LETTER XXVIII.

May 28.

MY DEAR COUSIN:--

This morning Lord Shaftesbury came according to appointment, to take me to see the Model Lodging Houses. He remarked that it would be impossible to give me the full effect of seeing them, unless I could first visit the dens of filth, disease, and degradation, in which the poor of London formerly were lodged. With a good deal of satisfaction he told me that the American minister, Mr. Ingersoll, previous to leaving London, had requested the police to take him over the dirtiest and most unwholesome parts of it, that he might see the lowest as well as the highest sphere of London life. After this, however, the policeman took him through the baths, wash houses, and model lodging houses, which we were going to visit, and he expressed himself both surprised and delighted with the improvement that had been made.

We first visited the lodging house for single men in Charles Street, Drury Lane. This was one of the first experiments made in this line, and to effect the thing in the most economical manner possible, three old houses were bought and thrown into one, and fitted up for the purpose. On the ground floor we saw the superintendent's apartment, and a large, long sitting room, furnished with benches and clean, scoured tables, where the inmates were, some of them, reading books or

papers: the day being wet, perhaps, kept them from their work. In the kitchen were ample cooking accommodations, and each inmate, as I understand, cooks for himself. Lord Shaftesbury said, that--something like a common table had been tried, but that it was found altogether easier or more satisfactory for each one to suit himself. On this floor, also, was a bathing room, and a well-selected library of useful reading books, history, travels, &c. On the next floor were the dormitories--a great hall divided by board partitions into little sleeping cells about eight feet square, each containing a neat bed, chair, and stand. The partition does not extend quite up to the wall, and by this means while each inmate enjoys the privacy of a small room, he has all the comfort of breathing the air of the whole hall.

A working man returning from his daily toil to this place, can first enjoy the comfort of a bath; then, going into the kitchen, make his cup of tea or coffee, and sitting down at one of the clean, scoured tables in the sitting room, sip his tea, and look over a book. Or a friendly company may prepare their supper and sit down to tea together. Lord Shaftesbury said that the effect produced on the men by such an arrangement was wonderful. They became decent, decorous, and self-respecting. They passed rules of order for their community. They subscribed for their library from their own earnings, and the books are mostly of their own selection. "It is remarkable," said his lordship, "that of their own accord they decided to reject every profane, indecent, or immoral work. It showed," he said, "how strong are the influences of the surroundings in reforming or ruining the

character." It should be remarked that all these advantages are enjoyed for the same price charged by the most crowded and filthy of lodging houses, namely, fourpence per night, or two shillings per week. The building will accommodate eighty-two. The operation supports itself handsomely.

I should remark, by the by, that in order to test more fully the practicability of the thing, this was accomplished in one of the worst neighborhoods in London.

From these we proceeded to view a more perfect specimen of the same sort in the Model Lodging House of George Street, Bloomsbury Square, a house which was built de novo, for the purpose of perfectly illustrating the principle. This house accommodates one hundred and four working men, and combines every thing essential or valuable in such an establishment--complete ventilation and drainage; the use of a distinct living room; a kitchen and a wash house, a bath, and an ample supply of water, and all the conveniences which, while promoting the physical comfort of the inmates, tend to increase their self-respect, and elevate them in the scale of moral and intellectual beings. The arrangement of the principal apartments are such as to insure economy as well as domestic comfort, the kitchen and wash house being furnished with every requisite convenience, including a bath supplied with hot and cold water; also a separate and well-ventilated safe for the food of each inmate. Under the care of the superintendent is a small, but well-selected library.

