Pauperism, its causes and remedies

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PAUPERISM:

ITS CAUSES AND REMEDIES,

BY

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London and New York:
MACMILLAN AND CO.
1871.

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PREFACE.

This book contains the substance of a course of lectures which I delivered in the University of Cambridge, during the October term of 1870, on Pauperism, its Causes and Remedies. For many reasons I found it more convenient not to publish the book in the form of lectures.

I cannot refrain from acknowledging the great assistance I have derived from my wife in preparing these lectures for publication. Not only was the subject of the lectures suggested by her, but she has carefully revised every page, and by pointing out various alterations and improvements has rendered me most valuable aid. I am also much indebted to the youth who has so carefully and patiently acted for me as an amanuensis.

For the convenience of the reader, an alphabetical index is added to the end of the book.

Cambridge, 1871.
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PAUPERISM:
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CHAPTER I.
PAUPERISM, AND THE OLD POOR LAW.

We are accustomed to hear much boasting about the vast wealth of England. We are told that our exports and imports are rapidly increasing; glowing descriptions are given of an Empire upon which the sun never sets, and of a commerce which extends over the world. Our mercantile marine is ever increasing; manufactories are augmenting in number and in magnitude. All the evidences of growing luxury are around us; there are more splendid equipages in the parks and the style of living is each year becoming more sumptuous. This is one side of the picture; and if we could look upon it and close our eyes to other sights, and close our ears to other sounds that are around us, we might fold ourselves in the mantle of self-complacency, and repeat the platitudes so often uttered that nothing can exceed the happiness
and prosperity of England. But let us look on another side of the picture; and what do we then observe? Side by side with this vast wealth, closely contiguous to all this sinful luxury there stalks the fearful spectre of widespread poverty, and of growing pauperism! Visit the great centres of our commerce and trade, and what will be observed? The direst poverty always accompanying the greatest wealth! Any one visiting Manchester or Liverpool, contemplates with wonder the vastness of the manufactories; the range of docks filled with shipping extending over miles; the leading thoroughfares are broad; the shops contain everything which can gratify the tastes of the most wealthy; the merchants often live in princely style, and dispense a splendid hospitality. But within a stone’s throw of these docks, of these manufactories, and of these stately streets there will be found miserable alleys and narrow courts, in which people drag out an existence steeped in a misery and a wretchedness which baffles description. In thousands of cases all the members of a family live in some dark and unwholesome cellar, and no inconsiderable portion of the population of our large towns herd together, father, mother and children, in a single room. Not long since I was conversing with a West-end clergyman, and he was speaking not of Bethnal Green, nor of Seven Dials, but of a street quite within the precincts of luxurious and glittering Belgravia, in which he knew from his personal knowledge that every house had a separate family living in each room. Dr Whitmore, the medical superintendent of Marylebone, in a recent report, states that in his district
there are hundreds of houses with a family in every room; he also says that the number of poor is increasing, and the manner in which they are housed is becoming worse and worse. But if these general descriptions are doubted the same sad tale is only too surely verified by specific facts which the utmost ingenuity cannot explain away. Official returns show that in London there are never less than 125,000 paupers, and that as each winter recurs the number rises to 170,000. There is abundant reason to conclude that a number at least equally large are just on the verge of pauperism; often struggling with admirable resolution to obtain their own livelihood, and frequently suffering far more than is endured by the recipients of parochial relief. But it is not only in our large towns that this wide-spread poverty is to be observed; the condition of the rural population is scarcely more satisfactory. A Royal Commission has lately made a most complete and searching investigation into the condition of those who are employed in agriculture. I shall have frequently to refer to the evidence which they collected. It is sufficient here to state that it was proved beyond all dispute that in a great number of counties these labourers earn only 9s. or 10s. a week; in some districts their children could not grow up in greater ignorance if England had lost her Christianity and her civilization; the houses in which in many cases they are compelled to dwell do not deserve the name of human habitations. A country gentleman would be shunned by his associates if he ventured to stable his horses or to kennel his hounds in such wretched hovels. It is no
palliation, but on the contrary it is an aggravation of such a state of things to be reminded that the soil was never so well cultivated, that more skill and capital are devoted to agriculture, that the value of land is each year increasing, that the competition for farms is keen, and that rents are rapidly rising. How comes it that the augmented produce is so distributed that the condition of those who till the soil has not only not improved, but has in some cases retrograded? How, again, does it happen that the greater is the wealth accumulated in our large towns, the deeper seem to be the depths of poverty into which vast multitudes sink? By an official return just issued it is shown that there is at the present time an annual increase, amounting to £10,000,000, in the export and import trade of this country. When this return was published the press warmly congratulated the country upon its satisfactory condition. The very day these congratulations appeared a letter was written to a leading London journal by the vicar of a London parish, containing the following statements. “Fever, and especially scarlet fever, abounds. In one court, with only 11 houses, there are five cases; in a small street close by there are 18. These are but samples of what might be found throughout the parish. It is largely the result of want,...One poor fellow a ventilating blind-maker, whose children have been at our schools for years, has been out of work for eighteen months; two of his children were buried in the same grave a few days since, and now a third is at death’s door. Another poor fellow, a carpenter, has been searching in vain for work, for months. The sight of his