

## CHAPTER II.

### THE SUBMERGED TENTH.

In setting forth the difficulties which have to be grappled with, I shall endeavour in all things to understate rather than overstate my case. I do this for two reasons: first, any exaggeration would create a reaction; and secondly, as my object is to demonstrate the practicability of solving the problem, I do not wish to magnify its dimensions. In this and in subsequent chapters I hope to convince those who read them that there is no overstraining in the representation of the facts, and nothing Utopian in the presentation of remedies. I appeal neither to hysterical emotionalists nor head-long enthusiasts; but having tried to approach the examination of this question in a spirit of scientific investigation, I put forth my proposals with the view of securing the support and co-operation of the sober, serious, practical men and women who constitute the saving strength and moral backbone of the country. I fully admit that there is much that is lacking in the diagnosis of the disease, and, no doubt, in this first draft of the prescription there is much room for improvement, which will come when we have the light of fuller experience. But with all its drawbacks and defects, I do not hesitate to submit my proposals to the impartial judgment of all who are interested in the solution of the social question as an immediate and practical mode of dealing with this, the greatest problem of our time.

The first duty of an investigator in approaching the study of any question is to eliminate all that is foreign to the inquiry, and to concentrate his attention upon the subject to be dealt with. Here I may remark that I make no attempt in this book to deal with Society as a whole. I leave to others the formulation of ambitious programmes for the reconstruction of our entire social system; not because I may not desire its reconstruction, but because the elaboration of any plans which are more or less visionary and

incapable of realisation for many years would stand in the way of the consideration of this Scheme for dealing with the most urgently pressing aspect of the question, which I hope may be put into operation at once.

In taking this course I am aware that I cut myself off from a wide and attractive field; but as a practical man, dealing with sternly prosaic facts, I must confine my attention to that particular section of the problem which clamours most pressingly for a solution. Only one thing I may say in passing. There is nothing in my scheme which will bring it into collision either with Socialists of the State, or Socialists of the Municipality, with Individualists or Nationalists, or any of the various schools of thought in the great field of social economics—excepting only those anti-Christian economists who hold that it is an offence against the doctrine of the survival of the fittest to try to save the weakest from going to the wall, and who believe that when once a man is down the supreme duty of a self-regarding Society is to jump upon him. Such economists will naturally be disappointed with this book. I venture to believe that all others will find nothing in it to offend their favourite theories, but perhaps something of helpful suggestion which they may utilise hereafter.

What, then, is Darkest England? For whom do we claim that “urgency” which gives their case priority over that of all other sections of their countrymen and countrywomen?

I claim it for the Lost, for the Outcast, for the Disinherited of the World.

These, it may be said, are but phrases. Who are the Lost? I reply, not in a religious, but in a social sense, the lost are those who have gone under, who have lost their foothold in Society, those to whom the prayer to our Heavenly Father, “Give us day by day our daily bread,” is either unfulfilled, or only fulfilled by the Devil’s agency: by the earnings of vice, the proceeds of crime, or the contribution enforced by the threat of the law.

But I will be more precise. The denizens in Darkest England, for whom I appeal, are (1) those who, having no capital or income of their own, would in a month be dead from sheer starvation were they exclusively dependent upon the money earned by their own work; and (2) those who by their utmost exertions are unable to attain the regulation allowance of food which the law prescribes as indispensable even for the worst criminals in our gaols.

I sorrowfully admit that it would be Utopian in our present social arrangements to dream of attaining for every honest Englishman a gaol standard of all the necessaries of life. Some time, perhaps, we may venture to hope that every honest worker on English soil will always be as warmly clad, as healthily housed, and as regularly fed as our criminal convicts—but that is not yet.

Neither is it possible to hope for many years to come that human beings generally will be as well cared for as horses. Mr. Carlyle long ago remarked that the four-footed worker has already got all that this two-handed one is clamouring for: "There are not many horses in England, able and willing to work, which have not due food and lodging and go about sleek coated, satisfied in heart." You say it is impossible; but, said Carlyle, "The human brain, looking at these sleek English horses, refuses to believe in such impossibility for English men." Nevertheless, forty years have passed since Carlyle said that, and we seem to be no nearer the attainment of the four-footed standard for the two-handed worker. "Perhaps it might be nearer realisation," growls the cynic, "if we could only produce men according to demand, as we do horses, and promptly send them to the slaughter-house when past their prime"—which, of course, is not to be thought of.