The common room, thirty-three feet long, twenty-three feet wide, and ten feet nine inches high, is paved with white tiles, laid on brick arches, and on each side are two rows of tables with seats; at the fireplace is a constant supply of hot water, and above it are the rules of the establishment. The staircase, which occupies the centre of the building, is of stone. The dormitories, eight in number, ten feet high, are subdivided with movable wood partitions six feet nine inches high; each compartment, enclosed by its own door, is fitted up with a bed, chair, and clothes box. A shaft is carried up at the end of every room, the ventilation through it being assisted by the introduction of gas, which lights the apartment. A similar shaft is carried up the staircase, supplying fresh air to the dormitories, with a provision for warming it, if necessary. The washing closets on each floor are fitted up with slate, having japanned iron basins, and water laid on.

During the fearful ravages of the cholera in this immediate neighborhood, not one case occurred in this house among its one hundred and four inmates.

From this place we proceeded to one, if any thing, more interesting to me. This was upon the same principle appropriated to the lodgment of single women. When one considers the defenceless condition of single women, who labor for their own subsistence in a large city, how easily they are imposed upon and oppressed, and how quickly a constitution

may be destroyed for want of pure air, fresh water, and other common necessaries of life, one fully appreciates the worth of a large and beautiful building, which provides for this oppressed, fragile class.

The Thanksgiving Model Buildings at Port Pool Lane, Gray's Inn, are so called because they were built with a thank-offering collected in the various religious societies of London, as an appropriate expression of their gratitude to God for the removal of the cholera. This block of buildings has in it accommodations for twenty families, and one hundred and twenty-eight single women; together with a public wash house, and a large cellar, in which are stored away the goods of those women who live by the huckster's trade.

The hundred and twenty-eight single women, of whom the majority are supposed to be poor needlewomen, occupy sixty-four rooms in a building of four stories, divided by a central staircase; a corridor on either side forms a lobby to eight rooms, each twelve feet six inches long, by nine feet six inches wide, sufficiently large for two persons. They are fitted up with two bedsteads, a table, chairs, and a washing stand. The charge is one shilling per week for each person, or two shillings per room.

Lord Shaftesbury took me into one of the rooms, where was an aged female partially bedridden, who maintained herself by sewing, The room was the picture of neatness and comfort; a good supply of hot and cold water was furnished in it. Her work was spread out by her upon the

bed, together with her Bible and hymn book; she looked cheerful and comfortable. She seemed pleased to see Lord Shaftesbury, whom she had evidently seen many times before, as his is a familiar countenance in all these places. She expressed the most fervent thankfulness for the quiet, order, and comfort of her pleasant lodgings, comparing them very feelingly with what used to be her condition before any such place had been provided.

From this place we drove to the Streatham Street Lodging House for families, of which the following is an outside view. This building is, in the first place, fire proof; in the second, the separation in the parts belonging to different families is rendered complete and perfect by the use of hollow brick for the partitions, which entirely prevents, as I am told, the transmission of sound.

The accompanying print shows the plan of one tenement.

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Open gallery, five feet wide

