

in the matter, we would place the appointment of the Committee in the Government for the time being, holding it responsible for the fitness of those appointed. The utter absurdity of the old system of making Ministers members of such boards, already busy enough as they must be, is obvious.

Carlyle says, "The true university of these days is a library;" true anyhow, true ten thousand times over in a youthful democratic country like ours, whose young men who will govern the land and make the laws ten years hence are, perhaps, serving behind the counter to-day. Let those now entrusted with the affairs of the country and the interests of society look to this. Let them give those young men the only practical means of qualifying themselves for great and solemn trust—fraught either with benefit or danger, according to the discharge of them, to the community at large. Let them place the appliances ready for those whose circumstances and fortune in life debar them from the privileges of a university, nearer at hand, in more senses than one, than the big toy in carved stone that, as in mockery and derision of its lofty object, is perched away at Grosé Farm, away from everybody but those who, like Thurtell's "respectable man," can drive thither in "a gig," or can spare the hours snatched from earning daily bread to trudge backwards and forwards from the main quarter of the city to the *embouchure* of the Parramatta Road.

THE SOCIAL EVIL (1859).

A PUBLIC meeting was some time since held in the metropolis for the purpose of considering the best means of dealing with that most wretched and hopeless of all questions, the name of which, in the periphrasis of the publicists, stands at the head of this column.

A great deal was said on the occasion, a good deal of sympathy, and much spasmodic speechifying. But nothing pertinent was suggested, and nothing practical was done. A great many of the gentlemen present were very admirable in their way, very admirable indeed; but scarcely, we suspect,

the sort of men to grapple with this question. It was a matter of pitch, and they had gloves on, very white ones, too.

It may do excellently well for a number of reverend ministers of the Gospel to appear upon a platform and pronounce on the horrors and the woes, the curse and the corruption, of body and soul in this lowermost abyss of human misery. But that affair of preaching has been going on for centuries; and on this peculiar question, in the hearts of those most concerned, there lurks a grim satiric sense of differences between the world's talk upon the subject and the world's practice. And there is no use burking or shirking the matter. There are terrible psychologic difficulties surrounding the question which none other, not even drunkenness itself, presents, and which homilies and advices by themselves, even from the lips of angels, will not affect. All the preaching since the days of Him who dealt mercy to the woman taken in adultery never brought back an erring female to the forsaken path.

Preaching on the subject is simply preaching, whether the **thing** be worked up in the best infernal patterns and coloured with brimstone, or full of sympathies and sentiment and graceful mournings for what is holiest and loveliest in woman. **Very** few of the preachers know the pathology of the frightful disease they pretend to treat. They do not, and for obvious reasons they ought not. Their prescriptions for the evil are, therefore, in the main, practically idle. Whoever attempts to deal with it must know something about it practically and thoroughly, dark though the price which was paid for the knowledge, bitter as the curriculum of the loathsome study may have been.

There are two points of view from which the question is to be regarded,—as it concerns the individual, and as it affects society at large. The latter point, the only one upon which legislation and the exercise of statesmanship is demanded, because the only one upon which they can be practically effective, has been pushed out of sight and persistently ignored in British communities. Unfathomable and immeasurable in some directions is the cant and hypocrisy of English social opinion and practice. Horrors such as the cities of antiquity

and the vastest abodes of barbarians presented scarcely a shadow of, are allowed to fester and rot in English society under the pure eyes of cherished and guarded English maidenhood, simply because English masculine ears must not hearken, even in the service of God and God's most forlorn creatures, to anything that savours of what is "naughty." And then, of a surety, honourable members of the legislature, virtuous husbands and fathers, keep no "mistresses," and only sneak under cover of night into the verandahs of a brothel.

