The Morning Chronicle's

LABOUR AND THE POOR

Volume I

THE METROPOLITAN DISTRICTS

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Cover Image:
Folly Ditch, Jacob's Island, Bermondsey
From "Old & New London"
George Walter Thornbury & Edward Walford
Published 1878
Image courtesy of The British Library

"What's life to me? Labour—labour—labour—and for what? Why for less and less food every month. Ah, but the people can't bear it much longer; flesh, and blood, and bones must rise against it before long."

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Preface

This work attempts to be a faithful reproduction of the "Labour and the Poor" letters as printed in *The Morning Chronicle*. Only obvious typographical errors and omissions have been corrected. Variations in the spelling and hyphenation of words have largely been retained. We hope any such inconsistencies prove to be of some historical interest to the reader.

As much as possible we have tried to recreate the original layout and styling of the text and all factual tables have been reproduced as closely to the originals as possible with only minimal alterations made where necessary to improve readability.

Not all letters were titled. Where missing we have added titles to the Table of Contents to assist navigation and explanation of content. The letters themselves are as per the originals.

A handful of illustrations have been added to each volume. These did not appear in the original text but hopefully provide added interest.

R. W.
K. B.

Introduction

Destitution, Discontent, and Desperation

Cholera, famine, and revolution, both industrial and political, might best describe succinctly the period in question. Cholera had just claimed over 53,000 lives in England and Wales alone, the devastating famine in Ireland had killed an estimated one million people, the Industrial Revolution had taken skilled jobs and mechanised them, and the revolutions throughout Europe had shaken its political foundations to the core. Great Britain had thus far managed to avoid being caught up in the political revolutions but was she to be next? There was certainly discontent brewing amongst the "dangerous classes" as the rise of the Chartist movement had recently shown, and the personal accounts that follow throughout this series will paint a grim, vivid picture of widespread poverty, destitution, and desperation amongst the lower classes in the mid-nineteenth century—one ripe for revolution.

The wealthiest and most powerful nation in the world was well-advanced in its transition from an agricultural-based society to an urban-based one, but the process had not been a smooth one. This rapid urbanisation, mainly the result of people moving into the towns and cities in search of better paid factory work, placed huge demands on housing. The supply failed to keep up, chronic overcrowding ensued, and living conditions deteriorated rapidly.

Unprecedented population increases put further pressure on the housing stock and on the people in their attempts to eke out a living, for instance the population of England and Wales had doubled in the last 50 years; in cities such as Manchester and Liverpool it had actually quadrupled. The massive influx of Irish into Britain in search of employment and relief from the desperate situation at home further swelled the populations of the already overcrowded towns and cities. The potato crop had failed successively, the Corn Laws had exacerbated the situation with the high price of grain, the political parties had failed to grasp the magnitude of and deal with the situation, and so they were left with little choice but to starve at home or seek relief across the Irish Sea.

The Industrial Revolution had left many casualties by the wayside as machines replaced the skilled mechanics, the skilled artisans, the craftsmen of the day whose jobs were being replaced by lower-skilled factory work, often undertaken by women and children for much lower wages. The unskilled faced increasing competition for employment with poor pitched against poor, driving down the already meagre rates of pay—where work was to be had. The growing pains of industrialisation were being felt by the many, to the benefit of the few.

Great Britain in 1849 had unimaginable underlying poverty—poverty seemingly out of sight of the wealthy who were shocked at the findings uncovered by the "Labour and the Poor" investigation, as their *Letters to the Editor* highlighted. How hard they were looking in the first place is difficult to say; certainly the large array of benevolent institutions seeking to help the poor showed a certain level of compassion, but *Punch* magazine of the time pulled no punches when it stated, referring to *The Morning Chronicle's* investigation, "… these wonders and terrors have been lying by your door and mine ever since we had a door of our own. We had but to go a hundred yards off and see for ourselves, but we never did. … But of such wondrous and complicated misery as this you confess you had no idea. No. How should you? You and I—we are of the upper classes; we have had hitherto no community with the poor."

The disconnect was palpable. The working classes were living in often appalling and overcrowded conditions. Families were crammed into damp cellars and garrets, with outdoor privies shared between multiple dwellings. Cesspits, open sewers, and pig-sties abounded, and access to clean drinking water was a rarity for many. Cholera was rampant, sanitation was lacking, destitution was rife, and the crowded living conditions of the poor were in desperate need of improvement. For a supposedly civilised nation, with its model institutions and morality being put forward as an example to the rest of the world, such widespread poverty was a national disgrace. Something had to be done.

The Morning Chronicle's Investigation

Against this backdrop *The Morning Chronicle*, a leading Londonbased newspaper of the day, set itself the task of investigating the condition of the poor throughout England and Wales in the hope that their findings might lead to much needed change.