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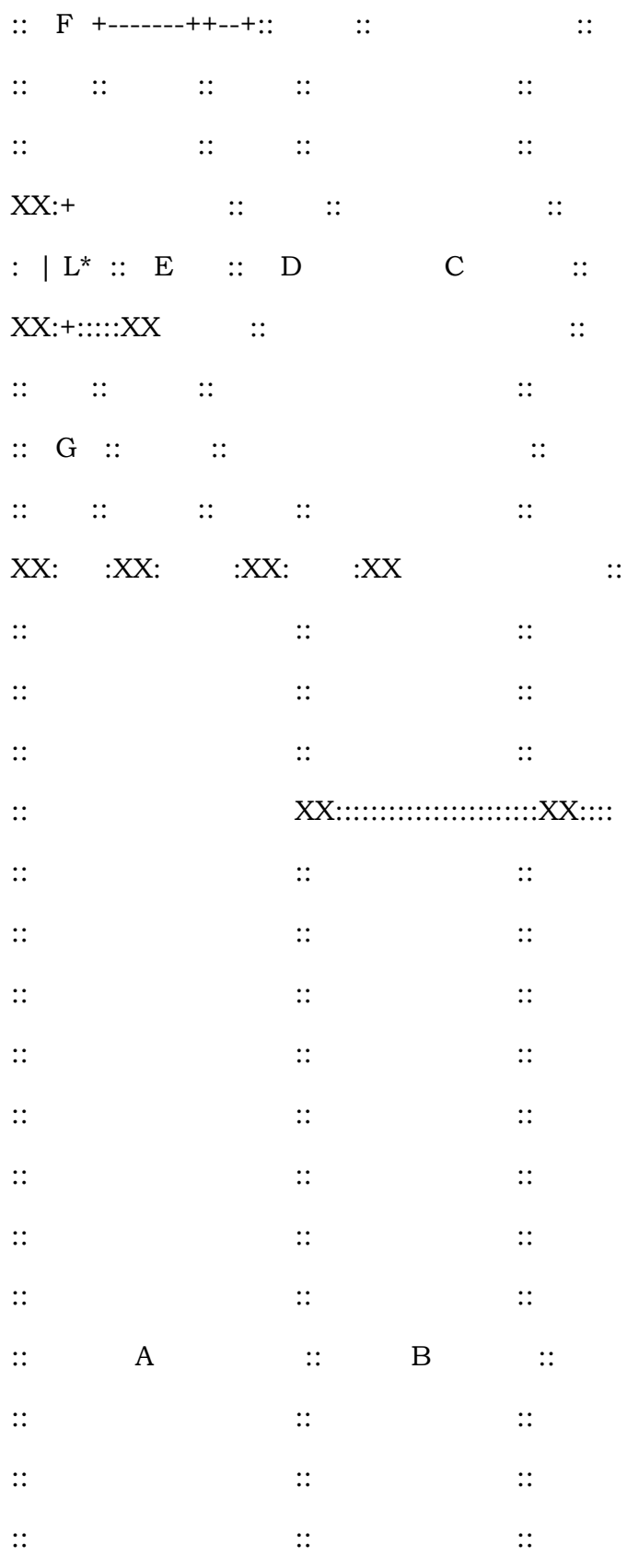
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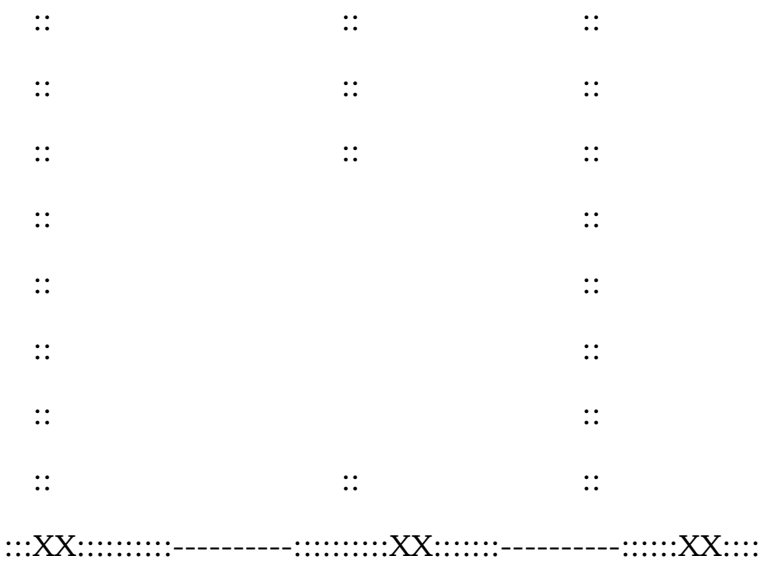

By means of the sleeping closet adjoining the living room, each dwelling affords three good sleeping apartments. The meat safe preserves provisions. The dust flue is so arranged that all the sweepings of the house, and all the refuse of the cookery, have only

to be thrown down to disappear forever; while the sink is supplied to an unlimited extent with hot and cold water. These galleries, into which every tenement opens, run round the inside of the hollow court which the building encloses, and afford an admirable play-place for the little children, out of the dangers and temptations of the street, and in view of their respective mothers. The foregoing print, representing the inner half of the quadrangle, shows the arrangement of the galleries.

