which it would be difficult to overrate. To arrest the fickle and wandering eye, and to make learning not a task, but a pleasure and sport—this is the great secret, which enables one person to manage and instruct, with perfect ease, one hundred and more children, just at the age when they are least capable of being controlled and disciplined. It might, perhaps, have been better for us all if, even in higher establishments, our education had partaken more of the same character, instead of being the dull drudgery to which we often look back as to a fearful incubus sitting and brooding there upon our early hours and energies, and crushing out our young life. But the system of education is improved.

Refreshed by what we witnessed here, we advanced along Durham-street, peering, according to our wont, into all manner of courts and entries. In Victoria-court, we marked the flower-pot with its greenness adorning the windows, a sure sign of the taste and comparative refinement of the inmates. Allowing for its narrowness, we found cottage neatness, cleanliness, and comfort in Davison’s-court. The proprietor of this place, who lives at the entrance of it, and of whom I know nothing unless what I learned by the inspection of this little alley, deserves the highest eulogy; and his tenantry deserve to be joined with him in the praise, for they vie with each other in keeping their houses in the most perfect order. It did our hearts good to look at these cottages—the outside whitewashed, without a

soil upon the pathway—and within, little palaces for cleanliness and beauty. In this court, there are twenty-eight houses, and fourteen of them are furnished with neat clocks—a token of superiority of mind and habit. Nor let it be supposed that these cottages are beyond the reach of the poor. One shilling per week is the rent for each; and the people are, in general, in the humblest circumstances. We entered one, and learned that the husband is a porter, earning only 9s a week; yet he and his wife continue to live upon this, and the most refined individual in Belfast might sit at their hearth, while their little rooms are furnished with as much neatness as it is possible for the most fastidious to desire. We were delighted with the whole scene. It was like a vision of Dante’s Paradise, after wandering through his Inferno. We lingered in the court, walking up and down with a feeling of perfect luxury. “How is it,” said I, in a sort of ecstasy, to a woman whose furniture was white as the driven snow, “that you are all so clean and orderly in this place?” “Oh,” said she, “Mr. Davison likes to see us so.” Landlords, here is a great moral! This Mr. Davison, whoever he be, has learned effectually, I think, one grand lesson much trumpeted in high places, but, I fear, little practised in any place, touching the duties of property. His is a sort of feudalism within that little pleasant domain, and his power is exercised in the most salutary form. His family of twenty-eight households all bless him. Their pride is to please him, and his pleasure is to see them happy. There they are, Protestants and Roman Catholics, living in perfect harmony, while their dwellings literally enjoy what Horace beautifully styles, apertis otia portis. I must not forget to mention, either, that not a single instance of cholera occurred within this entry (although so narrow), during the awful visitations of that scourge. The pestilence was rebuked at the threshold; it looked down, but, finding no encouragement to enter there, it turned aside to scenes where it could riot at its pleasure. Nor had it far to travel before it was gratified to the full, for the Blackstaff was
WALKS AMONG THE POOR.

soon at hand, and a far less practised scent than it can boast, could easily discern the grateful perfume of that notable stream. Poetry has done much to spread and perpetuate the names of Castalia and Scamander, but these ancient waters will shortly find a rival in the celebrity which science is giving to our classic stream. It already enjoys a continental, and will speedily have a world-wide fame. Enviable privilege! to live on its banks, to drink its inspirations, and to gaze upon its glassy surface giving back the sunshine and clouds of Heaven. The Alumni of Cambridge have their Cam; by all means, let those of Queen's College have their Blackstaff. It certainly cannot exult in its breadth, nor does it always surge with much majesty in its course, but it fills its banks with right good-will, and contains the largest possible amount of matter within the smallest possible space—in this last particular affording a practical solution of a great problem which has long puzzled the wisest mathematicians. I know not whether any Nymph frequents its shores, such as presided over ancient streams, but if so, I fear we must have incurred the wrath of the divinity, by the irreverent manner in which, seizing a certain unpoetic member of the face, we rushed across her path and hurried on. Strange as it may appear, under the circumstances, I felt as though actually pursued by grim Pestilence and Death. But this sort of feeling, I grant, is quite unpardonable, seeing that the inhabitants of Belfast have long and deeply studied and discussed the properties of this river; nor could mere monetary difficulties be permitted to stand in the way of its removal, if, as some allege, the lives of thousands are endangered by it. We must conclude, then, since it still flows on in the face of day, and still contributes its liberal exhalations to the atmosphere, that it is quite innocuous—perhaps salutary rather than otherwise.

I regret to state that we met with no second Davison's-court in our progress along Durham-street, but many places which were too well calculated to set it off to still greater advantage. Throughout our inqui-
inhabitants. Its suburban situation is greatly in its favour. Many of its people are, doubtless, very poor, and their domestic and sanitary condition capable of great improvement. But they are not shut up within walls which debar the entrance of the pure air and light of heaven. The mountain breezes play upon their dwellings, and they have only to look around to catch some glimpses of the country, not yet quite eaten up by the insatiable appetite of our monster town. We met with some strange phases of human nature, however, in this place. One might have supposed that a belief in magic spells and fairies had all died away, and that in this very vulgar, materialistic, and somewhat sceptical age, none could have been found, at least in this part of Ulster, to credit the tales of our grandmothers. But there are some people in Sandy-row who still retain the elder faith on these subjects, and, if works can prove the sincerity of conviction, theirs must be sincere indeed. Night after night, and month after month, in the midnight hour, Oberon and Titania, Puck, Peas-blossom, Robin-goodfellow, and all the rest of those little gentry, whom Shakspeare has immortalized in his immortal "Dream," have found willing followers in this neighbourhood, and led them a mystic dance for gold to Cave-hill. Not in the Californian or Australian fashion, however, have these "diggings" been executed. It is not gold, scattered about in dust, or even in "nuggets," which forms the object of this search, but compactly laid up in chests—deposited, as the fairy records say, upon the summit of the "hill," by the Danes, in those days when they were compelled to make a hasty retreat from this part of the isle. More than once have these gold-seekers struck upon the iron chests, but, just at the moment, the propitious influence was absent, and a kind of mysterious darkness and confusion fell upon their eyes. They believe, too, they heard a voice—we may suppose it something like the "procul ā, procul ēste profani" of the ancients. However this be, the chests still remain precisely where the Danes placed them, and these indefatigable Sandyrowites are, at the present time, making inquiry, far and wide, for the seventh son of a seventh son, gifted with second sight, and possessing the power, as the legends tell, to take off the spell which has for ages rested upon this gold, and to give the treasure to the eager eyes and grasp of these sleepless and long expecting votaries of Magic and of Mammon. We understood that a man had just been discovered who answers to this description, and, of course, it is hoped that, some of these nights, the Danish gold will be dragged from its hiding-place, to make the fortune of all who are in the secret.

You must not suppose that I am calling upon my imagination in this narrative. I give you the facts in my own way, it is true, but in substance exactly as we learned them from a person intimately connected with these gold-seekers. I have exhibited this thing more as a folly than a crime. But it partakes very largely, both in its nature and effects, of the latter character. The persons engaged in it have abjured religion, and deem those members of their family who know aught of Christianity as serious obstacles in the way of their success, because "the spirits of the vasty deep" cannot come so freely where these are; and they themselves are tossed and agitated in mind, by day and by night—feverish and dissatisfied with a life of ordinary industry and toil. The dream of sudden and inordinate wealth has maddened them, and they are ready, if that were possible, to sell their souls for gold. "They have done no good," was the language of the individual, for whose veracity I am prepared to vouch, "since that night, between two and three years ago, when they went to dig at the Cave-hill." I remembered the forcible words of sacred writ—"The love of money is the root of all evil; which, while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows"—a lesson, by the way, which might be usefully studied in other and more elevated places. The lust of gold burns and blights the hearts of thousands, in our marts of commerce and elsewhere, who would smile at or condemn the ignorant dupes of Sandy-row.

I was rejoiced, however, to find the schoolmaster
abroad in this neighbourhood, for, in proportion as he labours in his important vocation, all such delusions will vanish, and a higher type of society will be realized. Little as is thought of it, the mission of the schoolmaster is one of the most noble in the world, and second to none in responsibility and power. It is his to form and mould the age. We found in Victoria-place a school, upon the National System, in full operation. The names of the Committee are a guarantee for all that is benevolent, and the teacher seemed well adapted to give efficiency to the establishment. The whole erection, with its furniture, has cost only about £200; and a more profitable investment of private or public beneficence could not well be imagined. One hundred and thirty-four children were in attendance, but it appears that twice that number are on the books. The average received from these is twopence per week, which, with other sources of income, enables the teacher to have an assistant in his laborious work. About eighty read the Scriptures during the hour allotted to religious instruction; and we were given to understand that no attempt is made to inculcate sectarian views. The building is used in the evening as an adult school for the workers of some neighbouring “mill,” but not by them exclusively, for all are, on equal terms, admissible to its privileges. Thus, there is opened a fountain of life in this district; and our sincere desire is, that thousands may flock to it for healing and salvation. Let secular and religious education be provided for the people, and Sandy-row will soon have another sort of celebrity than that unenviable one which it has hitherto possessed. Belief in magical arts and incantations, digging in the dead of night for Danish gold, club law, political and party brawls, and other evil works of this description, will give place to intelligence, domestic quiet, sober and industrious habits, moral and religious worth; and the very aspect of the people and of their dwellings will whisper the change, in no doubtful accents, as the stranger passes along to learn and study the form and features of their social condition.

Belfast, Oct. 1, 1852.

LETTER IV.

Sir,—Entering Smithfield by one of those thoroughfares which lead to it from one of the more elegant parts of the town, the first thing that arrested our attention, as usual, was the number and evident prosperity of the temples of Bacchus—if, indeed, that somewhat respectable heathen divinity would acknowledge our modern drunkeries, or permit them to be called by his name. We counted at one door, in passing, ten immense puncheons of whiskey, all waiting to be carried in and broached for the benefit of thirsty customers. There they all lay, ready to do their appropriate work of debasing and pauperizing the wretched victims of intemperance, the lovers of strong drink; and as I looked at their big, bloated forms, without a particle of pity or remorse in them, I thought they seemed not inapt types of some who live by their means; yet I could not altogether get rid of certain images which appeared to come around, fluttering in rags, lean enough, and crying, “Give, give.” I paused to reflect how much wretchedness and death—how much damnation of soul for both worlds—could be drawn out of those same ten great barrels of intoxicating liquor; but, in my reverie, I forgot to calculate the excellent profits which the sale of so large a quantity of alcoholic drink would yield to the landlord, and, still worse, I forgot the interests of Government and of the Revenue. I was compelled soon, however, to acknowledge myself but a novice in such things, for, on expressing some surprise to a person standing in his shop hard by, he exclaimed, “Oh, that is nothing, there is that number laid down there every six weeks or so—they do a great business in that place!” Walking round the market-square of
Smithfield, we counted about twenty public-houses, all, or nearly all, exhibiting unmistakeable marks of a brisk and lucrative trade; while in immediate juxtaposition with some of them (fit and significant combination) may be seen the well-known sign of the pawnbroker. One method we heard of for increasing the popularity of some of these spirit-stores, is to distribute drink at certain periods, gratuitously, to all likely comers. This may seem an expensive mode of ensuring public support, but such generosity has its reward. It is found in these cases a profitable virtue, for who, under such circumstances, would be so ungrateful as not to patronise to the utmost of their power, and even beyond it, the liberal houses that intoxicate and madden people for nothing? It is not in human nature, but especially in the nature of a warm Irish heart, to be guilty of such meanness and baseness to one's best friend. Some years since, we had a war with China, because his Celestial Majesty had prohibited a free trade in opium with "the outside barbarians." Much has been said in vindication of that affair, but so far as this trade in opium was concerned—considering the horrible abuse of the drug in that land, of which the Chinese Government had the best right to judge—a more unhappy occasion of war, I believe, was never found or made by a professedly civilized, to say nothing of a Christian nation. It may be said that people have a right to poison themselves if they please—it is the glorious liberty of a man to get drunk, whether with alcohol or opium—and who shall dare to fetter his freedom? The position is false, and it can be asserted only by such as overlook the most vital distinctions. The abstract right a man may have—to exercise it, however, he must live on some uninhabited spot of earth, where none can be affected by his crimes, or involved in their consequences. But in a state of society where we are all indissolubly linked together, and where we are compelled to suffer the dread consequences of crimes perpetrated (as we know the greater part of our crimes are) under the influence of intoxicating liquors, and, moreover, when we are compelled by law to support the wretches, with their families, who reduce themselves to impotence and beggary by such evil courses, we surely ought to have some legal protection against the cupidity which seeks its own aggrandizement at the expense of public weal and social morality, and some legal penalty, adequate effectually to check the vicious, brutalizing, and pauperizing habits which fill our workhouses and jails. In this respect, the spirit, at least, of the Chinese prohibition should have provoked us to admire and imitate, rather than to send forth our hostile fleets and armies. The principle of legal interference, in some sense, is asserted among us; but the punishment is too feeble, and too rarely inflicted, to prove of much utility. We can readily perceive, indeed, some difficulty in the way of making drunkenness a legal offence, and still greater in carrying out any legislative enactment on the subject fully and fairly into execution. Theorists may allege, with some plausibility, that the ground on which legal action is advocated here, would equally justify such an extent of interference with the whole economy of life as would prove an intolerable burden, since various other personal habits also entail much evil at times on the community. This objection, however, I hold to be unsound and unphilosophic; for, while no Legislature is at liberty, under any circumstances, to violate the laws of natural equity, the measure of its interference with the customs of society cannot be always regulated by mere abstract principles, but at times by an enlightened and well-judged expediency; nor would it be difficult to make out such a case in relation to the drinking habits of our people, and the bearing of these habits upon the poverty and crime of the nation, as might well warrant such a special interference in this particular. But, whatever may be said as to the wisdom or expediency of a law which would restrain personal indulgence in the use of intoxicating liquors, what friend to humanity, what true patriot, would not rejoice to behold at least some effectual legal restriction
placed upon the number of those places where drunkards are made, and the materials of social and moral ruin publicly vended? Where is the consistency of legislative enactment for the education of the masses in habits of intelligence and virtue, and the appropriation of large public funds to this object, while, at the same time, no effectual hindrance exists to the multiplication of the means and appliances whereby all these philanthropic schemes are frustrated, and the seeds of national demoralization and ruin sown broadcast through the land? Can any consideration of public revenue, any advantage derivable to the Exchequer of the country, be placed, for a moment, in competition with the interests of social virtue, prosperity, and order? Will not that policy, in the end, prove as suicidal in its effects, as it is unworthy of a Christian nation, which permits the indefinite augmentation of elements fraught and charged with so much evil to the entire community? And will the religious and intelligent portion of this great empire long suffer the anomaly, now so glaring, of a Government building up with one hand and pulling down with another, erecting churches and school-houses, and paying preachers and teachers for the education of the people, and, at the same time, affording the widest possible scope to those whose selfish interest it is to sink and imbrute the soul and body of the nation? The thing is an insult to common sense, and calls loudly for reformation.

No inhabitant of Belfast needs any description of the general aspect of Smithfield. It seems a storehouse, or rather salehouse, for all the nondescript wares which can be collected from whatever quarter. How such heterogeneous articles contrived to come together into one and the same place, and set themselves down there, side by side, in truce and amity, is a problem which it perplexes the mind to solve. One would think of the "rudis indigestaque moles," but that, after all, it is not quite a chaos of formless things—only a glorious disorder of things of some shape and name, but such as no one, perhaps, ever saw before, or ever will again see, except in Smithfield, brought together within so limited a compass. It might seem as if there had been a design to surprise the passer-by, by the strangeness of the contrasts and combinations, such as we might see in a huge kaleidoscope—only substituting ugliness for beauty; or, as if all the warehouses and shops in the town had poured out their refuse contents into this one common repositary and receptacle. But with such matters, unless they may serve to illustrate the manners and lives of the people, we can at present have no concern. It is easy, however, to see that a singular social medley must be found collected and associated within the precincts of Smithfield. Honest industry, on whatever scale it is pursued, is worthy of all honour; and the merchandize of this place is not without its advantages to a numerous class, both of traders and purchasers. It is reported very currently, however, that many goods find their way into this mart by other than the established means of honourable traffic; and I have known some friends who have had the pleasure of finding there, and buying back, their property, after it had unaccountably disappeared from their houses or their tables. To what extent the Smithfield people are directly implicated in such unbusiness-like transactions, one has no means of judging; but that the law of meum and tuum is very ill understood by many of the hangers-on and underlings of this square, is but too easily proved. I met with evidence of this very lately, from an Englishman who had just settled in one of the angles of the place. He said he had found Ireland all that it had been represented, by friends who wished to deter him from the perilous attempt of living in so horrible a place. He had now been about three months in Ireland, and he saw nothing but thieves. His goods, by which he had hoped to attract purchasers, had attracted only purloiners—and he was determined to sell off, even at "prodigious sacrifice," and fly from the country at the earliest possible moment. I suggested to him that Smithfield was not the whole of Ireland, but that a
part of the country lay outside. The thing did not seem to have properly occurred to our intelligent friend before, nor did it then appear to produce any strong impression on his mind. He had but one idea—that it was Ireland he saw out there from his shop door—and he was filled with indignation at his own folly in venturing to come to the land, after the remonstrances of so many of his well-wishers, who knew the character of the people so much better than he had known it; and, until his dying hour, he would have but one opinion of the Irish—that "they are only a set of thieves—every one of them." I perfectly understood his logic: its careful generalizations, its Baconian inductiveness, its impartial character, are at times met with in higher quarters. But there is no doubt that this honest and clear-headed Saxon had found Smithfield a rather troublesome place to live in, after all. Looking around, the other day, to see and sympathize with the ill-used stranger, I found he had carried his threat into execution. He has left Ireland, which means Smithfield; Lot has escaped out of Sodom, and now the city and the country may expect immediate doom. We may smile at the sweeping, wholesale condemnation of this Cheshire-man, and believe that few of our lowest Irish, on the other side of the channel, could be found of more Boeotian intellect; but it is well to learn, even from the most ignorant and prejudiced; and there is no doubt that Smithfield is the rendezvous of a gang of youthful miscreants—candidates for the hulks and the gallows—who find a market there for their booty, and skulking-places in its vicinage where they may escape the eye and hand of justice. I should suppose that the very worst grade of our population will be found heaped together, corrupting and being corrupted, in this quarter. It is a sort of tumour, a morbid ganglion in the heart of our city; and, by a well-known law of disease, the vitiated humours of the system find their way to the diseased part—it draws to itself and assimilates even a portion of the wholesome succulence which would, otherwise, nourish and strengthen the body.

We penetrated into Smithfield-court, which is not unworthy of its patronymic. This is, as we learned on the spot, the battle-ground of the whole neighbourhood; and wrathful pugilists resort thither, even from the most distant parts of the town, to settle their disputes after their own fashion, undisturbed by impertinent policemen. How far these explosions of brutality are connected with the drinking habits of the people, may be gathered from the fact that Saturday night and Sunday are the times when these fierce, and often bloody, struggles take place. The court is somewhat spacious, but very filthy, and the houses filled with as many human beings as can huddle together within their walls. To most of these—it is but too certain—these periodic fights afford no small gratification, although they protested to us their entire freedom from any participation in them, farther than allowing them to come off there, which they seemed to regard rather in the light of a virtue than otherwise. All the fighting, however, is not done in Smithfield-court. It is only a few weeks since, that the space at the top of old Hudson’s-entry was the scene of a most brutal contest between two lads of tender years, one of whom was backed by his mother, who, when her boy grew faint and feeble from loss of blood, spirited him on, by the promise of choice eatables, if he would only bruise and beat his antagonist. It was the Smithfield holiday—the Sabbath—and multitudes, young and old, flocked to the spot to witness the "sport," and to give the necessary impetus to these youthful gladiators. There stood the mother, with arms extended and hair dishevelled—a human fiend—urging on, by voice and gesture, her own child to murderous deeds, while the blood spurted over his tattered garments and fell upon the ground. Our informant—a humane man—ran to obtain the aid of the police; but, somehow or other, these guardians of the public peace are at times difficult to be found, and when he himself attempted to put an end to this atrocious spectacle, that mother turned upon him like a tigress, and seemed ready to spring at his throat for
daring to interfere with her or her child. I expressed the hope that this was an unprecedented instance of wickedness, even in that neighbourhood, but was assured that it was by no means so rare; and that there are few weeks that are not ushered in and closed by the most disgraceful brawls of some kind—the result, in general, of drunkenness and debauchery.

And who can doubt this, after taking a survey of some of the neighbouring alleys? I have referred to old Hudson's-entry. It is a complete den of vice and uncleanness, probably unsurpassed in what is called the civilized world. While we endeavoured to take in the loathsome picture it presents, I was forcibly impressed—more than ever—with the fact, that while the female character, when virtuous, is nearly allied to the angelic, when vicious and fallen, it can find no halting-place in its downward descent, until it sinks into that of the very demon. Indeed, it is a question, if, in the rank of demons, any parallel can be found in moral deformity and odiousness to an imbruted, guilty, shameless woman—and with such characters this entry is, for the most part, filled. As we stood gazing down it (it is the only place of the kind which, in all our Walks, we shrank from traversing), we beheld these wretches squatting at their doors, or staggering along and tottering from side to side of the narrow passage, unable to walk because of drink, although it was during the morning hours. They breakfast upon whiskey, and "sup full of horrors" upon the same; and hence the numerous puncheons laid down every few weeks to supply the flourishing establishments of Smithfield. How low! shall we continue to brand the victims, and let the victimizers escape; nay, pronounce them respectable, because they succeed in enriching themselves, although by means which entail misery and degradation upon their species? Truly, the laws which regulate social justice imperatively call for revision and change. This entry is the resort of many of the vilest characters of the town; and the testimony of those residing in the neighbourhood is, that however bad it is at other times, it is on Saturday night, and on Sunday too, as if in utter contempt of all laws, divine and human, that it holds its horrid jubilee. Then, the sounds of cursing and blasphemy are loudest, and, to use the language of a person who, from his position, sees the whole place, "they fight like devils." He used the expression in sad and sober earnestness, and it is with no flippancy of spirit that I record his testimony. Is it not a fearful thought, a more fearful reality, that, in the very midst of our Church-going people, such wickedness should be permitted to run riot, and that these human Harpies should be polluting the very Sabbath light and air with their abominations?

Tristius haud illis monstrum, nec saevior ulla
Pestis et ira Deum Stygiis sese extulit undis.

I have this moment learned from your columns, that the Town Council has appointed "an officer of health, having the entire superintendence of the sanitary condition of the town, with the assistance of five constables under his control," and that Surgeon Browne, R.N., who formerly distinguished himself in this walk, is the gentleman upon whom the choice of the Council has fallen. Many thanks are due to our public Authorities for this seasonable and judicious step. They will win by it "golden opinions of all sorts of men," and it is to be hoped that all sorts of men will cordially cooperate in furthering the design of this appointment. I would take the liberty of calling the attention of this gentleman to Marquis-street, which runs out of Smithfield into Mill-street. This, like so many other parts of the town, is, I believe, wholly destitute of the requisite means of domestic cleanliness, and most bitter were the complaints of some of the inhabitants as to the condition of the locality altogether. My conviction is, that these complaints are too well founded. There is an entry, M'Lean's-court, connected with this street, which runs out of Smithfield into Mill-street. This, like so many other parts of the town, is, I believe, wholly destitute of the requisite means of domestic cleanliness, and most bitter were the complaints of some of the inhabitants as to the condition of the locality altogether. My conviction is, that these complaints are too well founded. There is an entry, M'Lean's-court, connected with this street, which, for all that is foul and filthy, surpasses almost anything of the kind which had come under my eye. If it were not for the force of habit, which too much reconciles us to any evil, however great, the dwellers in this
quarter would long since have made themselves heard by those whose duty it is to correct such abuses. I found some of them had at length petitioned the Board of Health respecting a foul nuisance which was within a yard, off the street, and which had become so intolerable as to compel persons to rush away from their houses—and, Sir, I feel warranted, after all I have witnessed, to say that it must be no common or measurable annoyance which will produce this effect upon the well-seasoned senses and nerves of our back-street population. A man who has dwelt contentedly in Marquis-street, and breathed the air of M'Lean's-court without a murmur, and yet at length confesses himself fairly vanquished by a stench, has a claim to be heard by Boards of Health and Town Councils. I had not an opportunity of personally inspecting this nuisance—the gates being closed; but I learned that it consists of a reservoir connected with one of the Smithfield mills. With what this warm water is impregnated on its passage, or at its source in Millfield, I cannot say, but, from all accounts, the effluvium it emits is most offensive and sickening. This warm pond fills the air with its vapours, and the character of this vapour is by no means improved by the decomposition of certain dead animals which float at large in this comfortable hot-bath, until, in long process of time, they finally dissolve away. Such, in substance, is the narrative of the case, and here, as elsewhere, I state the result of my inquiries without fear or favour, only regretting if, in any feeble attempt to promote the general weal, I should happen, however unwillingly, to occasion personal offence. What parties are to blame for this nuisance, is a question which I cannot answer.

