

" 3. A revision of the rules for the admission of patients to the benefit of the charity, and the removal of the present restrictions which exclude a large majority of those for whom its benefit is most needed, and would be most valuable.

" 4. The extension of the numbers by a wiser application of the large revenues of the charity, and by the admission of patients paying a portion of the cost of maintenance.

" 5. The systematic and clinical teaching of Psychology, as followed in Paris, Vienna, and Edinburgh."

*And we added to this summary the following words by Dr. Conolly :*

" A new Bethlehem, judiciously situated and planned, might be a model, a school of instruction, and a benefit for ever. We should then possess a public asylum in which the intentions of the charitable founders, and the exertions of humane and scientific physicians, would not be frustrated ; and where, above all, the amplest possible means would be furnished, and their application perpetuated, for the relief of the most terrible of all forms of human misfortune."

*It will be seen that the Charity Commissioners and Dr. Hood already, to some extent, have accepted our programme. The value of a country site is acknowledged in the suggestion of the branch establishment in the country ; the rules for the admission of patients are to be relaxed, and some attempt is to be made to render Bethlehem available as a school for the clinical study of mental disease. Let us hope that a farther consideration of the views which we have felt it our duty strongly to insist on may lead the governors of Bethlehem and their adviser Dr. Hood to enlarge the boundaries of that noble institution, which already owes so much to the skilful organization of its late resident physician.]*

#### *Recent Suicides.*

" Among the many mysteries of human life few things are more mysterious than those moral epidemics of which our universal self-knowledge now informs us. Like physical diseases, they seem to sweep from time to time through the moral atmosphere with a course so irresistible and uniform that philosophers have been led to doubt whether we have a free will in moral matters any more than in physical. In both alike we seem creatures of circumstances, unable to avoid, to resist, or to remedy our inevitable evils. One of the most remarkable of these epidemics appears to be running its course now. Our readers cannot have failed to notice the number of suicides which have been reported lately. Our impression of Thursday contained accounts of five, one being an aggravated case of combined murder and suicide.

One young woman of nineteen, a stranger to London, having lost her situation after a month's employment, had attempted to throw herself over London Bridge. A young girl, who had deserted her home, and got into bad habits, and was on the verge of destitution, had also tried to drown herself; and two married women, in fits either of passion or of drink, had attempted to poison themselves. The other case was a very sad one. A young married woman had, with her husband and three children, removed from Tunbridge Wells to Reading, with all the furniture of their little home, in hopes of obtaining some employment. After a day or two her husband deserted her, and she wandered from one inn in Reading to another, until her scanty store of money was exhausted, and she had to sell her few sticks of furniture for forty shillings, to buy a little longer lease of life. When this was almost exhausted, she hired a perambulator, drew her children down to the river side, and there, half an hour after, the perambulator was observed standing empty, and the woman and her three children were floating, quite dead, in the water. In spite of all we have heard of the periodic recurrence of moral epidemics, it is impossible not to ask ourselves whether any reason can be assigned for the multiplication of such cases. It seems very strange at first sight that they should be on the increase just now. There can be no doubt that the country is, on the whole, very prosperous, and the working-classes generally well off. There is certainly nothing to show that there is greater distress than usual, and there ought to be much less. The prolonged dry weather is said to have some effect upon the nervous system; but we look for some substantial and moral cause, and in the apparent absence of general distress it may seem at first sight difficult to account for such an epidemic.

It is not, however, mere distress or suffering, or even severe pain, that leads to suicide. Pain and suffering, by a merciful law, seem to generate a reactionary force of patience, and, perhaps, the sharpest pain of body or mind, if it be sheer pain and no more, is borne with the most submission and calm. Those who have seen much of human suffering will bear witness that the quietest and most cheerful sufferers are frequently those who have the most to bear, and that the greatest impatience is often seen in the least grievous misfortunes. Nor is it strictly among the class of paupers or extremely poor that suicides are common. The regular pauper is content to exist so long as the workhouse will give him a scanty subsistence. When refused admission at critical moments he will sometimes lie down and die, but we do not hear of his committing suicide. And the very poor, who are just above the workhouse, able perhaps by the help of occasional charity to keep a room and a few pieces of so-called furniture about them, are often more bright and energetic than those above them. In a small dark kitchen you may find an old sailor racked with rheumatism, scarcely able to move, and in

agony at every change of wind, yet cheery and hopeful. He has been over the greater part of the world; after his service at sea he turned itinerant preacher, and has been a sort of bishop *in partibus infidelibus* among his sect; and one would think it an unbearable misery to him to be dying in a dark kitchen of a back street. But in the intervals of his pain he will fight his battles and preach his sermons to you over and over again with never-flagging delight, and maintain a cheery interest in all the news you can bring him. Or you shall find an old woman in a garret who is not able to get downstairs except at long intervals, and sits alone all day with only the exchange of an occasional word with perpetually shifting neighbours in the next room, and sometimes does not know how to get a cup of tea. Yet she shall tell you she is never dull, quite comfortable, and has everything she wants, and she will seem to cheer you more than you can cheer her. Even those who are engaged in the hard struggle of supporting a family against slack work and weak health will, so long as they are able to get on at all, work with never-flagging heart. If they fail at last, they will apply to the workhouse with an overworn and numbed sensation, and be incapable of the sharp and stinging pain which is implied by an act of suicide.