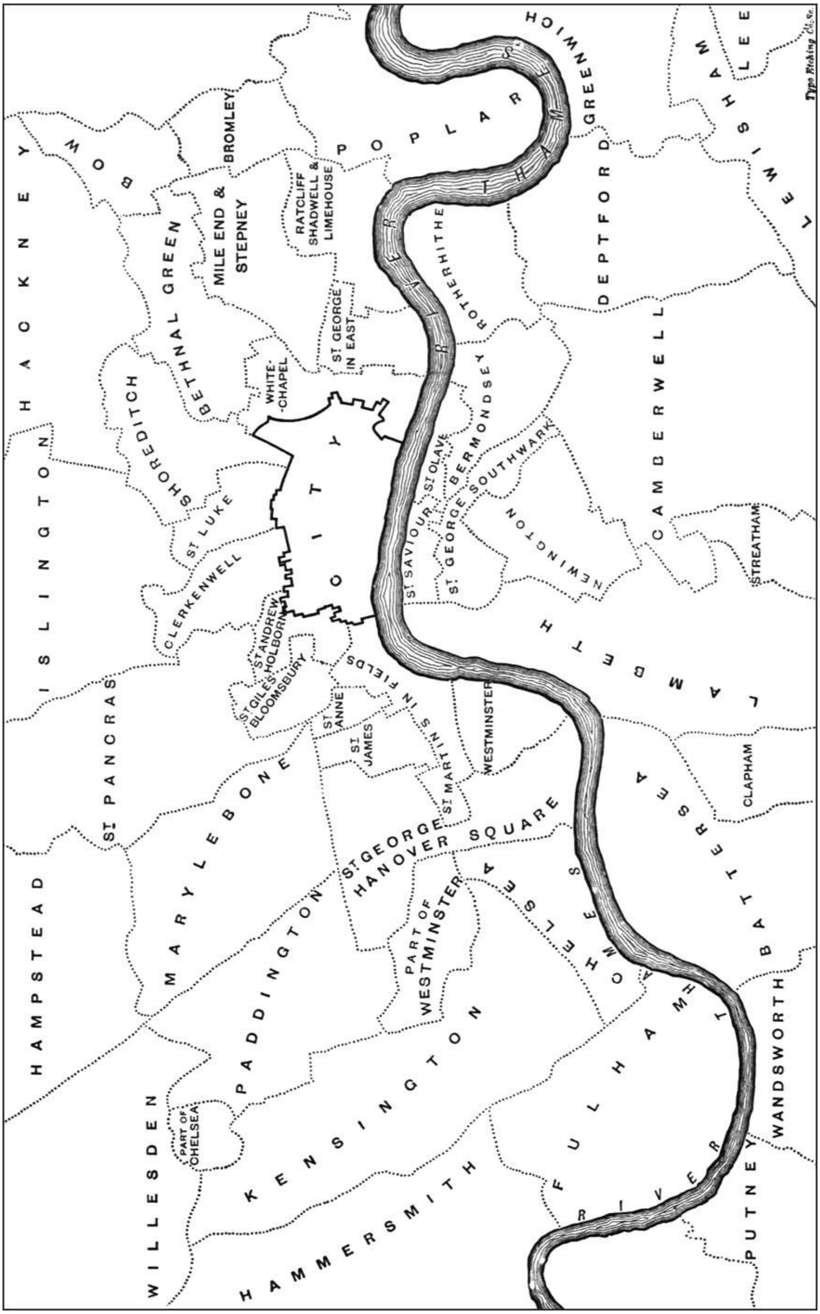
The reputed catalyst for their "Labour and the Poor" series was an article written by Henry Mayhew recording a journey into Bermondsey, one of the most deprived districts of London, which was printed in September 1849. Following this it was proposed that an in-depth investigation be carried out and "Special Correspondents", the investigators, were selected and distributed around the country. The first article or "Letter" appeared on the 18th of October 1849 and the series would run for almost 2 years and 222 letters.

The well-known and respected writers and journalists recruited for the task included Henry Mayhew who was assigned to the Metropolitan districts, Angus Bethune Reach to the Manufacturing districts, Alexander Mackay and Shirley Brooks to the Rural districts, and Charles Mackay to investigate the cities of Birmingham and Liverpool. The author of the letters from Wales is as yet unknown.

The "Labour and the Poor" letters were extremely popular at the time, being widely read throughout the nation and even abroad. The revelations in them caused quite a stir amongst the middle and upper classes of Victorian society. *Letters to the Editor* poured in with donations for specific cases of distress that appeared in the letters and also for the general alleviation of the suffering of the poor. A special fund was set up by *The Morning Chronicle* to collect and distribute these donations.

These *Letters to the Editor* have been included in this series, predominantly in the Metropolitan district volumes whose letters elicited the majority of responses. They provide a unique window into the thoughts and sentiments of the Victorian readership as they react to the incredible accounts of misery and desperation being unveiled.

The Morning Chronicle's extraordinary and unsurpassed "Labour and the Poor" investigation provides an unparalleled insight into the people of the period, their living and working conditions, their feelings, their language, their sufferings and their struggles for survival amidst the poverty and destitution of 19th century Britain. An investigation of such magnitude had never before been attempted and the undertaking was truly of epic proportions. Its impact at the time was profound. Its historical importance today is without question.



Map of The Metropolitan Parishes

A Visit to the Cholera Districts of Bermondsey

There is an Eastern fable which tells us that a certain city was infested by poisonous serpents that killed all they fastened upon; and the citizens, thinking them sent from Heaven as a scourge for their sins, kept praying that the visitation might be removed from them, until scarcely a house remained unsmitten. At length, however, concludes the parable, the eyes of the people were opened; for, after all their prayers and fastings, they found that the eggs of the poisonous serpents were hatched in the muck-heaps that surrounded their own dwellings.

The history of the late epidemic, which now seems to have almost spent its fatal fury upon us, has taught us that the masses of filth and corruption round the metropolis are, as it were, the nauseous nests of plague and pestilence. Indeed, so well known are the localities of fever and disease, that London would almost admit of being mapped out pathologically, and divided into its morbid districts and deadly cantons. We might lay our fingers on the Ordnance map, and say here is the typhoid parish, and there the ward of cholera; for as truly as the West-end rejoices in the title of Belgravia, might the southern shores of the Thames be christened Pestilentia. As season follows season, so does disease follow disease in the quarters that may be more literally than metaphorically styled the plague-spots of London. If the seasons are favourable, and typhus does not bring death to almost every door, then influenza and scarlatina fill the workhouses with the families of the sick. So certain and regular are the diseases in their returns, that each epidemic, as it comes back summer after summer, breaks out in the self-same streets as it appeared on its former visit, with but this slight difference, that if at its last visitation it began at the top of the street, and killed its way down, this time it begins at the bottom, and kills its way as surely up the lines of houses.

Out of the 12,800 deaths which, within the last three months, have arisen from cholera, 6,500 have occurred on the southern shores of the Thames; and to this awful number no localities have contributed so largely as Lambeth, Southwark, and Bermondsey, each, at the height of the disease, adding its hundred victims a week to the fearful catalogue of mortality. Any one who has ventured a visit to the last-named of these places in particular, will not wonder at the ravages of the pestilence in this malarious quarter, for it is bounded on the north and east by filth and fever, and on the south and west by want, squalor, rags, and pestilence. Here stands, as it were, the very capital of cholera, the Jessore of London—Jacob's Island, a patch of ground insulated by the common sewer. Spared by the fire of London, the houses and comforts of the people in this loathsome place have scarcely known any improvement since that time. The place is a century behind even the low and squalid districts that surround it.

In the days of Henry II., the foul stagnant ditch that now makes an island of this pestilential spot, was a running stream, supplied with the waters which poured down from the hills about Sydenham and Nunhead, and was used for the working of the mills that then stood on its banks. These had been granted by charter to the monks of St. Mary and St. John, to grind their flour, and were dependencies upon the Priory of Bermondsey. Tradition tells us that what is now a straw yard skirting the river, was once the City Ranelagh, called "Cupid's Gardens," and that the trees, which are now black with mud, were the bowers under which the citizens loved, on the sultry summer evenings, to sit beside the stream drinking their sack and ale. But now the running brook is changed into a tidal sewer, in whose putrid filth staves are laid to season; and where the ancient summer-houses stood, nothing but hovels, sties, and muck-heaps are now to be seen.