I had heard of Botany, in the neighbourhood of Smithfield, as occupying the lowest place in the social scale, and as presenting, also, in its physical aspects, all that is most forlorn. But it is evident that considerable improvement has been effected in, at least, the external appearance of this labyrinth of courts and alleys. Unequivocal symptoms of a low and debased morale met us, indeed, in several parts of it, and gross ignorance on the most important subjects reigns but too manifestly there, as well as throughout the whole of the district now under consideration; but the general condition of the dwellings is decidedly superior to what we had been led to anticipate. We were informed, whether correctly or not, that this improvement is owing to the efforts of the Town Council; and certainly it is to be deeply deplored that any obstacle should impede their plans for the utter demolition of the disgraceful and odious tenements to be found in so many quarters of the town, and the erection of buildings suited to the wants of our rapidly-augmenting population. Unless something of this kind be done, and done quickly, either by public funds or individual and private enterprise, the result must be, that as our numbers increase, the whole social condition of the lower orders will sink still deeper; for I hold it to be a sound and undeniable principle, that the manner in which a people are housed determines, very largely, their entire status and character. A few minds, filled with noble sentiments, and kindled with a celestial ray, may successfully combat the influences which fall, dark and crushingly, upon them, from close, crowded, and rotten habitations; but the rule is so general as scarcely to admit of an exception, that reduce men to live and herd together in places fit only for swine, and they become swinish in all their habits, retaining only the human form, and so much of the human soul as to render their animal instincts more dangerous and destructive. We are told that, in 1841, "one-half of the people of Ireland had dwelling-houses consisting of only a single room, and three-fourths of all Irish houses were of mud." Who does not see the close connexion which such a domestic economy must have with the character of a nation—a connexion of reciprocal cause and effect? And who would not heartily unite to arrest the process of deterioration which must ensue within our immediate bounds—among those far too low and degraded already—if, while their numbers increase, no better or enlarged
accommodation be provided to meet the growing necessities of the case? If it were advisable to trouble you with further details, I might occupy no little space in describing some strange exhibitions which we witnessed in connexion with the domestic arrangements of the houses in and around Smithfield—all illustrative of the principle which underlies the preceding remarks—but I must forbear.

My impression of the religious condition of the people at large, in this district, must be conveyed only in general terms. It was the early boast and glory of Christianity that its mission was directed to the poor, nor has the Church altogether failed to preserve and perpetuate this benevolent feature of our Divine faith. But, assuredly, the amount of our existing machinery is wholly inadequate to the exigencies and extent of the evil to be combated in this department. There are multitudes—multitudes, outcast and destitute, at our very doors, for whom none of us seem to care. In this quarter alone we discovered that, while all, or nearly all, profess to be attached to some form of religion, very few, in any way, recognize the existence and claims of God. The institutes of the Sabbath are almost wholly neglected—the most rudimental principles of Christianity are unknown; and, altogether, the mass of practical infidelity and stupid animalism is such as to appal even the heart where faith in God and truth is stoutest; while one is wholly at a loss to know how it is to be dealt with, or whether the growing and deepening evil can ever be overtaken. All the elements of poverty, wretchedness, ignorance, immorality, and irreligiosity, are seething here as in a mighty cauldron, and ready to overflow—nay, actually overflowing—and, like lava torrents, blighting and devastating all they touch. By all means, Sir, let us not forget the claims of the heathen abroad, but let us also practically admit the higher claims of the heathen around our Christian sanctuaries at home.

It can, assuredly, afford little pleasure to reveal to the world the social evils which afflict either our native land, or the town of our habitation, especially when the revelation is calculated to reflect discredit upon ourselves, or upon those with whom we may be connected by the bonds of citizenship or of country. Pride itself would fain conceal such things from a stranger's eye, and, if possible, throw a veil over defects and deformities likely to excite the scorn or contempt of neighbouring communities or nations. Whether such feelings be right or wrong, there are few insensible to their influence; but there are higher principles which call for the sacrifice of all personal and selfish considerations, and never do these speak with such force and authority as when the well-being of the poor and helpless is involved. And, after all, since concealment is impossible here, it is our wisdom, at once and without reserve, to acknowledge our sins—or misfortunes, if we choose to call them such—and to set about the work of improvement with manliness and moral courage.

I will not venture to assert, that the condition of the lowest poor of Belfast exhibits a picture of greater actual destitution and neglect than may be found in other parts of the empire—that is not likely—but I must say, that the contrasts which glare out upon the eye as it descends from the summit to the base of the social fabric here is stronger than I ever remember to have seen it in any other locality. Nor is this my testimony alone; for, having conversed on the subject with some whose duties have led them to explore the general state of the lower classes in many parts both of England and Ireland, fully and minutely, I find a coincidence of sentiment in relation to this matter, which confirms and corroborates my own impressions. Can that, then, let me ask, be a sound or even a safe state of things, in which the different grades of the community are not rising equally, and advancing pari passu, in the march of improvement and civilization? Is it, indeed, true, that in this Northern Athens of ours, with its seats of learning, its collegiate and academic halls, its large and elegant temples of worship, its public edifices of various kinds not wanting in architectural ornament and
beauty, and its commerce superior to that of any other
port in the kingdom—greater than that of Dublin and
Cork combined—is it true, that in this, one of the most
flourishing, intellectual, and (shall I add?) religious
towns of the united empire, we have in our back lanes
and alleys, an amount of wretchedness—physical, social,
moral—which, if not absolutely, is at least relatively,
larger and more appalling, than may probably be found
beside, throughout the length and breadth of the land?
Doubtless, the very prosperity of the town may have
indirectly and in part contributed to all this, by drawing
towards it, from various quarters, great numbers of the
most destitute, with the hope of bettering their circum-
stances. But I have shown other causes at work much
more potent in their influence, and affording a more
satisfactory, though at the same time more melancholy,
explanation of the phenomenon.

When the Representative of our gracious Queen
lately made an almost Royal progress through our
principal streets, and gazed at those proofs of opulence
and prosperity which everywhere met his eye, how
little could he or any of his distinguished cortège ima-
gine the misery to be found in immediate proximity
to the brilliant and joyous scene. If only some of those
streets through which he passed could have opened,
and disclosed what lay beyond, the effect would have
been as that of a loathsome spectre at a feast, or as of
the corruption of a charnel-house breaking in upon the
gaiety and glitter of a bridal. It is perfectly right to
deck ourselves in holiday attire, when called upon to
receive and welcome the highest public functionary of
the land, but it is not right to forget the abject condition
of the vast numbers of our population who could only
grimly smile at such a happy spectacle; nor is it right
to overlook the fact, that there are diseases at work
beneath the surface—at the very core of the social
body—which it will demand something widely different
from a gala day and public fête to cure, or even mitigate.
This will prove a work of agony and bloody sweat—
one to be undertaken in a martyr spirit—one which
mere money-getting and money-loving respectability has
neither the eyes to see nor the heart to prosecute—and
a work which, unless speedily commenced, will baffle all
our united ability and skill, for the disease is becoming
daily more confirmed and deadly—taking deeper pos-
session of the vitals, and spreading in leprosy and
gangrene through the whole system.

Of this disease, or rather complication of diseases, I
have now attempted something like a faint description
—how imperfect the execution, no one can be more
sensible than myself. I might proceed, for the materials
are almost exhaustless; but I never meant to do more than
furnish samples of the general and aggregate condition of our
poorer population. And, with a slight modification of
the somewhat hackneyed quotation, I can conscien-
tiously affirm, that to the best of my knowledge, I have
“spoken of it as it is—nothing extenuated, nor set
down aught in malice.” Here I would gladly resign
my pen to some more competent hand, to suggest re-
medies or alleviations at least. But should none be
disposed to undertake this task, I suppose I must en-
deavour to fulfil it, as I best can, amid other and more
direct engagements.

Belfast, Oct. 12, 1852.

P.S.—May, 1853.—It cannot be doubted that some
improvement has been effected in, at least, the sanitary
condition of the town, since the foregoing letters were
first published, but it is certain that, however faithful
and zealous the parties in office may have been, little
has been done towards a radical cure of the evil. It
is rather strange, too, that particular places noticed in
these “Walks” remain in precisely the same condition
as when first noticed by me, and some of them are even
worse than they were. I may mention M‘Lean’s-court,
the vicinity of Hamill-court, Dickey’s-entry, and Lynas-
court. The Blackstaff, of course, remains in statu quo.
I have heard, however, that some step has been taken
preparatory to the abatement of this eminent nuisance.
I hope the news is true. It gives me great pleasure to state that the Messrs. Herdman have employed means to remedy the evil complained of in the neighbourhood of Marquis-street. I am given to understand that these gentlemen are nobly solicitous to remedy all that can possibly injure the health and comfort of the working classes, and I personally regret that any misapprehension as to their feelings on this question should have arisen from the reference made to what was felt to be an intolerable nuisance—a reference made, as I stated, in total ignorance of the names of parties implicated. I feel bound to add, that the reservoir is an accumulation of water from Millfield, which, after being received into their mill to condense their steam, is returned in the same state in which it entered. They cannot, therefore, stand chargeable with the pestiferous nature of its contents.

REFORMATION OF THE POOR OF BELFAST.

LETTER V.

SIR,—The first point, as it appears to me, to which the attention of the inhabitants of Belfast should be directed is, by what means the sanitary state of the town may be most effectually and speedily improved. I give this the first place in our inquiries, not because I would raise the external and physical above the inward and moral elements of our nature and condition, but from the deep conviction that it is almost useless to attempt any extensive change in the latter department until due attention is paid to the former. At all events, it is obvious that our efforts with respect to these must go hand in hand; and, had this course been more faithfully adopted, the enemies of religion would have been deprived of one of their most plausible objections to the Christian system. Under the influence of a false spiritualism, the Church has, to a large extent, neglected the temporal relations of men, as though her garments would be soiled by contact with earthly things—all the while forgetful of the great fact, that the Divine Author of our religion himself spent no inconsiderable part of the time allotted to his brief sojourn here, in ameliorating the outward and corporeal circumstances of "the common people." We surely are not
prepared to assert that our mission is more ethereal than His, or that we can furnish a better—an improved edition of the Faith he came to establish.

With respect to sanitary changes, a terrible responsibility lies somewhere. It is not for me to adjudge, or apportion the degree of this belonging to the several parties involved; but it is to be greatly feared that the rate-payers and general community have not continued to take sufficient interest in the affair, and that many who should have taken the lead have tacitly acquiesced in the notion that it was none of their business to interfere in such matters:—and so neglect has aggravated the evil tenfold, and now such a measure of exertion is demanded as may in part atone for past indifference.

From a variety of causes, public attention is at present more alive to the sanitary condition of this town than it has been in all probability for some years. It appears to me that one of the first things to be tried, then, is to give some definite form and direction to the anxieties so extensively felt on this subject; and this could, in all probability, be best done by a public meeting which would serve powerfully to strengthen the hands of the Authorities, and give greater efficacy to the whole scheme. In order to the success of any project of this kind, it is needful also that the entire newspaper press of Belfast (second in power to none in the kingdom) utter its voice, and that the clergy of all denominations join heart and hand in furthering the object. However we may differ on other points, here is one in which all agree, and surely none will imagine this to be a work lying beyond his sphere, or bearing no special relation to the duties of his calling. Far am I from wishing to play the part of a false alarmist. But while I would not be guilty of the temerity of saying that cholera will certainly visit our town again, I would shrink far more from the greater temerity of saying that it will not. The probabilities are against us. We ought to be prepared then for the worst; and our measures should be prompt and continuous. We are told that it will require years to bring about a thorough sanitary reformation, and this is no doubt true. Many general arrangements are necessary, and many practices of long standing must be abolished, before a perfectly pure and healthy atmosphere, light, and cleanliness can become the property and blessing of the several localities of the town, to the extent which we all desire. But I am persuaded, that a mighty impulse might now be given to the whole matter, if the proper steps were adopted, which, if the favourable season be permitted to pass away, may not be again possible for some time to come. Some system of wide and extended co-operation is absolutely necessary—and we should aim at thorough and radical reform. Without this, the work will ever have to be begun anew, and Sisyphus rolling the stone upward, which ever rebounded to the plain, will be the apt emblem of our abortive labours. It is said that the sanitary provision lately made by the Town Council is intended to be only temporary; but, unless the causes of the evil are eradicated, no one can see any end to the necessity of its continuance. The branches may be lopped off to-day, but if the trunk and roots remain, new branches of the poison tree will sprout forth again to-morrow. The object, then, which we should aim at is two-fold—first to secure an immediate and energetic appliance of all available sanitary rules and measures to the filthy portions of the town; and, secondly, to set on foot such a system as will bring about, at the earliest possible period, something like a radical cure of the whole evil. And, whilst I would advocate the enforcement of all just, legal means of accomplishing these purposes, I own I have great confidence in the working of a spontaneous and unbought benevolence.

What I would then beg leave to suggest is, that at such a public meeting as has been referred to, or by any other method thought more advisable, a Sanitary Association be formed, with a General Committee divided into sections, corresponding with the different wards of the town, which Committee should co-operate with the Town Council and the Board of Health in all
immediate measures for bettering the existing state of
the dwellings of the poor, but should not consider its
mission fulfilled until it has, by the diffusion of know-
ledge, and by all other lawful means, effected a satisfac-
tory change in the entire sanitary economy of the town and
neighbourhood. By the formation of a large Committee,
and a well-regulated division of labour, the task de-
volving upon individuals would become comparatively
easy. Such an association has just been originated in
Manchester, under the direction of the Mayor; and,
certainly, it is not less needed in Belfast. The man
who imagines that the extant machinery is sufficient,
must have a most inadequate conception of the magni-
tude and virulence of the evil to be remedied, and
should spend a few weeks in visiting, for himself, the
close and filthy localities of the town. The objects of
the Manchester Association are—first, to promote at-
tention to temperance, personal and domestic cleanli-
ness, and to the laws of health generally; secondly, to
induce general co-operation with the Boards of Health
and other constituted Authorities, in giving effect to
official regulations for sanitary improvement; and the
means it adopts are—first, visitation of districts; se-
condly, familiar and well-illustrated sanitary lectures,
given in school-rooms and elsewhere; thirdly, the dis-
tribution of short tracts on the subject, written in plain
language, and given or lent to the poor by the Minis-
ters of religion, school-teachers, and the various agents
of societies employed in district visiting; and fourthly,
such other means as experience and opportunity may
from time to time suggest. I place this programme
before the public, in order to render the whole subject
as palpable as possible, taking it out of the land of
shadows into that of reality; and, also, trusting that
the Manchester of Ireland will not fall below her sister
city on the other side of the channel in this work of
enlightened charity and social justice.

This is not the place to enter into details; but it
might not be amiss to mention, that one valuable effect
of such an Association would be, to bring public opi-
nion to bear thoroughly upon the whole question; and
I, for one, have great confidence in the power of pub-
lic opinion. To what else can we attribute the destruc-
tion of the most inveterate evils which had long preyed
upon society? It is the most potent instrument in all
our modern social improvements. And, with the pub-
lic press to plead the cause of humanity, I do not des-
pair of our being able to stir up the proprietors of the
squalid and noisome tenements, or rather dens, which
breed disease and death, moral and physical, in the
midst of us, to put their hand to the work of refor-
mation, and to practise the duties, as they have long en-
joyed the rights and emoluments, of property. There
are obligations due to society, which may be sufficiently
powerful to demand the sacrifice of all the minor cour-
tesies of life—courtesies, by the way, which are seldom
thought of, except where riches and station are con-
cerned; nor can any one have just reason to complain
of a little plain dealing upon such a subject, who
tramples beneath his feet the claims of the poor, and
sets his heart like the "nether millstone against all the
tender and solemn pleadings of compassion and mercy.
Within the bounds assigned by divine and human laws,
I can see no sufficient cause why the indignation of
long-outraged public feeling should not be poured upon
the heads of those who are wallowing in wealth, scraped
together from a species of property, the character and
appointments of which are a perfect disgrace to any
civilized community. In the end, it will be found ne-
necessary to secure such an "Improvement Act" as will
enable the Authorities to sweep away such places alto-
tgether; but meanwhile, much might be done by the
landlords to mitigate the evil, if they would only act
upon the principles of social integrity, and take some
personal interest in the condition of their tenements,
instead of leaving the whole in the hands of "Agents"
—content to receive the weekly wages wrung from
the miserable occupiers of these filthy and festering
abodes.

But, if such an intelligent and active Committee
were formed, I am persuaded that, while they would find some proprietors who could only be shamed into effort, they would find others ready, from a sense of duty, to lend a helping hand to promote their object. And even with six months of hard labour, a vast change for the better would be effected; while, in the meantime, we should be practically educating the people in the laws of health and the habits of cleanliness, and thus laying the basis of an institution which should have for its ultimate object a permanent and entire revolution in the sanitary condition of the town. Nor let any one allege that our efforts would be frustrated by the incorrigibility of the poor, and their indisposition to improvement. I am bound to say, that in all my recent intercourse with the population of our lanes and alleys, every suggestion was received with thankfulness, and, more than this, with an evident willingness to benefit by it, while, in all my "Walks," I never met with the shadow of an insult or rebuff. The people at large will be found ready to respond to our exertions in the spirit in which they are made; and, although we all know the force of long-established habits, there are two things more powerful still:—love and labour will conquer all.

There is another class of persons, also, whose services such a Committee should endeavour to enlist in this cause—I mean the proprietors of public works. And if these be possessed, as I believe they are, of the generous and noble spirit which distinguishes a similar class on the English shores, they will not be found wanting in this hour of need. Employing, as they do, so large a number of the working population, it cannot be a matter of indifference with them how their servants are housed and lodged; nor will they be unwilling to contribute to a scheme which might serve to elevate them in the scale of physical and social wellbeing and comfort,—knowing how much this will tell upon their own interests as employers, even if they should overlook, which they will not, the higher claims of justice and charity. It is very gratifying to be able to point to a specific illustration of the spirit of this class of capitalists. Messrs. John Charters & Co. of the Falls Mill, employ somewhere about seven or eight hundred "hands," and these are all cared for, as to their sanitary state, with praiseworthy solicitude. These gentlemen keep their hundred houses in admirable condition, whitewashing them within, and, as far as necessary, without, once a year, and in some cases oftener—as on the removal of tenants. These houses have all the conveniences indispensable to comfort and cleanliness—each with a yard about twenty feet in length, and furnished with a supply of water. They consist not only of the ordinary accommodations below, but of three sleeping apartments above. And the whole rent-charge (the landlord paying all taxes) is but 2s, on the average, per week. A man is employed to visit these dwellings once a month, and to report on their sanitary condition. If neglect be discovered, the parties are called up and admonished, and this seldom fails to accomplish the end in view; while something like premiums are given to reward those who are distinguished for household cleanliness and order. This latter method of rewards may be very useful as a stimulus, under some circumstances, and at an early stage in the process of reformation; but the sooner it is superseded by personal conviction of the benefit of cleanliness for its own sake, the better—and this can be best effected by domiciliary visits, and instruction in relation to the laws of health. It will not be deemed out of place to refer to the conduct of the Messrs. Charters, as it may tend to awaken others to follow their excellent example. It is impossible to overrate the amount of influence which might be exerted by the class to which they belong—one likely to become every year more numerous and more powerful in this manufacturing community. Nor should the idea of small premiums to the best kept houses be lost sight of by any Association which might be formed for the general sanitary improvement of the town, at least in its first movements and operations. This plan, if judiciously
applied, at all events in those alleys and courts which are most in need of special attention, would serve to bring the people themselves into action; and until this is secured by some means, it is vain to expect any thorough and complete reformation. External coercion may achieve something; but the active co-operation of the parties to be benefited must be enlisted, if the work is to be accomplished in a full and satisfactory manner; and until higher principles can be brought into play, lower motives might be employed to effect this object.

There is one point which must strike all who have given any attention to this subject—namely, the deficiency there is in the supply of water furnished to the inferior portions of the town, where it is most required. Our sanitary state can never become all it ought to be until this evil is remedied. The larger towns of England are exhibiting the most laudable attention to this matter, some of them bringing water from great distances; as, for example, Liverpool, which has opened communication with sources of supply at the distance of thirty miles or upwards. Lough Neagh is comparatively at our doors; and, as a wealthy and flourishing community, we ought not to be outdone in this work of necessity and mercy by our neighbours on the other side of the Channel, especially when the facilities are so much greater in our case, and the expenditure to be incurred must prove so much less.

But in reference to these and other means which it is needless now to mention, it must be obvious that unless the inhabitants of Belfast in general arouse themselves to aid the civic Authorities, nothing great or valuable can be accomplished. The sentiment of Cicero, when Rome was threatened by a terrible foe, is not inapplicable to the case—“There is no one . . . . in any tolerable condition, who should not be disposed to contribute as much as he dares, and is able, to the common safety of the State.” It is a work in which all are deeply interested, and in which all should cordially unite. A common enemy, more fearful than Catiline and his conspirators, may soon be in our midst; and, even if Divine Providence should preserve us from the visitation of pestilence, fever and disease are every day silently, but not less effectually, invading our territories, and sapping the strength and life of our population. A vast sensation is produced in the public mind when some dread plague sweeps away its thousands at once to the grave; but let us not forget the thousands who are dying around us, by no sudden stroke it may be, but nevertheless as the victims of filth, foul air, and putridity. By the way, speaking of Rome reminds one of the greater care displayed by the ancients in reference to these matters. The Cloaca of Rome, its Baths, and its Aqueducts, all constructed at immense expense, and upon the most magnificent scale, still form, though now in ruins, the wondrous monuments of the greatness of “the Eternal City”—at once among the most stupendous, ornamental and useful works by which it was distinguished. Pompeii, too, contains monuments of the same description (some of them still in excellent preservation)—though, as we might expect, upon a much smaller scale. And what is well worthy of attention, not a few of these—as the Cloaca or sewers of Rome—belong to a very high antiquity. Livy attributes the origin of these to the times of the first Tarquin. We make our boast of an advanced civilization; but, after all, we fall far behind the ancients in not a few of the provisions made by them for the health and physical purity of the population. The maintenance of the Roman Cloaæ was regarded of such vital importance that the Emperors created an office especially for this purpose, and to the “Curatores Cloacarum” belonged, as you are aware, the whole responsibility of this department. Have we, Sir, any corresponding class of officers? Are their duties discharged with fidelity and intelligence? Is the sewerage of the town such as to satisfy the demands of those most competent to judge as to the conditions and laws of the public health? All this is involved in the idea of sanitary improvement. And connected
with this stands the abomination, so utterly disgraceful to us, of nearly seven thousand houses in the borough and in Ballymacarrett (almost one half of the whole number), destitute of those conveniences so indispensable to domestic cleanliness and health. Who will say, there is not an imperative and crying necessity for some organization by which these evils may be removed; or, where not capable of entire removal, at least mitigated, to the last possible degree and extent? Surely the public Authorities would hail the existence of such an organization with delight, as sharing with them a serious responsibility, and as strengthening their hands in the execution of a work which has become one of the most onerous in which any public body of men could be called to engage.