"Now," said Lord Shaftesbury, as he was showing me through these tenements, which were models of neatness and good keeping, "you must bear in mind that these are tenanted by the very people who once were living in the dirtiest and filthiest lodging houses; people whom the world said, it did no good to try to help; that they liked to be dirty better than clean, and would be dirty under any circumstances."

He added the following anecdote to show the effect of poor lodgings in degrading the character. A fine young man, of some considerable taste and talent, obtained his living by designing patterns for wall paper. A long and expensive illness so reduced his circumstances, that he was obliged to remove to one of these low, filthy lodging houses already alluded to. From that time he became an altered man; his wife said that he lost all energy, all taste in designing, love of reading, and fondness for his family; began to frequent drinking shops, and was visibly on the road to ruin. Hearing of these lodging houses, he succeeded in renting a tenement in one of them, for the same sum which

he had paid for the miserable dwelling. Under the influence of a neat, airy, pleasant, domestic home, the man's better nature again awoke, his health improved, he ceased to crave ardent spirits, and his former ingenuity in his profession returned.

"Now, this shows," said Lord Shaftesbury, "that hundreds may have been ruined simply by living in miserable dwellings." I looked into this young man's tenement; it was not only neat, but ornamented with a great variety of engravings tastefully disposed upon the wall. On my expressing my pleasure in this circumstance, he added, "It is one of the pleasantest features of the case, to notice how soon they began to ornament their little dwellings; some have cages with singing birds, and some pots of flowering plants; some, pictures and engravings."

"And are these buildings successful in a pecuniary point of view?" I said. "Do they pay their own way?"

"Yes," he replied, "they do. I consider that these buildings, if they have done nothing more, have established two points: first, that the poor do not prefer dirt and disorder, where it is possible for them to secure neatness and order; and second, that buildings with every proper accommodation can be afforded at a price which will support an establishment."

Said I, "Are people imitating these lodging houses very rapidly?"

"To a great extent they are," he replied, "but not so much as I desire. Buildings on these principles have been erected in the principal towns of England and Scotland. The state of the miserable dwellings, courts, alleys, &c., is the consequence of the neglect of former days, when speculators and builders were allowed to do as they liked, and run up hovels, where the working man, whose house must be regulated, not by his choice, but by his work, was compelled then, as he is now, to live, however narrow, unhealthy, or repulsive the place might be. This was called 'the liberty of the subject.'" It has been one of Lord Shaftesbury's most arduous parliamentary labors to bring the lodging houses under governmental regulation. He told me that he introduced a bill to this effect in the House of Commons, while a member, as Lord Ashley, and that just as it had passed through the House of Commons, he entered the House of Lords, as Lord Shaftesbury, and so had the satisfaction of carrying the bill to its completion in that house, where it passed in the year 1851. The provisions of this bill require every keeper of a lodging house to register his name at the Metropolitan Police Office, under a penalty of a fine of five pounds for every lodger received before this is done. After having given notice to the police, they are not allowed to receive lodgers until the officers have inspected the house, to see whether it accords with the required conditions. These conditions are, that the walls and ceilings be whitewashed; that the floors, stairs, beds, and bed clothes are clean; that there be some mode of ventilating every room; that each house be provided with every accommodation for promoting decency and neatness; that the drains and cesspools are perfect; the

yards properly paved, so as to run dry; and that each house has a supply of water, with conveniences for cooking and washing; and finally, that no person with an infectious disease is inhabiting the house. It is enacted, moreover, that only so many shall be placed in a room as shall be permitted by the commissioners of the police; and it is made an indispensable condition to the fitness of a house, that the proprietor should hang up in every room a card, properly signed by the police inspector, stating the precise number who are allowed to be lodged there. The law also strictly forbids persons of different sexes occupying the same room, except in case of married people with children under ten years of age: more than one married couple may not inhabit the same apartment, without the provision of a screen to secure privacy. It is also forbidden to use the kitchens, sculleries, or cellars for sleeping rooms, unless specially permitted by the police. The keeper of the house is required thoroughly to whitewash the walls and ceilings twice a year, and to cleanse the drains and cesspools whenever required by the police. In case of sickness, notice must be immediately given to the police, and such measures pursued, for preventing infection, as may be deemed judicious by the inspector.