Not far from the Tunnel there is a creek opening into the Thames. The entrance to this is screened by the tiers of colliers which lie before it. This creek bears the name of the Dock Head. Sometimes it is called St. Saviour's, or, in jocular allusion to the odour for which it is celebrated, Savory Dock. The walls of the warehouses on each side of this muddy stream are green and slimy, and barges lie beside them, above which sacks of corn are continually dangling from the cranes aloft. This creek was once supplied by the streams from the Surrey hills, but now nothing but the drains and refuse of the houses that have grown up round about it thicken and swell its waters.

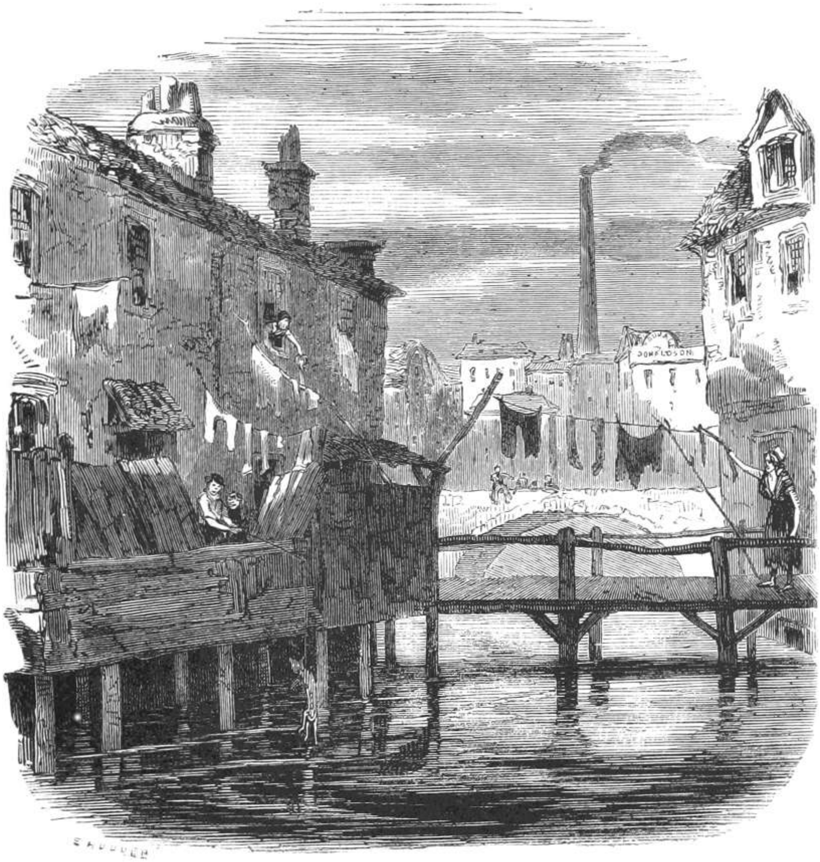
On entering the precincts of the pest island, the air has literally the smell of a graveyard, and a feeling of nausea and heaviness comes over any one unaccustomed to imbibe the musty atmosphere. It is not only the nose, but the stomach, that tells how heavily the air is loaded with sulphuretted hydrogen; and as soon as you cross one of the crazy and rotting bridges over the reeking ditch, you know, as surely as if you had chemically tested it, by the black colour of what was once the white-lead paint upon the door-posts and window-sills, that the air is thickly charged with this deadly gas. The heavy bubbles which now and then rise up in the water show you whence at least a portion of the mephitic compound comes, while the open doorless privies that hang over the water side on one of the banks, and the dark streaks of filth down the walls where the drains from each house discharge themselves into the ditch on the opposite side, tell you how the pollution of the ditch is supplied.

The water is covered with a scum almost like a cobweb, and prismatic with grease. In it float large masses of green rotting weed, and against the posts of the bridges are swollen carcasses of dead animals, almost bursting with the gases of putrefaction. Along its shores are heaps of indescribable filth, the phosphoretted smell from which tells you of the rotting fish there, while the oyster shells are like pieces of slate from their coating of mud and filth. In some parts the fluid is almost as red as blood from the colouring matter that pours into it from the reeking leather-dressers' close by.

The striking peculiarity of Jacob's Island consists in the wooden galleries and sleeping-rooms at the back of the houses which overhang the dark flood, and are built upon piles, so that the place has positively the air of a Flemish street, flanking a sewer instead of a canal: while the little ricketty bridges that span the ditches and connect court with court, give it the appearance of the Venice of drains, where channels before and behind the houses do duty for the ocean. Across some parts of the stream whole rooms have been built, so that house adjoins house; and here, with the very stench of death rising through the boards, human beings sleep night after night, until the last sleep of all comes upon them years before its time. Scarce a house but yellow linen is hanging to dry over the balustrade of staves, or else run out on a long oar where the sulphur-coloured clothes hang over the waters, and you are almost wonderstruck to see their form and colour unreflected in the putrid ditch beneath.

At the back of nearly every house that boasts a square foot or two of outlet—and the majority have none at all—are pig-sties. In front waddle ducks, while cocks and hens scratch at the cinder-heaps. Indeed, the creatures that fatten on offal are the only living things that seem to flourish here.

The inhabitants themselves show in their faces the poisonous influence of the mephitic air they breathe. Either their skins are white, like parchment, telling of the impaired digestion, the languid circula-



Jacob's Island

tion, and the coldness of the skin peculiar to persons suffering from chronic poisoning, or else their cheeks are flushed hectically, and their eyes are glassy, showing the wasting fever and general decline of the bodily functions. The brown, earth-like complexion of some, and their sunk eyes, with the dark areolæ round them, tell you that the sulphuretted hydrogen of the atmosphere in which they live has been absorbed into the blood; while others are remarkable for the watery eye exhibiting the increased secretion of tears so peculiar to those who are exposed to the exhalations of hydro-sulphate of ammonia.

Scarcely a girl that has not suffusion and soreness of the eyes, so that you would almost fancy she had been swallowing small doses of arsenic; while it is evident, from the irritation and discharge from the mucous membranes of the nose and eyes for which all the children are distinguished, that the poor emaciated things are suffering from the continual inhalation of the vapour of carbonate of ammonia and other deleterious gases.