No letter on the sanitary reform of Belfast could be complete, which did not touch upon what, by way of distinction, is called the monster nuisance. But so much has been said and written respecting the Blackstaff, that it may seem foolhardiness in one whose pursuits have had little, if any, connexion with such matters, to venture a single remark upon the subject. But one mind exists in the community in relation to the necessity of destroying this intolerable pest—the question is, how can it be best accomplished? The difficulties, so far as I have been able to learn, are of two kinds—those of expense and those of execution. Certain pecuniary claims of public works, it appears, stand in the way of any equitable adjustment in case of withdrawing the water rights and privileges of this stream; and it is believed that culverting it over, besides being attended with great expense, would be found an unwise and impracticable measure, because of the floods which, at times, descend from the hills, and which would burst, it is supposed, the structure, and overflow the neighbourhood. Now, might not an iron pipe be laid in the bottom of the river, with open apertures on the upper side of it, these being sufficiently large to receive the contents of the sewers of mills and houses by which it passes, conveyed also in pipes of suitable dimensions? This main pipe might be fifteen or twenty inches in diameter, or wider, if required—the former, I understand, is the dimension of the pipe by which all the water is conveyed from the Water-works into town. The fall of the river, it is true, is not great—only six feet, I am told, from the Railway terminus to the bed of the Lagan—but this is said by practical men to be rather favourable than otherwise to the proper conveyance of a stream largely polluted, while a rapid current is likely to leave considerable sediment behind it. But a weir might be constructed in some fitting place in the upper part of the river, where a portion of the accumulated water might be discharged, twice or thrice a week, through this main pipe of sewerage, by means of an open raised mouth; and so the natural descent of the whole mass would be accelerated by this forcible and more artificial process. Thus the Blackstaff would become a comparatively pure stream—any pollution it receives from other sources being insufficient to render it noxious. And whatever may be thought of such a method, at all events, if practicable, it would be free from the objections so strongly urged against culverting, as well as the difficulty arising from what has been represented as the inordinate demands of the owners of public works on the margin of the river. These, on the contrary, might in such a case be reasonably expected to contribute largely towards the execution of the plan, since they would be thereby furnished with a supply of water not, as now, destructive to the health and life of their workmen. This suggestion, of which I am rather the expounder than the originator, may extort the smile of some who imagine that no method can be effective unless it be complex and very expensive. One thing, however, is very palpable, that the time has come, if ever it is to be accomplished, when public measures ought to be adopted for the suppression of this horrid pestilential nuisance, and that no resources, whether of skill or money, should be withheld from an object, the attainment of which is called for by the
loud and simultaneous cry of the whole community. All party feeling, if any has ever been permitted to mingle with the question, is fearfully out of place here.

But I must now leave this whole matter in the hands of the public. Howard, in the last century, established a great principle, and ploughed it into the mind of Europe and of the world. Plunging into noisome prisons, he vindicated the rights of even their guilty inmates to the physical conditions of health—a truly godlike thought—and it is a notorious fact, that the felon who has become obnoxious to the laws of his country, even in their direst form, is now better fed and lodged than thousands and tens of thousands of our honest, industrious sons and daughters of toil. But as if the evils which Howard combated had been transferred from the guilty to the innocent, these have now to complain of precisely the same miseries which then afflicted the objects of his compassion—crowded, comfortless, squalid apartments—fetid atmosphere—vile companionships—and loathsome disease; for what was the jail fever of Howard's day but the typhus under which hundreds of thousands of our poorer population now languish; and something like twenty thousand of them are annually committed to a premature grave, in these isles? I only wish we studied and practised, as we ought, the policy of prevention. Nor is there any department in which this would be more serviceable than in the one to which I have now called attention, nor any in which combination is more called for, or the outlay of capital, in the form, not only of money, but of labour and time, more absolutely demanded. Whatever individuals and limited means may effect, the evils are too numerous and aggravated to be conquered, without wide association and generous and large expenditure. But the results will, even on the ground of social economics, amply reimburse those who embark in the enterprise. Our empire has taken the lead in this noble work—one far more glorious than feats of arms—and there is no doubt the issue will prove the political wisdom of the scheme; while, too, in all the higher interests of humanity—morals and religion—it will be found productive of incalculable benefits. In vain do we expect the lessons of Christianity to be long remembered in the miserable abodes to which the poor of our population are doomed. Let us remove the feudalism in the midst of which they live and move—let us supply them with pure air, and light, and water—let us place around them the genial conditions of bodily health, purity, and comfort—let us seek to inspire in their hearts the virtue of self respect, or at all events render its existence possible—and then, but not much sooner, can we reasonably expect that the principles and graces of Christianity will find a fitting soil, in which they may extensively strike root and flourish.

Belfast, Oct. 28, 1852.
LETTER VI.

SIR,—The appearance of two important papers read before the statistical section of the British Association, at its recent meeting in this town, and since deservedly published, induces me to call attention again to the subject of the public health. The one is entitled "The Connexion of Atmospheric Impurity with Disease, by H. M'Cormac, M.D."; the other "The Sanitary State of Belfast, with Suggestions for its Improvement, by A. G. Malcolm, M.D." These pamphlets should be circulated by thousands among the reading and intelligent population of Belfast and its vicinity; and the information they contain, as to the laws and conditions of health, should be presented in a form and garb which might render it interesting to all who possess even the ordinary rudiments of education, among the operative and poorer classes of our population.

It is truly astonishing how inattentive all orders of the community are to the circumstances which affect life and health. In our highly artificial and competitive state of society there are various mental and social influences at work, which serve, if not counteracted, to induce disease and to shorten the average duration of human existence. The ceaseless turmoil and feverish anxiety attendant upon business, in many of its departments, must necessarily have the effect of rendering the bodily system—(such is the close connexion of the mental and physical in our nature)—more liable to succumb to the power of those noxious elements which sap the constitution and impair the health. The strong and elastic fibre which distinguishes man in the ruder periods of his history, is generally lost as he advances to the higher walks of civilization; and thus a law of compensation is found to prevail throughout the entire circle and round of human destiny. We must pay the penalty of progress; and can hardly expect to enjoy the physical advantages of what has been called a state of nature, in combination with the intellectual and social advantages of a more refined and artificial era of human advancement. We have little doubt, that if the statistics of mortality pertaining to different occupations and professions were accurately and extensively marked, they would be seen to evolve facts and principles which might claim the rank and dignity of hygienic laws. Speaking generally, we live fast and fervently in these days. Our forefathers found the sober stage-coach and the ordinary post sufficiently rapid for all their purposes; but nothing short of the railway-car and the electric telegraph will suffice to meet the demands of our existing social economy. Time is so precious now, that whole cities and communities are excited to a wondrous pitch, by the simple consideration of the earlier or later arrival of a mail, and we must needs harness the very lightnings, to speed intelligence from city to city, and from land to land. Away, across mountains and valleys, and beneath the depths of ocean, we send our words of light and fire, quick and quicker still, to the busy hives of men, who, like ourselves, are toiling, struggling, rushing on, in the rapid race of life. And all this external machinery—all these appliances to expedite our intercourse and traffic, give us but the exponent—reflect back but the image of our inward soul and thought. Who need wonder, then, that amid all this velocity, and wear of vital energies, this heat and battle, and high pressure of existence, the laws of health should be fearfully violated, and the strain upon the spiritual portion of our nature often become too great and intense for the material frame. Sana mens in sano corpore, was the phrase which embodied the elder wisdom upon this subject; but the endless agitations and excitements of modern life rarely permit this combination to be realized. "Who can minister to a mind diseased?" The Phar-
macropoia supplies no antidote to this form of distemper. The remedy lies with the mind itself, and upon its right culture and discipline depends the possession of that tranquil temperament most conducive to a sound, healthy, and prolonged life. It is worthy of special remark, that the Society of “Friends,” as they are called, is distinguished for the longevity of its members; a fact which, doubtless, stands in intimate relation with the calm and placid spirit which it is, somehow or other, the tendency of their system to generate and foster.

While, however, modern life and usage have certain mental evils affecting health, especially in large and commercial cities, and these such as cannot be easily avoided, we possess in this day, a knowledge of the physical causes of disease far superior to anything which former times could boast, and are, therefore, deeply culpable if we neglect to use it aright. Our globe is enveloped with a vital appendage wondrously adapted by Divine Wisdom to the purposes of health and vigour; but because this covering is invisible, and cannot be subjected to the cognizance of the senses, like the grosser forms of matter, we are apt to overlook its importance altogether. Yet, upon its condition, more than upon almost aught besides, depends, as science has clearly demonstrated, the sanitary condition of the people. “Such,” observes Dr. M'Cormac, “is the immensity of the mighty ocean of the atmosphere, that it suffices for the removal of every impurity, if we only resort to the wise yet simple precaution of instantly replacing the portion that we consume. To breathe a polluted atmosphere, when we have it so completely at our disposal to avail ourselves of that which is unpolluted, is a monstrous error. It is as if one who might have fair water from the spring were to consume soil and impurity instead.” This gentleman attributes to atmospheric impurity “the whole tribe of periodic diseases, from the simple intermittent, or ague of temperate climates, to the destructive remittents of the torrid zone.” And while he admits that we are wholly ignorant of the “primary sources of small-pox, measles, scarlet-fever, plague, and cholera,” he observes “that their severity is frightfully aggravated, and their frequency incalculably increased, by crowding, want of ventilation, insufficient cleanliness; in short, everything which renders air impure and stationary, a nursery for the leaven or ferment, which, being taken into the lungs, leavens the whole system, and reproduces the complaint.” Of typhus, under all its forms and aspects, he says, “it is simply the result of dirt, crowding, and foul air.” And to the same source he traces phthisis or consumption, and scrofula—two of the most terrible maladies to which flesh is heir. Each of these is a tuberculous disease—consumption being the specific name we employ, when the tubercles are formed in the lungs—scrofula, when they exist in other portions of the system. And he emphatically adds, “the habitual respiration of foul, unrenewed air, I look upon as the only real source of tubercle, including under this designation both phthisis and scrofula.” We send the unhappy victims of consumption to a Southern clime, often when it is too late to throw off the viris; but when this proves effectual, it is not the climate which effects the cure, so much as the transmigration to a pure untainted atmosphere. “Let us keep the consumptive in pure fresh air, and we shall at once realise a Pau, a Nice, a Madeira, better than any Pau, or Nice, or Madeira without fresh air.”

These are weighty words, and deserving of profound attention. My letters hitherto have borne simply on the condition of the humbler orders; but it would be a great mistake to imagine that the upper and middle classes are exempt from the charge of neglecting the conditions of health. Malaria and foul air often fill the gilded saloons of the rich, as well as the squalid and dreary hovels of the poor. Amid lustres, and drapery, and works of art, and cushioned luxury, the subtle poison spreads and accumulates, and does its work of death, all unthought of by the children of
fortune and of rank—and does it the more effectually, because its presence is unsuspected there. Sanitary reformation, to be complete, must extend, then, to other places besides the lanes and alleys of our crowded and populous towns and cities. The work must not be omitted in the habitations of opulence and respectability, and the gross violations of the laws of health, now so common, must be discontinued. Among these, one of the most glaring is the crowding of large numbers into ill-ventilated apartments, to breathe for hours a heated, contaminated atmosphere, to sit immersed in a fluid nearly exhausted of its oxygen, and filled with nitrogen, carbonic acid gas, and other effluvia destructive of health—until the physical and mental powers, too, are borne down by a pressure, the cause of which neither host nor guests seem to apprehend, but which may be guessed by even the most unscientific, when the hour of deliverance strikes, and the victims of this social blunder (for I will not call it by any harsher name) escape into the pure, genial element which a benevolent God has provided for the maintenance of the vital functions. Combe's "Constitution of Man" has been charged with materialistic tendencies, nor am I about to defend it throughout. I believe that no treatise on the human "constitution" can be completely and truly philosophic, which omits those higher principles of our nature that belong to us as spiritual and immortal, or which does not assign to them the loftiest place. We are all conscious of deep yearnings, wants, faculties, aspirations, which cannot be met by the whole assemblage and compass of external and created good; and therefore, to reduce man, if such be the tendency of this or any other book, to the rank of a poor pensioner upon materiality, is to mutilate his nature, to commit treason against the great soul of humanity, and treason against the God who has made that humanity what it is. But, thus guarding against false impressions, who can doubt that there is an immense amount of the most important truth touching the physical relations of our being in
SANITARY IMPROVEMENT.

for this defective state of things, is the improved condition of our domestic atmosphere."

Will it be asked, what has all this to do with the sanitary improvement of the lower classes? Let us remember that the rich may contaminate the poor, as well as the poor contaminate the rich; disease may spread from the genteel dwelling of the street to the humble habitation of the alley, as well as in the opposite direction. Moreover, there is an old proverb of great force—"Physician, heal thyself." It is utterly in vain, to expect the more affluent orders to enter with energy and zeal on the work of general sanitary reformation, until they learn to appreciate for themselves, and to apply for their own benefit, the principles which regulate the public health. Nor are the poor the only parties who need to be instructed on the subject; or, at all events, to avail themselves of the sources of knowledge within their reach. Modern benevolence prides itself that, both in religious and lower interests, it turns its face to the poor; it might not be amiss, however, if at times it cast a glance in other, and in some instances, not less necessary, directions.

Dr. M'Cormac's paper does great justice to the specific point which he proposed to discuss. But Dr. Malcolm's pamphlet launches into the whole question of sanitary reformation; and a more comprehensive, searching, and luminous discussion, within its limits, it has never been my fortune to read. With a master-hand it grasps the entire subject, in its relation to Belfast; and a greater boon of the kind could not be desired, than that a copy of this invaluable essay should be placed in the hands of every householder capable of reading it, in this town and its suburbs. Nor let it be supposed that it is a "dry-as-dust" digest—a mere detail of facts and figures; its literary merits are as great as its scientific and statistical information is complete and satisfactory. I will not, of course, undertake to say that it is as absorbing as "Uncle Tom's Cabin," but, for the nature of the subject, I cannot imagine a more interesting production. It has, indeed, a fearful interest—one rendered more deep and overwhelming, because it is the embodiment of facts, and the record of inquiries, intimately connected with ourselves, affecting the life and happiness of tens of thousands here at our very doors. Taking it up, for the purpose of marking such portions as might be specially referred to in this letter, I find there is scarcely a page of it which I have not adorned all over with lines and notes of admiration. Perhaps some abatement may be made for the painful excitement one has lately been made to experience in connexion with the theme, but certainly, in my apprehension, the only way in which justice can be done to this brochure is to "read, mark, and inwardly digest it." It first details "the sanitary characteristics of Belfast;" secondly, shews how "the vital statistics of the town" fully corroborate the great sanitary laws; thirdly, proves the increased tendency to, and mortality of, "epidemic visitations and outbreaks" in this place; and, lastly, points out "the objects most demanded" for the improvement of the public health. It is hardly possible to select for notice any part of this wide range of thought, where all is so important. But by two points, it may be supposed, the now living, busy, and, I trust, benevolent people of Belfast (yes, and even the self-loving, where benevolence may not be much in the ascendant) should feel themselves very powerfully arrested—namely, the growth and increased fatality of epidemic diseases in the midst of us, and the remedial measures to be adopted to stay this and kindred evils. Dr. Malcolm has shown, by tables which he has constructed from the registers of the Belfast Fever Hospital, that, for thirty years, the rate of mortality in connexion with fever has been on the advance, having risen from less than four-and-a-half to ten-and-a-half per cent. upon the number of cases; and, what is at least equally startling, that the intervals between the times of epidemic visitation have been diminishing, having narrowed down from eight to two years and a-half. And in another part of his paper, speaking of the vital statis-

SANITARY IMPROVEMENT.
tics of the town generally, he observes, that our mortality is one in thirty-five per annum, whereas it is admitted, by the most competent authorities, that, by proper sanitary measures, the mortality of the towns of this empire might be reduced to one in fifty per annum—so that between eight and nine hundred lives are sacrificed among us every year by the various noxious agencies which it is the design of sanitary measures to destroy or mitigate. "One-half," he observes, "of the living population are under twenty years," while "our infant mortality is absolutely excessive." Fever may be said to be endemic in this town. "During the last thirty years, it has attacked 62,000 inhabitants, of whom nearly 6,000 perished." And "while the proportion of fever deaths in all Ireland to the total deaths is only six per cent., it is here sixteen and two-tenths per cent.; and while the proportion of deaths from zymotic diseases is thirty-eight per cent. for all Ireland, here it is forty-seven and one-tenth per cent."

Sir, let these facts be profoundly pondered; and if their moral fail to awaken the slumbering attention, and to call forth the strenuous exertions of the intelligent inhabitants of Belfast, then may we wholly despair of being ever able to break the lethargic spell. There is not a man capable of reflection, from the first civic functionary down to the humblest artisan, who should not feel the force of these statements, as if an Angel spoke. Nay, it is God himself who speaks in such revelations as these; and to turn away the ear, with sullen apathy or soulless indifference, is second in guilt only to the crime of refusing to hear the supernatural revelation vouchsafed to us on other, and still higher themes. Here we are thrown back upon the principle, to which I adverted in a former part of this letter—the immutability of the laws of health, and the certainty that we must pay the penalty of their neglect or violation, and that despite all moral considerations. Doubtless the people of Belfast have been advancing in religious worth during the last thirty years, but all this time its physical condition, so far as the question of health and life is concerned, has been deteriorating; and now, in these respects, it stands far below the average state of the island at large, at least in regard to a very numerous and fatal class of distempers, and these, the very distempers which form the most decisive sanitary test in any locality. These are assertions which it would be unpardonable to make at random, and which hardly any one would perhaps believe, were they not, as in the present instance, unavoidable inferences drawn from the clearest and most accurate premises. I lately ventured to express an opinion as to the relative position of our lower population here, which, as coming from a comparative stranger, might be deemed of little worth; but now, all is amply and painfully confirmed by the oracles to which on such questions the people of Belfast will cheerfully bow. And let it be distinctly understood that the meaning of all this is not simply that the absolute epidemic mortality of Belfast has been increasing, but its relative epidemic mortality. The former, of course, must be expected in proportion to the increase of the inhabitants; the latter can arise only from an aggravation of the causes which produce such disease and death in any locality. And to one class of these, Dr. Malcolm refers in pointed and powerful form, in these words:—"To give accommodation to the thousand operatives which the giant demand of an unusually prosperous manufacture created, strings of houses on the simplest plan were hurried up, generally without sufficient carefulness as to drainage, ventilation, house wants, or situation; and the more ancient and cheaper districts, though already sufficiently crowded, were resorted to by the unthinking artisan, in his desire to have a dwelling sufficiently near his employment." This prepares us for the assertion, that "in several spots, the germs of fever have remained unmoved, un molested, for a period of thirty years."

What then is to be done? This is the ever recurring question. But there is, in my opinion, a question still more difficult of solution—how are we to induce
the public at large to take any practical interest in the matter—not merely to read letters or articles on the subject, though that is something, but to move, to act—to act determinately, efficiently, perseveringly, until the work of reformation is accomplished; or, at all events, such changes made, as shall reduce the evils under which the community suffers, to something like a minimum? Disguise it as we may, the area of two square miles, on which Belfast, within and without the Borough, stands, has some natural disadvantages which must always tell to a certain extent against its sanitary condition. Three-fourths of this space present something approaching a dead level; and the humidity of the atmosphere, arising from well-known meteorological causes, is abundantly established by the fact, that it rains, on the average, on nearly every alternate day throughout the year. But while some evils of the locality are inevitable, others, and by far the greatest number, and the most fatal, are capable of entire removal, or of very great alleviation; and to these, immediate and universal attention should be directed by all classes, by those in power and those out of power. The chief desiderata are, improved drainage; more copious supply of water; great attention to the removal of all which gives birth to malaria and animal poisons; the entire destruction of tenements where foul air, filth, and disease cannot but dwell together and hold carnival; the throwing open of our miserable courts and entries, the majority of which are shut in, as if purposely to exclude the light and air of Heaven, mere culs-de-sac, or blind alleys, without any thoroughfare to secure ventilation; more close inspection of the character, and site, and appointments of new buildings for the working classes, as well as of those existing houses where so many crowd together, as if in one common den; the removal of slaughter houses; the provision of parks and places of public open air recreation for the children of toil, many of whom are doomed to spend the greater part of every day in an atmosphere wholly unsuited to the animal economy; and above all, the creation and wide diffusion of a sound sanitary education among all orders, especially among those who are more directly concerned, and least likely to seek it for themselves. Other things are desirable, and would come in time, but these are indispensable, and nothing less should satisfy the sanitary reformers of our town.

It must be obvious that, to secure these, there must be a combination of legal power on the part of the Authorities, with an earnest willingness on the part of the people. I like the idea of Dr. Malcolm, that there should be "a permanent Borough Board to superintend and regulate all sanitary matters, and be in constant occupation." It is not sufficient that a Sanitary Committee should be formed at particular junctures, such even as was constituted under favourable auspices in 1848, but, alas! expired in 1850, when the dread epidemic, the approach of which called it into existence, passed away; it is necessary to have something more than a temporary enthusiasm on this subject. Far am I from undervaluing the noble exertions of the Sanitary Association of 1848. Their names are but synonyms for all that is philanthropic; and every one is bound to aid the present Officer of Health, in his efforts to extend sound views and establish better habits among the poor in the different wards of the town.—But we must go for something more than all this; we must have an organization endowed with an immortality at least equal to that of the foe to be combated, and endowed, too, with a power to enforce its mandates—at least in those directions where mandates are required; while it shall evoke, by kind, conciliatory, educational measures, the voluntary co-operation of the parties to be benefited; and thus proceed steadily and without remission until the work is done, and well done. In a certain sense, indeed, it can never be said to be complete; but the huge evils which now constitute our special disgrace, and the sources of our frightful mortality, may be obviated, and Belfast become, what it should be our ambition to make it, a wholesome and pure residence. "Cleanliness is next to godliness," or
“comeliness,”—for that is the true reading of the adage. Of comeliness this rising commercial city is not destitute. There is grace and beauty in its surrounding scenery, in its hills and waters (always excepting the Blackstaff), in its villas and private parks, in its main streets and public edifices, in its shops, palatial warehouses, and factories. There is grace and beauty in its loyal attachment to a constitutional government, to liberty, and to learning. It has its orators, scholars, and men of science; its religious and charitable institutions, which form the true glory and grace of any community. The “goodliness” is here, but where is the “cleanliness?” Not in the thousand habitations of its artisans and operatives. It is, as if with a fair and noble countenance we permitted the feet and arms and hands to remain polluted. It is something like the whitened sepulchre, beautiful outwards, but within “full of dead men’s bones, and all uncleanness.” The want of physical purity and health will dim the brightest lustre; they are elements indispensable to the true ideal of loveliness. With sanitary lustration, and the free play of health-giving influences, Belfast would be second to few cities in the empire in all the aesthetic and other qualities which befit the residence and home of an intelligent and refined people.

_Belfast, Nov. 12, 1852._

LETTER VII.

Sir,—Allow me, in this communication, to call public attention to some miscellaneous topics of far too great importance to be omitted in any enumeration of the means of social progress.

And, first, as to Public Baths and Wash-houses.—I find, in a recent number of _The Medical Times and Gazette_, a most important and suggestive account of the manner in which such institutions are appreciated by the working orders in various parts of England. Those described in this report are conducted under the provisions of certain Acts of Parliament passed in the present reign. And it is highly gratifying to know that there has been, year by year, on the part of those for whose benefit they are especially designed, a growing demand for these means of health, comfort, and physical purity. For the five years ending December, 1852, the aggregate amount of bathers and washers at the London Baths alone, has reached to upwards of three millions one hundred thousand (the number in 1852 being 950,000 more than in 1848), while the receipts of the last year have been £13,413; and this table, including seven metropolitan establishments, omits one in Euston-square which is not conducted under the Acts of Parliament. Then, taking five of the other towns of England as a sample of the whole—Liverpool, Hull, Bristol, Preston, Birmingham—we find the combined receipts of similar establishments, during the past year, to have been nearly £5,600. And such is the prosperity which has crowned the labours of the Committee now for eight years promoting this philanthropic scheme, that they deem it no longer necessary to render any special aid to existing establishments. All this augurs well for the advance-
ment of the cause in England, although, after all, it is
only the commencement of a process which is destined,
I trust, to extend through the length and breadth of the
empire.