In the same way with other classes, it is not the mere sense of pain, however sharp, that impels to self-destruction; it is the loss of hope, the keen sense of despair, in whatever way it may be produced, that drives men to this miserable refuge. To take, again, an example from the poorer classes:—A young Danish tailor comes over to England with his wife and child. He is as attractive a character as any of the simple nation with which we have lately been made so well acquainted, and he prospers with his work. But his young wife dies in her second confinement, and leaves him alone in England, scarcely able to make himself understood, and with two little children on his hands. He struggles bravely for a time, but the misery of his loneliness, the despair of being able to take care of his children, the complete break-up of his hopes, overpower him at last, and he hangs himself. So, in the case of the young woman who had left her Norfolk home and come to push her way as a servant in London, but found herself after a month friendless and helpless, it was the collapse of hope, the despairing prospect, which made life intolerable. In the instances of the three women of bad character there was the same sort of feeling, with, besides, the desperate spirit which has wrecked everything that was valuable in life, and feels that life itself may as well follow. More evidently still is this the case with the higher classes. Among these it is seldom the mere fact of their being reduced to want or poverty which impels them to suicide. But a fall with them is often deeper and more painful by contrast than in the lower classes, and after a sudden loss of money and all it involves they look up as from the

bottom of a terrible precipice. The sense of a gulf between the past and the present establishes an irremediable despair, and they cannot face the hopeless prospect before them. The worst case on Thursday was an instance to the same effect. It was not mere poverty that drove the unfortunate woman at Reading to drown herself and her children. It seems she had a brother just returned from Australia who offered to keep her, but she said she had never been dependent on any one, and she never would be. It was the nakedness of desertion, the despair of the sudden change, which destroyed her. This feeling, too, is intimately connected with that sense of injustice and wrong which often oppresses the minds of those who destroy themselves; for it is this feeling, that all the world is against them, that they can get no redress and no justice, which often loosens the last hold of hope and completes the work of despair.

If this be anything like a fair account of the state of mind which leads to this unhappy crime, we may, perhaps, see something in the present state of things to account for its prevalence. We are often reminded of the increased pace in life at the present day, of the increased excitement, and the keener struggle. Human life has been always compared to a race, and, like a race, it seems to get faster the longer it lasts. The pace now is certainly excessive. Everything and everybody are in a hurry and rush. Our minds and habits are like the trains on metropolitan railways—working at the very highest pressure that circumstances will allow. Business is now getting as fast in comparison as the two-minute trains. But the same haste and hurry and rush that we witness in towns extends in its degree and kind through every grade of society. Almost every class is overstocked, and what in the higher classes is a struggle for success becomes in the lower classes a struggle for life and death. This not only overstrains and overwears the nerves, and leaves men with less power of self-control, as it gives them less time for healthy reflection, but it increases the desperation at such falls and disasters as we have been considering. To slip, or still more, to fall in the race of life, is now often almost fatal. To the man himself who has stumbled it nearly always appears to be. A crowd rush in to take a man's place when he is down for a moment, and there seems no chance of recovering his position. In such a merciless struggle what wonder if some, like the poor servant girl of our report of Thursday, are frightened into despair at the very entrance into it, and take the first wild means of escape? Less wonder still if those who have fought well and suddenly failed abandon all effort, and violently snatch themselves and their children from being further trampled down!

But, whatever the cause may be, there is the fact; and it is one, unfortunately, with which we are almost powerless to deal. It will not be changed by increased prosperity, if increased prosperity, by

involving a keener struggle and more exhausting labour, itself feeds the evil. To restrain the crime by the dread of punishment is the most hopeless plan of all, for when a man is bent on inflicting the last punishment on himself it is of no use to threaten him with fine and imprisonment. The only effective remedy for this, as for all diseases, would be to remove or soften its causes, and this might be done if the restraining and encouraging influence of sympathy could meet the sufferer at the critical time. Such a remedy, however, it is very hard to apply. It is one of the consequences of the rush and hurry of life of which we have spoken that men easily become very much alone in the world. A man's neighbours, and even relations, whose friendship would have sustained him in quieter times, are absorbed in their own occupations, and even husband and wife fail sometimes to find opportunities for that mutual refreshment of quiet confidence which is one of the great benefits of such a relation. How, then, can poor people in one of the labyrinths of this great city find a friend at the crisis of their despair? Such an office is the peculiar duty of a clergyman, and of those who, under whatever names, devote themselves to the Christian office of visiting the sick and suffering. It is not our province to speak of the religious encouragements which can be offered, though these ought to be the strongest of all, but the mere exercise of kindly feeling, of genuine sympathy, would be enough to soothe many of these overworn beings, and lead them out of their despair. There is a charm about a bright smile, a kind eye, and a gentle voice, which has a subtler and more penetrating influence upon the human heart than all the arguments and punishments in the world. It is true in our overgrown parishes, it is as hard to apply this remedy as the others. But this is the direction in which to work at this moral disease if its epidemic character continues. Every addition to the means of quiet, to the influences which lead to rest, contentment, and peace, will tend to counteract the evil. The more the turmoil and hurry of our life increase, the more necessary is it to increase the opportunities of escaping from them, or at least of softening them.—*The Times*, August 13.

#### *The Overgrowth of our Public Lunatic Asylums.*

A prominent and painful feature in the Reports of these different county asylums is the general outcry for an increase of accommodation. Although it is not yet satisfactorily proved that there is a positive increase in the annual production of lunacy, it is certain that each asylum in its turn becomes unequal to the wants of the county. New buildings are nearly completed, we are told, at the Sussex Asylum; additions have been made to the Wilts Asylum, by which accom-