What, then, is the standard towards which we may venture to aim with some prospect of realisation in our time? It is a very humble one, but if realised it would solve the worst problems of modern Society.

It is the standard of the London Cab Horse.

When in the streets of London a Cab Horse, weary or careless or stupid, trips and falls and lies stretched out in the midst of the traffic, there is no question of debating how he came to stumble before we try to get him on his legs again. The Cab Horse is a very real illustration of poor broken-down humanity; he usually falls down because of overwork and underfeeding. If you put him on his feet without altering his conditions, it would only be to give him another dose of agony; but first of all you'll have to pick him up again. It may have been through overwork or underfeeding, or it may have been all his own fault that he has broken his knees and smashed the shafts, but that does not matter. If not for his own sake, then merely in order to prevent an obstruction of the traffic, all attention is concentrated upon the question of how we are to get him on his legs again. Tin load is taken off, the harness is unbuckled, or, if need be, cut, and everything is done to help him up. Then he is put in the shafts

again, and once more restored to his regular round of work. That is the first point. The second is that every Cab Horse in London has three things; a shelter for the night, food for its stomach, and work allotted to it by which it can earn its corn.

These are the two points of the Cab Horse's Charter. When he is down he is helped up, and while he lives he has food, shelter and work. That, although a humble standard, is at present absolutely unattainable by millions—literally by millions—of our fellow-men and women in this country. Can the Cab Horse Charter be gained for human beings? I answer, yes. The Cab Horse standard can be attained on the Cab Horse terms. If you get your fallen fellow on his feet again, Docility and Discipline will enable you to reach the Cab Horse ideal, otherwise it will remain unattainable. But Docility seldom fails where Discipline is intelligently maintained. Intelligence is more frequently lacking to direct, than obedience to follow direction. At any rate it is not for those who possess the intelligence to despair of obedience, until they have done their part. Some, no doubt, like the bucking horse that will never be broken in, will always refuse to submit to any guidance but their own lawless will. They will remain either the Ishmaels or the Sloths of Society. But man is naturally neither an Ishmael nor a Sloth.

The first question, then, which confronts us is, what are the dimensions of the Evil? How many of our fellow-men dwell in this Darkest England? How can we take the census of those who have fallen below the Cab Horse standard to which it is our aim to elevate the most wretched of our countrymen?

The moment you attempt to answer this question, you are confronted by the fact that the Social Problem has scarcely been studied at all scientifically. Go to Mudie's and ask for all the books that have been written on the subject, and you will be surprised to find how few there are. There are probably more scientific books treating of diabetes or of gout than there are dealing with the great social malady which eats out the vitals of such numbers of our people. Of late there has been a change for the better. The Report of the Royal Commission on the Housing of the Poor, and the Report of the Committee of the House of Lords on Sweating, represent an attempt at least to ascertain the facts which bear upon the Condition of the People question. But, after all, more minute, patient, intelligent observation has been devoted to the study of Earthworms, than to the evolution, or rather the degradation, of the Sunken Section of

our people. Here and there in the immense field individual workers make notes, and occasionally emit a wail of despair, but where is there any attempt even so much as to take the first preliminary step of counting those who have gone under?

One book there is, and so far as I know at present, only one, which even attempts to enumerate the destitute. In his "Life and Labour in the East of London," Mr. Charles Booth attempts to form some kind of an idea as to the numbers of those with whom we have to deal. With a large staff of assistants, and provided with all the facts in possession of the School Board Visitors, Mr. Booth took an industrial census of East London. This district, which comprises Tower Hamlets, Shoreditch, Bethnal Green and Hackney, contains a population of 908,000; that is to say, less than one-fourth of the population of London.

