

CHAPTER XXI.

ENVIRONMENT.

A civilised people desires that they who produce its wealth should be intelligent, honest, thrifty, far-seeing, prudent, and, to the fullest extent possible, cultivated and well mannered. It is impossible that these advantages should be secured, and the economies which they invariably effect secured with them, unless the workman is adequately remunerated for his labour, and is encouraged to hope.—*Thorold Rogers.*

In Sicily the workers are as temperate as dogs; and they are treated like dogs.—*The Clarion.*

Some sell their lives for bread ;
Some sell their souls for gold ;
Some seek the river bed ;
Some seek the workhouse mould.

Such is proud England's sway,
Where wealth may work its will ;
White flesh is cheap to-day,
White souls are cheaper still.—*Fantasias.*

By Nature we nearly resemble one another ; condition separates us very far.—*Confucius.*

Let us now consider how far drunkenness is responsible for the poverty of the masses. First of all, let me say a few words on drink and drinking. It would be a mistake to suppose that the man who is oftenest drunk is the heaviest drinker. Many a highly-respectable middle-class gentleman spends more money on drink in one day than a labourer earns in a week, yet withal is accounted a steady man. I have seen a journalist, and one very severe upon the vices of the poor, drink eight shillings worth of whiskey and soda in an evening, and do his work correctly. I have known a sailor to sit up all night playing at cards, and consume about a pint of rum and a gallon of stout in the process, and then go out at eight in the morning and score nine consecutive bull's-eyes at 200 yards. But the average poor labourer of the slums would be mad on a quarter of the liquor. Why?

There are three principal reasons:—1. The labourer is often in a low state of health. 2. The labourer does not drink with any caution or method. 3. The labourer does not get pure liquor.

Now I must in justice say for the poor that they have great excuse for drinking, and that they are often blamed for being drunk when they are simply poisoned.

Drunkenness is a disease. It is just as much a disease as typhus fever or cholera, and often arises from very similar causes. Any medical man will tell you that the craving for alcoholic stimulants is frequently found amongst men whose nervous system is low.

But there are, I think, three chief causes of drunkenness. A man may crave for drink when his system is out of order. And this may result, and generally does result, from over-work, from worry, from dulness of life, inducing depression, from lack of rest, or from living or working amid unhealthy surroundings. Hence you will find many professional men give way to drink from sheer mental over-strain, and you will find many dwellers in the slums give way to drink from loss of sleep, from over-work, from ill-health or from the effects of foul air.

Or a man may become a drunkard from the habit of taking drink. Doubtless there are many thousands of men working in the coal mines, or ironworks, or as coal dischargers, or as wool staplers, or masons, or chemical labourers, who from the intense heat, or severe exertion, or choking dust, amongst which they labour, are compelled to drink freely, and so acquire the morbid taste for liquor.

Or a man may lead a dull and cheerless life, and live amid squalid and gloomy surroundings, and so may contract the habit of going to the public-house for company and change and for excitement, and so may acquire the habit of drinking by those means.

Or a man may have inherited the disease from drunken parents; parents who acquired it from one of the causes above named.

Now, Mr. Smith, you know that many of the poor work at unhealthy trades and live in unhealthy places; and you know that they work too hard and too long, and that their lives are dull and anxious, and I ask you is it surprising that such people take to drink? Moreover, those purists who bear so hardly upon the workers for this fault, have seldom a word to say against the men who drive them to drink. But the real culprits, the people actually responsible for nearly all the drunkenness of the poor, are the grasping employers, the polluters of the rivers and the air, the jerry-builders, the slum-lords, and the detestable

knaves who grow rich by the sale of poisoned and adulterated liquor.

Give the people healthy homes, human lives, due leisure and amusement, and pure meat and drink, and drunkenness will soon disappear. While there are slums, while men have no pure pleasure, while they are overworked, and untaught, and while the wealthy brewer can open his poison dens at every street corner, it will be useless to preach temperance. The late Dean of Manchester spoke like a man of sense when he said that if he lived in the slums he too would take to drink.

Do you doubt me when I say that it is the surroundings that make the vices of the people?

Put a number of well-disposed people into bad surroundings and compel them to stop there. In a century you will have the kind of people now to be found in the slums. Take, now, a lot of people from the slums and put them in a new country where they must work to live, where they can live by work, where fresh air and freedom and hope can come to them, and in a generation you will have a prosperous and creditable colony. Do you not know this to be true? Has it not happened both ways? Do not Dr. Barnardo's outcast children turn out well? Then what is the reason? Men are made by their environment.

