



A Family Newspaper: devoted to

Religious & General Intelligence.

REV. E. D. VERY,

"BY PURENESS, BY KNOWLEDGE—BY LOVE UNFEIGNED."—ST. PAUL.

EDITOR.

Volume III.

SAINT JOHN, NEW-BRUNSWICK, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 1850.

Number 3.

THE GLEANER.

When the earth is crown'd with fatness,
And the yellow harvest yields
To the sickle of the reaper,
Toiling in the sunny fields,
Mark the glad contented gleaner,
Gather one by one her store—
Every act of cheerful labour
Makes her richer than before:
Comfort ye of lowly grade—
Ear by ear the sheaf is made.

Envy not thy richer neighbour,
Though he owns a large estate:
Messengers from Heaven coming,
Do not tarry at his gate.
Open wide the cottage lattice—
Enters in the balmy air;
And the great sun brightly shining,
Glads the hearts that worship there.
Comfort ye of lowly grade—
Ear by ear the sheaf is made.

Golden treasures thickly scatter'd,
Strew the world's great surface o'er;
Man is but a humble gleaner,
Finding knowledge, seeking more;
Step by step he plods his way,
One by one his blessings rise:
He who binds his store together,
He, alone, is truly wise.
Comfort ye of lowly grade—
Ear by ear the sheaf is made.

Family Friend.

[From the London City Mission Magazine.]

THE DOCK LABOURER.

FLUCTUATIONS OF WAGES.

The immense establishment of the London Docks is worked by from 1,000 to 3,000 hands, according as the business is either 'brisk' or 'slack.' Out of this number there are always from 400 to 500 permanent laborers, receiving upon an average 16s. 6d. per week wages, with the exception of coopers, carpenters, smiths, and other mechanics, who are paid the usual wages of their crafts. Besides these there are many hundreds—from 1,000 to 2,500—casual laborers, who are engaged at the rate of 2s. 6d. per day in the summer, and at 2s. 4d. per day in the winter months. Frequently, in case of many arrivals extra hands are hired in the course of the day, at the rate of 4d. per hour. For the permanent laborers, a recommendation is required, but for the casual laborers no 'character' is demanded. The number of the casual hands engaged by the day depends, of course, upon the amount of work to be done, and I find that the total number of laborers in the docks varies from 500 to 3,000 and odd. On the 4th of May, 1849, the number of hands engaged—both permanent and casual—was 2,794; on the 26th of the same month it was 3,012, and on the 30th it was 1,189. These appear to be the extremes of the variation for the present year. The fluctuation is due to a greater or less number of ships entering the dock. The lowest number of ships entering the dock in any one week last year was 29, while the highest number was 141. This rise and fall is owing to the prevalence of easterly winds, which serve to keep the ships back, and so make the business 'slack.' Now, deducting the lowest number of hands employed from the highest number, we have no less than 1,823 individuals who obtain so precarious a subsistence by their labor at the docks that, by the mere shifting of the wind, they may be all deprived of their daily bread. Calculating the wages at 2s. 6d. a-day for each hand, the company would have paid £376 10s. to the 3,012 hands employed on the 26th of May last, while

only £148 12s. 6d. would have been paid to the 1,189 hands engaged on the 30th of the same month. Hence not only would 1,823 hands have been thrown out of employ by the chopping of the wind, but the labouring men dependent upon the business of the docks for their subsistence would in one day have been deprived of £227 17s. 6d. This will afford the reader some faint idea of the precarious character of the subsistence obtained by the laborers employed in this neighborhood; and consequently—as it has been well proven, that all men who obtain their livelihood by irregular employment are the most intemperate and improvident of all—it will be easy to judge what may be the condition and morals of a class who to-day, as a body, may earn near upon £400, and to-morrow only £150. * * * The reader must also remember what kind of men the casual laborers generally are. They are men, it should be borne in mind, who are shut out from the usual means of life by the want of character. Hence you are not astonished to hear from those who are best acquainted with the men, that there are hundreds among the body who are known thieves, but who come there to seek a living, so that, if taken for any past offence, their late industry may plead for some little lenity in their punishment.