How do his statistics work out? If we estimate the number of the poorest class in the rest of London as being twice as numerous as those in the Eastern District, instead of being thrice as numerous, as they would be if they were calculated according to the population in the same proportion, the following is the result:—

	East London		Estimate for rest of London		Total
<b>PAUPERS</b>					
Inmates of Workhouses, Asylums, and Hospitals .. .. .	17,000	...	34,000	...	51,000
<b>HOMELESS</b>					
Loafers, Casuals, and some Crim inals .. .. .	11,000	...	22,000	...	33,000
<b>STARVING</b>					
Casual earnings between 18s. per week and chronic want ..	100,000	...	200,000	...	300,000
<b>THE VERY POOR</b>					
Intermittent earnings 18s. to 21s. per week... .. .	74,000	...	148,000	...	222,000
Small regular earnings 18s. to 21s. per week... .. .	129,000	...	258,000	...	387,000
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	331,000		662,000		993,000
Regular wages, artisans, etc, 22s. to 30s. per week ... ..	377,000				
Higher class labour, 30s. to 50s. per week ... .. .	121,000				
Lower middle class, shopkeepers, clerks, etc. ... .. .	34,000				
Upper middle class (servant keepers)	45,000				
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	908,000				

It may be admitted that East London affords an exceptionally bad district from which to generalise for the rest of the country. Wages are higher in London than elsewhere, but so is rent, and the number of the homeless and starving is greater in the human warren at the East End. There are 31 millions of people in Great Britain, exclusive of Ireland. If destitution existed everywhere in East London proportions, there would be 31 times as many homeless and starving people as there are in the district round Bethnal Green.

But let us suppose that the East London rate is double the average for the rest of the country. That would bring out the following figures:

HOUSELESS		East London	United Kingdom
Loafers, Casuals, and some Criminals ...		11,000	..... 165,500
STARVING			
Casual earnings or chronic want ...		100,000	..... 1,550,000
Total Houseless and Starving ...		<u>111,000</u>	..... <u>1,715,500</u>
In Workhouses, Asylums, &c. ...		17,000	..... 190,000
		<u>128,000</u>	<u>1,905,500</u>

Of those returned as homeless and starving, 870,000 were in receipt of outdoor relief.

To these must be added the inmates of our prisons. In 1889 174,779 persons were received in the prisons, but the average number in prison at any one time did not exceed 60,000. The figures, as given in the Prison Returns, are as follows :—

In Convict Prisons ... ..	11,600
In Local Prisons ... ..	20,883
In Reformatories ... ..	1,270
In Industrial Schools ... ..	21,413
Criminal Lunatics ... ..	910
	<u>56,136</u>

Add to this the number of indoor paupers and lunatics (excluding criminals) 78,966—and we have an army of nearly two millions belonging to the submerged classes. To this there must be added, at the very least, another million, representing those dependent upon the criminal, lunatic and other classes, not enumerated here, and the more or less helpless of the class immediately above the houseless and starving. This brings my total to three millions, or, to put it roughly

to one-tenth of the population. According to Lord Brabazon and Mr. Samuel Smith, "between two and three millions of our population are always pauperised and degraded." Mr. Chamberlain says there is a "population equal to that of the metropolis,"—that is, between four and five millions—"which has remained constantly in a state of abject destitution and misery." Mr. Giffen is more moderate. The submerged class, according to him, comprises one in five of manual labourers, six in 100 of the population. Mr. Giffen does not add the third million which is living on the border line. Between Mr. Chamberlain's four millions and a half, and Mr. Giffen's 1,800,000, I am content to take three millions as representing the total strength of the destitute army.

Darkest England, then, may be said to have a population about equal to that of Scotland. Three million men, women, and children, a vast despairing multitude in a condition nominally free, but really enslaved;—these it is whom we have to save.

It is a large order. England emancipated her negroes sixty years ago, at a cost of £40,000,000, and has never ceased boasting about it since. But at our own doors, from "Plymouth to Peterhead," stretches this waste Continent of humanity—three million human beings who are enslaved—some of them to taskmasters as merciless as any West Indian overseer, all of them to destitution and despair.

Is anything to be done with them? Can anything be done for them? Or is this million-headed mass to be regarded as offering a problem as insoluble as that of the London sewage, which, feculent and festering, swings heavily up and down the basin of the Thames with the ebb and flow of the tide?

This Submerged Tenth—is it, then, beyond the reach of the nine-tenths in the midst of whom they live, and around whose homes they rot and die? No doubt, in every large mass of human beings there will be some incurably diseased in morals and in body, some for whom nothing can be done, some of whom even the optimist must despair, and for whom he can prescribe nothing but the beneficently stern restraints of an asylum or a gaol.

But is not one in ten a proportion scandalously high? The Israelites of old set apart one tribe in twelve to minister to the Lord in the service of the Temple; but must we doom one in ten of "God's Englishmen" to the service of the great Twin Devils—Destitution and Despair?