This goes on in this eminently practical nineteenth century, in supremely practical British communities, where practical men look upon the economics of public health, sanitary legislation, as the most practical of things. Ventilation in public lodging houses must be provided for by special Acts of Parliament, and fifty other matters which range themselves round the salubrities of sinks and sewers. But on matters that far more deeply and insidiously affect the health of the people, there the national Mr. Pecksniff, and the national Mrs. Grundy, and the Decencies of Society, all *dimanché* and in white neckcloths, meet one inexorable and impracticable, "a melancholy train." God help us; and the father with eyes too arid in their hopeless woe for a tear to wet the sockets, gazes on his son dropping piecemeal before him, a mass of hideous syphilitic carrion, the victim of some error in the climacteric of youthful passions which the Decencies of Society never committed in the calends of their youthful adolescence.

On the pavement beside the house, walks with those fresh cheeks and the full eyes of childhood, which Jeremy Taylor so touchingly speaks of, offspring cursed with the curse which will bask and warm its hateful life in the blood of the unborn, the children of those doomed little ones. The pretty little maiden but three months ago in honest service is "on the town" to-night, where she never would have been had she not seen Betsy This, or Nelly That, flaunting in King Street, in hat and mantle, satin flounces, and lavender boots, doing what the law seemed to take no notice of, and everybody looked at as a matter of course. Law, this, which with all

the disgrace of police-office inquisition, and the heavy checks of large pecuniary penalties, and gaol confinements in default, meanwhile puts down the slightest approach to irregularity in the sale of spirituous liquors. British, and, therefore, Colonial law has, by the way, a logic of its own on this head. The wretched woman shall expose herself as ware for sale in the streets, nay, call attention by some horrible process of devices akin to those of the hawker and the chapman, and the law does nothing, and has power to do nothing the while. But when the interests of public decency and the open scandal of the thing cease, and the abomination of it is about to be completed in secret, then the constabulary impersonation of the law dives into "houses of ill fame," then the majesty of Quarter Sessions is invoked, and the culprits punished much in a Spartan fashion, not for anything done, but for being found in places which the law regards as objectionable. How the creatures who ply their wretched trade on the streets try to reconcile this obvious contradiction in the regulation of things, if they do at all, we know not. Their opinion upon legislation and legislators, roughly and readily in their own simple and unthinking way arrived at, gives a practical result perhaps not very different from that of persons who have set themselves the task of watching parliamentary men and parliamentary proceedings.

"Hideous disorders," says one deeply learned in the dismal statistics of this province of human shame, Dr. McCormack, "attend the unlawful commerce of the sexes, blighting the infant unborn, inducing inevitable ruin and decay. The skin, throat, bones even do not escape. The beautiful structure of the eye is doubly implicated, first in syphilitic iritis, and then in gonorrhœal ophthalmia, that wretched malady which, as I conceive, has housed itself in Egypt, and infects our race. These diseases are at once acute and chronic, nor does one attack yield exemption from another. The evil is urgent, the very remedy is dire. Medical writings are rife with details only to be surpassed by the yet more horrible reality. Very children even are found in the Lock hospitals of great cities, while millions, it may be affirmed, are lavished on the wages

of debauchery. In Edinburgh, he counts one-fourth of the annual mortality as amongst the female victims to prostitution, this so brutish vice and utter violation of the loftier destinies of our kind. Brothels, and low lodging-houses, if possible worse, subsist in all our larger towns, and there prostitution and syphilis, the sin and the soil, go hand-in-hand. Forty thousand illegitimate children, according to the Registrar, are yearly born in England, besides those who perish, sometimes mother and child together, through the execrable arts of hired aborters. In London alone, two thousand women, it is said, annually replace those who die in their sin and misery."

