

THE
LIFE AND WORK
OF THE
EARL OF SHAFTESBURY.

IN one of the most depraved quarters of London, not far northward from the foot of Holborn Hill, in a neighbourhood with a network of disreputable courts and alleys, the resort of notorious ill-doers, the dread of timid wayfarers, and the despair of the police, there sit, in an ill-furnished room, two or three men waiting anxiously. They are men belonging to humble but respectable walks of life, and have, it would seem, nothing in common with the people who pass along the uneven pavement of what is called by courtesy the "street"—the crop-headed jail-birds, the cunning-faced cadgers, the sickly, ill-clad women—hurrying away to creep into holes and corners for the night. The wind is in the east, and, although the spring of the year is approaching, it is as cold as in the depth of winter.

The street grows quieter; St. Paul's has some time since boomed out the hour of midnight, and there is silence, broken only by snatches of tipsy song from

some straggling reveller. Presently there is heard the firm steady tread of one who walks as with a purpose. The step is recognised; the door is thrown open, and the watchers stretch out their hands to grasp that of the stranger—a tall, thin, pale-faced man, with a sad and careworn expression of countenance. He returns the salutation cordially—although it is obvious that he belongs to a different rank from those with whom he is associated—and without delay proceeds to the business that has brought him to this strange place at this strange hour. A hurried conference is held, certain plans are discussed, there is a still and solemn silence for a few minutes, and then all the party rise, button up their stout overcoats, and sally forth, one of the number bearing in his hand a small parcel of candles! They walk in silence until they reach their destination—the Victoria Arches under Holborn Hill, known as the Vagrants' Hiding Place, when they light their candles and enter the dark, dismal vaults. As they enter, a few poor, miserable, hunted wretches brush hastily past and make their escape into the street, or plunge into the recesses of the Hiding-Place, conscience making cowards of them all. It is some time before the visitors can distinguish objects distinctly—the darkness is intense, and some of the arches are vast. As their eyes become more accustomed to the gloom, they see sights which cannot now, thank God, be seen, and will never more be seen in the great city where vice and misery are rampant still in the midst of luxury and high civilisation. There, spread on the dank floor, on layers of rotten

THE VAGRANTS' HIDING PLACE.

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straw filled with vermin of all kinds, lie wretched human beings whose poverty, occasioned by the wrong-doing or misfortune of themselves or others, has deprived them of every other resting-place. As the light falls upon their faces some of them start up with the keen, cunning look of those who know that they have broken the laws and must depend upon their wits to escape the penalty; others turn over with a sigh of weariness, and draw around them the scanty garments that scarcely cover them; while others break out into foul imprecations upon the intruders. Everywhere, in holes and corners, some almost burrowing into the soil, others lying closely side by side for the sake of warmth, are to be seen these poor outcasts, sheltering in the only place on earth where they can rest—this hiding-place of sin and misery, of filth and rags. Terrible are the faces that meet the gaze of the visitors—faces that bear indelible marks made by vice, disease, or sorrow—that haunt the imagination long afterwards, and re-appear as spectres in the visions of the night.

Not to gaze and moralise, but to work, is the object of the visitors; not to pity only, but to help; and by two o'clock in the morning they have taken thirty of these wretched outcasts, and have brought them from the cold and darkness of the arches into the light and warmth of a comparatively cheerful room used as a Ragged School. Among the rescued are two boys—mere skin and bone in bundles of rags—whose sunken jaws and sparkling eyes tell the story of their sickness, and want, and premature decay. They are seated on either

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side of the tall, slight man, whose sorrowful eyes have grown more sorrowful, as he looks upon them through the mist of his tears. His heart has been torn by the revelation those boys have made to him of their hapless lot. They are brothers in affliction, who have been drawn together by mutual need, for both are orphans. One of them has seen better days, and can remember a bright and cheerful home; but "when father died" and the home was broken up, he was left friendless and destitute, and in his misery found a shelter in the dark arches, where his companion had slept alone every night for a whole year, until this comrade in misfortune came to share the straw and the rags that made his bed. But the dawning of this day has brought with it the dawning of hope; the "kind gentleman," beside whom they sit, has spoken to them words of tenderness and pity which seem like the echoes of words spoken in childhood, when happiness had a meaning; and when they learn from him that they need no more go back to the arches, but may find comfort, and help, and home in a Refuge for the Homeless, the floodgates of their tears, closed since their young hearts had grown hard and cold with the world's neglect, are opened, and they weep for very joy.