Can nothing be done, Sir, to furnish the working
and poorer classes of Belfast with a fuller and more
available supply of this kind of provision, and thus to
place them on a level, at least, with their fellows in
other parts of the United Kingdom? I have made
some inquiries at the establishment on Falls-road, and
the only conclusion at which I can arrive is, that not-
withstanding the unquestionable benevolence of the
founders and supporters of it, the Institution must, be-
fore long, be broken up, unless the public, or the public
Authorities, in some way interpose to prevent that ca-
tastrophe. Profoundly ignorant, as I am, of any poli-
tical by-play, if such there be, affecting the past or
prospective fate of these Baths and Wash-houses, my
remarks must be confined to the simple question, how
far they can be made conducive to the well-being of
the labouring poor. Amidst such a dense population
of artisans and operatives of various kinds as that
which lies all around them, it would be lamentable in-
deed, if they cannot be placed upon some footing which
would ensure their permanence and prosperity; and,
if this be within the range of possibility, it cannot fail
to reflect severely on the public spirit of Belfast, who
should the only establishment of the kind which exists in
a population of one hundred and four thousand, be per-
mitted to perish. A debt of £1,400 rests upon the In-
stitution, but the building and apparatus have been
estimated by competent and impartial valuators at
something above that sum. Large donations and sub-
scriptions, to meet the interest of this outlay and other
expenses, have hitherto been contributed by those who
have taken a deep interest in the enterprise; but, from
all I have heard, this order of effort is not likely
to be continuous, nor is it to be expected. The fact is,
and it must not be concealed, the establishment has
not, especially of late, yielded a revenue adequate to the
expenditure, and, of necessity, methods have been re-
sorted to which have had a serious bearing upon the
humbler orders, whose interests should be mainly
studied in all such concerns.

Better than four years since, a change was made in
the washing department, for the purpose of increasing
the funds. Since then, the classes able to pay have,
doubtless, found great facilities supplied to them, at what
to them is a very reasonable charge; but the poor,
who before could not only have three hours' washing
for one penny, but could also have their clothes dried
in the establishment gratuitously, are now, to a large
extent, virtually excluded, by the fact that they are not
permitted the use of the drying apparatus at all, which
is reserved for those whose custom is more profitable;
and being compelled thus to take their clothes away in
a wet state, the result is, that the applicants of this
class have diminished to one-fourth of the former num-
ber. This is a great evil—although, under the cir-
cumstances, it would be unjust to attach any moral
blame to the Committee. Then, the bath charge is
obviously too high for the generality of the poor. Two-
pence is the rate in London, and I should suppose
throughout England: at all events, it ought not to be
higher in this country. For three months after the
opening of the institution, the charges being then 6d and
2d, I find the demand was great—amounting to, on the
average, 732 applicants per week. This might be
partly the result of novelty, but unquestionably it would
be, to a large extent, occasioned by cheapness. From
1849, when the charges were raised, there has been a
considerable falling away, until the average is now
only about 163 applicants of all classes per week, of
whom but sixty-one are among the working poor.
Whether it was financially wise or politic to raise the
terms, is a question which I will not take upon me to
discuss, in the absence of the data necessary to a fair
conclusion; but as a general principle, the effect of such
a course must ever be to diminish the demand, and,
so far as the working classes are concerned, the insti-
tution thus becomes a partial failure. It has been alleged that the situation is unfavourable; but this objection can apply only to the upper and middle classes of bathers. Certainly, if such establishments are to exist at all in Belfast, for the benefit of the working classes, the region of Falls-road possesses one of the very first claims. Looking at the matter, indeed, in a financial point of view, whatever affects the first and second class applicants, must proportionally affect the power of the committee to meet the necessities of the third class; but it is to be hoped that, under a somewhat altered regimen, and one which could afford to wait a little for the fruits, and especially with a reduction of the terms to their original amount, the establishment would soon rise from its present depression, and become what it ought to be, a source of physical and moral well-being to the neighbourhood.

For my part, I am unable to imagine any public institution towards the support of which (provided it were placed under a legal management which would accommodate it to the use of the poor) the inhabitants ought to be more willing to contribute by a rate—should there even be a deficiency for a few years. I understand the Town Council have declined to use the power with which they are entrusted to purchase and adopt this building; and it is not for any one, without adequate information, to pronounce an opinion upon the matter. But of one thing all reflecting persons must be convinced—namely, the absolute necessity which exists for public baths and wash-houses in more than one or two localities of Belfast, if this populous manufacturing and commercial town is to stand side by side with other centres of wealth and social influence in the empire. The value of such appliances, in a variety of lights, both as they affect the health of the body and the mind, is now so fully conceded by all who have given themselves to the study of social problems, that I should deem it a waste of time and space to argue the question. The only inquiry is, will the public permit the establishment on Falls-road to sink;

and, in case they do so, are they content that no provision of a similar kind shall be made elsewhere for the wants and necessities of our rapidly augmenting working population? It would be a source of still deeper regret, if the town which was the very first in Ireland to move in the affair, should, in less than six short years after the inauguration of the project, be found to relinquish this branch of sanitary and general improvement—and that, notwithstanding the growing necessities of a giant population, created by the annual increase of our trade and manufacture. The supposition is too monstrous to be entertained, and no more, I hope, is needed than an honest appeal to the public spirit and intelligence of the inhabitants, to dissipate the danger, and give security and permanence to the institution. I candidly confess that the most feasible mode, as it seems to me, to achieve this object, would be, that the municipal authorities should take the whole thing into their own hands—they having the power to levy such a rate as would be necessary to consolidate the establishment.

But, if an insuperable objection exist to this, then it becomes imperative upon all who have the welfare of the poor at heart—among whom the members of the Town Council will stand pre-eminent—to originate and carry out some plan by which the condition of our working people shall not be allowed to deteriorate, by which habits of cleanliness so closely allied with the higher virtues, shall be diffused and encouraged, by which this cheap and easy method of preserving the health and comfort of the community shall be brought within the reach of the humblest, and by which the capital of Ulster and the commercial capital of Ireland shall be saved from the disgrace of abandoning one of the most obvious and palpable agencies for the improvement of her industrial classes.

The next subject on which I would offer a few observations, is that of public parks for the recreation and health of our pent-up population. This is a point which has been long agitated in private circles, but on which no public determinate action has hitherto been attempted in
Belfast. Yet, I believe, there are few towns, if any, of equal standing and numbers, in the three kingdoms, unprovided with this species of accommodation; while none can traverse its narrow ways and penetrate its crowded courts and alleys, without the overwhelming conviction that no place can be in greater need of such an outlet for a dense, toil-worn, sickly, miasm-breathing population. It is strange that the civilization of the ancient world, which we are wont to decry as something infinitely beneath what we enjoy, embraced many elements of social and physical well-being, which are partially or wholly neglected in these modern times. The copious supply of pure water, baths, and cloacae, were, as already intimated, among the objects of special attention in old Rome, while, as yet, the elevating influence of Christianity was unknown on the banks of the Tiber. And in the construction of Roman habitations (both the domus of the wealthy and patrician orders, and the insula of the middle and lower classes), care was taken that there should be no crowding, such as often converts our modern dwellings into dens of noisome disease and death. It was a law of the Twelve Tables—incorporated, too, with more recent Roman legislation—that a space of at least five feet should separate each house, whether occupied by high or low, from its neighbour. Every habitation, in even the most thickly-populated parts, was thus self-contained and distinct; and, in addition to inner courts and frontal areas, arteries were thus provided for free currents of air in all directions, by statutes, the spirit, at least, of which it would not be amiss to imitate under the more humane and holy influences which Christianity is shedding upon these centuries. Moreover, wide and public places, adorned often with the noblest works of art (themselves an education for the people), afforded, in the cities of the ancient world, the means both of bodily and mental exhilaration and refreshment. I do not say that our civilization has not brought with it advantages infinitely superior to any possessed by those who lived before the Christian era, but I do say that we may well blush when we discover how far, in these and similar particulars, we have fallen behind a people who could not boast, as we can, those lofty and ennobling views of truth and duty which Divine Revelation has made the cheap and household inheritance of these times.

We may not have the genius to create, nor, in many cases, even the taste to relish, the aesthetic embellishments of Roman portico, forum, or circus, but at least we might be expected to have science enough to understand the necessity of parks and pleasure-grounds for our swarming population, and benevolence and enterprise enough to carry our convictions into practice. We cannot glance across the channel, and allow our eye to sweep the shores of Britain, North or South, without having our apathy on this subject powerfully rebuked. It is not want of wealth or wisdom which accounts for this neglect; nor is it, I hope, a want of interest in the condition of those who contribute so largely to the opulence of this town. What is required, is the example of a few leading men, who, like the noble and liberal men of Manchester, shall, out of their abundance, resolve to take the initiative in this great and important undertaking, and thus confer a signal and lasting benefit upon present and future generations in this vicinity. Whatever can be done in this respect should be done quickly, for the price of land is likely, of course, to rise higher every successive year, and as the necessity of public parks increases with the increase of our population, the demand for space will enhance immeasurably the expense of such a project. At the present moment, I have reason to believe that a suitable plot of land, of some fifty or sixty acres (and less than this would be out of the question), could be obtained on moderate terms, in a very suitable locality, if there only existed the determination to arise and act.

Should, however, the requisite spirit and liberality be wanting for a scheme of this magnitude, the next best thing would be to ascertain how far the Botanic Gardens and the grounds connected with the Water...
Public Baths, Wash-Houses, and Parks.

Works could be made available to the purpose. The Gardens were, as you are aware, thrown open last summer to the working classes—at a small charge, I believe, but it seems they did not use the privilege to the extent that was anticipated. It is necessary, however, to bear in mind that the habit has to be created on the part of those who are most in need of such refreshment, and it will demand more than one or two seasons to do this. Besides, it is to be feared that the distance must operate greatly against the success of such an experiment, at the outset. Distance is a formidable objection to those who have not learned as yet to love nature; or rather, who have lost their first love for her, amidst the harsh and coarse realities of a fierce and deadly struggle for the bare necessaries of existence. Their soul is not in harmony with the sweet and gentle influences of field and hedge-row, of tree and flower. They must be allured out of their dark and dismal abodes, where, sunk in sullen apathy, and brooding over their lot, they have neither eye, nor ear, nor heart for God's most beautiful and eloquent world. Rather will they rush in brutal desperation to the dram-shop, to obtain a short oblivion of their cares and woes, though only to multiply them an hundred-fold when the debauch is over, and consciousness restored. O ye sons and daughters of affluence, favoured children of fortune! pity the errors which you cannot but condemn, and leave no method untried to draw the degraded to purer enjoyments and more elevating scenes.

On the whole, it seems to me obvious that the Botanic Gardens can never become, except in a very limited degree, a substitute for public parks; but, in order to the success of the experiment in even this partial form, they must be thrown open at least on two or three evenings in the week, during the summer months, and the admission be made gratuitous.

I fear that the Queen's Island, although a beautiful outlet, cannot be made available to the poorer classes to any extent, arising from the mode and expense of entrance. But it has often struck me, in common with others, how admirable a promenade might be supplied to the poor at the Water Works, now approached in general only by the more wealthy classes. Nominally open to all, they are virtually shut against a large proportion of the working people, in consequence of the forms and modes of admission. This might be obviated, at least on certain evenings in the week; nor have I the least fear of any injury being sustained by the establishment from any ingress of this order. Only those who have looked at the working classes through the medium of prejudice or distorted fancy, will entertain any doubt as to the safety of their admission. Individuals might be found, certainly, who would possibly abuse the privilege; but what is to prevent the appointment of a few officers, on these open evenings, who, without intruding themselves unnecessarily, could guard against all such contingencies; or what is to prevent the erection of palings in particular parts? The greater proximity of this place is strong argument in its favour, and purer air and nobler prospects are not to be found in any other part of the neighbourhood than are supplied by these beautiful, but now all but unused grounds. I know plausible objections can be raised to this, as to every other conceivable project. To start objections demands neither genius nor wisdom. The question is—Should anything be done in the way of public parks and walks; and what is, under all circumstances, the most practicable and the best course? They who object to these suggestions are called upon to devise better plans, unless they are prepared to shew that no effort of this kind is at all demanded.

That man, however, would be a curiosity in his way, who should take such a position in the present age. The necessity of some measures of the kind now advocated will be admitted by all whose opinion is likely to exert much influence; and it is only the supineness and spirit of procrastination which so deeply pervade the masses of society, that prevent immediate and vigorous attention to this and similar provisions for the benefit of those among us who dwell in the pestiferous alleys,
and work in the crowded and often unhealthy rooms and regions of the town. In connexion with this point, it may be well to remember the startling fact which our sanitary statistics reveal, that the average at death in Belfast is only nine years, fourteen years under the average for the whole kingdom; while such is the amount of juvenile mortality that one-half of the living population of the town (52,000) are under twenty years of age. Does not this speak trumpet-tongued on behalf of this and other modes of promoting the physical well-being of the community?

And as to the moral influence of such measures, who can doubt that drunkenness, and vice in some of its worst forms, would be diminished, if we could produce a taste for pure, open-air recreations? I speak in the full recollection of those great principles which pertain to the subject of human depravity in its deeper roots, and more hidden developments. He may be a very sincere, but can hardly be a very enlightened Christian, who will not advocate and espouse all lawful, available means of checking and countervailing the evil tendencies of human nature, while, at the same time, he never forgets devoutly and diligently to employ that more potent and perfect instrumentality which God has established for the glorious renovation of man, and his complete restoration to the Divine image.

Belfast, Jan. 27, 1853.

P.S.—May, 1853. While these letters, in their present form, are passing through the press, a respectable deputation, I understand, is about to wait upon the Town Council, to enforce a memorial of the Clergy and Medical men of the town, to the effect, that the Baths and Wash-houses on Falls-road shall become public property, and be made available to the ends advocated above.

LETTER VIII.

Sir,—I had occasion, formerly, to refer to the industrial condition of our workers, and to the amount of their earnings in some departments of labour. It is very pleasing to learn, that at present, the general prosperity of our capitalists is telling favourably upon the rate of wages among the employed. It is in this state of things, we find a true and satisfactory solution of the problem which wild theorists and others (no real friends of the working orders) would attempt to reduce, by a process which must of necessity defeat itself, in consequence of the disorder and insecurity that would infallibly ensue. The Divine Author of our nature and of society has, by laws infinitely wise and good, made provision for the diffusion of wealth and comfort through the several ranks which compose the body politic, and that in a great measure apart from those sentiments of benevolence which cannot be presumed to act in all minds with the force and constancy necessary to ensure such a result. These laws, it is very possible to frustrate, but certainly not to improve, by the cry of “Liberty, equality, and fraternity.” Of all these, when rationally understood, I am the humble but earnest advocate. But, with liberty, if it mean license and lawlessness; with equality, if it mean the destruction of property; with fraternity, if it mean spoliation; no sane or righteous man can have any sympathy—and only idle demagogues who trade upon the credulity of the masses, or visionaries who would have us to accept their dreams for realities, will be found to propagate such principles. The inequality between the rich and
the poor is to be diminished, not by methods which would level the former, but by those that tend to the elevation of the latter. I do not affirm—far from it—that the wealthy, as a class, are fulfilling all the duties which they owe to their less fortunate brethren, or that the legislation of the land, as it bears upon the hard-handed sons of toil, has been, or is, all it should be; but the remedy of existing evils is assuredly not to be found in communism, which would soon prove itself the source of the most disastrous consequences to all classes, and especially to those it professes to benefit. To soften the asperities which affect the poor, to vindicate their rights to “a fair day’s wages for a fair day’s work,” to promote their interest by wise and equitable legislation, to induce the more affluent to feel and practically to acknowledge their claims to sympathy in distress and to justice at all times, to uplift them by education, and teach them self-respect and self-reliance—all this, and more of the same kind, is the business of the true philanthropist: but to innovate upon the very foundations of society, as if the whole were a mere human and artificial construction, instead of being, in its essential principles at least, the wise and beautiful creation of God, is as unphilosophic and impolitic as it is wicked and impious.

I have alluded to the principles of political economy, and their effect in making those whose capital lies in skill and strength the partakers with those whose capital consists in wealth, in its usual acceptation. But, when these principles have fully played their part, there will always be enough to demand the interposition of general benevolence or legal statute; and one of the most difficult questions in our ordinary social economics is—How are we to deal with those who are, or seem to be, thrown out of the circle of the established laws and means of self-support?

It is an instructive fact, and one which may serve to shew the complexity of the subject, that England has been engaged in pauper legislation for a period now of nearly five hundred years, during more than three centuries of which time compulsory payment has been substituted for voluntary charity; and still we hear loud complaints in some quarters as to the inadequacy or grievances of existing arrangements. The reproach which rested on the Imperial Parliament, as to the condition of the Irish poor, was never removed till the commencement of the present reign. Before the year 1838, no legal provision whatever existed for the destitute and helpless in this part of the United Kingdom, and the consequence was seen in the fierce competition of the peasantry for little patches of ground, their only resource against starvation, which they cultivated (if cultivation it could be called) in a way which yielded only the most meagre subsistence to the occupants after the payment of the rent-charge. Thus gaunt famine was always at the door, and wretched beggary, sturdy and importunate, infested all the highways and towns of the kingdom, rendering a country—one of the most fertile in natural resources—a hissing and byword among the nations. And yet, not a few of those who ought to have known better among the British people (and the British press too, was not free from the charge,) heaped calumny upon the native Irish character, as though it stood chargeable with the production of this mass of misery and pauperism, the consequences mainly of the neglect of those on both sides of the channel who should have united for the common welfare, instead of wasting their energies in mutual recrimination, in political and religious hostilities. Great fears were entertained or affected by some, at first, as to the probable operations of the Poor Law in Ireland, but the general result has, I believe, disabused the sincere, and baffled the designing. The establishments reared under the provisions of the act have not yet, indeed, become all they ought to be; nor will they, until they be made to a far larger degree self-supporting. It must become a fixed and axiomatic principle in our entire social economy, that, unless in cases of actual physical incompetency, or where the opportunity to labour is wanting, no one is entitled to
be maintained out of the resources of the nation, unless he yield, in some form or other, an adequate return for his support. These remarks extend, of course, only to public and legal supplies, not to private and voluntary beneficence.

But what, Sir, is to be done with those who, from invincible dislike to the regimen of the poorhouse, from love of liberty, or other similar causes, will not avail themselves of the facilities which the law affords to the indigent and destitute? Are they to be driven from our doors on the ground that those who will not work must not eat, although that work can be performed only under conditions which are, whether right or wrong, wholly repulsive to their feelings? Is not this to punish them for what, at all events, is no moral delinquency? On the other hand, by yielding to the impulse of charity, or to that questionable impulse which seeks to relieve itself from the pain consequent upon the spectacle of distress, are we to contribute to those habits of idleness and vagrancy which are so utterly subversive of every upright and manly quality? It may be easy for the stern and stoical mind to settle these difficulties by a reference to law and statute, just as Shylock quotes his "bond" as a sufficient answer to every plea of mercy; but there are those, and they constitute, perhaps, a majority of the community, who are almost daily perplexed by the attempt to reconcile the dictates of the judgment and of the heart upon these points; and the way in which they commonly settle the matter, I imagine, is to give general and remote considerations to the winds, and to yield to the pressure of the real or even supposed present, palpable necessity. Under these circumstances, it is obvious that the practice and trade of street-begging, although one of the most immoral and debasing possible, will continue to exist, however forbidden by the laws of the land, and the very best, if not the very wisest among us, will be tempted to perpetuate and deepen the evil.

It were surely well if some method could be devised to meet this kind of exigency, and to preclude the necessity of such a struggle and such an issue. There existed, some years since, in London, and I suppose it is still in operation, an establishment admirably adapted to this purpose. It consisted of large industrial apartments and premises, where any one, without question as to parish or settlement, could find a day's employment, and just remuneration for such common and unskilled labour as applicants of this order might be able to perform. Now, would not such an establishment among us, if placed under regulations which would prevent any infringement upon the laws of trade, prove a blessing, doing more to annihilate vagrancy than any or all the prohibitions of the Statute Book? No excuse could then exist for that system of palliation now so common, and by which, while want is temporarily relieved, the causes of it are deepened and perpetuated; and so our benevolence would be free to flow in its proper channel, where, by a divine arrangement, the effect of mercy is to "bless him that gives and him that takes"—and our well-doing would be such as reason, conscience, sentiment, would all harmonize to render a delight. Those among the aged, the helpless, and the infirm, whom no Poor Law can reach, or who, from circumstances, ought not to be consigned to its provisions, would then constitute the only, as they are the proper, objects of charity, while all others would be compelled to work, if not within the precincts of a poorhouse, at least in such a form as to increase, not diminish, the wealth of the nation.

For the knowledge of the metropolitan experiment I am indebted to a friend, whose life among us is adorned by daily acts of unostentatious goodness; and should any individual or association deem the project worthy of serious consideration, there would be little difficulty in ascertaining the history and working of the institution. At all events, here is a type and symbol of the manner in which the destitute but able-bodied can be best relieved—not by indiscriminate almsgiving, but by a system which demands and cherishes self-help on the part of those who otherwise sink lower and lower into
all the mean vices of whining, canting, idle, professional mendicancy.

Before passing away from this subject, it may be mentioned, that pleasing official evidence exists of the improving condition, on the whole, of the lower classes in this country at the present moment. By a return made to the House of Commons, it appears that the "expenditure for the relief of the poor in Ireland for the year ending Sept. 29, 1852, had decreased £280,700, compared with the preceding year, when the total sum disbursed was £1,166,954." Emigration may, in some degree, account for this diminution; but other social changes are now in progress, which, it is fondly hoped, will serve to develop the industrial and general resources of this long-afflicted land, and place our lower population in a situation of greater independence and comfort than they have realised in past periods of their history. It is time they should emerge from that state of semi-barbarism in which they have been for ages sunk. The conditions alone are needed; for that the Celts are as capable of advancement as Saxon or Norman tribes, must be admitted by all who impartially view their movements in other lands. It, therefore, becomes those whose superiority is owing mainly to outward circumstances, to deal in sympathy rather than scorn; at all events, to "judge righteous judgment," when they cast their eye upon this less happy portion of the British dominions.

There is another topic which may occupy the remainder of this letter—namely, the debased and guilty condition of the many females in this town who are sunk into the depths of vice and sensual profligacy. This opens to the mind one of the most sore and appalling evils of our social condition. And the question cannot fail to urge itself upon the thoughts of all who have any interest in the welfare of the community, how is this evil to be eradicated; or, if not wholly eradicated, reduced in its dimensions? No doubt, considerable exaggeration has been practised in relation to the number of miserable women living by prostitution in the empire. But, when we have made all due allowance for the credulous zeal of some who have paraded figures that might well startle the most apathetic, we are compelled, by what falls under the observation of every intelligent observer in the great towns and cities of the United Kingdom, to conclude that the amount of this vice is such as to threaten the destruction of much that is hopeful in the condition of the rising generation, and to counterwork, to a large extent, the influence of all our educational and religious institutions. Even if we take the low estimate of 7,000 prostitutes in London, given years since, this would, in the then-existing population of a million and a-half, be one for little more than each 200 of the inhabitants—and with the present population of two millions, the proportion is not diminished. But, when you have withdrawn all the remaining women and all children from the population, the relative extent of this crime is magnified to a degree which needs no exaggerated portraiture to convince us that this is one of the most fearful stains upon the character of England's capital. But who will allege that this description of vice is less prevalent in other localities? We are told, upon respectable authority, that no lady can safely walk the streets of Edinburgh after night-fall. Do Glasgow, Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham, Leeds, Dublin, Belfast, rank higher in social virtue and chastity? Are the sights and sounds which assail us, as we walk the streets of this town by night, less calculated to corrupt youth and deprave manhood? We learn, that "in London alone, two thousand women annually replace those who die amid their sin and misery," while one-fourth of the general female mortality may be attributed to the results of this horrid vice. One knows not in what terms to describe the dark and diabolical forms of this plague-spot, which is everywhere eating into the very heart of our civilization, while unknown, or all but unknown, among the children of the desert. It brings with it both to body and soul a peculiarly withering curse, and the victim and the victimizer are alike degraded. Man, the first aggressor, becomes in his turn
the subject of assault, and these lost and ruined women, many of them almost children, being thrown out of the pale of sympathy and society, are revenged, by dragging into the same hell many of those who have agreed to consign them to their dismal fate.

