

els of lath-and-plaster, which had been such ready fuel for the flames, substantial houses of brick were erected, which rendered the occurrence of anything like so great a calamity all but impossible. But this was not only advantage; the city, as reconstructed, was much more healthy than it had ever been before. In the very year before the fire the Plague destroyed nearly one-third of the inhabitants; from that time until the present day the Plague has been all but unknown in London. Had no such conflagration occurred, it is difficult to imagine how a great and thorough improvement of the metropolis would ever have been effected; had the fire been confined within a small area no large improvement could have resulted. The fact is, that the great fire of 1666 was just exactly what London wanted to save it from becoming the most inconvenient and most pestilential city in Europe, if not in the world.

And what the great fire has done for London, cholera has done for every other town. This frightful malady has been a very useful teacher. In many of the places that were almost decimated by it we have learned to adopt sanitary measures, and so have considerably raised the value of life and prolonged its average duration. If the cholera had not been here, and the deaths from it frightfully sudden, as well as very numerous, should have gone on temporizing and dithering, thinking about expenses, and no great reform would ever have been attempted; the streets would have remained imperfectly sewered, or not sewered at all; houses would still have been crowded with people from the cellar to the garret. Happily the cholera struck hard, and struck people of every class, and has thoroughly frightened us, and compelled us to make our towns more healthy. The work is not effectually done yet, and therefore it will not be a matter greatly to be deplored if cholera, or some other pestilence, should again give us the admonition that we need, and teach us once more that "cleanliness is next to godliness."

I do not know but that even to a railway accident we might apply this paradox, and say, "the worse it is the better." On the thousands of miles of railway in Great Britain, a fatal accident is unhappily a very common occurrence; and accidents on a small scale, though in the aggregate, fatal to large numbers, do not attract much attention. But if a severe collision or break-down took place, involving the deaths of two or three hundred persons, then the public feeling would be so mightily aroused that inquiries would be stimulated to the most extraordinary exertions to make railway travelling as safe as it is expeditious. The more severely the necessity for increased security is felt, the more likely are those inventions which will produce it to be forthcoming.

If many a political injustice and abuse, we may say, "the worse the better." Things must, generally, become very bad indeed before anything is likely to be done to cure them. It was the Old Sarum that stirred us to Reform; and it is, to a great extent, the fact that there are no Old Sarums now, that renders it impossible, at all events difficult, to get up a reform agitation at the present time. Small grievances people will endure, without much impatience, from one generation to another; but get a grievance that is a grievance indeed, and then see how things will go! Had the Stuarts been a little more moderate than they were, they might have retained the throne, and prolonged, for some time at least, much of their despotic power. Happily they had not good sense enough to temper