Nor was this to be wondered at, when the whole air reeked with the stench of rotting animal and vegetable matter; for the experiment of Professor Donovan has shown that a rabbit, with only its body enclosed in a bladder filled with sulphuretted hydrogen, and allowed to breathe freely, will die in ten minutes. Thénard also has proved that one eight hundredth part of this gas in the atmosphere is sufficient to destroy a dog, and one two hundred and fiftieth will kill a horse; while Mr. Taylor, in his book on poisons, assures us that the men who were engaged in excavating the Thames Tunnel suffered severely during the work from the presence of this gas in the atmosphere in which they were obliged to labour. "The air, as well as the water which trickled through the roof," he tells us, "was found to contain sulphuretted hydrogen. This was probably derived from the action of the iron pyrites in the clay. By respiring this atmosphere the strongest and most robust men were, in the course of a few months, reduced to a state of extreme exhaustion and died. They became emaciated, and fell into a state of low fever, accompanied with delirium. In one case which I saw," he adds, "the face of the man was pale, the lips of a violet hue, the eyes sunk and dark all round, and the whole muscular system flabby and emaciated." To give the reader some idea as to the extent with which the air in Jacob's Island is charged with this most deadly compound, it will be sufficient to say that a silver spoon of which we caught sight in one of the least wretched dwellings was positively chocolate-coloured by the action of the sulphur on the metal.

On approaching the tidal ditch from the Neckinger-road, the shutters of the house at the corner were shut from top to bottom. Our intelligent and obliging guide, Dr. Martin, informed us that a girl was then lying dead there from cholera, and that but very recently another victim had fallen in the house adjoining it. This was the beginning of the tale of death, for the tidal ditch was filled up to this very point. Here, however, its putrefying waters were left to mingle their poison with the 267 cubic feet of air that each man daily takes into his lungs, and this was the point whence the pestilence commenced its ravages. As we walked down George-row, our informant told us that at the corner of London-street he could see, a short time back, as many as nine houses in which there were one or two persons lying dead of the cholera at the same time; and yet there could not have been more than a dozen tenements visible from the spot.

We crossed the bridge, and spoke to one of the inmates. In answer to our questions, she told us she was never well. Indeed, the signs of the deadly influence of the place were painted in the earthy complexion of the poor woman. "Neither I nor my children know what health is," said she. "But what is one to do? We must live where our bread is. I've tried to let the house, and put a bill up, but cannot get any one to take it." From this spot we were led to narrow close courts, where the sun never shone, and the air seemed almost as stagnant and putrid as the ditch we had left. The blanched cheeks of the people that now came out to stare at us, were white as vegetables grown in the dark, and as we stopped to look down the alley, our informant told us that the place teemed with children, and that if a horn was blown they would swarm like bees at the sound of a gong. The houses were mostly inhabited by "corn-runners," coal-porters, and "longshore-men," getting a precarious living—earning some times as much as 12s. a day, and then for weeks doing nothing. Fevers prevailed in these courts we were told more than at the side of the ditch.

By this way we reached a dismal stack of hovels called, by a strange incongruity, Pleasant-row. Inquiring of one of the inmates, we were informed that they were quite comfortable now! The stench had been all removed, said the woman, and we were invited to pass to the backyard as evidence of the fact. We did so; the boards bent under our feet, and the air in the cellar-like yard was fœtid to positive nausea. As we left the house a child sat nursing a dying half-comatose baby on a door step. The skin of its little arms, instead of being plumped out with health, was loose and shrivelled, like an old crone's, and had a flabby monkey-like appearance more than the character of human cuticle. The almost jaundiced colour of the child's skin, its half paralyzed limbs, and state of stupor, told it was suffering from some slow poison; indeed the symptoms might readily have been mistaken for those of chronic poisoning from acetate of lead. At the end of this row our friend informed us that the last house on either side was *never* free from fever.

Continuing our course we reached "The Folly," another street so narrow that the names and trades of the shopmen were painted on boards that stretched, across the street, from the roof of their own house to that of their neighbour's. We were here stopped by our companion in front of a house "to let." The building was as narrow and as unlike a human habitation as the wooden houses in a child's box of toys. "In this house," said our friend, "when the scarlet fever was raging in the neighbourhood, the barber who was living here suffered fearfully from it; and no sooner did the man get well of this than he was seized with typhus, and scarcely had he recovered from the first attack than he was struck down a second time with the same terrible disease. Since then he has lost his child with cholera, and at this moment his wife is in the workhouse suffering from the same affliction. The only wonder is that they are not all dead, for as the man sat at his meals in his small shop, if he put his hand against the wall behind him, it would be covered with the soil of his neighbour's privy, sopping through the wall. At the back of the house was an open sewer, and the privies were full to the seat."

One fact, says an eminent writer in toxicology, is worthy of the attention of medical jurists, namely, that the respiration of an atmosphere only slightly impregnated with the gases emanating from drains and sewers, may, if long continued, seriously affect an individual and cause death. M. D'Arcet had to examine a lodging in Paris, in which three young and vigorous men had died successively in the course of a few years, under similar symptoms. The lodging consisted of a bed-room with a chimney, and an ill-ventilated ante-room. The pipe of a privy passed down one side of the room, by the head of the bed, and the wall in this part was damp from infiltration. At the time of the examination there was no perceptible smell in the room, though it was small and low. M. D'Arcet attributed the mortality in the lodging to the slow and long-continued action of the emanations from the pipe (Ann. d'Hyg., Juillet, 1836).

We then journeyed on to London-street, down which the tidal ditch continues its course. In No. 1 of this street the cholera first appeared seventeen years ago, and spread up it with fearful virulence; but this year it appeared at the opposite end, and ran down it with like severity. As we passed along the reeking banks of the sewer the sun shone upon a narrow slip of the water. In the bright light it appeared the colour of strong green tea, and positively looked as solid as black marble in the shadow—indeed it was more like watery mud than muddy water; and yet we were assured this was the only water the wretched inhabitants had to drink. As we gazed in horror at it, we saw drains and sewers emptying their filthy contents into it; we saw a whole tier of doorless privies in the open road, common to men and women, built over it; we heard bucket after bucket of filth splash into it, and the limbs of the vagrant boys bathing in it seemed, by pure force of contrast, white as Parian marble. And yet, as we stood doubting the fearful statement, we saw a little child, from one of the galleries opposite, lower a tin can with a rope to fill a large bucket that stood beside her. In each of the balconies that hung over the stream the self-same tub was to be seen in which the inhabitants put the mucky liquid to stand, so that they may, after it has rested for a day or two, skim the fluid from the solid particles of filth, pollution, and disease. As the little thing dangled her tin cup as gently as possible into the stream, a bucket of night-soil was poured down from the next gallery.