As their rescuer returned towards his home that morning, his head was bowed, and his heart was heavy. He knew that there were hundreds, and it might be thousands, of boys in the great city in as hopeless a case, who were drifting from bad to worse until they should be past hope—sunk into irremediable depravity;

IN THE STRAND.

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and he knew not how they were to be reached. By day and night the wailing of the world's sorrow haunted him; the cry of the children rang ceaselessly in his ears; and it was no figure of speech he used when those who saw his cheeks grow paler, and his face more sad, asked him of the cause, and he answered with choking voice: "I have been in a perfect agony of mind about my poor boys!"

Turn now to another scene. It is the month of May. The busy Strand is unusually crowded; men and boys are distributing handbills concerning every philanthropic and Christian organisation under the sun. Multitudes are pressing in at the open doors of Exeter Hall. A group of foreigners, on the opposite pavement, are looking on in blank astonishment; they are gazing at a sight which is more characteristic of English life and feeling than can be seen at any other place, or at any other season. It is the Festival time of England's great Religious Societies. There are assembling, from all parts of the earth, those who have been fighting throughout the year a hard battle with the world's sin, and misery, and want, and who have come to tell of their victories or defeats, to hear of the conquests of others, and to gather up strength for further conflict. From this centre will issue forth mighty waves of influence that will reach to the uttermost parts of the earth, and affect the condition of the ignorant, the needy, and the oppressed, from the rising to the going down of the sun.

Enter the building. It is thronged in every part. The vast area of the hall presents at the first glance a motley, indistinguishable mass; examine more closely, and there will be seen a larger proportion of earnest-looking faces than are commonly met with in so great an audience. There is an air of soberness and sedateness—perhaps of demureness—over the many, although scattered here and there are groups of friends who are exchanging cordial greetings. The vast orchestra, with the exception of the two front rows, is packed, for the most part with men, many of whom are attired in clerical garb.

Presently the organ ceases to play, and there is a stir and a flutter in the audience, as divines, philanthropists, and social or religious leaders drop in by twos or threes, and take up their position on the platform. But the signal for a spontaneous burst of enthusiastic greeting is given when the secretary precedes a tall, slender, pale-faced man, who gazes for a moment with cold passionless eyes upon the sea of heads and the waving handkerchiefs, as he holds the rail of the platform nervously, and then, after a formal bow, buries himself in the depths of a huge arm-chair. Every person in that hall has recognised him; every person claims to know and revere him, and every person represents a constituency of some kind, each member of which would greet him as heartily on the ground of knowing and revering him.

The preliminaries of the meeting over, the chairman rises to speak, and again the hall rings with repeated

THE BIBLE EFFETE!

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cheers. He stands unmoved—still as a statue: there is a far-away look in his eyes; he seems almost unconscious that he is the object of attention. As the cheering continues, he seems almost displeased at the demonstration, for no shadow of a smile passes over the strongly-marked lines of his face. Then, when the echoes of the thunderings have died away, he draws his slight, but graceful form to its full height, grasps firmly the rail of the platform, and in a loud, but rather indistinct, voice, commences his speech.

It proceeds on a somewhat dead level, although uttered with great dignity, until he adverts to certain philosophical works that have recently issued from the press, and have disturbed men's minds by their tendency to teach that the Bible is unsuited to the present times. Then the whole manner of the man is changed; the pale face kindles; the voice becomes clear and ringing; the slender frame is all alive with strength and energy; the whole man is transfigured.

Good Heavens! (he exclaims) were the truths of the Book prevalent in the hearts of men, should we be disturbed and frightened as we are day by day, by those gigantic frauds that are bursting out in every community, and which lead us to believe that all honesty in trade, all honesty in public life, all honesty in private life, have left the world for ever? Is it unsuited to the times in which we live, when, if its holy precepts and its Divine commands had been listened to, we should not have before us these gigantic evils.