The account of the variation in the total number of hands employed, and the sum of money paid as wages to them by the different dock companies when the business is brisk or slack, may be stated as follows:—

At the London Docks the difference between the greatest and smallest number is 2,000 hands; at the East and West India Docks 2,500 do.; at the St. Katharine Docks 1,200 do.; at the remaining docks (say) 1,300 do. Total number of dock-labourers thrown out of employ by the prevalence of easterly winds 7,000.

The difference between the highest and lowest amount of wages paid at the London Docks is £1,500; at the East and West India Docks £1,875; at the St. Katharine Docks £900; at the remaining docks £975; Total £5,250.

From the above statement, then, it appears that by the prevalence of an easterly wind, no less than 7,000 out of the aggregate number of persons living by dock labour may be deprived of their regular income, and the entire body may have as much as £5,250 a-week abstracted from the amount of their collective earnings at a period of active employment.—But the number of individuals who depend upon the quantity of shipping entering the port of London for their daily subsistence is far beyond this amount. Indeed, we are assured by a gentleman filling a high situation in St. Katharine's Docks, and who from his sympathy with the laboring poor has evidently given no slight attention to the subject, that, taking into consideration the number of wharf laborers, dock labourers, lightermen, riggers and lumpers, shipwrights, caulkers, ship carpenters, anchor smiths, corn porters, fruit and coal meters, and indeed all the multifarious arts and callings connected with shipping, there are no less than from 25,000 to 30,000 individuals who are thrown wholly out of employ by a long continuance of easterly winds. Estimating, then, the gains of this large body of individuals at 2s. 6d. per day, or 15s. per week, when fully employed, we shall find that the loss to those who depend upon the London shipping for their subsistence amounts to £20,000 per week; and considering that such winds are often known to prevail from a fortnight to three weeks at a time, it follows that the entire loss to this large class will amount to from £40,000 to £60,000 within a month; an amount of privation to the laboring poor which it is positively awful to contemplate. Nor is this the only evil connected with an enduring

easterly wind. Directly a change takes place, a 'glut' of vessels enters the metropolitan port, and labourers flock from all quarters, indeed they pour from every part where the workmen exist in a greater quantity than the work.—From 500 to 800 vessels frequently arrive at one time in London after the duration of a contrary wind; and then, such is the demand for workmen, and so great the press of business owing to the rivalry among merchants, and the desire of each owner to have his cargo the first in the market, that a sufficient number of hands is scarcely to be found. Hundreds of extra laborers, who can find labor nowhere else, are thus led to seek work in the docks. But, to use the words of our informant, two or three weeks are sufficient to break the neck of an ordinary glut, and then the vast amount of extra hands that the excess of business has brought to the neighborhood are thrown out of employment, and left to increase either the vagabondism of the neighborhood, or to swell the number of paupers and heighten the rates of the adjacent parishes.

This may in some measure account for the poverty and wretchedness of the people located in the many courts and alleys round about the docks, but it seems also to afford a ready explanation as to the amount of crime to be found there. As we said before, uncertain employment destroys all habits of prudence; and where there is no prudence, the present affluence cannot be made to provide for the future want. Since it is the very necessity of those who depend upon their daily work for their daily food, that if such work is not to be obtained they must be either paupers, beggars, or thieves, it cannot be wondered at that the great majority of the population round about the port of London, where work is of such a precarious nature, should consist principally of these three classes.

At one of the docks alone I found that 1,823 stomachs would be deprived of food by the mere chopping of the breeze. 'It's an ill wind,' says the proverb, 'that blows nobody any good'; and until I came to investigate the condition of the dock labourer, I could not have believed it possible that near upon 2,000 souls, in one place alone, lived, chameleon-like, upon the air; or that an easterly wind, despite the wise saw, could deprive so many of bread.