In this wretched place we were taken to a house where an infant lay dead of the cholera. We asked if they *really did* drink the water? The answer was, "They were obliged to drink the ditch, without they could beg a pailfull or thieve a pailfull of water." But have you spoken to your landlord about having it laid on for you? "Yes, sir; and he says he'll do it, and do it, but we know him better than to believe him." "Why, sir," cried another woman, who had shot out from an adjoining room, "he won't even give us a little whitewash, though we tell him we'll willingly do the work ourselves: and look here, sir," she added, "all the tiles have fallen off, and the rain pours in wholesale."

We had scarcely left the house when a bill caught our eye, announcing that "this valuable estate" was to be sold!

From this spot we crossed the little shaky bridge into Providence-buildings—a narrow neck of land set in sewers. Here, in front of the houses, were small gardens that a table-cloth would have covered. Still the one dahlia that here raised its round red head made it a happier and brighter place. Never was colour so grateful to the eye. All we had looked at had been so black and dingy, and had smelt so much of churchyard clay, that this little patch of beauty was brighter and greener than ever was oasis in the desert. Here a herd of children came out, and stared at us like sheep. One child our guide singled out from the rest. She had the complexion of tawed leather, and her bright, glassy eyes were sunk so far back in her head, that they looked more like lights shining through the hollow sockets of a skull than a living head, and her bones seemed ready to start through the thin layer of skin. We were told she had had the cholera twice. Her father was dead of it. "But she, sir," said a woman addressing us, "won't die. Ah! if she'd had plenty of victuals and been brought up less hardy she would have been dead and buried long ago, like many more. And here's another," she added, pushing forward a long thin woman in rusty black. "Why, I've know'd her eat as much as a quartern loaf at a meal, and you can't fatten her no how." Upon this there was a laugh, but in the woman's bloodless cheeks and blue lips we saw that she like the rest was wasting away from the influence of the charnel-like atmosphere around her.

The last place we went to was in Joiner's-court, with four wooden houses in it, in which there had lately been as many as five cases of cholera. In front, the poor souls, as if knowing by an instinct that plants were given to purify the atmosphere, had pulled up the paving-stones before their dwellings, and planted a few stocks here and there in the rich black mould beneath. The first house we went to, a wild ragged-headed boy shot out in answer to our knock, and putting his hands across the doorway, stood there to prevent our entrance. Our friend asked whether he could enter, and see the state of the drainage? "No; t'ain't convenient," was the answer, given so quickly and sharply, that the lad forced some ugly and uncharitable suspicion upon us. In the next house, the poor inmate was too glad to meet with any one ready to sympathise with her sufferings. We were taken up into a room, where we were told she had positively lived for nine years. The window was within four feet of a high wall, at the foot of which, until very recently, ran the open common sewer. The room was so dark that it was several minutes before we could see anything within it, and there was a smell of must and dry rot that told of damp and imperfect ventilation, and the unnatural size of the pupils of the wretched woman's eyes convinced us how much too long she had dwelt in this gloomy place.

Here, as usual, we heard stories that made one's blood curdle, of the cruelty of those from whom they rented the sties called dwellings. They had begged for pure water to be laid on, and the rain to be shut out; and the answer for eighteen years had been, that the lease was just out. "They knows it's handy for a man's work," said one and all, "and that's the reason why they imposes on a body." This, indeed, seems to us to be the great evil. Out of these wretches' health, comfort, and even lives, small capitalists reap a petty independence; and until the poor are rescued from the fangs of these mercenary men, there is but little hope either for their physical or moral welfare.

The extreme lassitude and deficient energy of both body and mind induced by the mephitic vapours they continually inhale leads them—we may say, *forces* them to seek an unnatural stimulus in the gin-shop;

indeed, the publicans of Jacob's Island drive even a more profitable trade than the landlords themselves. What wonder, then, since debility is one of the predisposing conditions of cholera, that—even if these stenches of the foul tidal ditch be not the *direct* cause of the disease—that the impaired digestive functions, the languid circulation, the depression of mind produced by the continued inhalation of the noxious gases of the tidal ditch, together with the intemperance that it induces—the cold, damp houses—and, above all, the quenching of the thirst and cooking of the food with water saturated with the very excrements of their fellow-creatures, should make Jacob's Island notorious as the Jessore of England.

LABOUR AND THE POOR.

THE METROPOLITAN DISTRICTS.

[FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT.]

Letter I.

The plan of publishing in this journal a series of communications descriptive of the condition of the poor was fully explained in *The Morning Chronicle* of yesterday. To me has been confided the office of examining into the condition of the poor of London; and I shall now proceed to state the view I purpose taking of the subject.

Under the term poor I shall include all those persons whose incomings are insufficient for the satisfaction of their wants—a want being, according to my idea, contra-distinguished from a mere desire by a positive physical pain, instead of a mental uneasiness, accompanying it. The large and comparatively unknown body of people included in this definition I shall contemplate in two distinct classes, viz., the *honest* and *dishonest* poor; and the first of these I purpose subdividing into the *striving* and the *disabled*—or, in other words, I shall consider the whole of the metropolitan poor under three separate phases, according as they *will* work, they *can't* work, and they *won't* work. Of those that will work, and yet are unable to obtain sufficient for their bodily necessities, I shall devote my attention first to such as receive no relief from the parish; and under this head will be included the poorly-paid—the unfortunate—and the improvident. While treating of the poorly-paid, I shall endeavour to lay before the reader a catalogue of such occupations in London as yield a bare subsistence to the parties engaged in them. At the same time I purpose, when possible, giving the weekly amount of income derived from each, together with the cause—if discoverable—of the inadequate return. After this, it is my intention to visit the dwellings of the unrelieved poor—to ascertain, by positive inspection, the condition of their homes—to learn, by close communion with them, the real or fancied wrongs of their lot—to discover, not only on how little they subsist, but how large a rate of profit they have to pay for the little upon which they do subsist—to ascertain what weekly rent they are charged for their waterless, drainless, floorless, and almost roofless tenements; and to calculate the interest that the petty capitalist reaps from their necessities. Nor shall I fail to point out how, when the poor are driven to raise a meal on their clothes or their bedding, he who makes the advance is licensed by law to receive as much as 20 per cent. for the petty loan upon the shirt or the blanket, though more than five per cent. is forbidden to be charged for the loan upon the land. But, however alive I may be to the wrongs of the poor, I shall not be misled by a morbid sympathy to see them only as suffering from the selfishness of others. Their want of prudence, want of temperance, want of energy, want of cleanliness, want of knowledge, and want of morality, will each be honestly set forth. This done, I shall proceed to treat of the poor receiving parish relief, outside and inside the union; after which, the habits, haunts, and tricks of the beggars of London will be duly set forth; and, finally, those of the thieves and prostitutes.