Even the discussion of this subject is ignored in some quarters, partly from false, perhaps affected, delicacy, and partly from the alleged hopelessness of the case. But this is the way to render it, indeed, hopeless. We must learn to look the evil fairly in the face, and to study attentively its causes and its cure. Society has been wont to put its eternal ban upon the unhappy female who violates, in a single instance, the law of purity, so that, no hope remaining of restoration to name or place, the temptation becomes strong, almost invincible, to plunge deeper and deeper into the bottomless gulf of black perdition; and thus the task of reformation, which at first would be comparatively easy, becomes afterwards such as to repel the attempts of even the most heroic.

"Facilis descensus Averni:
Sed revocare gradum, superasque evadere ad auras,
Hoc opus, hic labor est."

It may be said, indeed, that this social decree constitutes a safeguard upon female virtue; but when it is remembered that, in the first instance, this vice is almost invariably perpetrated in a state of mind which allows little or no room for reflection as to consequences, it may be well doubted whether the law which dooms the person, once guilty, to excision, does not serve effectually to destroy more souls than it saves. At all events, where is the justice of smiling upon the seducer, and frowning his less guilty victim into everlasting infamy and despair?

I know no institutions which more happily illustrate the compassion of that religion whose Divine Author said to the guilty, "Go and sin no more," than our modern penitentiaries for reclaiming such miserable and abandoned women. The establishment in Brunswick-

street is worthy of praise; it reflects honour upon its originators and friends; and who can calculate the blessings it has conferred upon many a broken-hearted and desolate female? May it long flourish under the guidance of its excellent Committee, and the assiduous attention of its well-qualified matron! It realizes what is so desirable in all our public and industrial institutions—self-support—no subscriptions having been required by it for the last two years. But it is surely capable of yielding still more extended benefits, if some means could be adopted to detach the wicked from their courses, and to bring them within its enclosure and influences. Capable of accommodating fifty, only seventeen were within its walls, when a short time since, I had the privilege of making some inquiries as to its condition. It appears that, since the workhouse began to provide shelter for this class of unfortunates, the number applying for admission to the penitentiary has diminished. But still, what multitudes infest our streets and swarm in the noisome dens, some of which have been already described! Can no mission of mercy be formed to visit the haunts of these fallen and wretched ones, and to draw them out of the pit into which they have sunk? Would it be Utopian to expect that among the benevolent, the high-minded, and Christian women of Belfast, some few at least might be found who, striking out of the beaten path, would dare to be singularly great in their mode of doing good? Monstrous and disgusting indeed would be the spectacles which they would behold in their godlike efforts; but to be the means of reclaiming the lost, and especially such as these, would be reward beyond all comparison. I am perfectly convinced, that the thing chiefly required is actually to see what exists in these dark places of society, now seldom penetrated by the foot of mercy; and then there would not be wanting some scheme of active aggression upon these territories of loathsomeness. It would be felt that a moral-sanitary reform is, to say the least, not less needed than that which removes the sources of physical disease and death, that social and mental
PAUPER SUPPORT, AND PENITENTIARIES.

Putridity and malaria cannot be allowed to remain without poisoning the community and filling it with abominations too shocking for humanity to bear.

Two things are requisite, both of which the penitentiary supplies—work, and culture. Ignorance and idleness are among the chief indirect causes of prostitution, and no system can effectually rescue the guilty but one which cherishes the habit of honest industry, showing it to be honourable, at the same time acting powerfully upon the heart and conscience; and it is a truly wonderful and blessed thing, that even in the midst of all this debasement, conscience, although dormant, is not dead.

But, whatever efforts of this kind may be made to reclaim those already involved, it will be felt by all, that the chief consideration is how we may most effectually cut off further supply, by drying up the existing sources of profligacy. Education, if of the true kind, and widely administered, will, of course, nurture mental and moral habits unfavourable to this as to all other forms of evil. The cultivation of temperance principles will also have a powerful effect. Sanitary reform and an improved arrangement in the dwellings and domestic economy of the poor are imperatively necessary. The supply of a wholesome, light, cheap literature for the masses, instead of the polluting, licentious productions now circulated (many of them translations of the most infamous French Novels), is loudly demanded, too, in proportion as the power of reading becomes diffused. And, in addition to these and similar agencies, a wider field for profitable industrial skill and labour is absolutely required. The heartrending revelations of Mr. Mayhew have shown to what an extent prostitution is resorted to in London for the sake of bare subsistence; and who need wonder, however deeply he may deplore it, that young women, so wretchedly paid as the shirtmakers and seamstresses of the metropolis, should be tempted to listen to the voice of the destroyer, and to sell body and soul, purity, and peace of conscience—for bread? How much of

the guilt lies at the door of those who so vilely defraud these poor daughters of humanity of what is their due, is a question not so very difficult to answer; but I will not wait to discuss it. Those who are more conversant than I can be, with the rates of remuneration given by employers to young female workers of Belfast, will be able to say how far this source of vice exists in our population. But, unquestionably, social morality is largely dependent upon the amount to which the conveniences and comforts of life are diffused in the community.

In connexion with this subject, it may be asked, can nothing effectual be done, by a vigilant police, to shut up those disorderly houses, where this vice, with its associate vice of drunkenness, cloaks by day and night? It is strange, indeed, if the power of our Magistracy cannot be brought to bear upon such scenes of wickedness. And yet, I am credibly informed, that nothing is more difficult than to obtain a conviction, even in cases where the evil is notorious and glaring, and where the quiet of the neighbourhood is broken, night after night, by obscenity and all the blasphemies of maddened crime and lust. Do we live in the middle of the nineteenth century of the Christian Era, and in a town not wanting in intellectual and religious advancement? Is there an unwillingness to probe this wound, and to employ the vigorous methods necessary to extirpate the fatal malady from the social body? And shall the infernal arts of the procurers be practised with impunity in the midst of us, and innocence be seduced into the paths of guilt, to feed the coffers of foul adventurers who come in open day to traffic in the passions of our youth? If there be no provision in our Statute-book to shield us from this and similar evils, all I will say is, that the time of our Legislature has been often wasted in discussions infinitely less important in their bearing upon the social and moral welfare of the people than one of this nature and tendency would prove itself to be—and, certainly, it would be difficult to imagine any form in which legislative authority could
with greater grace and propriety be brought into opera-
tion, than in bridling cupidity when it trades in licen-
tiousness.

Some have even ventured to argue that prostitution
is a necessary evil, and must therefore be tolerated.
But in what sense is it a necessary evil? Just as
theft and murder are. These are the result of per-
vorted instincts likewise; and these instincts are often
so powerful as to hurry their subjects into overt acts of
crime, as if by a mad ungovernable impulse; yet we
never regard the culprit as less guilty because of the
intensity of his passions: nor do we argue, that to save
society at large from the incursions of the thief or
murderer, a certain portion of the community must be
given up to his lawless depredations without restraint
or hindrance. The position only betrays the corrup-
tion of the mind which adopts it, and deserves the
execration of all the wise and good.

This subject, Sir, is one demanding the most earnest
attention of the Christian, and the Christian patriot.
It is one in which all classes are most profoundly in-
terested, and I cannot better close my remarks than by
employing the words of our able fellow-townsmen, Dr.
M'Cormac, in his elaborate work on "Moral Sanatory
Economy":—"Each well-principled, well-constituted
man and woman must feel alike interested in averting
stain, were it from the lowliest, humblest of the sex.
Then, by a mother's surpassing tenderness, a wife's
unselfish devotion, a daughter's untiring fondness, a
sister's deep affection, let each manly heart and striving
intellect contribute their best influences towards re-
instating the sex in their honoured, lofty place, and so
avert the horrors, the anguish, and the pollution, from
which all alike should essay to shield them."

Belfast, Feb. 10, 1852.

LETTER IX.

Sir,—During the interval which has elapsed since
I last addressed you on the condition of the poor, the
most generous expressions of good-will to the cause,
and, in some instances, promises of substantial aid, have
been made by gentlemen who have the welfare of the
town at heart. And here I cannot resist the tempta-
tion of referring to that young Nobleman—an honour
to his class—noble by rank, but still more so, by per-
sonal worth and accomplishments—the Earl of Belfast
—who, from Nice, has testified his strong approval of
the appeals which have appeared in your journal, and
to which, it appears, he has not been inattentive amidst
all the varied objects that have met him on his Conti-
nental tour. It would be mere affectation to seem
insensible to such a testimony from such a quarter;
but I can safely affirm, that all which is personal
is lost in the admiration, which, in common with
thousands, I entertain for the qualities of a mind that,
at so early a period, is giving promise—and more than
this, is yielding the first fruits, of an illustrious manhood.
Already distinguished for his devotion to the interests
of the working orders, and his large and liberal views
of social progress, I believe, if Divine Providence pro-
long his life, he will yet be, not only a distinguished
ornament of our Irish Peerage, but also one of Ireland's
best and truest patriots.

From the important subjects dwelt upon in my last
letter, I now pass on to the still more important sub-
ject of education; not forgetting, however, the close
connexion subsisting between these topics; for, how-
ever we may attempt by sharp distinctions, to separate
the several elements—physical and moral—which af-
ffect the community, all such classifications are necessarily imperfect:—it is enough to say, they are ours, not nature’s, not God’s.

Here a boundless field opens upon our view. Some of the most difficult social and political problems of the day stand in intimate connexion with the education of the masses. Widely different, as you well know, are the opinions entertained by parties, whom we are bound, in the judgment of charity, to believe alike desirous of benefiting the poor, and alike honest in the maintenance of their several views. These antagonistic opinions, however, have reference not to the substance, but to the accidents of the question. Amid the most discordant theories, no one can now be found, at least no one whose sentiments would be for a moment tolerated, to advocate the ancient reign of ignorance and night. The only inquiries in this day are, how can the blessings of education be best diffused among the poor? By what species of organization can we most effectually overtake the teeming population rising around us in all the rude strength of nature, but without the discipline and culture which can alone render that strength the source of individual or national weal? And how may our systems be so constructed and executed, that while meeting existing wants, they will not entail consequences, in the issue, more disastrous than the very evils which they are designed to remedy?

Under other circumstances, I might attempt an examination of these collateral subjects; but, at present, such a discussion would be out of place. In Belfast, we find the national system of education at work, and, in addition to this, several congregational and other schools for the benefit of the poor, having no connexion with the National Board, and some of them at variance with the principles upon which that Board is instituted. Now, for my part (though in this I may be deemed latitudinarian, especially by some who are accustomed to draw their conclusions from a different state of things), I look upon Ireland as so peculiar in regard both to her social and religious condition, and see so much that is good in education, however defective it may be in some respects, and believe that it contains within itself the antidote of so many of those evils which may be incident to the mode of its communication, that, without entering upon vexed questions, I should rejoice to witness the extension of the existing machinery—national or unnational—or of any system which honestly aims at the production of a manly, upright, and religious population, however wanting I might deem it in some of those qualities and appliances essential to the most enlightened, liberal, and best conditioned forms of culture. If Ireland wait, until all the moot points of this great controversy are adjusted, she may wait for centuries, and meanwhile see generation after generation “destroyed for lack of knowledge.”

All honour is due to those in Belfast who have sought to carry the blessings of education to the lowest poor; but who can pass through the courts and alleys of the town, without the deep conviction that very much yet remains to be done? Swarms of children, in all directions, arrest the eye, growing up in filth and ignorance, the future candidates for the honours of jails, penal colonies, and something worse;—and when piercing through the miserable exterior, we descry and realize the existence of the immortal within, so strangely disguised and housed, who can fail to mourn still more the deep degradation in which these wretched children of want and neglect are plunged? These are among the things which constitute our national shame and sin, and to which other empires point, not without some reason, when we assail the corruption and guilt by which they are characterized.

How far the adult poor can be reached by educational influences is a question which might be well worthy of distinct consideration. Dr. Hook, of Leeds, in a lecture on “Institutions for Adult Education,” tells us, that in the city of Coventry, where he formerly resided, “elder brothers, parents, and sometimes grand-sires,” were brought under instruction, and that,
"With spectacles on nose and pouch on side,
Their big manly voice
Turning again towards childish treble,"

"They lipsed the alphabet, and stammered forth the pence table." I see little prospect, however, in this direction. Melancholy as the thought is, that the existing adult generation of this class must pass off the stage in deep ignorance, amidst all the boasted enlightenment of this second half of the nineteenth century, it is, I fear, to a large extent, inevitable. We have, however, the consolation, that this empire of gross darkness is, year by year, diminishing in extent, and, moreover, that the lessons of Christianity, that great quickener of the human intellect and heart, may even now be brought home to the hearths of the most abject by a faithful and well-appointed agency, so that notwithstanding the want of what is usually denominated education, their minds may, to some extent, become possessed of the great thoughts of immortality, of salvation, of eternity, of God. This is one glorious peculiarity of our faith, that it is capable of accommodating itself to every grade of intellect and culture or no culture, from the sage seated amidst the accumulated treasures and monuments of ancient and modern literature and science (himself the impersonation and embodiment of the whole), down to the veriest savage that roams the wilds, herding with beasts hardly more savage than himself. It is to this order of means we mainly, almost entirely look, in relation to the mental, not less than the spiritual elevation of those in the lowest stratum of society, who have arrived at maturity. Individuals, indeed, may, even after that period, rise above the necessities of their condition, urged and upborne by an inward spring of energy, such as God delights at times to create in the least likely spots of social life, as if to reveal the intrinsic greatness of humanity and the exhaustless resources of his own wisdom and power. History has its records to proclaim and immortalize events of this kind when they rise to the rank of prodigies; but there are instances of true moral heroism, in the form of self-culture and elevation, which, though the genius of history deems them unworthy of a place upon her emblazoned page, are well calculated to fill us with admiration and joy. Still, however, all this is only exceptional. The lowest —and it is of the lowest I speak—are, as a class, involved to such an extent in the dire necessities and hardships belonging to their position, that, after a certain period of life, it is not to be expected they can be elevated by any ordinary educational process.

Our business, then, is especially with the young. And, without entering upon any details of the difficulties with which I have had to contend, in order to obtain anything approaching definite and satisfactory statistics of the existing provision for the education of the youthful poor of Belfast, I would take this opportunity of pressing the necessity of registering the necessity of some central registration of such matters, a thing which might be easily managed, if the functionaries of our public and private institutions considered the unspeakable value, for all purposes of benevolent enterprise, of accurate, and, at the same time, comprehensive tables. To the statesman, the social reformer, and the christian patriot, statistics are now almost everything. Principles being to a large extent settled and determined, we want facts. We know pretty well the direction of the port for which the vessel of society is bound and chartered, and the general laws which are to regulate her course; but we need the daily observation of the sun, and the frequent use of the line, both to sound the depths and to determine our rate of sailing; and we need something like a log-book and a chart by which all on board may see at a glance where we are, in the great voyage of social and religious progress. The fancy of the poet and the eloquence of the orator are excellent things in their place; but the battle of light and truth is becoming every day, more and more, an affair of figures of arithmetic rather than figures of speech.

From the abstract of the census of 1851 (the entire document has not yet appeared) we learn that the po-
population of Belfast, on both sides of the river, is 104,081. Now, appealing to the census of 1841, for the proportions of the population at different ages, we discover what is found to hold good generally in the large and manufacturing towns and cities of the empire. This element, if not an absolutely invariable quantity, cannot admit of any material modification, within the space of ten years. It might have been more satisfactory, indeed, to have seen the returns for 1851, and as you are aware, I had hoped for information upon this point from head-quarters, in anticipation of the actual publication of the blue-book; but I have no doubt, the results would have fully confirmed my present calculations, while in other respects the summaries, and even details, could have rendered little or no assistance in my special inquiries as to the educational condition of the poor—no discriminating lines of class or rank being drawn—at least, if its tables be constructed on the same principle as those of 1841. In this latter year, the population of Belfast was 73,308, and the number between five and fifteen years of age was then 17,279, to which we must add at least 1,000 more, if we would comprehend the number between four and fifteen, for the proportion under five years of age, at that period, was upwards of 11,000. These 18,000, in round numbers, would give us about one-fourth of the whole population at what we denominate the school age; and I go down to the lower limit, in order to include all the children who should be in infant schools, confessedly among the most important appliances of our modern education. Now this proportion applied to our present population would shew 26,000 at the school age at this day. These, of course, include children of all ranks. The question then arises, how many should be excluded from our calculation, in order to arrive at a correct estimate of the number belonging to the lower classes? I believe no “census” will aid us here; and it is possible, somewhat different, but, I think, not widely different notions will be entertained upon the subject. I have been at pains to obtain the opinion of those most competent to form one, of those who are themselves engaged in tuition, and who have the widest range of information as to the more respectable schools of the town, and the result of my inquiries is, that in all probability there is not above somewhere like 2,000 of all ages, male and female, in all such establishments. This is the highest estimate, formed by a gentleman who would at once be pronounced, if I were at liberty to name him, one of the very first authorities on such a question. Only a portion, but of course the greater portion of those, as being under fifteen, would come within the scope of my present remarks; but suppose there were actually that number, fifteen years of age and under, at school, (though it cannot be imagined that any large proportion of the children of this class are out of school,) yet let 1,000 be added, and still we have 23,000 of the children of the working and lower poor as a remainder.

What educational provision, then, exists for this immense class of juveniles? I have obtained the statistics of sixty-one schools, great and small, pertaining to such; including in this enumeration all the National Schools, all those of the Established Church, all the other schools connected with places of worship, and the public and private ones which stand in no such connexion, descending downwards to the smallest schools (such as they are) of the back streets and lanes. The average daily attendance, males and females, in these sixty-one schools, amounts altogether to 5,860. Looking at the general difference between the number enrolled, and that in daily attendance on the average of six months, and allowing that with all the fidelity of the search, some of the smaller schools of the lanes may have been overlooked (although twenty-two such have been visited in the various obscurer localities of the town), I am disposed, especially because of the difference referred to, to add about 3,000, in order to reach the number which, according to this very defective system of attendance (and of education, too, in some quarters), are, more or less in-
structed, in all the schools of this description. The estimate is high, but I am unwilling to be charged, even by the most sceptical, with the design of seeking to make out a mere case for popular appeal. This would leave about 14,000 children without the benefits of education at least in week-day schools. Now, it will be seen that in this calculation I am including the children of the operative classes as well as of the lower poor. But who can for a moment doubt, that the deficiency falls mainly, almost wholly, within that lowest circle and grade of the community, for the benefit and elevation of which I have sought in these letters to enlist public sympathy?—"the dangerous and perishing classes" as they have been appropriately called. In an appeal lately published in this town, advocating an excellent project of the Presbyterian Town Mission, I find it stated that about 10,000 of our youth are in Sabbath schools, where religious instruction is communicated. This estimate, of course, includes all ranks and different ages. I have no means of knowing what proportion of these 10,000 belong to the classes who constitute my present clients, and are of the age specified; but if that part of them, fifteen years of age and under, and pertaining to the working and poorer sections, be at day schools also, which I believe will be found generally the case, they are, of course, embraced in my estimate; if not, my experience of Sabbath schools compels me to say, that where the merest rudiments of education have to be taught within the very limited period devoted to their duties, the most faithful instructors can do very little in the inculcation of those higher and holier principles which constitute the true glory and real business of such institutions. Supposing, however, that 2,000 poor children are found in all our Sabbath schools over and above those who, in any way, or to any extent, attend day schools, and recognising the small pittance of culture which can be given in the hour or two weekly consecrated to such work by our noble-minded and self-denying teachers, we should still have in the town of Belfast, in the midst of our civilization, and the most ample provision for the intellectual and moral advancement of the more fortunate classes, about 12,000 children, or say 10,000 if you choose, between four and fifteen years of age, out of school, and exposed to all the polluting vices which they behold daily, in their homes and in the streets.

From the preceding inquiries, two things are very obvious; that an immense mass of the youthful lower population of Belfast is destitute of any means of education—no provision adequate in amount being now in existence—and that, even with regard to the means existing, the poor do not avail themselves of it to the full extent. This last position is clear from the fact, that while ignorance abounds, the schools are generally by no means full, and great irregularity exists as to the character of the attendance.

Two things, then, are imperatively required. In the first place, we need some active and efficient agency by which the poor might be stimulated to secure the blessings of education for their children. It is not enough that a school-house be erected and a teacher provided, however well qualified for his office. Doubtless, in every locality where such provision is made, some parents will be found glad enough to seize the advantage, but the very persons whose children are most in need of such influence are those that are least likely to have any desire or spontaneity on the subject. Sunk and imbruted themselves in deep ignorance and vice, they cannot, of course, appreciate the value of education. Many of them too, are without natural affection, and unwilling to deny themselves the weekly pence which they spend in the dram shop, in order to meet the necessary expense of instruction. Now, whatever may be alleged by some, in defence of the compulsory system of the Continent, it is enough for us to know, that the genius of the British Constitution and the character of our people will not permit us to dream for a moment for having recourse to any such regimen. It may, indeed, seem a great hardship, that since the punishment of crime (to so
large an extent the result of ignorance and its attendant vices) entails an immense annual expense upon the country, we are not at liberty to save ourselves from such consequences by a system of legal compulsion applied at the fountain head of the evil, especially after the laborious construction of a machinery adapted, as it is thought, to the wants and exigencies of the nation. But so it is; and it is so, as the fruit of our free institutions, and as part of the tax we must pay for preserving inviolate liberties which, if trampled upon in one department of our social economies, or in one rank of life, would soon cease to be sacred or respected elsewhere, and the abandonment of which would be but ill compensated by any supposable benefits, which might be forced upon us by the hand of power, though that power might assume the name and aspect of a paternal Government. There is a more excellent way, and one which, free from all objections, would be fraught with blessings to all parties. Moral suasion will seldom fail, if regulated by wisdom and inspired by love. There is an omnipotent influence in pure disinterested love, which at once heals and constrains the soul; and were this, descending from the upper circles, to shew itself more frequently in the abodes of poverty and wretchedness, it would act like what it is, a mighty heavenly charm to soften the asperities, sweeten the bitterness, and elevate and win the affections of those reckless, heartless, alienated ones, who now seem separated from us by a wide, and to them, but not to us, an impassable gulf.

We want, then, what Dr. Chalmers calls "moral excavations," and especially a Ministry and Mission of mercy to the lanes and courts of the town, to persuade the poor to place their unhappy children under instruction. And my conviction is, that as a general principle this labour of love would be best accomplished by the gentler sex, especially dealing with mothers. Could some of the noble and tender-hearted women of Belfast whom Divine Providence has gifted with leisure, be enlisted in this enterprise, the result would soon be seen in a vast augmentation of the number in attendance in our schools. This work would, indeed, like all beside which is great and worthy, demand much self-denial and patient perseverance; but the result would form an ample and glorious reward. When Angels, in their ministry, descend to earth, they find the recompense of their toils in the hearts they have gladdened and purified—and the ministry of Christian women is but a little lower than that of Angels in the motives which inspire it and the might—the might of gentleness—by which it is clothed and crowned.

Before leaving the subject of active visitation, I must venture a remark in relation to the Committees of existing schools. I do so, however, with great hesitation, not having full means of judging how far it is demanded. My reference is to the vast amount of absenteeism revealed by a comparison of the numbers enrolled, with the average in attendance. To what extent this can be controlled or prevented is a question not easily decided; but it will not be denied, that some vigorous scheme should be in operation to diminish the evil to the very utmost, if anything like a satisfactory or useful education is to be imparted to the classes for whom these institutions are intended. What can be effected in the purifying and elevation of the mind, during the irregular and fitful attendance of those who, at other times, and during a large portion of the week, are probably exposed to the most degrading and noxious influences?

The next thing required, is the increase of an educational organization suitable to the wants of the children of the lower poor. It may seem inconsistent to present a plea of this kind, in juxtaposition with the admission just made, that the extant provision is not used to its full extent, but the inconsistency is only apparent. There is an overwhelmingly large proportion of the destitute children of all populous towns that cannot be brought at first within any educational establishments, except such as have been expressively designated, whether happily or not, ragged schools. These have been formed, as you
know, in many towns and cities of the empire, from the English metropolis downward, and they have now passed out of the category of mere experiments. The tentative process is ended, and their beneficial effects have become matter of history. London, Liverpool, Birmingham, Glasgow, Dublin, and many other of our great centres of social life, have lifted their voice in one and the same testimony. And though last in this enumeration, not least, Belfast has its own independent testimony to supply. The Frederick-street School, the first ragged school established in Ireland, stands forth a living witness on this subject. Its industrial and other departments are an honour to its managers, and only need to be supported as they deserve, to make them a still greater benefit to the community. But in addition to such establishments, we need schools of humbler pretensions and less cost in various localities through the densely populated parts of the town, such as the Rev. Mr. Taylor lately originated in Alexander-street, and of which so gratifying a report appeared in your and other journals.

