LETTER XXIX.

DEAR FATHER:--

I wish in this letter to give you a brief view of the movements in this country for the religious instruction and general education of the masses. If we compare the tone of feeling now prevalent with that existing but a few years back, we notice a striking change. No longer ago than in the time of Lady Huntington we find a lady of quality ingenuously confessing that her chief source of scepticism in regard to Christianity was, that it actually seemed to imply that the educated, the refined, the noble, must needs be saved by the same Savior and the same gospel with the ignorant and debased working classes. Traces of a similar style of feeling are discernible in the letters of the polished correspondents of Hannah More. Robert Walpole gayly intimates himself somewhat shocked at the idea that the nobility and the vulgar should be equally subject to the restraints of the Sabbath and the law of God--equally exposed to the sanctions of endless retribution. And Young makes his high-born dame inquire,

"Shall pleasures of a short duration chain
A lady's soul in everlasting pain?"

In broad contrast to this, all the modern popular movements in England are based upon the recognition of the equal value of every human soul. The Times, the most aristocratic paper in England, publishes letters

from needlewomen and dressmakers' apprentices, and reads grave lectures to duchesses and countesses on their duties to their poor sisters. One may fancy what a stir this would have made in the courtly circles of the reign of George II. Fashionable literature now arrays itself on the side of the working classes. The current of novel writing is reversed. Instead of milliners and chambermaids being bewitched with the adventures of countesses and dukes, we now have fine lords and ladies hanging enchanted over the history of John the Carrier, with his little Dot, dropping sympathetic tears into little Charlie's wash tub, and pursuing the fortunes of a dressmaker's apprentice, in company with poor Smike, and honest John Brodie and his little Yorkshire wife. Punch laughs at every body but the work people; and if, occasionally, he laughs at them, it is rather in a kindly way than with any air of contempt. Then, Prince Albert visits model lodging houses, and commands all the ingenuity of the kingdom to expend itself in completing the ideal of a workman's cottage for the great World's Fair. Lords deliver lydeum lectures; ladies patronize ragged schools; committees of duchesses meliorate the condition of needlewomen. In short, the great ship of the world has tacked, and stands on another course.

The beginning of this great humanitarian movement in England was undoubtedly the struggle of Clarkson, Wilberforce, and their associates, for the overthrow of the slave trade. In that struggle the religious democratic element was brought to bear for years upon the mind of Parliament. The negro, most degraded of men, was taken up, and

for years made to agitate British society on the simple ground that he had a human soul.

Of course the religious obligations of society to every human soul were involved in the discussion. It educated Parliament, it educated the community. Parliament became accustomed to hearing the simple principles of the gospel asserted in its halls as of binding force. The community were trained in habits of efficient benevolent action, which they have never lost. The use of tracts, of committees, of female cooperation, of voluntary association, and all the appliances of organized reform were discovered and successfully developed. The triumphant victory then achieved, moreover, became the pledge of future conquests in every department of reform. Concerning the movements for the elevation of the masses, Lord Shaftesbury has kindly furnished me with a few brief memoranda, set down as nearly as possible in chronological order.

In the first place, there has been reform of the poor laws. So corrupt had this system become, that a distinct caste had well nigh sprung into permanent existence, families having been known to subsist in idleness for five generations solely by means of skilful appropriation of public and private charities.

The law giving to paupers the preference in all cases where any public work was to be done, operated badly. Good workmen might starve for want of work: by declaring themselves paupers they obtained

employment. Thus, virtually, a bounty was offered to pauperism. His lordship remarks,--

"There have been sad defects, no doubt, and some harshness, under the new system; but the general result has been excellent; and, in many instances, the system has been reduced to practice in a truly patriarchal spirit. The great difficulty and the great failure are found in the right and safe occupation of children who are trained in these workhouses, of which so much has been said."

In the second place, the treatment of the insane has received a thorough investigation. This began, in 1828, by a committee of inquiry, moved for by Mr. Gordon.

An almost incredible amount of suffering and horrible barbarity was thus brought to light. For the most part it appeared that the treatment of the insane had been conducted on the old, absurd idea which cuts them off from humanity, and reduces them below the level of the brutes. The regimen in private madhouses was such that Lord Shaftesbury remarked of them, in a speech on the subject, "I have said before, and now say again, that should it please God to visit me with such an affliction, I would greatly prefer the treatment of paupers, in an establishment like that of the Surrey Asylum, to the treatment of the rich in almost any one of these receptacles."

Instances are recorded of individuals who were exhumed from cells

where they had existed without clothing or cleansing, as was ascertained, for years after they had entirely recovered the exercise of sound reason. Lord Shaftesbury procured the passage of bills securing the thorough supervision of these institutions by competent visiting committees, and the seasonable dismissal of all who were pronounced cured; and the adoption for the pauper insane of a judicious course of remedial treatment.