In the present article I shall endeavour to give the reader a general idea of the wealth and poverty, the power and weakness, the knowledge and ignorance, the luxury and want, the crime and charity, which all lie huddled together in London, in such vast and striking confusion. But before doing so, let me briefly draw attention to the extraordinary change of feeling which has taken place of late years, and which makes the poor of the present day of such moment to us that, from high to low, from one corner of the land to the other—in the mansion, the counting-house, and the taproom—the sufferings and privations of the labouring classes should be listened to with so lively an interest that the columns of a morning newspaper are judged a fit place for the exposition of them. Indeed, the chief distinction of the present age from the past, consists, not in the substitution of steam for human labour—in the use of cranks and levers for thews and sinews—nor does it lie in the iron bands which now link town to town, and brace county to county, nor in the nerve-like wires that carry our wishes from one corner of the land to the other with the same marvellous instantaneousness as our muscles act in obedience to our will. These, it is true, are salient points of difference between us and our forefathers. Still the broad line of demarcation separating our own times from all others is to be found in the fuller and more general development of the human sympathies.

By the Act 27th Henry VIII. the officers of towns are directed to collect alms for the purpose of keeping "sturdy vagabonds and valiant beggars" to continual labour; and it is provided "that a sturdy beggar is to be whipped for his first offence, his right ear cropped for his second, and if he again offend he is to be sent to the next gaol till the quarter sessions, there to be indicted for wandering, loitering, and idleness; and if convicted, to suffer *execution as a felon* and as an enemy of the commonwealth." To those who have been accustomed to regard the "good old times" as a kind of past millennium, it must appear utterly incredible that, in the days of the Field of the Cloth of Gold, mere beggary was punishable with death; or that "bluff King Hal" should have hung up during his reign, as Harrison tells us, "of great thieves, of petty thieves and rogues, three score and twelve thousand"—slaying twice as many as the recent scourge that we prayed to have removed from us. It must be equally difficult for such as are ignorant of the atrocities perpetrated by "merry England," to believe that in the year 1785 no less than ninety-seven persons were hanged for the offence of stealing in shops to the value of five shillings; and that the late Lord Ellenborough said in the House of Lords, when a bill was brought in a *second time* for the abolition of the capital punishment awarded to this offence, "he trusted that laws which a century had proved to be *beneficial*, would not be changed for the illusory opinions of speculatists and modern philosophy" (Hansard, vol. xx.).

The bull and badger baiting—the dog and cock fighting—the rat killing—and such other sports of the last century as pleased only in proportion to the amount of pain inflicted, have entirely passed away; and in their place there have sprung up among us laws and societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals. Our princes and nobles are no longer the patrons of prize fights, but the presidents of benevolent institutions. Instead of the "bear-gardens" and cock-pits that formerly flourished in every quarter of the town, our capital bristles and glitters with its thousand palaces for the indigent and suffering poor. If we are distinguished among nations for our exceeding wealth, assuredly we are equally illustrious for our abundant charity. Almost every want or ill that can distress human nature, has some palatial institution for the mitigation of it. We have rich societies for every conceivable form of benevolence: for the visitation of the sick—for the cure of the maimed and the crippled—for the alleviation of the pangs of childbirth—for giving shelter to the houseless—support to the aged and the infirm—homes to the orphan and the foundling—for the reformation of juvenile offenders and prostitutes—the reception of the children of convicts—the liberation of debtors—the suppression of vice—for educating the ragged—teaching the blind, the deaf, and the dumb—for guarding and soothing the mad—protecting the idiotic—clothing the naked—feeding the hungry. Nor does our charity cease with our own countrymen; for the very ships of war which we build to destroy the people of other lands, we ultimately convert into floating hospitals to save or comfort them in the hour of their affliction among us.

Let us now turn our attention to the number and cost of the honest and dishonest poor throughout England and Wales, so that we may be able to see what proportion the aggregate amount bears to the number of individuals living in a state of poverty and crime in the metropolis. Mr. Porter, usually no mean authority upon all matters of a statistical nature, tells us, in his "Progress of the Nation," p.530, that "the proportion of persons in the United Kingdom who pass their time without applying to any gainful occupation is quite *inconsiderable*. Of 5,800,000 males of 20 years and upwards living at the time of the census of 1831, there were said to be engaged in some calling or profession 5,450,000, thus leaving unemployed only 350,000, or rather less than six per cent." "The number of unemployed adult males in Great Britain in 1841," he afterwards informs us, "was only 274,000 and odd."

But this statement gives us no adequate idea of the number of persons subsisting by charity or crime. For the author of the "Progress of the Nation," strange to say, wholly excludes from his calculation the mass of individuals receiving in and out door relief, as well as the criminals, almspeople, and lunatics throughout the country. Now, according to the last report of the Poor-law Commissioners, the number of paupers receiving in and out door relief was, in 1848, no less than 1,870,000 and odd. The number of criminals in the same year was 30,000 and odd. In 1844 the number of lunatics in county asylums was 4,000 and odd; while, according to the occupation abstract of the returns of the population, there were in 1841 upwards of 5,000 almspeople, 1,000 beggars, and 21,000 pensioners. These formed into one sum, give us no less than two millions and a quarter individuals who pass their time without applying to any gainful occupation, and consequently live in a state of inactivity and vice upon the income of the remainder of the population. By the above computation, therefore, we see that, out of a total of sixteen million souls, one-seventh, or fourteen per cent. of the whole, continue their existence either by pauperism, mendicancy, or crime.

Now, the cost of this immense mass of vice and want is even more appalling than the number of individuals subsisting in such utter degradation. The total amount of money levied in 1848 for the relief of England and Wales was seven millions four hundred thousand pounds. But, exclusive of this amount, the magnitude of the sum that we give voluntarily towards the support and education of the poorer classes, is unparalleled in the history of any other nation, or of any other time. According to the summary of the returns annexed to the voluminous reports of the Charity Commissioners, the rent of the land and other fixed property, together with the interest of the money left for charitable purposes in England and Wales, amounts to £1,200,000 a year; and it is believed that by proper management this return might be increased to an annual income of at least two millions of money. "And yet," says Mr. McCulloch, "there can be no doubt that even this large sum falls far below the amount expended every year in voluntary donations to charitable establishments. Nor can any estimate be formed," he adds, "of the money given in charity to individuals, but in the aggregate it cannot fail to amount to an immense sum." All things considered, therefore, we cannot be very far from the truth if we assume that the sums voluntarily subscribed towards the relief of the poor equal, in the aggregate, the total amount raised by assessment for the same purpose; so that it appears that the well-to-do amongst us expend the vast sum of fifteen million pounds per annum in mitigating the miseries of their less fortunate brethren.