It has been said that dirt is matter in the wrong place. I often think that ne'er-do-wells are examples of energy in the wrong place. Emerson says "There is no moral deformity but is a good passion out of place." Some natures cannot thrive without a great deal of excitement. They have in them such desire of activity, such hunger for adventure, that they are incapable of settling down to the dull hum-drum life of British respectability and profit-making. Sir Walter Raleigh was a bold explorer and a grand admiral, but I cannot imagine him a success as a Lancashire weaver, with £1 a week and two holidays a year. Turn these restless spirits loose in a congenial sphere, and they will do much good work, as, indeed, much good work has been done by such. But dulness and monotony, task work and tracts, are not food hot enough for their palates. And so they seek such change and such excitement as lie in their way. And the dealer in doctored gin and the retailer

of racing "morals" find their profit in them; but they might have been fine factors in the sum of human progress.

To tell these people that they shall have help and love when they quit their vices is like telling a sick man that he shall be sent to the seaside as soon as he recovers his health.

Sow some wheat on sterile land, and it will give a poor harvest. Would you say, "While there are poor harvests there must be sterile lands?" Put a fish into a small and dirty globe, and he will sicken. Would you say that while there are sick fishes there must be small globes and impure water? Yet you say while there are vice and improvidence there must be poverty.

Why do the middle and upper classes take so much trouble with the nursing and education of their children? Why do they instil into their young minds principles of honesty, of industry, of virtue, of culture? Why do they send their sons and daughters to school and to college? Why do they teach them cleanliness and sobriety? Why do they so jealously watch over their morals? Why do they take such trouble and incur such expense in the effort to shield them from all that is vicious, and indecent, and unhealthy? Is it not to ensure their moral and mental and physical welfare? You will say, "Of course."

It seems, then, that even the children of educated, honest, and virtuous parents need to be carefully trained and guarded to prevent them falling into idleness and vice. For if children would grow up good without watchfulness and cultivation, it would be mere folly and waste of time and means to trouble about teaching them. Now if all this care is necessary to ensure moral excellence, it follows that without such care moral excellence could not be ensured. That is to say, that in our colleges, in our Sunday schools, in our home lessons, in the tender and earnest solicitude of good parents, we find an acknowledgment of the fact that a child is what he is taught to be.

Now suppose a child is deprived of this education. Suppose it is born in a poor hovel, in a poor slum. Suppose its home surroundings are such that cleanliness and modesty are well-nigh impossible. Suppose the gutter is its playground; the ginshop its nursery; the factory its college;

the drunkard its exemplar; the ruffian and the thief its instructors! Suppose bad nursing, bad air, bad water, bad food, dirt, hunger, ill-usage, foul language, and hard work are its daily portion. Suppose it has inherited poor blood, dull spirits, enfeebled wit, and stunted stature, from its ill-fed, untaught, overworked, miserable, ignorant, and unhealthy parents, can you expect that child to be clever, and moral, and thrifty, and clean, and sober?

Again. What next to their education and surroundings makes well-bred and well-taught children happy and good and industrious? Simply their good and pleasant environment. Life is to them worth living. They have comfort and love and knowledge and—hope. But the child of “the great unwashed” has none of these things. His lot is labour and poverty, his pleasure is in drunkenness and gambling, his future is gloomier than his horrible present. You talk about the social virtues! These poor creatures have not even food, or rest, or air, or light! Now, I say, give them food and air, and light and leisure; give them education, and give them hope, and they will cease to be vicious and improvident.

The poor! The poor! The poor! The thriftlessness of the poor! The intemperance of the poor! The idleness of the poor! How long yet have we to listen to this cackle? How long have we to hear men prate about the poor and about the working classes who never knew what poverty is, who never knew what hunger means, who never did a stroke of manual work, and whose knowledge of “the poor” is got from the poems and the novels and the essays of university “swells,” or from furtive and uncharitable glances at the public-house steps or the pawnshop door as their excellencies’ carriages are hurrying them through the outskirts of the slums!

Perhaps you will say, John, that if the surroundings make the man, then all the denizens of the slums, and all the workers in the mines, would drink. But, no. You would not say that the bad drainage of a district would give *all* the inhabitants the fever, but only that it would give those the fever whose health made them most amenable to the germs of the disease.

I am not arguing that poverty inevitably leads to drink, but only that it is the chief cause of drunkenness.

There is a common belief to the effect that if the poor were all industrious, sober, and thrifty they would cease to be poor. This error arises from confusion of thought.

It is quite true that a sober man will succeed better than a drunken man; but it is not true that if all the people were sober their wages would increase.