The third step was the passage of the ten hour factory bill. This took nearly eighteen years of labor and unceasing activity in Parliament and in the provinces. Its operation affects full half a million of actual workers, and, if the families be included, nearly two millions of persons, young and old. Two thirds as many as the southern slaves.

It is needless to enlarge on the horrible disclosures in reference to the factory operatives, made during this investigation. England never shuddered with a deeper thrill at the unveiling of American slavery than did all America at this unveiling of the white-labor slavery of England. In reading the speeches of Lord Shaftesbury, one sees, that, in presenting this subject, he had to encounter the same opposition and obloquy which now beset those in America who seek the abolition of slavery.

In the beginning of one of his speeches, his lordship says, "Nearly eleven years have now elapsed since I first made the proposition to the house which I shall renew this night. Never, at any time, have I

felt greater apprehension, or even anxiety. Not through any fear of personal defeat; for disappointment is 'the badge of our tribe;' but because I know well the hostility that I have aroused, and the certain issues of indiscretion on my part affecting the welfare of those who have so long confided their hopes and interests to my charge." One may justly wonder on what conceivable grounds any could possibly oppose the advocate of a measure like this. He was opposed on the same ground that Clarkson was resisted in seeking the abolition of the slave trade. As Boswell said that "to abolish the slave trade would be to shut the gates of mercy on mankind," so the advocates of eighteen hours labor in factories said that the ten hour system would diminish produce, lower wages, and bring starvation on the workmen. His lordship was denounced as an incendiary, a meddling fanatic, interfering with the rights of masters, and desiring to exalt his own order by destroying the prosperity of the manufacturers.

In the conclusion of one of his speeches he says, "Sir, it may not be given me to pass over this Jordan; other and better men have preceded me, and I entered into their labors; other and better men will follow me, and enter into mine; but this consolation I shall ever continue to enjoy--that, amidst much injustice and somewhat of calumny, we have at last 'lighted such a candle in England as, by God's blessing, shall never be put out.'"

The next effort was to regulate the labor of children in the calico and print works. The great unhealthiness of the work, and the tender

age of the children employed,--some even as young as four years--were fully disclosed. An extract from his lordship's remarks on this subject will show that human nature takes the same course in all countries: "Sir, in the various discussions on these kindred subjects, there has been a perpetual endeavor to drive us from the point under debate, and taunt us with a narrow and one-sided humanity. I was told there were far greater evils than those I had assailed--that I had left untouched much worse things. It was in vain to reply that no one could grapple with the whole at once; my opponents on the ten hour bill sent me to the collieries; when I invaded the collieries I was referred to the print works; from the print works I know not to what I shall be sent; for what can be worse? Sir, it has been said to me, more than once, 'Where will you stop?' I reply, Nowhere, so long as any portion of this mighty evil remains to be removed. I confess that my desire and ambition are to bring all the laboring children of this empire within the reach and opportunities of education, within the sphere of useful and happy citizens. I am ready, so far as my services are of any value, to devote what little I have of energy, and all the remainder of my life, to the accomplishment of this end. The labor would be great, and the anxieties very heavy; but I fear neither one nor the other. I fear nothing but defeat."

From the allusion, above, to the colliery effort, it would seem that the act for removing women and children from the coalpits preceded the reform of the printworks. Concerning the result of these various enterprises, he says, "The present state of things may be told in few

words. Full fifty thousand children under thirteen years of age attend school every day. None are worked more than seven, generally only six, hours in the day. Those above thirteen and under eighteen, and all women, are limited to ten hours and a half, exclusive of the time for meals. The work begins at six in the morning and ends at six in the evening. Saturday's labor ends at four o'clock, and there is no work on Sunday. The printworks are brought under regulation, and the women and children removed from the coalpits." His lordship adds, "The report of inspectors which I send you will give you a faint picture of the physical, social, and moral good that has resulted. I may safely say of these measures, that God has blessed them far beyond my expectation, and almost equal to my heart's desire."

The next great benevolent movement is the ragged school system. From a miserable hole in Field Lane, they have grown up to a hundred and sixteen in number. Of these Lord Shaftesbury says, "They have produced--I speak seriously--some of the most beautiful fruits that ever grew upon the tree of life. I believe that from the teachers and from the children, though many are now gone to their rest, might have been, and might still be, selected some of the most pure, simple, affectionate specimens of Christianity the world ever saw." Growing out of the ragged school is an institution of most interesting character, called "a place for repentance." It had its origin in the efforts of a young man, a Mr. Nash, to reform two of his pupils. They said they wished to be honest, but had nothing to eat, and must steal to live. Though poor himself, he invited them to his humble