But though we give altogether fifteen million pounds a year to alleviate the distress of those who want or suffer, we must remember that this vast sum expresses not only the liberal extent of our sympathy, but likewise the fearful amount of want and suffering, of excess and luxury, that there must be in the land. If the poorer classes require fifteen millions to be added in charity every year to their aggregate income in order to relieve their pains and privations, and the richer can afford to have the same immense sum taken from theirs, and yet scarcely feel the loss, it shows at once how much the one class must have in excess and the other in deficiency. Whether such a state of things is a necessary evil connected with the distribution of wealth, this is not the place for me to argue. All I have to do here is to draw attention to the fact. It is for others to lay bare the cause, and, if possible, discover the remedy.

There still remains, however, to be added to the sum expended in voluntary or compulsory relief of the poor, the cost of our criminal and convict establishments at home and abroad. This, according to the Government estimates of the present year, amounts to £948,000, which, together with that before mentioned, makes, in round numbers, the enormous sum of £16,000,000 per annum; and reckoning the national income, with Mr. McCulloch, at £350,000,000, it follows that the country has to give nearly 5 per cent. out of its gross earnings every year to support those who are either incapable or unwilling to obtain a living for themselves.

This is a general view of the burdens of the entire country. Let us now proceed more particularly to examine the relative advantages or disadvantages of the several counties, and to contrast the moral, intellectual, and physical condition of the best and the worst with the two metropolitan counties in particular. First, in reference to the density of the population or number of inhabitants per hundred statute acres, the returns teach us that Middlesex is the most crowded of all the counties; the number of individuals there congregated being as much as 1,931 per cent. above the average of the other counties; whilst the proportion for Lancashire, where the inhabitants are the next most numerous, is but 243, and Surrey, the third in density, 179 per cent. above the mean quantity. In ignorance, Middlesex and Surrey are respectively 59 and 53 per cent. below the average; so that the metropolitan counties rank not only as the most crowded, but as the best instructed. In crime, however, Middlesex is almost as much *above*, as in ignorance it is *below* the average, while Surrey occupies very nearly a medium place in the moral condition of the country. Nor are the metropolitan counties less distinguished for their wealth than they are for their knowledge. The number of persons of independent means is the highest in Middlesex and Surrey, while the real property in Middlesex is 33 per cent. above the average, and in Surrey 6 per cent. below it. The deposits in the savings banks are in Middlesex 18 per cent. above, and in Surrey 15 per cent. below, the average. Again, the number of illegitimate children in the metropolitan counties is less than in any other district, and they are equally illustrious for the rarity of improvident marriages among the people—Rutland being the only county, indeed, that ranks before them in this respect. Finally, though not blessed with the fewest paupers, still the proportion of persons receiving parish relief is in both counties about 12½ per cent. below the average. It may then be said, that whilst the population is the most dense in the metropolitan counties, the people are the most instructed, the most independent, the most prudent in marriage, and have the smallest number of illegitimate children of any other county in England and Wales; and whilst the amount of savings in Middlesex is considerably above the average, the amount of pauperism in both counties is as considerably below it; and yet, strange to say, Middlesex is almost as distinguished for the criminality of its inhabitants as it is for their knowledge, independence, prudence, and chastity.

Having now contrasted the morality, intellect, and wealth of the people of the metropolitan districts with those of other counties, let us proceed to set forth more particularly the characteristics of London itself.

The city of London, within the walls, occupies a space of only 370 acres, and is but the hundred and fortieth part of the extent covered by the whole metropolis. Nevertheless, it is the parent of a mass of united and far spreading tenements, stretching from Hammersmith to Blackwall, from Holloway to Camberwell. A century ago, according to Maitland, the metropolis had drawn into its vortex one city, one borough, and forty-three villages. Despite its vast extent, still its increase continues to be so rapid, that every year further house room has to be provided for twenty thousand persons—so that London increases annually by the addition of a town of considerable size. At all times there are 4,000 extra houses in the course of erection. By the last return the metropolis covered an extent of nearly 45,000 acres, and contained upwards of two hundred and sixty thousand houses, occupied by one million eight hundred and twenty thousand souls, constituting not only the densest, but the busiest hive, the most wondrous workshop, and the richest bank in the world. The mere name of London awakens a thousand trains of varied reflections. Perhaps the first thought that it excites in the mind, paints it as the focus of modern civilization, of the hottest, the most restless activity of the social elements. Some, turning to the west, see it as a city of palaces, adorned with parks, ennobled with triumphal arches, grand statues, and stately monuments; others, looking at the east, see only narrow lanes and musty counting-houses, with tall chimneys vomiting black clouds, and huge masses of warehouses with doors and cranes ranged one above another. Yet all think of it as a vast bricken multitude, a strange incongruous chaos of wealth and want—of ambition and despair—of the brightest charity and the darkest crime, where there are more houses and more houseless, where there is more feasting and more starvation, than on any other spot on earth—and all grouped round the one giant centre, the huge black dome, with its ball of gold looming through the smoke (apt emblem of the source of its riches!) and marking out the capital, no matter from what quarter the traveller may come.

Those who have only seen London in the day-time, with its flood of life pouring through its arteries to its restless heart, know it not in its grandest aspect. It is not in the noise and roar of the cataract of commerce pouring through its streets, nor in its forest of ships, nor in its vast docks and warehouses, that its true solemnity is to be seen. To behold it in its greatest sublimity, it must be contemplated by night, afar off, from an eminence. The noblest prospect in the world, it has been well said, is London viewed from the suburbs on a clear winter's evening. The stars are shining in the heavens, but there is another firmament spread out below, with its millions of bright lights glittering at our feet. Line after line sparkles, like the trails left by meteors, cutting and crossing one another till they are lost in the haze of the distance. Over the whole there hangs a lurid cloud, bright as if the monster city were in flames, and looking afar off like the sea by night, made phosphorescent by the million creatures dwelling within it. At night it is that the strange anomalies of London are best seen. Then, as the hum of life ceases and the shops darken, and the gaudy gin palaces thrust out their ragged and squalid crowds, to pace the streets, London puts on its most solemn look of all. On the benches of the parks, in the niches of the bridges, and in the litter of the markets, are huddled together the homeless and the destitute. The only living things that haunt the streets are the poor wretches who stand shivering in their finery, waiting to catch the drunkard as he goes shouting homewards. Here on a door-step crouches some shoeless child, whose day's begging has not brought it enough to purchase it even the twopenny bed that its young companions in beggary have gone to. There, where the stones are taken up and piled high in the road, and the gas streams from a tall pipe in the centre of the street in a flag of flame—there, round the red glowing coke fire, are grouped a ragged crowd smoking or dozing through the night beside it. Then, as the streets grow blue with the coming light, and the church spires and chimney tops stand out against the sky with a sharpness of outline that is seen only in London before its million fires cover the town with their pall of smoke—then come sauntering forth the unwashed poor, some with greasy wallets on their back, to hunt over each dirt heap, and eke out life by seeking refuse bones or stray rags and pieces of old iron. Others, on their way to their work, gathered at the corner of the street round the breakfast stall, and blowing saucers of steaming coffee drawn from tall tin cans, with the fire shining crimson through the holes beneath; whilst already the little slattern girl, with her basket slung before her, screams watercresses through the sleeping streets.