In the formation of these schools, two principles would, in all likelihood, come into operation, neither of which can be well dispensed with in the execution of our philanthropic schemes—the denominational (I will not call it the sectarian), and the undenominational. The former, where it is brought into play, is likely to act with the greater intensity and concentration, though it is liable to some objections which might be easily enumerated. The latter has, in a mixed community, special advantages, wearing of course an aspect of liberality which cannot be readily harmonized with proselytizing tactics. Without attempting to decide their respective merits, there will be found in every place some, from original temperament or from habit, more disposed to adopt the one principle and mode of action, and some the other. Let all be fully persuaded in their own mind, but let all act. It would be a happy thing for Belfast, if, in connexion with each congregation and under its auspices, there existed one or more ragged schools, not necessarily located near the place of public worship, but where the density and wants of the population most demanded; and if, in addition to these, others upon broader grounds, and with wider suffrages, were brought into operation, under the direction of Committees which should duly represent the various elements contained in their constituencies. If even twenty of these, however humble their location meanwhile might be, (a private house or two houses united,) were established in the most destitute portions of the town, under the management of efficient teachers, the effects would very speedily appear, and in forms which would gladden every benevolent heart. Nor let any object, that the project is impracticable. A moderate annual collection in the several Churches of Belfast, with such subscriptions as might be readily obtained by an active agency, would go far to meet the whole expense, and doubtless grants could be secured from the National School Society, where no objection existed to the provisions of the board. The schools should lay hold of the infant mind as early as possible, for from the age of four to seven is perhaps the most critical and formative of the whole life; while some or all of them should be industrial in their character. The necessity of industrial instruction is becoming daily more obvious. The only wonder is, that it should have been so long overlooked as a necessary part of the education to be given to the youth, especially of the lower classes. And when parents have learned to value the blessing conferred upon their offspring, and brought to their very doors, they will—elevated by the new and happy influence stealing in and settling upon their domestic hearths—be willing and anxious to contribute to the perpetuation of such a boon. The human heart, even in its deepest degradation, must be touched not by the cold hand of condescending charity, beneath which it only shrinks and collapses more and more, but by the warm hand of genial, holy, and fraternal love, and it will soon lift itself up, and, like the sunflower, turn and expand its reviving form in the
beam which has kindled within it the sense of a new
and diviner life.

I write, Sir, not for a party (there are enough to do
that) but for my country, for humanity, and I humbly
trust, for God. Those who desire to inculcate their own
distinctive religious views have, so far as I can see, a
perfect right to do so, and such would doubtless prefer
denominational action in their aggression upon this
outer field, as they would also seek denominational
support. As a Protestant, holding firmly the prin-
ciples usually denominated Evangelical, and these the
fruit of personal inquiry, and I hope, solemn convic-
tion, there are, of course, certain tenets which I deem
essential to a sound religious education. But all this
might, I think, be made to harmonise, without any
sacrifice of truth or conscience, with a system of com-
bined action in regard to the other and secular element
of instruction; and surely if there be any department
of philanthropy in which such combined action is im-
peratively demanded, it is in the department now under
consideration. It is a too familiar and deplorable fact
that religion may be made the occasion of the most
divisive courses, although in itself the great cement of
human society. It is one of the nicest problems in the
ethics of the spiritual life to combine a conscientious
adherence to our own convictions with that spirit of
catholicity which the equal interest and rights of others
may require in the origination and working out of ex-
tended schemes for the benefit of our kind; but this is
necessary, and in no land more so than in that in which
we live. It was in view of the speculative side of this
problem that Lord Bacon, after quoting the language
of Lucretius, exclaims from the higher stand point of
Christianity, "Certainly it is Heaven upon earth to
have a man's mind move in Charity, rest in Providence,
and turn upon the poles of Truth!"

Yet let me not be misunderstood. I am no advocate
of indifferentism or mere secularism in education. It
accords both with the maxims of a sound philosophy
and with those of Christianity, which in this respect,
as in others, exhibits its wondrous harmony with all
the fundamental laws of our nature, to insist upon an
education which shall go deep and embrace the whole
man. With the shallow sensationalism which, origi-
nating in Britain, reached its climax in such specula-
tions as those of Coudillac, Condorcet, and the Baron
d'Holbach in his infamous "Systeme de la Nature" (a
work whose tendency even Voltaire himself depre-
cated), I have no sympathy—nor with the schemes
and theories of education which have grown out of
such doctrines. The mind of man is not a mere tabula
rasta, passively receiving its impressions from without.
It is not moulded and made by the mere force of ex-
ternal circumstances. It is itself a great living power,
or rather spring and source of living powers, to be
quickened into action in a manner corresponding with
its own inherent nature; and to deal with it, therefore,
as a mere machine—to be moved in any direction the
operator pleases, as some of our modern educationalists
would do, is to win failure, and to deserve it. The
soul of man, even in its lowest debasement, is to be
treated with reverence, because it has capacities, in
virtue of which it may again wear the very image of
God. And to treat it with reverence it must be ap-
proached as a spontaneous and spiritual being; nor can
any education be complete or true, that overlooks these
conditions. If we are to lift our wretched youthful
population, civic or rural, to the place that belongs to
them as dwellers in time or as inheritors of eternity, we
must do far more than teach them to read and write—
far more than simply store their memories with sym-
bols, and words, and dead facts. We must draw out
and excite their faculties by the administration of a
due, intellectual, and moral stimulus—we must supply
an aliment suited to the immortal nature which we
seek to nourish and expand—we must teach and train
them to think for themselves, and on the highest themes
—we must bring them up that they may stand face to
face with the various relations which they sustain to
God and man—we must inspire in their minds due
self-respect and self-reliance—we must instil the great
principles of Divine truth—and, withal, and especially, deal with them as guilty and depraved beings—but as those for whose redemption and recovery a glorious provision has been made, and one, the application of which to their consciences and hearts, is the loftiest, purest, effort and triumph of education. I would go as far as may be in the path of united action, but, holding such views, I should feel compelled, wholly apart from any sectarian object, at proper periods, and under the best circumstances, to carry out to the utmost of my power the great laws of this higher culture—in combination with others, if possible; but, if not, by some distinct and separate arrangement of my own.

The importance of these considerations will be acknowledged by all who contemplate education in its higher aspects as preparing the human being for a right discharge of his duties in time, and for the fulfilment also of his immortal destinies. But their importance will be seen likewise in connexion with the social economics of the question, and the bearing of education upon public crime serves to bring them into strong relief.

Whether crime is on the increase or not, is an inquiry which it might be supposed very difficult to answer, from the very contradictory opinions advanced on the subject. In an essay on "Jail Revelations, by a Governor," we read—"Crime is decidedly on the increase in proportion to the increase of population;" while, on the other hand, the Rev. Mr. Clay, of Preston, one of the highest authorities on such a point, gives it as his deliberate and well-weighed judgment, that it is, throughout Great Britain, for the most part, diminishing. But their importance will be seen likewise in connexion with the social economics of the question, and the bearing of education upon public crime serves to bring them into strong relief.

Whether crime is on the increase or not, is an inquiry which it might be supposed very difficult to answer, from the very contradictory opinions advanced on the subject. In an essay on "Jail Revelations, by a Governor," we read—"Crime is decidedly on the increase in proportion to the increase of population;" while, on the other hand, the Rev. Mr. Clay, of Preston, one of the highest authorities on such a point, gives it as his deliberate and well-weighed judgment, that it is, throughout Great Britain, for the most part, diminishing. But their importance will be seen likewise in connexion with the social economics of the question, and the bearing of education upon public crime serves to bring them into strong relief.

To account for this improvement in our criminal statistics, it will not do to point to the reduction of our population. Apart from all other considerations, the ratio of improvement is greater than the ratio of that reduction. Besides, it must not be forgotten that, while by emigration our numbers have been thinned, the tide of emigration has been mainly composed of a class above that which furnishes the chief proportion of our criminals, leaving that class behind, and, so far as this is concerned, but little diminished. If it be said that disease and famine did their work of death chiefly in the ranks of such, even this will not serve the objector's purpose, when he takes into consideration—to use the language of the report adverted to—how much "the demoralization and debasement consequent upon a famine of more than three years' duration, must necessarily continue to affect the social system long after the cessation of the calamity by which they were generated." Unquestionably, the diminution of our numbers has relieved the labour market of a portion of the pressure of competition, and left a wider field for the honest industry of those who might otherwise have been tempted to commit one branch of public crime, "offences against
property.” In this way, an indirect and limited effect may have been produced; or rather an occasion given for the operation of other higher and more positive influences. And, we cannot resist the conclusion, that such influences have been at work throughout a wide circle. To this conclusion we are bound to come, by the fact that, for the three years ending with 1851 inclusive, the number of “instructed offenders” has been regularly diminishing—those who could “read and write” in 1849 being 7,419, and those of a similar standing in 1851 being 5,015. Then it is gratifying to learn, what is still more closely connected with my present and immediate object, that for several years the number of juvenile offenders has been decreasing steadily, though slowly—going down from 2,962 in 1848, to 2,003 in 1851. And in England the same pleasing phenomenon is visible, despite all the mystifications which have been thrown around the subject by the well-meant but ill-informed zeal of certain writers. Nor, in connexion with this fact, can it be for a moment doubted, that an increasing proportion of the young have been brought under the discipline of schools, and put in possession of the rudiments, at least, of learning, of late years, in this as in other parts of the Empire; while, speaking generally, education—not only that of the school-room, but likewise that of various religious and other institutions—has been spreading as it never did before, under the impulse which has been given to the great cause of social, intellectual, and moral progress in our times. The results are such as by no means to content the Christian Patriot, but they are certainly such as to fill his heart with gratitude to Almighty God, and to encourage and stimulate him to more powerful and extended efforts.

We are often told that, as there are other sources of crime beside ignorance, so we are not to attribute wholly to education the improved condition of public morals in the nation. I freely admit the force of this remark, and believe that the overlooking of this fact has led many into grave errors. It is perfectly possible that crime may even increase for a time in society, side by side with an increase of education, because there may be other powers in operation, and in forms of greater intensity. But to argue from all this, as some have ventured to do, that there is no tendency in education to lessen the violation of the laws, is surely to commit a strange paralogism. That, other things being equal, vice and immorality of every kind will diminish in proportion to the culture of the intellect and heart, and, moreover, that such culture will have the effect of partially, if not wholly, counteracting the influence of many of the inducements to crime which may from time to time arise in society, are propositions which seem to me so self-evident as to need no argument to demonstrate them. Reason and all experience justify us in regarding them as settled and indisputable principles.

But this throws us back upon the remarks already advanced in relation to the true idea of education, as embracing the whole man, emotional as well as mental, and as involving the due application of that higher and holier order of truth, which has come down into the sphere of humanity to lift us from the dust, and to clothe us with righteousness and purity. And here it must be added that there is greater danger of allowing ourselves to be fascinated and misguided in the present day by the mere mechanism and show of public instruction, as if there were some mysterious power in the very walls and furniture of a school-house to mend or make the morals of a nation. There cannot be a greater mistake than to suppose that all who are “at school” are being really educated. Nor must we overlook the powerful influence for evil to which a very large proportion of those children, even under right and wholesome tuition in the school-room, are exposed at the domestic hearth and among wicked associates.

The recollection of these things will serve to explain such circumstances as that communicated to me by two of the Chaplains of our County Jail—that not a few of the juvenile offenders who come under their care have been nominally at some school, though irregular in their
attendance. They have, however, been neglected in
that higher religious culture which is so indispensable;
and with respect to most of them, any little knowledge
they may have acquired by their occasional school
attendance has been in a great measure lost by the
unhappy condition in which their lot has been cast.
From the character and fidelity of these gentlemen, I
am quite prepared to believe that these young crim-
nals make considerable progress in the best knowledge
during their imprisonment; and the great regret is, that
when liberated, it is only to return again to former
scenes and associations, to be again perverted, or rather
to be arrested in the process of reformation which has
been happily commenced under the discipline and in-
struction to which, for a few months, they have been
subjected. By the way, I do not include in this salu-
tary discipline the practice of whipping, which, I fear,
is of doubtful utility. I know that some of our
most enlightened local philanthropists, who have long
taken a deep interest in this and similar questions, lift
their voices against this system of dealing with youth-
ful criminals, as calculated only to harden them in their
iniquity; and the results, I believe, go far to establish
the soundness of their views. But if, as the excellent
Governor of our County Jail earnestly desires, some
Reformatory and Industrial School were provided for
the benefit of such offenders, upon their liberation,
where their education could be continued and some
trade taught them—for few of them have ever learned
any trade—the result would be of unspeakable benefit
to themselves; and saying nothing of the higher and
more divine principles involved, it would be a vast
pecuniary saving to the community; for how soon and
how generally are these offenders again in the hands
of the police authorities, to be again prosecuted and
imprisoned at considerable expense to the country.
When shall we learn (as I had occasion in some former
letter to ask), the policy of prevention? Because these
charges come to us in the shape of taxes, we seem to
forget that they are really the penalty of our social
neglect. If, as these County and Police rates are fur-
nished each year, they could be analyzed, and so pre-
sented as palpably to exhibit what we are compelled
to pay for this, and that, and the other offender whom,
by a little, a very little, timely attention and compara-
tive cost, we might have made useful and honourable
members of the community—and productive members,
too—instead of being, as they are, idle, guilty con-
sumers of the fruits of others' industry—this would
surely awaken us to consideration, and prompt us to
action. And yet, however disguised the whole thing
may now be by words and forms, this is the real and
proper mode of contemplating the matter. I respect-
fully call, then, upon our wealthy merchants, mill-
owners, manufacturers, and men of property generally,
to look at this subject with even a portion of that saga-
city they display in the management of their ordinary
affairs, and, if I do not greatly mistake, they will arrive
at the conclusion, that even on the lower ground of
social and personal economy, it would be their interest,
as it is that of all taxpayers, to shield themselves from
the heavier charge which law imposes, by the self-im-
position of a lighter charge for the purposes of juvenile
education among the ignorant and neglected classes of
society.
I will not, however, do the Christian public of Bel-
fast the injustice to suppose they need to be stimulated
by inferior motives when the grand consideration of
duty, obligation, and benevolence are familiar to their
minds and pressed upon their attention by those faith-
ful men who adorn the office of the Christian Ministry
in our various Churches, and who themselves, and by
their curates and agents, are doing their utmost to
arrest and destroy the evils of ignorance and immo-
rality which are stalking, not unseen, in the waste
places of our city. I would very respectfully but ear-
nestly entreat their powerful voice to second what they
may deem not unwise or improper in the sentiments
and plans now suggested, believing they will give me
credit for what my own consciousness emboldens me
to claim—exemption from any motive in this appeal, except such as they themselves would approve, and such as I humbly trust God will not wholly condemn.

_Belfast, Feb. 16, 1853._

P.S.—_May, 1853._ Since the above letter first appeared, the young Nobleman, to whom the opening paragraph refers, has been suddenly removed by death. His eulogy has been uttered by a thousand hearts. I will but remind the reader of one of the most touching passages of the _Æneid_, where the poet speaks of the illustrious Marcellus, the adopted son and intended successor of the Emperor, snatched away in the bloom of youth. Only, in thought, substituting Divine Providence for the heathen Fates, few, I imagine, will deny the appropriateness of the allusion:

"O nate, ingentem luctum na quaere tuorum:
Ostendent terris hunc tantum Fata, neque ultra
Esse sinent."

LETTER X.

_Sir,—My last letter bore upon the subject of education, especially in connexion with that large mass of our youthful population which can be reached only by some such agency as Ragged Schools. The latter part of my communication had reference to the question in its relation to public crime. I remarked that it would be a gross fallacy to allege that education would prevent all violation of social law, for of this many other causes exist beside ignorance; but that it would be equally fallacious to allege, in the face of all experience, and in opposition to every dictate of common sense, that education does not exert a great and powerful influence in the repression of crime, elevating, as it does, the mind above the range of those objects, passions, and instincts which give occasion to vice and immorality—multiplying the sources of purer, because intellectual and moral, enjoyment—nurturing superior habits—and tending to create a consciousness of internal resources, as well as producing an aptitude for the due and vigorous employment of these in profitable and useful labours. I speak now of education in its lower aspects. But, when we take into consideration its higher forms, as the discipline and culture of the spiritual elements of our nature, it would be little less than a work of supererogation to argue its beneficial effects upon the whole organization and destinies of human life.

Examining further the statistics of crime, I find that from the 1st of January to the 24th of September, 1851, the number of general committals to our County Jail, including those arising from drunkenness, was 2,192, to which we must add, for the remaining three months
EDUCATION.

(as we learn by a comparison of tables), 655, making the total for the year, 2,847. Now, of the number of committal cases in the nine months specified, 193 were under sixteen years of age, while of these, 127 were from Belfast, and 66 from other parts of the County. And of that portion of the general mass, for the whole year, which fell within the "returns" of the Clerks of the Crown and Peace, namely, 648 cases, 42 delinquents were sixteen years of age and under, and 212, or about one-third, 21 years of age and under, while, of the entire aggregate of all ages, only 93 could read and write, being only about one-seventh of the whole. These facts are highly significant and suggestive, in relation to the theme of my last letter. In the large proportion of juvenile offenders pertaining to Belfast, we find a powerful plea for greater efforts on the part of its inhabitants, and in the comparatively small number of educated offenders generally in the country (as already shewn), and in the county (as now disclosed) we see at least one great and important direction which these efforts should take. But will these efforts be made, and will Christian philanthropy arise to the rescue of the children of the poor? "Beggary, Filth, and Crime" are bidding for their souls, and the issue is well portrayed in lines which lately appeared in our public prints:

"And I'll bid higher and higher,"
Said Crime with wolfish grin,
"For I love to lead the children
Through the pleasant paths of sin,
They shall swarm in the streets to pilfer,
They shall plague the broad highway,
Till they grow too old for pity,
And ripe for the law to slay.

"Prison and hulk and gallows
Are many in the land,
'Twere folly not to use them,
So proudly as they stand.
Give me the little children,
I'll take them as they're born:
And I'll feed their evil passions
With misery and scorn.

TEMPERANCE REFORM.

"Give me the little children,
Ye good, ye rich, ye wise,
And let the busy world spin round
While ye shut your idle eyes;
And your Judges shall have work,
And your lawyers wag the tongue
And the jailors and policemen
Shall be fathers to the young."

From these considerations, the transition is easy to the subject to which it is my present design to call attention—namely, Temperance Reform.

And who will question the dire necessity which exists for such reform in the community? In the first place, is it not a well-known and admitted fact, that the greater portion of the public crime which afflicts our nation is committed under the stimulus of strong drink? Sir Matthew Hale—one of the most illustrious and upright Magistrates that ever adorned the judgment seat, and one of the most observant of men—left it on record, as the result of his wide and varied experience, that by far the greater number of offenders brought before him were habitual drunkards, and that the offences with which they stood chargeable were committed, for the most part, under the immediate influence of intoxicating liquors. And the case is not altered yet. The declaration of Judge Erskine, at the Salisbury Assizes, in 1844, was, that "ninety-nine cases out of every hundred were through strong drink." Judge Coleridge, at Oxford, confirmed this testimony, observing, that either to the direct or indirect influence of this cause he could trace all the crime brought under his cognizance, while Judge Patteson, in his address to the Grand Jury at Norwich, embodied his mind on the subject in these pregnant words—"If it were not for this drinking, you and I should have nothing to do." We learn from authority, that "of the 7,018 charges entered at Bow-street Police-office, in the year 1850, the half was for being drunk and incapable, and adding to these the offences indirectly instigated by intoxication, the proportion rises to at least 75 per cent. I have already referred to the committals to our County
Jail, in the year 1851, and of these one-third were directly for drunkenness. But how many of the remainder were the result of intoxicating liquors? Even when crime is committed under the impulse of base political passions, from revenge, malice, or other motives of this description, do we not almost invariably discover that the perpetrators equip themselves for these deeds of darkness, rapine, and blood, by first maddening their souls by means of alcoholic drinks? Bad as human nature is—fearful as are the passions which agitate and degrade the soul of man, and arm him against his fellow, so long as reason and conscience have any place or influence, a powerful restraint exists upon the outward development of these propensities, but all such restraint is destroyed, and reason and conscience laid asleep most effectually by the appliances referred to; and the savage and insane being rushes to the perpetration of his foul and murderous acts, reckless of consequences, without fear or shame, or sense of responsibility. My conviction is, and it has not been formed without consideration, that if we could banish alcoholic liquors from common use, placing them among the labelled drugs of the Pharmacopolist, and the articles necessary to mechanical and artistic purposes, we should reduce the public crime of the land to a small and inconsiderable fraction of its present amount. Here is the prolific fountain which sends forth its bitter and deadly streams into the low, dark places of society. It is this which keeps up, and that in the very face of all our benevolent and religious institutions, a constant supply for the hulks, jails, penal colonies, and scaffold; and it will continue to do so, until society arises in its might, the might of morality and religion, and determines by all lawful means to put down for ever this source and spring of public demoralization and crime.

Then, Sir, is it not also a well-known and admitted fact, that a very large proportion of the domestic misery, disease, and squalid poverty to be found in the community, is the offspring of the same cause? Who can visit the abodes of wretchedness in our crowded alleys and lanes, where human nature in its lowest condition of physical, social, and moral destitution, presents itself, and in forms which cannot fail to harrow up the feelings of all but the most insensible and selfish, and not find that habits of intemperance are among the chief causes of the whole? Other influences are doubtless at work in some instances, but this will be seen to be the main source of the evil in the vast majority of cases—often the only source, and when not the only one, the bitter, deep, aggravation of others. With what fearful infatuation do multitudes of our working men, even with wives and families dependent upon their efforts, spend the greater part of their hard earnings in the indulgence of this besotting vice of drunkenness, thereby imbruting themselves, planting thickset the thorns of domestic discord around their hearth, involving their wretched children in vice and destitution, and sowing broadcast the seeds of that crop of social miseries which constitute the odium of our nation. I have said, that to the drinking habits of the lower orders we mainly owe the constant necessity which exists for the machinery of punishment. I have no hesitation in affirming that the same cause chiefly fills our workhouses as well as our jails. Public embarrassment and private calamity, fluctuations of trade, decline of manufacture, agricultural distress, these and other similar events may, at times, reduce even the honest, industrious, and sober artizan and peasant to a state of pauperism—and in Ireland, notwithstanding all its natural resources, its fertile soil, and its capabilities of social progress, we have had many such drawbacks upon the comfort and elevation of the hard-handed sons of toil. but, after all, were it not for our national vice of intemperance, and the vices which this engenders or promotes, we might, as a people, occupy a far higher place in relation to all that constitutes the physical and moral prosperity of communities. I may be told that we are not alone in this ruinous practice. That is, alas, too true; but how does that affect the question? Be-
cause England and Scotland degrade and demoralize themselves; because their working and poorer classes wallow to so large an extent in the mire of drunkenness, is that any reason why Ireland should do so too? The guilt may be much the same, but the folly is pre-eminently ours. As a nation, we cannot afford to squander any part of our limited gains in such indulgences. Our poor, as a general fact, are amongst the poorest poor upon the face of the earth, and it is therefore nothing less than absolute suicide in them to fling their scanty earnings, only just sufficient to place them above barbarism and starvation, into the coffers of the spirit store and the publican.