If we could improve the condition of the dock labourer, our principal aim must be to make dock labor more uniform in its character. How this is to be done I do not pretend to say. My vocation, as I said before, is to point out the evil; it is for others to discover the remedy. But, as long as matters are so arranged that it is possible for a continuance of easterly winds to deprive 20,000 individuals of a living, and to abstract, in three weeks, as much as £60,000 from the ordinary earnings of the class, why, just so long must the neighborhood of the docks swarm with the vice and crime that at present infest them.

LODGING-HOUSES AROUND THE DOCKS.

A few days ago I made an attempt to fathom the secrets of one of the low lodging-houses in the neighbourhood; and though I had proof demonstrative that the endeavour was attended with considerable personal risk, still I was determined to compass my end, so as to be able to give the public some idea of the misery and crime that infested that part of the town.

Entrusting myself to an experienced guide, I was led to one of the most frequented and cheapest lodging-houses in the neighbourhood. It was a large out-house, about the size of a small barn, and about as rudely put together. The walls were unplastered, and the tiles above barely served to cover it in. In the wet weather we were told it leaked like a sieve.—

Around the room ran a long dirty table, at which sat some score of ragged, greasy wretches. The others were huddled round the fire. Some were toasting herrings, others drying ends of cigars for tobacco, and others boiling potatoes in coffee-pots. I soon communicated to them the object of my visit; and having inquired how many of them out of those present worked at the docks, I found them ready to answer any questions in a more courteous manner than I had expected. There were 29 people in the shed, and about a fourth were occasional dock labourers. * * *

I wished to know something definite about their living. I asked one what he was boiling; he told me that it was a farthing's worth of coffee, and that was his supper. 'There's a shop round here makes farthings' worths of every thing,' said they. 'A farthing's worth of sugar, a farthing's worth of coffee, butter, and 'bacca. A halfpenny worth of bread—a farthing's worth of that an't no good.' * * *

'Look at me,' cried one standing up.—The man was literally a mass of rags and filth. His tattered clothes and shirt were black and shiny as a sailor's dreadnought with grease and dirt. 'Look at me; who'd give me a day's work in the state I am? Why, the best job I've had I only got 3d. by, and I don't make above 2s. 6d. a week honestly at the outside. We couldn't live on what we get, and yet we can live on a precious little here. Get a meal for 5 farthings. A farthing's worth of coffee, a farthing's worth of sugar, and ½ lb. of bread, 3 farthings. We can have a slap-up dinner for 2d.; a common one for 1d.' 'Oh, yes! a regular roarer for 2d.,' cried the beggar boy. 'Three halfpenny worth of pudding, and a halfpenny worth of gravy.' 'Or else we can have,' said another, '2½ lb. of taters—that's a penny—and ½ lb. fourpenny bacon—that's another penny. That's what we call a fust-rate dinner. Very often we're forced to put up with a penn'orth of taters and a halfpenny herring—that's a three-half-penny dinner. There's a chap here was forced to do to-day with a hap'orth of taters. He's been out ever since, and perhaps won't come in at all to-night. He'll walk the streets and starve.' * * *

The average number of persons sleeping in this house of a night is 50. Of these there are generally about 30 pickpockets, 10 street beggars, a few infirm old people who subsist occasionally upon parish relief, and occasionally upon charity; 10 or 15 dock labourers; about the same number of low and precarious callings such as the neighbourhood affords, and a few persons who have been in good circumstances, but who have been reduced from a variety of causes. At one time there were as many as 9 persons lodging in this house who subsisted by picking up dog's dung out of the streets, getting about 5s. for every basket-full. The earnings of one of these men were known to average 9s. a-week. There are generally lodging in the house a few bone grubbers, who pick up bones, rags, iron, &c., out of the streets. Their average earnings are about 1s. per day. There are several mud larks, or youths, who go down to the water-side when the tide is out, to see whether any article of value has been left upon the bank of the river. * * *

Knowing that this lodging-house might be taken as a fair sample of the class now abounding in London, and, moreover, having been informed by those who had made the subject their peculiar study, that the characters generally congregated there constituted a fair average of the callings and habits of those who resort to the low lodging-houses of London, I was determined to avail myself of the acquaintances I made in this quarter, in order to arrive at some more definite informa-