Suppose there are ten clerks in an office, nine of whom are unsteady and one steady. The steady man will very likely become head clerk. But this is not because he is steady, but because the others are not steady. For you will observe that no one thinks of promoting a clerk because he is honest, for very few clerks being dishonest the honest clerk is not singular.

You must not suppose that because a sober and industrious *man* will succeed—in *some* trades—better than a drunken and a lazy man that therefore the whole trade would succeed better by becoming abstainers and hard workers.

You are fond of “facts.” What are the facts with regard to thrift and industry amongst the workers?

The Hindoos are amongst the most abstemious and industrious people; and they are about the worst-paid people in the world. The immigrant Jews in the tailoring and slipper trades are wonderfully thrifty, sober, and industrious, and they work terribly long hours for shamefully low wages.

Under competition the workers do not gain any advantage by being sober and industrious. They gain a lower depth of serfdom and a harder task of slavery. If the Englishman will work for fifteen hours and live on bread and cheese, the foreigner will have to work for eighteen hours and eat grass, and *that* is what your capitalists mean when they tell you that Englishmen are being pushed out of the market by foreigners because foreigners will work harder and take less pay.

But allow me to quote the statement of this case given by me in my reply to the Bishop of Manchester:—

“In all foreign nations where the standard of living is lower than in England, your lordship will find that the wages are lower also.

“Has not your lordship often heard our manufacturers tell the English workers that if they would emulate the thrift and sobriety of the foreigner they might successfully compete against foreign competition in the foreign markets? My lord, what does that mean, but that thrift would enable our people to live on less, and so to accept less wages?”

“Your lordship knows that our shirtmakers here in Manchester are miserably paid.

“This is because capitalism always keeps the wages down to the lowest standard of subsistence which the people will accept.

“So long as our English women will consent to work long hours, and live on tea and bread, the ‘law of supply and demand’ will maintain the present condition of sweating in the shirt trade.

“If all our women became firmly convinced that they could not exist without chops and bottled stout the wages *must* go up to a price to pay for those things.

“*Because there would be no women offering to live on tea and bread; and shirts must be had.*

“But what, my lord, is the result of the abstinence of these poor sisters of ours? Low wages for themselves, and, for others——?”

“A young merchant wants a dozen shirts. He pays 10s. each for them. He meets a friend who only gave 8s. for his. He goes to the 8s. shop and saves 24s. This is clear profit, and he spends it in cigars, or champagne, or in some other luxury; *and the poor seamstress lives on toast and tea.*”

Many shallow thinkers assert that if a man is determined to succeed he *will* succeed. This is not true, but if it were true it would not prove that the qualities of energy, talent, and self-denial which enable one man to improve his condition would enable all men to improve their conditions. For the one man only succeeds because of his superior strength and skill; but if all men displayed strength and skill equal to his he could not rise.

There is a panic in a theatre and a fight for egress. A big strong man will force his way out over the bodies of the weak.

Now don't you see how foolish it is for that man to tell the weak that if they were as strong as he *they* could get

out? If they were as strong as he he could not get out himself.

A short time ago a certain writer, much esteemed for his graceful style of saying silly things, informed us that the poor remain poor because they show no efficient desire to be anything else. Is that true? Are only the idle poor? Come with me and I will show you where men and women work from morning till night, from week to week, from year to year, at the full stretch of their powers, in dim and fœtid dens, and yet are poor—ay, destitute—have for their wages a crust of bread and rags. I will show you where men work in dirt and heat, using the strength of brutes, for a dozen hours a day and sleep at night in styes, until brain and muscle are exhausted and fresh slaves are yoked to the golden car of commerce, and the broken drudges filter through the union or the prison to a felon's or a pauper's grave! And I will show you how men and women thus work and suffer and faint and die, generation after generation; and I will show you how the longer and the harder these wretches toil the worse their lot becomes; and I will show you the graves, and find witnesses to the histories of brave and noble and industrious poor men whose lives were lives of toil, and poverty, and whose deaths were tragedies.

And all these things are due to sin—but it is to the sin of the smug hypocrites who grow rich upon the robbery and the ruin of their fellow-creatures.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE RIGHTS OF THE INDIVIDUAL.

I think that my contention, which I see quoted by Mr Goschen, could be exhaustively proved, that every act of the legislature which seems to interfere with the doctrine of *laissez-faire*, and has stood the test of experience, has been endorsed because it has added to the general efficiency of labour, and, therefore, to the general well-being of society.—*Thorold Rogers*.

Law was made for property alone.—*Macaulay*.

You have, very likely, heard of the thing called Individualism. You may have read articles or heard speeches in which Socialism has been assailed as an interference