

cottages sometimes obliges the labourer to submit to this, although he may have work offered to him on better terms elsewhere.

On this subject of crowded cottages, and the immorality it leads to, I will quote the following words of Mr. Justice Coleridge, addressed to a Labourers' Friends Association in Devonshire, and which I read in the public journals some time ago. Coming from such authority and experience, they are deserving of the highest attention.

"I beg to impress upon you the importance of improving the moral and social condition of the labouring classes, with whose well-being your own interest is very closely identified. Many amongst them are wretchedly lodged. From my own experience as a judge, the painful conviction has been forced upon my mind, that very much of the crime which disgraces our country is mainly attributable to the mixture of sexes and of ages in the dwellings of the poor: a practice that debases and demoralizes the human mind, and which, unless counteracted, must effectually neutralize every effort made towards the elevation or improvement of the people."

"This is a very strong opinion: but it is the opinion of one who has had the best opportunity of inquiring into crime, and he speaks of it as being forced upon him, and it is one to which every inquiring mind must come that has witnessed the low and degrading habits to which such practices lead. It is the duty of owners of property to do all they can to remedy it, as it is no less the duty of the poor to second their efforts in doing so; but such is the force of habit, that in many cases where the landlord has attempted a remedy, the cottagers themselves have taken in lodgers; or when a son or daughter marries, let them have a part of their cottage,—a proof that any great improvement in this way must be a work of time, and can only be accomplished by degrees, as the rising generation become better educated, and more alive to social comforts, and feel that such habits lead to vice and misery, and make them every way as a class less respectable, not only in their own eyes, but in the eyes of their employers."

The present generation of children of the labouring class, now leaving school, have great difficulties and temptations to contend with; they are immediately thrown with companions who have not had the same advantages in this respect as themselves—having confirmed habits of a kind which education is intended to correct—jealous of those who have had any education whatever, and anxious to bring them in every way to a level with themselves—so that they have, in fact, more than ordinary temptations to resist.

Nor does this apply merely to their companions and fellow-labourers, working in the same occupation with themselves, but to a very great number of others—the jeerers and scoffers, who are continually saying, "What do we want with this or with that? a little reading and writing is all that the labouring man can want;" so that, for the present, the better educated can only be looked upon as a leaven to leaven the mass, and that from the numerous temptations they meet with, there may, and no doubt will be, some who fall into the low and degrading habits of those about them; but every succeeding year will, in this respect, bring a brighter prospect with it, and education will in the end lead to that improvement in society at large which its friends have reason to expect: every one now leaving our schools at all educated as a pioneer among these rough samples of humanity, smoothing the way for a better order of things, and gradually making it smoother with each succeeding year.

The ignorance of some in the labouring classes can scarcely be understood by those who have not examined into it; and I have met with instances myself, particularly of lads just growing into manhood, whose ignorance is greater than I could have imagined possible. The parents, after the age of twelve, or even before that, lose all control over them; they have nothing to guide them beyond mere animal impulse, and of course this guides them wrong—to improve them at this age and with such habits is almost hopeless, and in whatever light you view them, it must be with feelings of pity and commiseration. Characters of this kind are in such a state, and their minds are become so completely inactive, that they work wickedness mechanically and from habit, having no idea whatever of the light in which it appears to the respectable part of society about them.

In extending education, and introducing it into our schools in such a way as to reach the classes above the labourer, we might hope that more of intelligence would be brought to bear on parochial management—in those things of a civic kind, which regard our living together in small separate communities—the parts of a whole, and working together for the general good, and having to carry into effect those internal arrangements among ourselves which the law requires for the happiness of the whole—things in which society at large is deeply interested; but notwithstanding this,

they are too generally transacted in a way which loses sight of every business-principle, as well as of every principle of common sense.

In matters of this kind, it is painful to see the low standard of moral feeling which prevails in the agricultural districts, and the little regard which is paid that the public-houses, beer-houses, etc., and those places to which the labouring-man resorts, should be kept within the bounds of decency, so that from the character of those who keep them, the poor man may in some measure be protected from falling into the degraded and mischievous courses, into which many of them have been led by frequenting ill-conducted places of the kind. It has been thought somewhat of a safeguard to the morals of a parish, that the keeper of a beer-house should, in order to get a license from the excise, produce a certificate signed by six inhabitant rate-payers, rated above £6 per annum, and in theory this might seem to read well, but in practice it is found to be no protection whatever, as to regulating the number of beer-houses, and proportioning them to the population, or as to the respectability of the party to be licensed; and I can state, from my own experience, as well as from the evidence of others, that there is no character however bad, where six rate-payers in a moderate-sized parish may not be found to sign such certificate—either from what they please to term good-nature—or from a thorough indifference as to the mischief which may arise from it—or from a kind of bribery among the parties. I know instances annually occurring, where one might have supposed scarcely six men could be found in a whole county to sign such a recommendation, much less in a parish. The mischief which this leads to and the demoralizing effect which such practices have upon the more ignorant class of labourers, and particularly among the young men, is most deplorable, and a better state of things can only arise by the class immediately above the labourer, as well as the labourer himself, being from education brought to feel that such conduct is discredit to themselves, and is looked upon as such by the respectable classes immediately above them, and by thus being made to see their own conduct, in somewhat the same light as others see it; in the words of the poet of Scotland—

Oh, wad some power the giftie gie'em  
To see themselves as others see'em!

In general, the rule of conduct in such matters seems to be—if a man can get a living, that he is justified in doing anything which puts a penny into his pocket, no matter how much his doing so may bring into temptation and into mischief those about him. The poor labourers are many of them, in the winter, led to the beer-house by the warmth which it affords, and the result is, a starving wife—ragged and uneducated children—a brutalized peasantry—and many other evils, which might at all events be materially mitigated by a different conduct on the part of their employers, and by their taking a proper interest in the moral well-being and respectability of those around them, and towards whom they are, as beings, responsible to a higher power, and from a duty both to God and man, called upon to act in a very different way from that in which the generality of them do.

Now if the object of religion be (what I think every one must confess it is) to make men practically good, then I think it must be allowed by all that its teachers are by no means exceeding their duty, in endeavouring to give clearer and better views in those matters nominally of a civil kind having so intimate a relation; and so direct an influence on the morals of a people, and in the healthy administration of which, almost all the links in our social chain are equally interested.

The following passage from Mrs. Marcet's "Conversations on Political Economy," well expresses what ought to be the tendency of the education given to the labouring classes: she says:—

"I would endeavour to give the rising generation such an education as would render them not only moral and religious, but industrious, frugal, and provident. In proportion as the mind is informed, we are able to calculate the consequences of our actions; it is the infant and the savage who live only for the present moment; those whom instruction has taught to think, reflect upon the past and look forward to the future. Education gives rise to prudence, not only by enlarging our understanding, but by softening our feelings, by humanising the heart, and promoting amiable affections. The rude and inconsiderate peasant marries without either foreseeing or caring for the miseries he may entail on his wife and children; but he who has been taught to value the comforts and decencies of life, will not heedlessly involve himself and all that is dear to him in poverty and its long train of miseries."

It certainly appears to me to be the true theory of a healthy state of society, and certainly more consistent with honest, straight-