And this may be the most suitable place to refer to the general financial aspect of this subject. Four millions seven hundred and seventy thousand pounds sterling were expended by this part of the United Empire in the purchase of intoxicating liquors in the year 1850, and the returns clearly shew a considerable increase since that period, notwithstanding the decline of population and the preventive moral agencies at work. Then, with regard to our own town in particular, I learn from the most authentic sources, that the cost of its imports alone, of this kind, in 1851, was not far from three hundred and eleven thousand pounds, while, as it is probable its home production would equal its imports, we must double this sum, in order to reach the amount expended on this destructive indulgence by Belfast and that part of the neighbourhood supplied from its stores. The duty on whiskey alone taken out of bond, in this place, during three months of the last year, was thirty-four thousand pounds, which, for the whole year, at that rate would give one hundred and thirty-six thousand pounds—to be paid of course, by the consumer. Only let us reflect upon the immense sums thus wasted, and infinitely worse than wasted, in this form, and it will not require the philosophic acumen of an Adam Smith to perceive the severe loss sustained by the community in the destruction of so large a portion of its capital upon what he would style unproductive indulgence. There cannot be a greater fallacy than to suppose that remunerative employment is given by such a trade. Compare the manufacture of intoxicating liquors with that of linen yarn, woollen or linen cloth, and other articles of necessary or ornamental use, and it will be found that the proportion laid out on labour is miserably small. In the frieze coat worn by a workman, value, say 25s, about 18s have been paid in the shape of labour, whereas, in a puncheon of whiskey, value £20, only about 10s have been expended in that form, and a ton of wholesome aliment, which might have fed many families, has been wholly destroyed. If the six or seven hundred thousand pounds spent on intoxicating liquors in this town and neighbourhood were employed in forms which would yield adequate returns, society around us would present a widely different aspect, or if even a tithe of it were expended on purposes of education (one of the most profitable of all investments), results would be seen such as would gratify the political economist, while it would fill every Christian heart with thankfulness and joy.

But the financial part of the subject is not exhausted when we have considered the amount expended in the purchase of this commodity, and thus withdrawn from the comforts of the poor, and from the purposes of remunerative employment. We have likewise to take into consideration the expenses incurred in the punishment of crimes perpetrated under the influence of strong drinks, and in the support of those who have reduced themselves to pauperism and incurable disease by this vicious and insane practice. As a nation, we expend probably not less than five millions sterling in direct sacrifices to this Juggernaut; but how many millions more do we spend in the support of the victims crushed beneath its wheels, and the punishment of those who, having become “mad upon their idol,” have broken loose from all the restraints which the laws of God and of society have imposed upon their subjects? We complain mightily, and not without reason, of our im-
mense taxation in these lands; but let it be duly pondered that the United Kingdom expends, in the use of alcoholic liquors of various kinds, about seventy millions sterling, very nearly half as much more as it pays in Government taxation, and probably a dozen times as much as it pays in the shape of poor rates; while, if passing beyond legal enactments to the voluntary support of religious institutions, it will be found that about seventy fold more is spent on this national vice than we devote to the diffusion of Christianity throughout the world, and yet we profess to be a Christian nation.

But there is still another aspect of this subject which, in my estimation, is more important than any yet specified. Is it not a well-known and admitted fact, that the habit of drinking, even when it does not produce an utter and abject prostration of the whole man, constitutes one of the greatest obstacles to the progress of Christianity in these lands and in this town? The habitual tippler is one of the least likely persons living to be induced to devote any serious, calm reflection to the claims of religion, to the study and contemplation of the higher and holier interests of humanity. Towards everything of this order, he entertains an inveterate, ever-growing distaste and hostility, even in his intervals of sobriety. The whole frame and fashion of his mind is totally disqualified for the consideration of the higher truths, those truths the realization of which constitutes the grand distinction of rational and immortal beings. A spell is upon him, and he yields himself to its dominion, until all the faculties of his nature are disorganized and perverted. Strong for evil, he becomes impotent for good, until at last he seems like a victim bound at the chariot wheel of some fierce and cruel demon, that leads or rather drags him on to certain destruction, as a trophy of his infernal malignity and power.

If we look for a moment at the desecration of our Sabbaths, and the neglect of the divine services of religion in our midst, and trace these crying evils to their source, we shall find that to this habit and its consequences, more than to aught beside, they must be attributed. In the direct effects produced upon the mind as already described, and in the various forms of social dissipation and indolence which of necessity spring from drinking habits, we find an explanation, at least in part, of the fact, that thousands and tens of thousands even of the comparatively well-paid artizans of Belfast, and the other large towns and cities of the empire, are wholly alienated from even the external ordinances of Christianity, and spend the day of rest in maudlin indulgence in the dram shop, or in savoring idleness about the corners of our streets, and in places of low resort, bearing in their appearance and dress all the well-known marks of men sunk and degraded by bestial vice.

Let it be known, Sir, that there are 800 spirit shops in Belfast, and most of them open on the Sabbath, with the exception of the hour or two allotted to morning service—open, as I know many of them to be from an early hour, to catch the miserable victims that go forth even in the grey dawn to quench their thirst for this "liquid fire," and then none need wonder at the tide of immorality, licentiousness, misery, and crime, which overspreads and overwhelms the lower places of society—aye, and rises upwards, too, until the higher portion of the social fabric are also in danger of being submerged in this dark and noisome element.

It were as easy, as it would be painful, to dwell longer upon this point, for the materials are but too abundant. Enough, however, has been advanced to establish the imperative necessity for some special interposition on the part of the wiser and better men—hers of society. If we behold a fearful plague sweeping away its thousands and tens of thousands yearly to an untimely grave, we are anxious to trace the evil to its source, and if possible, to arrest the dire calamity. Intemperance is preying upon the strength, and, to a large extent, eating out the very life of that portion of the community whose only wealth and capital lie in
their strong arms and sinews, and upon whose sound physical social condition depends, in a great measure, the welfare of the whole State. It is doing more—for its effects reach upwards and onwards to the highest interests, in time and eternity, of the unhappy and guilty slaves of this vice. The political economist, then—the social reformer, the Christian legislator, and patriot—all the wise and good, without exception, are deeply interested in the question which now presents itself for consideration, what can be done to check, if not entirely to suppress, this overspreading abomination?—one which, strange to say, prevails most in those parts of the civilized world which make the loudest boast of the purity of their faith and the extent of their Christian benevolence, and one under the influence of which our poor country has suffered more than from the greater number of all the other evils—social or moral—of which her children have so frequently and bitterly complained.

I reserve for my next communication the remarks which I have to offer on the remedy of this evil.

_Belfast, March 7, 1853._

**LETTER XI.**

_Sir,—_My last letter sought to establish the necessity of some interposition in order to check, if we cannot wholly destroy, the current of intemperance which is sapping the very foundation of the social and moral well-being of our community. I now proceed to offer some remarks upon the mode by which this most desirable consummation might be reached; by which, at all events, a decided and great improvement might be effected.

Neither my inclination, nor my profession as a Minister of that religion which enjoins reverence for all lawful authority, permits me to indulge in harsh or unwarrantable complaints in regard to the Executive or the Magistracy of the land. Responsibility enough rests upon those who manage our public affairs; and they are at times made responsible for matters over which they can exercise little or no control. But none can question the great influence which our local authorities might employ in relation to the number and character of those places which create and foster the pernicious vice of drunkenness, and those other vices that derive from this their parentage and support.—Can any plea, consistent with those higher and nobler objects for which civil government and Magistracy exist, and from which these derive all their title to respect, be alleged for the multiplication, on every hand, of shops for the sale of intoxicating liquors? In a former communication, I pointed out a very limited space, within which upwards of twenty of these are to be seen lifting their fronts, with hardly an intermixture of shops of any other description; and I am credibly informed that some at least of these are dens
of infamy. But this is by no means a singular case; and it is needless to refer to special examples, unless as they may serve to render the general truth more vivid. Nearly, if not altogether, eight hundred houses for the vending of this article, in a population of one hundred and four thousand, forty thousand of whom, according to the proportion of our census, are under sixteen years of age, is a number which (the principles of the Total Abstinence Society apart) is enough to alarm all the friends of order, morality, and religion. This leaves about eighty individuals, male and female, in the whole population, from that age upwards, for the support of each of these establishments. But how many are there among us who make little or no use of such merchandise, thereby lessening greatly any possible pretence for such a large supply; and, at the same time, indicating the fearful extent to which those addicted to drinking must indulge the practice, in order to maintain the trade in its flourishing condition?

I am aware it has been argued, let such places be multiplied indefinitely, and the evil will remedy itself by the bankruptcy of those who embark in the competition—certainly, not a very benevolent or economically wise method of deciding the question, even if the anticipated result were found to ensue. But, is it not a notorious fact, that this horrid trade is largely exempt from the laws which regulate most others? The debased passion for strong drinks will support such houses in comparative prosperity, while others dealing in even the necessaries of life, will suffer decline. Here "the appetite grows by what it feeds upon," and the half-naked, squalid victims of intemperance will spend literally their last penny in the purchase of their favourite beverage, while wretched wives and children at home are famishing with hunger and lying down in their miserable hovels to die. I have no means of accurately ascertaining the relative proportions of the different kinds of shops in Belfast, but none can walk the second and third-rate streets of the town without being convinced that the facilities of the drunkard are little, if anything less, than "moral Scotland" supplies to its population. "In forty cities and towns in that part of the empire, every 149 of the population (of all ages I presume) supports a dram-shop, while it requires 981 to keep a barber, 1,067 to support a butcher, and 2,281 to sustain a bookseller." In the number of our public houses relatively to population we are surpassed in criminality by the following, among other agricultural towns of Scotland—Ayr, Campbeltown, and Dumfries, the average of whose supply is one such house for every 90 persons, whereas ours is one for every 130, taking into account the entire population; but we, on the other hand, surpass Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Paisley, which like ourselves, partake largely of the manufacturing or commercial character, their statistics showing, for the first two places, one dram-shop for every 164, and for the last place one for every 222 of the people. I believe that few of us were prepared to hear that Belfast has such unenviable pre-eminence, even over Glasgow, in her machinery and appliances for the manufacture of drunkenness, immorality, and crime—but so it is. I do not mean that we consume more alcoholic liquor than Glasgow (that is hardly possible) but we have, unquestionably, a greater number of places, proportionately, for the vending of the article.

Sir, the multiplication of these facilities is a great and sore evil in many ways. It multiplies the temptations to indulgence on the part of all classes, and especially of the poor; and it diminishes the chances of any kind or degree of respectability in the management of such concerns, by bringing into the trade many whose principles are so utterly debased, that they will not hesitate to have recourse to any means which may contribute to their nefarious traffic. Hence, music saloons of the lowest order, and every species of sensuality, are found in combination with several of the spirit shops. And thus wickedness runs riot, and holds carnival in every corner of our town, and that under the apparent sanction of Magisterial licenses. With all due respect, then, who can fail to perceive the solemn and great re-
responsibility resting upon those in whose hands is the
to withhold the means of extending these foun-
tains of pollution through every region and nook of the
town of Belfast? It would be no grateful task to de-
scribe the manner in which applications for license are
got up, and the political and other influences which are
brought to bear upon the matter; but to the guardians
of the public weal we are entitled to look with con-
fidence, as to those chosen for their integrity and for
their superiority to all those motives, mean, mercenary,
and political, by which so many are actuated, to the
utter disregard of all the social and moral interests of
the people. Without disparagement to his predeces-
sors—all honourable—we have, in our present Chief
Magistrate, a gentleman who is not more distinguished
for the impartial discharge of his official duties, than
for his sympathy with the cause of oppressed, down-
trodden humanity everywhere; and we have reason to
believe that he is fully alive to the evils which arise
from the drinking habits of society. Others associated
with him in the management of our civic affairs are of
the same mind. Can we imagine any means by which
they could more effectually employ their power for the
best interests of the community than by the rigid exe-
cution of the law in relation to the whole question of
licensing and surveillance? I believe that the law, as
it stands, if strictly adhered to, contains provisions
which would disqualify many applicants for license,
and would annul the licenses of not a few who are now
engaged in this work of debasement and death. Cer-
tain forms of accommodation I understand are required
for the accommodation of the populace? If
these things be so, then, Sir, let us understand on what
principle so many of these fatal springs are pouring
forth their currents, and inundating and blighting
society by their poisonous waters. It is high time
that the whole force of public opinion, that of the
virtuous and the philanthropic, should be brought to
bear on this subject in such a manner, especially, as to
sustain those of our Magistracy who desire to diminish
this source of demoralization and crime.

With respect to Sunday traffic, I am sorry to say,
the state of the law, both in Ireland and throughout
Great Britain, is such as to constitute a deep disgrace
to this professedly Christian empire; and it is strange
to mark the force of habit on the minds of even the
better portion of the community. Were it known for
example that the offices of commerce, or the marts of
general business, or the shops which retail the neces-
saries of life, plied their vocations on the day which our
religion has consecrated to rest; and were this manifest
as we passed along the streets to our respective Churches
on the Sabbath, we should rise en masse to petition the
Legislature to put down the impious infringement, the
daring violation. And yet we are silent as to the
busy traffic of the spirit stores, most of which are open
and at work on this day. Look at the excitement
created through the length and breadth of the land in
relation to the contemplated opening of the Crystal
Palace on the Sabbath. Now, Sir, I would ask, why
not also a general movement of all the Christian people
of this nation to render illegal and to abolish an evil of
still greater magnitude? How many myriads, especially
of the working and poorer orders, are drawn, on the
Lord's day, into the gin palaces and beer-shops of Eng-
land, and into the whiskey shops of Scotland and Ire-
land—how many thousands in our own town—and yet,
where is the public gathering, and where are the eloquent
remonstrances, and where the petitions setting forth to
Lords and Commons the horrors of this monster evil?
I own myself wholly unable to explain this glaring in-
consistency. Charity—nay justice,—will not allow me to attribute it to a want of moral principle, for some of those who have taken part in this movement are foremost in many good works. Neither can I attribute it to want of understanding, as if this beastly profanation and drunkenness of the million, every Sunday in the year, were not, to say the least, as bad and vitiating as the public assemblage of the thousands who would flock to Sydenham to gaze on its wonders, even admitting they betook themselves to its places of refreshment, to be there exposed to temptations; though I am thoroughly convinced that the liability to excess on such occasions would be greatly less than what is felt by those who visit the dram shop on the Sabbath under ordinary circumstances. Let me not be misunderstood.

I hold the sanctity of the Christian Sabbath with as firm a grasp as any man. I believe its abandonment would be, in every point of view, the source of social and moral ruin to our land, and I believe the working classes would be the chief sufferers from its violation. But here is my wonder, that those who have been so earnest against that violation in one shape, display, in general, no proportionate zeal in reference to the profanation upon a larger scale, and in more deadly and diabolic form.

We see a grand legislative experiment at work in the State of Maine, in North America. There the manufacture and sale of intoxicating liquors have been rendered wholly illegal, and the result of the enactment has been such in the suppression of crime and poverty as to call forth the vigorous efforts of other States to obtain a similar decree from their legislative bodies. Philadelphia has presented a memorial to that effect to the Senate and House of Representatives of Pennsylvania, and the Empire state, New York, is in movement upon the subject. In the latter, as we learn, the ladies have taken the initiative; and who have been greater sufferers from the vice of drunkenness than the wives and mothers of Britain and America? A petition, signed by 28,000 women, has been presented to the Legislature of New York, to seek the establishment of the Maine Law; and if that fail, they mean to present another with 500,000 female signatures. I might fill pages with the proofs of the delightful change which has been wrought by this law. Let the following facts stand as a sample and symbol of the whole. "When the Maine law passed, Portland was meditating a new alms-house (at a cost of 20,000 dollars) and a new jail; but under the operation of that law they are found unnecessary, the present buildings being ample for twice her present population, so long as that law shall be maintained, although some clandestine liquor-selling is still persisted in." And it is worthy of notice that little or no individual loss has been sustained by capitalists through this salutary enactment, which has put such a new face upon society. Nor have the medical men of Maine filled their purses in consequence of the sad deterioration of the public health. The absurdity of the plea of utility as to health and strength has been exploded for ever by the first medical and scientific authorities on both sides of the Atlantic, and deserves to be henceforth treated as hallucination or pretence. I refer, of course, to the use of alcoholic liquors as a beverage, for I do not question that there may be cases where, in the hands of a medical practitioner, they will be found beneficial and necessary.

I earnestly wish, Sir, that we, as a nation, were prepared to imitate the conduct of these American States, and to move for the total abolition of the law which licenses the manufacture and sale of intoxicating drinks; a thing which might be accomplished without serious injury, I should hope, to those who have embarked in the business. But, I fear, the time for such a demonstration has not yet arrived. Should not, however, the strong right arm of our Christianity be put forth to abolish the Sabbath traffic, at least, in strong drinks? The interference of the Legislature is, I believe, indispensable in this direction, before our local authorities, however well disposed, can effect any very great or decided change. And to prove the happy results...
which would universally flow from such a measure, it is only necessary to refer to those places in England and in Scotland where, through local influence, the system has been even partially tried. Immorality and irreligion, in all their forms, have proportionately diminished; and the Sabbath, which before was the special period of debauchery and crime, has become in some degree what it was designed by God to be, a blessing, and the source of blessings, to the community.

So far, I have spoken of legislative and magisterial interference, and of that species of general action which is necessary in order to secure the due and adequate exertion of such authority in the suppression or abridgment of the evil. Great stress must be laid upon the power and option of our Magistrates, both in the withdrawal of licenses where they are abused and prostituted to illegal purposes, and in withholding them where the necessary conditions prescribed by the law do not exist and where there is no clear necessity, even, according to the common notions, for their multiplication. And there is, in the nature and extent of this fearful national vice, especially as it appropriates to its orgies the day of sacred rest, enough, and more than enough, to constitute the ground of one of the strongest and most cogent appeals which a Christian people ever presented to a professedly Christian Legislature.

But there is another order of effort to which I look with great confidence in the accomplishment of temperance reform. The Total Abstinence movement has become a great fact, and the man who would seek to decry its essential principles would only expose himself to pity or contempt. Its trophies are to be found in every city and town, and in almost every village and hamlet of the empire, and thousands upon thousands have lifted their united testimony on its behalf. At first it had to contend with many difficulties, both from within and from without. A kind of advocacy, not always the most judicious, was employed by some of its friends, and this, aided by the prepossessions of a party who had fulfilled their mission, and whom it had come to displace, formed a powerful obstacle to its progress. But the public are, generally, in the end, just to merit, and the Society now numbers among its supporters and patrons many of the most illustrious Senators and professional and scientific men in the United Kingdom. Lord John Russell has said “It is the common and universal cause of all religion and all morality”—and the Earl Stanhope, the Earl of Arundel and Surrey, the Marquis of Westminster, and a host of others, some from the actual experience of its benefits, and others from the observation of its happy results, have followed in the same track of eulogy. I mention this, not because even such distinguished names were required to give lustre to so good a cause—one consecrated by the highest and purest benevolence—but in consideration of the weakness of those who seem to think nothing deserving of favour until it can number among its adherents the titled and the great.

I will not wait formally to argue the fundamental principles of this Institution. It has a Christian basis impregnable to the assaults of its foes. It is enough to say, that the only safety of the drunkard lies in the total abandonment of the practice of drinking, to tamper with which is to succumb and perish. And if the power of confederacy and public opinion is to be brought to bear upon the victims of intemperance, it must be by the embodiment of the same spirit of self-denial which we require them to display. It is purely absurd to suppose, that the poor will abandon the use of ardent spirits through the exhortation of those who continue to drink wines, and it is equally absurd to imagine they can be taught the lesson of moderation by any regimen which can be brought into operation by such self-indulgent philanthropists. Seeing then, that if any effective Association is to be formed for the overthrow of this vice, it must be founded upon the total abstinence principle, the only questions in the path of the true Christian patriot are, am I violating any law of God by the adoption of such a principle, and if not, am I not bound by the precepts and spirit of religion to forego
every indulgence, and to practice, if necessary, the most rigid self-denial, if thereby I may aid the great and sacred cause of national morality and social weal. It does not appear to me a matter of mere indifference to those who profess to seek the happiness and regeneration of their species, whether they will adopt this principle or not. If the use of intoxicating liquors be a duty, then no abuse of them on the part of others can affect that imperative obligation; but if not, then the prevalent abuse of them, coupled with the well-known fact of the power of example, appears to create a positive obligation to join the ranks of those who are helping forward the emancipation of the slaves of intemperance, and who are doing something more, and perhaps better—namely, permeating society with just views and sentiments upon this whole question with which our national progress and religious well-being are so intimately associated.

What we have chiefly to complain of is the apathy of the vast majority of those who might seem to be deeply interested in the success of this institution—the Ministers of Christianity. Were they to enter into the cause with their whole heart, it would soon receive an impulse which could not fail to bear it onward to the place that it is entitled to occupy among the very chief agencies of social and moral advancement, belonging to the present age. To this source we are led to attribute largely the prosperity of the Society on the transatlantic shores. To such an extent have the Ministers of religion there ceased to use intoxicating liquors, that one may travel for months through the States without meeting with such an article at the table of any sustaining this character. Who can help perceiving the powerful effect likely to be produced by such an example? We seem to forget that moderate drinking (the parent and precursor of immoderate) is rendered respectable, not by the practice of those who have no character to maintain, but of those who have. The more elevated, either in rank or profession, the parties who abjure the use of this dangerous beverage, the more extensive and profound, of course, the impression which is created. The King and Queen of Sweden, in the midst of a grand assembly lately held in Stockholm, declared their adhesion to the principles of total abstinence; and this, as we might expect, has sent a powerful wave of influence through every grade of society in the realm, and is likely to render the use of strong drinks a thing banned and interdicted in all the circles of fashion throughout that land. A similar testimony from the palace of our beloved sovereign would do more to dry up this fountain of our national miseries than any other conceivable measure. But we all know the chief obstacles which prevent those in high places from adopting a course like this. In addition to the force of long-established usage, the great tyrant of the world, our Government derives too large a share of its revenues from this quarter, to relinquish, by any act of its own, so profitable a mine, a very El Dorado, a California of gold. But if, notwithstanding the lights and influences of Christianity, other and higher considerations could be overlooked, we may be fully convinced that no country can be long benefited in its exchequer, but the very reverse, by funds derived from the social degradation of the people, nor can any maxim boast of truer wisdom and profundity than that uttered by, I believe, an American Statesman, “what is morally wrong can never be politically right.”

I perceive that some of the Christian Ministers of Belfast are taking an active part in the progress of Temperance Reform; and the reports of the Society exhibit the growth of the cause in this town and neighbourhood. Yet, side by side with this, there can be little doubt that the demand for intoxicating drinks has been rather on the increase of late. The increase of population may, in part, explain this, but the chief cause will be found in the fatal facility which exists in regard to the system of licensing; and no question, if the moral influence of the Abstinence Society were withdrawn, the state of things would be far more deplorable. During the year 1851, 4,000 persons at-
tended the regular weekly meetings of the central Institution, and 400 voluntarily entered into fellowship. A system of domiciliary visitation, too, was adopted by the Committee of the Institution, which cannot fail, if continued, to be productive of incalculable good in maintaining the fidelity of those who have taken the pledge, and of inducing many others, the most abandoned of our lanes and alleys, to unite themselves to a Society so earnest and persevering in its work of mercy. Among many places, this neighbourhood is greatly indebted to that indefatigable and benevolent lady, Mrs. Carlisle, of Dublin, who shared largely in the noble exertions of Elizabeth Fry, and who, in the Autumn of her life, still continues to display the energy and zeal by which her Spring time and Summer were distinguished. With a just appreciation of the evils of drunkenness, she has devoted herself to the promotion of total abstinence principles, and her recent visit to Belfast was productive of great benefit in the revival and extension of these, both here and throughout a wide circle around. It may serve to shew what can be achieved even by one individual, when fully devoted to the work, to remark that this venerable lady was the means, during the Summer of 1851, of adding 3,000 names to the rolls of the Institution. And who can calculate the amount of blessedness, both temporal and eternal, which will spring from that Summer tour?

Many of us, to say the least, equally responsible, who are sitting supinely in the indulgence of ease and pleasure, while this tide of sensuality is rolling its dark and deadly waters through the length and breadth of the land, may well blush when we trace the self-denying and untiring exertions of this excellent lady, who, even in advanced age, still retains the dews of her youth.

What a noble field of usefulness, and, therefore, of true glory, is here open to the women of Belfast, among whom there are not a few who are qualified by natural endowments and lofty principle to walk in the footsteps of this devoted female. My former letters sought to excite some interest on behalf of that miserable class of creatures who, wearing the form of women, have sunk below the rank of beasts. I have no means of ascertaining the probable number of such in our town and suburbs, but that it is great, cannot be questioned by any one who penetrates the neighbourhoods they inhabit, or walks the streets at night. What is to be done to reclaim the guilty, and to protect those still innocent in our youthful female population, who are exposed to the allurements of the seducer and the temptations of profligacy? The former part of the question is most difficult of solution; the latter stands closely connected with my present subject. Who can doubt that public-houses and dram-drinking are among the most prolific causes of the fall of many, who, otherwise, could never be enticed by the most wily and diabolical arts, to forget all that is due to the decencies and honour of female character and reputation? Here, then, as well as in the fearful havoc wrought by intemperance on the condition of wives and mothers, is the foundation of a special plea for the exertions of those females, who, by circumstances, education, and religious influence, are placed above the sphere of temptation themselves, and at the same time, are thus particularly qualified to extend a helping hand to aid their less fortunate sisters in the lower walks of life. In no way can they more effectually promote the cause of female virtue (and, therefore, of social and moral well-being at large) than by taking an active and decided part in the furtherance of the Institution to which my present remarks are devoted.