abode, and shared with them his living. Other pupils, hearing of this, desired to join with them, and become honest too. Soon he had six. Now, the honest scholars in the ragged school, seeing what was going on, of their own accord began to share their bread with this little band, and to contribute their pennies. Gradually the number increased. Benevolent individuals noticed it, and supplies flowed in, until at last it has grown to be an establishment in which several hundreds are seeking reformation. To prevent imposition, a rigid probation is prescribed. Fourteen days the applicant feeds on bread and water, in solitary confinement, with the door unfastened, so that he can depart at any moment. If he goes through with that ordeal it is thought he really wants to be honest, and he is admitted a member. After sufficient time spent in the institution to form correct habits, assistance is given him to emigrate to some of the colonies, to commence life, as it were, anew. Lord Shaftesbury has taken a deep interest in this establishment; and among other affecting letters received from its colonists in Australia, is one to him, commencing, "Kind Lord Ashley," in which the boy says, "I wish your lordship would send out more boys, and use your influence to convert all the prisons into ragged schools. As soon as I get a farm I shall call it after your name."

A little anecdote related by Mr. Nash shows the grateful feelings of the inmates of this institution. A number of them were very desirous to have a print of Lord Shaftesbury, to hang up in their sitting room. Mr. Nash told them he knew of no way in which they could earn the

money, except by giving up something from their daily allowance of food. This they cheerfully agreed to do. A benevolent gentleman offered to purchase the picture and present it to them; but they unanimously declined. They wanted it to be their own, they said, and they could not feel that it was so unless they did something for it themselves.

Connected with the ragged school, also, is a movement for establishing what are called ragged churches--a system of simple, gratuitous religious instruction, which goes out to seek those who feel too poor and degraded to be willing to enter the churches.

Another of the great movements in England is the institution of the Laborer's Friend Society, under the patronage of the most distinguished personages. Its principal object has been the promotion of allotments of land in the country, to be cultivated by the peasantry after their day's labor, thus adding to their day's wages the produce of their fields and gardens. It has been instrumental, first and last, of establishing nearly four hundred thousand of these allotments. It publishes, also, a monthly paper, called the Laborer's Friend, in which all subjects relative to the elevation of the working classes receive a full discussion.

In consequence of all these movements, the dwellings of the laboring classes throughout Great Britain are receiving much attention; so that, if matters progress for a few years as they have done, the

cottages of the working people will be excelled by none in the world.

Another great movement is the repeal of the corn laws, the benefit of which is too obvious to need comment.

What has been doing for milliners and dressmakers, for the reform lodging houses, and for the supply of baths and wash houses, I have shown at length in former letters. I will add that the city of London has the services of one hundred and twenty city missionaries.

There is a great multiplication of churches, and of clergymen to labor in the more populous districts. The Pastoral Aid Society and the Scripture Reading Society are both extensive and fruitful laborers for the service of the mass of the people.

There has also been a public health act, by which towns and villages are to be drained and supplied with water. This has gone into operation in about one hundred and sixty populous places with the most beneficial results.

In fine, Lord Shaftesbury says, "The best proof that the people are cared for, and that they know it, appeared in the year 1848. All Europe was convulsed. Kings were falling like rotten pears. We were as quiet and happy in England as the President of the United States in his drawing room."

It is true, that all these efforts united could not radically relieve the distress of the working classes, were it not for the outlet furnished by emigration. But Australia has opened as M new world of hope upon England. And confirmatory of all other movements for the good of the working classes, come the benevolent efforts of Mrs. Chisholm and the colonizing society formed under her auspices.

I will say, finally, that the aspect of the religious mind of England, as I have been called to meet it, is very encouraging in this respect; that it is humble, active, and practical. With all that has been done, they do not count themselves to have attained, or to be already perfect; and they evidently think and speak more of the work that yet remains to be done than of victories already achieved. Could you, my dear father, have been with me through the different religious circles it has been my privilege to enter, from the humble cotter's fireside to the palace of the highest and noblest, your heart would share with mine a sincere joy in the thought that the Lord "has much people" in England. Called by different names, Churchman, Puseyite, Dissenter, Presbyterian, Independent, Quaker, differing widely, sincerely, earnestly, I have still found among them all evidence of that true piety which consists in a humble and childlike spirit of obedience to God, and a sincere desire to do good to man. It is comforting and encouraging to know, that while there are many sects and opinions, there is, after all, but one Christianity. I sometimes think that it has been my peculiar lot to see the exhibition of more piety and loveliness of spirit in the differing sects and ranks in England than

they can see in each other. And it lays in my mind a deep foundation of hope for that noble country. My belief is, that a regenerating process is going on in England; a gradual advance in religion, of which contending parties themselves are not aware. Under various forms all are energizing together, I trust, under the guidance of a superior spirit, who is gently moderating acerbities, removing prejudices, inclining to conciliation and harmony, and preparing England to develop, from many outward forms, the one, pure, beautiful, invisible church of Christ.