The commissioner of police reports to the secretary of state systematically as to the results of this system.

After looking at these things, we proceeded to view one of the model washing houses, which had been erected for the convenience of poor women. We entered a large hall, which was divided by low wood

partitions into small apartments, in each of which a woman was washing. The whole process of washing clothes in two or three waters, and boiling them, can be effected without moving from the spot, or changing the tub. Each successive water is let out at the bottom, while fresh is let on from the top. When the clothes are ready to be boiled, a wooden cover is placed over them, and a stream of scalding steam is directed into the tub, by turning a stop cock; this boils the water in a few moments, effectually cleansing the clothes; they are then whirled in a hollow cylinder till nearly dry, after which they are drawn through two rollers covered with flannel, which presses every remaining particle of water out of them. The clothes are then hung upon frames, which shut into large closets, and are dried by steam in a very short space of time.

Lord Shaftesbury, pointing out the partitions, said, "This is an arrangement of delicacy to save their feelings: their clothes are sometimes so old and shabby they do not want to show them, poor things." I thought this feature worthy of special notice.

In addition to all these improvements for the laboring classes, very large bathing establishments have been set up expressly for the use of the working classes. To show the popularity and effectiveness of this movement, five hundred and fifty thousand baths were given in three houses during the year 1850. These bathing establishments for the working classes are rapidly increasing in every part of the kingdom.

When we returned to our carriage after this survey, I remarked to Lord Shaftesbury that the combined influence of these causes must have wrought a considerable change in the city. He answered, with energy, "You can have no idea. Whole streets and districts have been revolutionized by it. The people who were formerly savage and ferocious, because they supposed themselves despised and abandoned, are now perfectly quiet and docile. I can assure you that Lady Shaftesbury has walked alone, with no attendant but a little child, through streets in London where, years ago, a well-dressed man could not have passed safely without an escort of the police."

I said to him that I saw nothing now, with all the improvements they were making throughout the kingdom, to prevent their working classes from becoming quite as prosperous as ours, except the want of a temperance reformation.

He assented with earnestness. He believed, he said, that the amount spent in liquors of various kinds, which do no good, but much injury, was enough to furnish every laborer's dwelling, not only with comforts, but with elegances. "But then," he said, "one thing is to be considered: a reform of the dwellings will do a great deal towards promoting a temperance reformation. A man who lives in a close, unwholesome dwelling, deprived of the natural stimulus of fresh air and pure water, comes into a morbid and unhealthy state; he craves stimulants to support the sinking of his vital powers, caused by these unhealthy influences." There is certainly a great deal of truth in

this; and I think that, in America, we should add to the force of our Maine law by adopting some of the restrictions of the Lodging House act.

I have addressed this letter to you, my dear cousin, on account of the deep interest you have taken in the condition of the poor and perishing in the city of New York. While making these examinations, these questions occurred to my mind: Could our rich Christian men employ their capital in a more evangelical manner, or more adorn the city of New York, than by raiding a large and beautiful lodging house, which should give the means of health, comfort, and vigor to thousands of poor needlewomen? The same query may be repeated concerning all the other lodging houses I have mentioned. Furthermore, should not a movement for the registration and inspection of common lodging houses keep pace with efforts to suppress the sale of spirits? The poison of these dismal haunts creates a craving for stimulants, which constantly tends to break over and evade law.