Something more must be done, then, than preaching and making speeches. Upon this matter, as on all others which prejudice or are likely to prejudice its interests, society has a right to legislate on the grounds of self-protection. The affair from this point of view is simply one of police *correction-elle*. As things in this world just now are, and are long likely to be, it makes one's heart ache to think how long, to put down prostitution is impossible. But it is not impossible to keep it in check, and impose upon it those regulations which will protect the morally untainted from the terrible scandals and temptations hourly paraded in public places before the eye, which will to some extent guard public decency, and while doing this, act as a discouragement to the wretched trade itself, by denying it the open facilities that at present obtain for pursuing it with success. One step, simple, summary, and easily taken, would, we think, in the course of a year revolutionise the abomination, in some of its most public and, therefore, most dangerous characteristics. Remove by law from the thoroughfares and highways all women of abandoned character, or whose demeanour or habit of loitering in the streets makes it fair to believe them abroad for improper purposes, and you will do it is impossible to say how much in the right direction. Without mentioning that portion of King Street adjoining the Prince of Wales's Theatre, or the neighbourhood of the Victoria Hall, there is one spot in this city which for everything that can disgust and demoralise and be a disgrace to a civilized

community, is unparalleled by any locality in the world used as a public promenade,—the walk in Hyde Park. And often as we hear and have heard pretty lavish praise given to our police authorities, we have marvelled, as they were so admirable, with whom the blame of this crying evil lay.

We presume we ought not to be above taking some hints here and there from what French statesmen have thought and done upon this subject, especially as the results are very satisfactory evidences of the wisdom and the benefits involved. An immense amount of vulgar and ribald persiflage is talked in English society upon French police administration in this matter. But all honour, say we, to the brave and enlightened legislation that has dared to cope, for the benefit of society, with this darkest and wildest of all the evils that encompass it. Here are the regulations of the French authorities, and we put it to every sensible and reflecting reader, how much, by even a partial adoption of them, might be checked and diminished the present abominations left to welter and riot in open carnival of debauchery amongst ourselves, with a *nonchalance* on the part of our law makers that cares neither for the prostitute nor the victim :—

"Brothels are suffered, by license, to exist in certain quarters; but at and from the period of their establishment, they are placed under the entire management of a servile yoke of a portion of the police, whose office is to guard *attentas aux mœurs*." What a check this of itself would be on visitants of a certain class, is sufficiently obvious. "Such places are not permitted in the vicinity of a public school or a church, or, indeed, of any public institution whatever. The keeper of the brothel is bound within twenty-four hours to forward to the Prefecture of the Police the name, for the purpose of registration, of every young woman who may seek to reside in the house. Immediately after this formality, it is necessary that the woman should appear before the authorities; she is then cautioned and warned that if she enter on that course of life, she is under the surveillance of the police, and told her name, once entered as *une fille inscrit*, that name must always remain

as a lasting record of her degradation. If her youth be remarkable, she is sent to the Hospital of St. Lazare, where she is employed in needlework ; and if she be from the provinces, her parents or the mayor of her locality are written to for the purpose of interposing to induce her to return home. If she be friendless, she is received into the Hospital of St. Lazare. If this fail, she is then suffered to place her name upon the roll, and her residence is numbered in the books of the prefecture. She is forced to carry with her, and to produce to any person when required, a ticket showing the weekly medical report of her health made by the physician appointed to inspect houses inhabited by persons of her class, and those who dwell with them. Women of the kind are prohibited from wearing showy dresses, and (at Paris) from appearing in the Gardens of the Luxembourg, of the Palais Imperial, or the Tuileries, or other public promenades, and they are not allowed, upon any occasion, to appear at the windows of the houses they inhabit. For a breach of any one of those regulations, the penalty is two months' imprisonment. Those who live quietly in a similar course of life have also the eyes of the law upon them ; even the *fille isolé* is tracked through her course of sin ; and, in fine, upon the French prostitute every indignity that woman can suffer is inflicted by an active and vigilant police." Whether the best interests of society and those of the wretched women themselves are most consulted by English non-legislation or French law, we leave the intelligent reader to judge for himself.

How far some system, which for the female herself would render the walk of infamy an intolerable and odious road, shorn of the glaring riot and excitement which make its fascination and its reckless license, would drive her to some other calling, may not be unworthy of attention. People who, with the very best intentions in the world, talk of voluntary reform in Magdalen and asylums, forget the terrible physical change a course of prostitution makes in women ; and of whatever worth this may be in the individual, it is too fragile and too precarious a matter, as far as society's own interests are concerned, for it to trust to.