And now, Sir, as to the future of the Total Abstinence Society in Belfast and elsewhere, it is not to be supposed, that, having passed through its period of probation, and reached its present position, it is likely to yield to any hostile influences which may hereafter be brought to bear upon it. It has become, despite all the evil report it has had to endure, a recognised power, and it is all the stronger and better for the battle by which it has gained its commanding influence. The question is, will the
Christian Church cordially espouse its interests, or continue to look at it with coldness, if not distrust; and will the religious guides of the community, more especially, take the place which belongs to them in this crusade against intemperance and vice; or shall we continue to witness the gross inconsistency of religious profession, and even official place in the Church, combined with the vending of what leads to the greatest curse that now rests upon social life in these Islands? We may be well assured, that if those who occupy the situation of the leaders of society will not very speedily take a different stand in this respect from what they have hitherto (or at least the vast majority of them) done, they will find themselves thrust aside by another class of men created by the special necessities of the times, and embodying those principles which must find utterance and form in the workings of our modern philanthropy. It were well to study the signs of the times, and to help onward, instead of seeking to retard, or even to baffle, those developments for good by which our age is characterized. Our town is studded thick, on every hand, with shrines more or less capacious and costly, dedicated to the basest demon-god known in either ancient or modern times. His infernal rites and libations never cease. Even the Sabbath knows no respite to them; on the contrary, they are then practised with tenfold zeal and devotion, until, like the worshippers of Baal, the devotees inflict upon themselves, in the height of their frenzy, wounds and death. Society is not safe amid these infuriated and imbruted beings, and we are compelled to build jails and bridewells to shut them up, that we may preserve our property and sleep in peace in our homes. And yet our paternal Government thinks it meet to sanction these temples of sensuality and hotbeds of crime, and the Christian public closes its eye lest the glare of the iniquity might disturb its calm meditations, or lest it should make the unwelcome discovery that it is itself contributing to the fearful pest, the wide-spread abomination. How long is this apathy to last; and when the awakening comes—as come it must—will it be when judgment has commenced at the House of God? Let the friends of total abstinence advance more vigorously, as becomes those who are enlisted in one of the greatest and best enterprises of the age, and sooner or later their efforts will be crowned with an abundant reward.

I have just learned that, in Scotland, five general agents are constantly employed by the Temperance League, besides the local agents at work in the important towns of the kingdom, and these have distributed several millions of pages of temperance tracts during the last year. In addition to this, the Scottish League supports various able periodicals devoted to the cause. Never, till the press, the pulpit, and the platform, with a well-directed agency, are brought to bear on the subject, can we anticipate complete success.—Is it not discreditable that in Ireland sufficient zeal does not exist to support either periodical or agent in connexion with this all-important object?

Belfast, March 21, 1853.

P. S.—May, 1853. I rejoice to be able to state that, since the preceding letters were first published, a measure has been originated which is calculated to effect much good, if it be only prosecuted with vigour, regularity, and perseverance. I refer to the appointment of local inspectors, whose duty it is to visit the public-houses and to carry out the provisions of the law as far as it goes, especially in relation to Saturday nights and Sabbath days. In this respect decided improvement is already visible, though any relaxation in the vigilance of the inspectors is sure to be followed by a fearful reaction. All honour, too, to those magistrates who are using their official power for the partial suppression of the evil. Its entire or even general extirpation is an event far distant, I fear, but never to be lost sight of by the Christian Patriot.
LETTER XII.

Sir,—The man who overlooks the religious element of human nature can lay little claim to the possession of a sound philosophy, to say nothing of that purer wisdom which descends from a loftier sphere. A species of infidelity, at one time, prevailed amongst us (and it has not yet wholly disappeared), which sought to ignore altogether the spiritual qualities, the higher aspirations of the soul, reducing man to the rank of an animal, distinguished from his fellows of the fields and woods only by a better organization and superior sagacity, but like them realizing his entire destiny in the material enjoyments of the passing hour—in the gratification of his instincts—in short, in the possession of such forms of good as fall within the range of the seen and temporal. In perfect harmony with the spirit of this system, its advocates pointed to the grave as a place of eternal sleep, and aimed at the extinction of all the hopes of immortality, of all the lights of both natural and revealed religion. But still, these lights, like the great luminaries of Heaven, shone on, looking calmly down from their eminence, and through all the mists of false speculation they continued to shed their radiance into the great, deep heart of humanity. A shallow perverted logic might perplex the understanding by its sophistries, and “darken counsel by words without knowledge,” but the institutions of the soul remained true to the supernatural and divine, and though not always able to expose the fallacy of certain arguments, men, nevertheless, felt and believed—felt and believed in that more elevated region of their being where faith and feeling blend in one. The history of human opinions shows how utterly impossible it is to uproot those fundamental principles which ally the soul to God. To attempt it is suicidal, but happily the attempt is doomed to eternal failure; a fact which is now generally acknowledged even by those who pre-

sume to treat Christianity as only a myth, a delusion, or at best a worn-out system, a “development” almost effete, and about to give place to some higher form of social and spiritual life.

That wonderfully gifted man, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, with all his errors, did more, perhaps, than any modern thinker to breathe a better spirit into our literature, and to crush, if not wholly to destroy, that low reptile infidelity which had been seeking to coil itself into the very heart of British society. All pure genius, even when dealing with matter, is anti-materialistic in its tendencies; but his was pre-eminently fitted for the task of withering and exploding those debasing views to which a sensational philosophy had given birth. And whatever may be said of recent German speculations, there can be no doubt in the mind of any one who has taken the pains to obtain some acquaintance with this extraordinary phase of human thought, that with all its strange aberrations, it has contributed, and is contributing, both on the Continent, and in Britain, to the utter prostration of those systems which denied the moral dignity of man, and dwarfed him to the rank and stature of a mere animal mechanism.

I am not unmindful, indeed, of the new forms of evil to which a pure Christianity is exposed from the inroads of that mode of thinking which we term “transcendentalism,” and which Carlyle, Emerson, and others of less note are rendering somewhat familiar and popular among the Anglo-Saxons and others, on both sides of the Atlantic. It is impossible not to see, too, that our religious systems, so long stereotyped in “creeds” and “confessions,” are destined to pass through a severe ordeal, one that cannot be evaded by the ostrich wisdom of hiding our head from the fast-coming calamity, nor yet by pouring contempt upon the foe—a contempt oftener the result of ignorance than of enlightened courage. I fear that the religious convictions of this age are far from powerful, and in the absence of the living energies, the mere forms and logical utterances of our faith will avail us little in the coming
struggle. He must be miserably deficient in ecclesiastical lore, or strangely blinded by the idols of party and sect, who imagines that the Church will find her safeguard and anchor amid the storm in orthodox formularies however sound, in "subscriptions" and "tests," which, however valuable in certain circumstances, are often in greatest request just when the vital and essential elements of piety are declining in the soul or altogether dead; and which, pertaining at best, to a cool, reflective stage in the history of the Church, and not to the era of her "first love," constitute no guarantee whatever that those who are most ready to submit to them really possess one germ of that divine life which words cannot convey, nor logic teach, and which, when directly felt and enjoyed, spontaneously seeks expression in far other forms than those of abstract dogmas and definitions. Upon a consideration of the subordinate and secondary value of "Creeds" and "Declarations of faith and order," I do not enter. They doubtless have their place, but they will be found like stubble before the fire, if relied upon in the period of approaching conflict. And, Sir, I speak with less hesitation upon this subject, because the Church of which I am a member avows doctrinal principles which are deemed throughout Christendom as among the purest types of "Orthodoxy;" but woe must be ours, if such are allowed to become a substitute for the profound convictions and feelings which spring from the direct and immediate intercourse of the soul with God. Upon these, far more than upon those, depend our safety in the day of battle, the prosperity of true religion, and the advancement of the kingdom of Christ on earth.

I have referred to the new forms of antagonism which are coming upon us from Germany. But one thing is clear, that, however dangerous, they are of a nature loftier and more ethereal than those which pertained to the current forms of infidelity at the close of the last and the beginning of the present century. By some, they may be regarded as more dangerous on this account; but I should be disposed to doubt the soundness of the conclusion. At all events, they are less calculated to spread among the less speculative, that is, by far the larger portion of the community. And a believer in the Divine origin of Christianity, and in the certainty of human progress, may be permitted to hope that, while Kant and his successors have thrown open vistas and aspects of our nature, such as Hume, Paine, and others of their school, had neither eyes to see nor heart to apprehend, their followers will eventually be compelled to confess that the religion of the New Testament, without anything of the parade of system, practically anticipates all that is true and really sublime in their views, and that it alone can meet the conditions, and, for all valuable purposes, settle the problems, which their philosophy may, perhaps, be knowing enough to suggest, but certainly not wise or strong enough to satisfy or solve. Meanwhile, some are so sanguine as to believe, that the higher philosophic thinking of the age is approaching in several directions to its religious thinking, and by a process and path which could little have been surmised, converging towards that point where it will be found that the loftiest reason and the purest faith not only blend and harmonize, but are, in reality, corresponding hemispheres of one and the same great orb of universal truth. In Scriptural investigations, the mythic theory has already demolished the rationalistic, while it would not be difficult to point to several writers of eminence who have demolished both, leaving Paulus and Strauss alike, without the shadow of argument for their presumptuous hypotheses. In our own country, the "Phases of Faith," the "Nemesis of Faith," and other books of the same order, have called forth the "Eclipse of Faith," a work likely to exert a most powerful and salutary influence, especially upon the aspiring mind of the rising generation. Even the grossest errors of the leading metaphysical systems of the Continent not only admit but demand the existence of a lofty spiritual nature in man—their whole tendency being, not to depress or deny, but, in a certain sense, unduly to exalt the higher attributes of our being; while in the profounder and truer methods which the German, acting
upon the Scottish school, is creating and maturing (as seen, for example, in the writings of Sir W. Hamilton), we have an assurance that the mental culture of our leading thinkers in these lands and times is becoming more harmonious with those views of the intrinsic greatness of human nature which best accord with the spirit of the Christian religion, as well as reason to hope, that the result of this intercommunity with Continental metaphysicians, though attended by immediate danger, will issue finally in a sounder philosophy, and the more extended diffusion, among guiding minds, of principles, to say the least, not unfavourable to the Christian faith.

The bearing of these remarks upon the spiritual and moral reformation of all classes, and especially of the poor, is not very difficult to be traced. The measure of the religious life and vigour of any community, and not the mere accuracy of its doctrines, will always determine the amount of its zeal on behalf particularly of the neglected and destitute portions of the populace; and the prevailing character of what is styled the philosophic thought of any generation will always powerfully influence for good or evil the mind of the Church, and colour largely both the dogmatic and practical Christianity of the times. If any one doubt the former of these statements, he may find ample confirmation of it in the fact, that from the very first introduction of our faith—when "to the poor the Gospel was preached"—down through all the centuries, the epochs of simple, powerful feeling, when little inclination existed for theological discussion, have been those in which the most direct efforts have been made to Christianize the masses. And if any one be disposed to question the latter of these statements, I must request him to study the influence of the Oriental and Platonic philosophy upon the earlier developments of theology, of the Aristotelian upon its subsequent form during the scholastic ages, and of the Baconian method, both in its advantages and defects, in times less remote from the present. It is easy to allege, that Christianity, standing by itself as a Divine thing, is to be expounded and embodied wholly apart from any reigning system of human wisdom; but this has never been the case, and it would not be difficult to show that it never can. There are subtle relations which it is impossible to escape, and so, our modes of Scriptural investigation, and forms of theologic thought and action will ever largely depend upon the current system, the intellectual "organum" of the age.

It is a triumph, then, to find Science brought thus far to unite with Divine Revelation, and by demonstrating the exalted powers and properties of the soul, altogether apart from the accidents of external rank and circumstance, at least indirectly contributing to that order of effort which in these lands is now everywhere beginning to be put forth for the spiritual and moral elevation of the lower and long-neglected portions of society. We can thus, even on philosophic grounds, show cause for such exertion, and can no longer be stigmatized by any who would make the least pretensions to an enlightened and liberal education, as fanatics, for any measure of zeal we may display, in this service of Christian philanthropy. Differences of opinion may, indeed, and do exist, as to the manner in which this duty should be discharged, but there is no question as to the imperative obligation itself, at least among those whose opinion is of any weight. Accordingly, within the last few years, a growing and more intense desire has been evinced throughout Great Britain, to bring religious influence to bear more extensively upon the masses of the community. To the discredit of all our Church organizations, the working and lower classes had been allowed to drift away in a great measure beyond the reach of our Christian institutions, and in England at least, they have become, to a large extent, the prey of a vulgar, half-reasoning scepticism, partly the result of the old, and in some degree, of the new forms of antagonism to the Gospel. They are sagacious enough to perceive the abuses of religion when it is made the stepping-stone to emolument and power, but not enough to see that amidst all such gross and flagrant perversions, it has a real truth and glory which
not even the worst forms of corruption can destroy. Political circumstances, too, have alienated them from the ministrations of our Churches, and, for the most part, led them to indentify the Clergy of all denominations with those whom they have been pleased to call their enemies and oppressors. This, I believe to be, in general, a false impression, but whether false or true, it exists and operates.

Looking at the existing state of things, I have long felt that we need such another noble outburst of the religious life, such an intense fusion and action of all the spiritual elements of Christianity as distinguished the career of Wesley and Whitfield, to break down completely the barriers which separate us from the million, and to sweep away the mass of prejudice and worldliness which has been long accumulating in that quarter. He who chooses, may style these men enthusiasts (and I am not careful to defend all their actions), but I only wish we had more enthusiasts of the same stamp—men filled with the same lofty spirit of devotion and self-sacrifice—of the same burning zeal—and who, like them, penetrating the artificial disguises of humanity, could look right in upon the grandeur of the soul, and right onward into the awful eternity which lies before it, and could bring true religion into those powerful relations to the degraded and wretched masses of the population which it bore in the hands of its Divine Founder and his immediate followers. "Ragged Kirks" in Scotland, and "Ministries for the poor," and town, and city, and rural "Agencies" in England and Ireland, are all excellent appliances—and if conducted in a broad and Christian spirit, they cannot fail to be productive of much benefit. But our great danger lies in placing undue confidence in the mere machinery we employ, forgetting that, under God, nearly all depends upon the qualifications of the men who are enlisted in this work. There cannot be a grosser error than supposing that any order of agents, provided they only possess an average measure of sense and piety, are good enough for this department of labour. They should be men of the very highest religious endowments and mental capacity. I do not say that a large measure of erudition and scientific knowledge is absolutely requisite, although even these are by no means out of place, if there exist the wisdom to use them aright; but there cannot be too much stress laid upon intellectual discipline and skill, in order to adapt the truth to the faculties of the classes to be awakened, intellectual power to meet the latent or open objections which exist to its reception, and, above all, moral and spiritual force and intensity arising out of the personal and profound experience of Christianity as something more than a doctrine—as a divine life. One must not be deterred by even the certainty of self-condemnation from the utterance of the whole truth on this subject. All sections of the Church are complaining loudly of the want of vital prosperity in the present day; and the reason is not hard to be discovered. If the Ministry of our sanctuaries, or that of our lanes and alleys, is to act as a power, it must be powerful; and this it can be, only in proportion as it is rooted in the source of all power—God.

No one who has honoured my past letters with any attention will charge me with overlooking the lower interests of the humbler classes; but I should be unfaithful, indeed, if I did not here openly avow the solemn conviction, that nothing can for a moment be compared in value and importance with their religious improvement. And by this, I do not, of course, understand proselytism to any sect or party. Such a thing is not to be confounded with moral and spiritual worth any more than the pharisaic tithing of "mint, anise, and cummin" was with the "weightier matters of the law." The great object to be aimed at is the elevation of the ignorant and degraded masses to the possession of those divine principles which form the substance of Christianity, and in order to this, the inculcation of those simple but sublime truths which are so wonderfully adapted to man in every condition, and which, whether made known in the hovel or the palace, are, by the divine blessing, omnipotent to purify all the in-
ternal springs of character, and to new create the whole man. There is a deep and fearful blight, (account for it as we may), resting upon man in every rank of life. This is felt like a leprosy cleaving fast to the spirit. Conscience itself testifies that the relations and movements of the soul towards God are not what they ought to be, while Divine Revelation not only pours a flood of light upon the causes and consequences of this conscious guilt and disorder, but also discloses the means by which the evil may be remedied, and man placed in harmony and friendship with his Creator and Father. It is not unusual to enlist the sympathies of some on behalf of our Home Christian Missions, by referring to the happy results of Scriptural teaching on the social peace and order of the community, and to this there can be no objection, provided the peculiar glory of religion be not eclipsed or sullied by such advocacy. Doubtless, the best police that can be found for any people is that which employs the restraining and elevating force of Christian laws, and which, armed with the might of holy love, descends into the haunts of poverty and wretchedness, to reclaim the guilty and inspire the downcast and degraded with the lofty hopes and sentiments which create a new soul "under the ribs of death." Extinguish Christianity, and human laws and government would soon be stripped of the greater portion of their power to check the progress of crime, and guard the well-being of society. But this is comparatively a very low view of the subject; and the real interests of truth can seldom be served by descending from the elevated position which we are entitled to occupy. If the relations which the soul sustains to the infinite, eternal, and divine, were less real, grand, and palpable, than those which bind it to the human world around, there might be some reason to sink the higher aspect of religion; but the consciousness of every man forms a revelation on this point, which none can dispute or gainsay—one which, to say the least, is as indubitable as any he can have in reference to the claims and interests of the outward and visible scene.

I rejoice then, Sir, in the exalted and just conceptions so prominently set forth in the reports of the Belfast Town Missions. Founded upon those views of man's nature and destiny, which, taught by the Divine Word, all sound reason approves, these institutions, if rightly conducted, are likely to become every year more efficient in their operations. I am not disposed to enter into the distinctive peculiarities of these two Societies. While a lover of visible unity might wish to behold them incorporated, it is not unlikely that the aggregate results are proportionately greater, as it is, than they would be under any other regimen. Each may fill its own sphere and do its own work without rivalry, unless such as religion consecrates. None can look at the summary of their labours for the past year without acknowledging their claims upon public support. Their agents have made, within that period, 34,770 domiciliary visits; 4,211 visits to the sick; and held 2,176 meetings for the reading and exposition of Christian truth, which have been attended by 114,470 individuals.

Beside this, the distribution of Bibles and tracts, the conducting of Sabbath schools and Bible classes for the young, and various other modes of benevolent action, such as relieving the destitute and visiting benevolent institutions, must be taken into account, if we are to form any accurate idea of the immense amount of blessing conferred by these unostentatious but truly Christian Societies; and all this incalculable good has been done at a cost of only £684., including the entire expenses of both these organizations for the whole year—a pregnant suggestion this for even social economists! Of course this system of visitation and instruction has, for the most part, oscillated within fixed and definite limits; for, although these agencies extend themselves locally over the town and suburbs, it is not to be supposed they can have overtaken and embraced more than a mere fraction of the immense mass of spiritual ignorance and destitution comprised within these boundaries. I know that, apart from the missions now referred to, Curates, Scripture readers, and other agencies are
doing their utmost in the work of spiritual reformation; while there are those among the Protestant Clergy of all denominations who have not forgotten, amidst their multifarious engagements, the peculiar claims of the poor and perishing classes. But depths yet remain to be explored, dark as midnight and noisome as the lazarette. There are still within the circuit of this professedly Christian town, thousands upon thousands, as grossly wanting in religious knowledge as though they dwelt in the centre of barbarism;—or, if they know anything of the name of Christ, it is chiefly as a convenient name to curse with. These facts, however incredible they may seem, are forced upon conviction by the testimony of those who are engaged, from day to day, in piercing the moral gloom which rests upon our lower population. They have lifted up, at least in part, the veil which conceals the horrid features of animalism, brutality, stolid apathy, blasphemy, drunkenness, and spiritual ignorance prevailing among the dwellers in our back streets and courts, and it is impossible to gaze upon the picture without a shudder and recoil of the whole soul.

The sanitary and social reformer has a most important mission to these haunts of wretchedness; but the grand lever, after all, of genuine and permanent elevation is that supplied in the Word of the Gospel. This is power divine; and enthroned within the soul, it diffuses its mighty influence through the whole economy of the habits and life, making the external a fit symbol of the internal, and revealing its own sovereign efficacy in relation to both worlds.

I am not aware, that any specifically new description of agency can be devised to effect the great object we have in view; but the wider extension of existing forms of agency—more ample means to make it commensurate with the field it should occupy, and in connexion with this, a more profound interest on the part of the several Churches in the prosperity of the effort—these are to be earnestly desired. It is the work of the Churches as such, with their spiritual officers, and nothing can exempt them from the obligation of personal and immediate concern. They may and must of necessity employ men who can devote their time and talents to the labour, but these are their hands and representatives, and need to be stimulated and encouraged, as well as duly supported, by the parties who have delegated them to this work of evangelization.

It cannot be overlooked, that the announcement of a public meeting to promote the extension of Christianity in foreign lands will attract a multitude of persons, while it is next to impossible to secure a large attendance when the cause of home and city missions is to be advocated. We listen with breathless attention to the description of social and religious savagery as it exists in distant climes, but turn away with indifference from the recital of deeds of darkness and of demoralization which are occurring daily and hourly at our very doors. It would not be difficult to explain the causes of this inconsistency, for the phenomenon belongs to a class with which we are too familiar in the history of the human mind. But it is of greater importance to insist upon the fact, that such a state of things finds no sanction in the records of Christianity. Its laws are in harmony with the deep original laws of our nature. It came not to destroy but to save the grand fundamental principles of humanity. The Apostles were commanded to commence their ministry in Jerusalem and among their fellow-countrymen. Their patriotism was not to be subverted, but sublimated and purified, and thus taken up into that new life which had descended upon them from above. The calumnies then, so often flung upon our religion by such men as Volney and Voltaire—that it undermines the private and social affections, and produces an abortive desire for some distant and shadowy good, while it overlooks immediate and palpable relations and duties—are false, although it is very possible that the conduct of its professors has at times given but too much ground for such assertions. It is refuted, however, by the very first page of ecclesiastical history, and it will ever be refuted by the practical developments of a sound and healthy Church. As Irishmen, our first efforts should
be directed to the spiritual elevation of our own land—and on the same principle, the town of our habitation possesses the strongest claim of all. If Christianity is cosmopolitan, which I joyfully admit, it is also patriotic; and while the circles of our holy philanthropy are to widen and expand until they embrace the whole world, the first circles should unquestionably enclose those whom Divine Providence has specially committed to our sympathy and care.

It will be seen that I have avoided, in these letters, any discussion which might be calculated to stir up strife among the different sections of the professing Church. The union of all parties, in the pursuit of social and moral reform, is to be earnestly sought; and wherein we differ on spiritual subjects, it should be the aim of each and all to "speak the truth in love," remembering that "the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." These are principles, which have, I fear, been too often lost sight of in the controversies of this land.

Finally, I am not insensible to the political evils which have long afflicted our native Country, but of this I feel convinced, that if all these were fully redressed, and her temporal condition all we could desire, still would she stand in need of a pure, living, apostolic Christianity to render her truly prosperous and happy. It is this alone which can allay the fierce passions that have long agitated her bosom, and rendered her the scene of party strife and hate. It is this alone which can pour upon her eye the glories of immortality, and so revolutionize her whole condition that the beauty and magnificence of her natural, may find a fitting parallel in the loftier and lovelier features of her moral and spiritual scenery. And he is among the best friends of his country who seeks with earnestness to lift her working and poorer population out of the dust, to invest them with the immunities, and to instil into their hearts the principles, of that faith, which comes from God, and which leads back to the source from which it issues.

_Belfast, April 6, 1853._