Yet who, to see the squalor and wretchedness of London by night, would believe that twenty-nine only of the London bankers have cleared through their clearing-house as much as *nine hundred and fifty-four million pounds sterling in one year*, the average being more than three millions of money daily—or that the loans of merely one house in the City throughout the year exceed thirty millions? Who could have visited the Rookery of St. Giles's as it existed but a few months back, and have seen the unutterable abominations of this retreat of wretchedness, this nest of disease, at once the nursery and sanctuary of vice—where in one house alone, Mr. Smirke tells us, were huddled together eleven men, thirteen women, and thirty children—where as many as sixty of the foulest of the London lazzaroni often sleep in the same abode—who could witness this want and wretchedness, and yet believe that this country is "the bank for the whole world," as the late Mr. Rothschild called it in 1832; or that "all transactions in India, in China, in Russia, and indeed every other empire, are guided and settled in this country"?

Is it possible to believe that any man among us should want a roof to shelter his head by night, or a crust to quell his hunger by day, when we find that the amount of the property insured against fire is valued at more than five hundred millions sterling, even though, according to the returns made of the fires in the metropolis during 1836 and 1837, forty per cent. of the houses, amounting to two-fifths of the whole, were entirely uninsured. "A very short excursion into the worst part of St. Giles's," says Mr. Smirke, "will be enough to convince any one, through the medium of every sense, that it was built before the wholesome regulations respecting building and cleansing were in force. Indeed there is scarcely a single sewer in any part of it; so that here, where there is the greatest accumulation of filth, there is the least provision made for its removal." And yet, in the Holborn and Finsbury division alone—close neighbours—the length of main covered sewers is eighty-three miles, the length of smaller sewers to carry off the surface water from the roads and streets sixteen miles; the length of drains leading from houses to the main sewers two hundred and sixty-four miles, an extent almost equal to the distance of London from Edinburgh. The amount of money spent and the vastness of apparatus employed singly in lighting London and the suburbs with gas, would seem to dispel all thoughts of poverty. According to the account of Mr. Headley, the capital employed in pipes, tanks, gas holders, and apparatus of the London gas works, amounts to £2,800,000, and the cost of lighting averages close upon half a million of money per year; no less than 1,460,000,000 feet of gas being annually consumed, and upwards of nine millions being used on the longest night, giving a light equal to half a million pounds of tallow candles.

"The consumption of butchers' meat," says an excellent authority, "is nowhere so great in proportion to the population as in London." The population which obtains a supply of animal food from the metropolitan market amounts to two millions. Now, calculating the number of cattle and sheep sold in Smithfield in 1839, with the number of pigs and calves, from the returns of a previous year, and averaging the dead weight of each according to the judgment of an intelligent carcass butcher in Warwick-lane, the gross weight of animal food which is furnished by the Smithfield market will amount to two hundred and seventy million eight hundred and eighty thousand pounds of meat annually consumed in the metropolis alone. At the low price of 6d. per pound the above quantity amounts to £6,847,000; and dividing this quantity among a population of two millions, the consumption of each individual will average 136 pounds of meat in the course of the year; so that it seems almost impossible to believe that any living soul within or without the City walls should ever want a dinner.

The amount of crime in London is almost as amazing as its wealth. About thirty-six thousand criminals pass through the metropolitan gaols, bridewells, and penitentiaries every year. In one year the number of persons taken into custody by the metropolitan police for various infractions of the law amounts to 65,000 and odd—equal to the whole population of some of our largest towns. The criminal districts of the metropolis are peculiar. Larcenies in a dwelling-house were most numerous in Whitechapel in one year, and in St. George's in the Borough in another. Larcenies on the person, on the other hand, were most common in Covent-garden at one time, and at another in Shadwell. Highway robberies, burglaries, and shop-breaking occur most frequently in the eastern and southern districts, as Whitechapel, Southwark, Lambeth, Mile-end, and Poplar. The parish of St. James usually furnishes the largest proportionate number of cases under the head of drunkenness, disorderly prostitutes, and vagrancy. Clerkenwell is distinguished for the greatest number of cases of horse-stealing, of assaults with attempt to rescue, and wilful damage. Common assaults are said to be most frequent in Covent-garden and in St. George's-in-the-East. Coining and uttering counterfeit coin, in Clerkenwell and Covent-garden; embezzlement, in Whitechapel and Clerkenwell; and pawning illegally in Mile-end and Lambeth. Murder has been found to be most prevalent in Clerkenwell and Whitechapel, manslaughter in Islington and Clerkenwell, and arson in Marylebone and Westminster. One thing is at least clear, that, judging from the limited number of facts supplied to us, Clerkenwell would seem to hold a bad pre-eminence for the number and nature of the offences committed within its limits. The Constabulary Commissioners, who had access to the best sources of information, made a return of the number of thieves and suspicious characters within the boundaries of the metropolitan police, and the following is the result of their investigation:—They divided the whole number into three classes, and they found, 1st, that there were 10,444 persons who had no visible means of subsistence, and who are believed to live by the violation of the law, as by habitual depredations by fraud, by prostitution, &c. 2nd, of persons following some ostensible and legal occupation, but who are known to have committed some offence, and are believed to augment their gains by habitual or occasional violations of the law, there were 4,353; and, 3rd, there were 2,104 persons not recognized to have committed any offences, but known as associates of the above classes and otherwise deemed to be suspicious characters. Besides this return, the Constabulary Commissioners also obtained another, giving the number of houses open for the accommodation of delinquency and vice in the metropolitan district—namely, houses for the reception of stolen goods, 227; houses for the resort of thieves, 276; number of brothels where prostitutes are kept, 933; number of houses of ill-fame where prostitutes resort, 848; number of houses where prostitutes lodge, 1,554; number of gambling houses, 32; and number of mendicants' lodging-houses, 221.

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