Ah! but now they come and tell us that the Bible is effete; that it is worn out, that it can do nothing; and that we must now have some new influence, some new principle by which to regenerate and guide man. Effete! Indeed I should like to know whether it is effete at this moment in India. Is it effete in the effect lately begun

to be produced in China? Is it effete in the islands of the Pacific Ocean? Is it effete in Madagascar? Is it effete in Italy? You see what a country Italy is now become; you see how the Italians are now grasping at the Word of God; and, although they have not thrown off the trammels of the Church of Rome, they have imbibed the first principles whereby their conduct in public and private life should be guided. The Bible lies at the root of their freedom, and they know it well enough to make it the basis of their hopes and fears. That is the Book that will guide them. That Book, so far from being effete, possesses at this moment a greater force—a greater power of giving life, if I may so say—than in any antecedent period of its history. I should like to know who are they who say it is effete? Do the priests in Spain think it is effete? If they think so, why do they prohibit it under such fearful penalties? Why do they incarcerate or confiscate the property of, or send into exile, those men who devote their energy and their time to the study of God's Word? Does his Holiness the Pope of Rome think it effete? Does he think it a harmless plaything, that may lie upon the tables of his subjects? Do the Neologists themselves think it effete? If so, why do they pass their nights, why do they sweat and toil over the midnight lamp, for the sole purpose of destroying a book that is so effete—that, if left to itself, would soon die, or become an object of general contempt? They do not think it effete. They know its power upon the heart and the conscience. They know that if left to itself, that good old Book must work its own way, and what they deny with their lips they confess with their fears. Effete? It is effete as Abraham was effete when he became the father of many nations, when there sprang of one, and him as good as dead, as many as the stars for multitude and the sand upon the sea-shore innumerable. It is effete as eternity, past, present, and future, is effete. It is effete—and in no other sense—as God Himself is effete, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

Change the scene once more. It is the House of Lords. There is a stillness approaching to solemnity, broken only by the voice of a noble lord who is speaking, in a strain not often heard in that august Assembly,

upon a subject which has never been discussed there before. Every sentence he utters increases the spell by which he holds the House, and every development of his argument tends to move that stately assembly to a demonstration of feeling it is not wont to exhibit. For more than thirty years the speaker has been exposing the evils which beset operatives—especially children, young persons, and women—engaged in the manufacturing industries. He has carried measure after measure for their relief; inhuman hours of labour have been shortened; excess of physical toil has been abridged; oppression and cruelty, resulting in premature death, have been checked; and the means of education and mental improvement made possible. There are millions in the land who thank God for the voice that is now ringing in that august chamber; for it is the voice of one who has pleaded the cause of the poor and the oppressed as none other has done in the world's history. Rarely, however, has it been raised with greater effect than on this night, albeit his speech consists mainly of extracts from a Bluebook. For years he has been waiting until the set time should come when, strengthened by the success of former efforts, he may introduce that part of the great question of Protection which presented the gravest difficulties in the way of legislation; and now he is informing the House that the evils which were supposed to be peculiar to manufactures exist, even in a more aggravated form, in connection with the cultivation of the soil. He speaks of organisations of rural labour in many counties, known

as “agricultural gangs,” a system of revolting cruelty under which the maximum of labour is obtained for the minimum of remuneration, by extortionate gang-masters who monopolise all the children in a district, in order that they may not be independently employed. The gangs are collected in the morning, marshalled by the gangsmen, and driven off into the fields to clear it of weeds, to spread manure, to “thin” the turnips and mangel-wurzel, to pick off stones from the land, or to gather in certain root crops. At a rapid pace they are driven long distances to the scene of their labour; the little footsore and weary children, not more than six or seven years of age, being dragged by their elders and goaded on by the brutal gangsmen. Year in, year out; in summer heat and winter cold; in sickness and in health; with backs warped and aching from constant stooping; with hands cracked and swollen at the back by the wind, and cold, and wet; with palms blistered from pulling turnips, and fingers lacerated from weeding among the stones; these English slaves, with education neglected, with morals corrupted, degraded and brutalised, labour from early morning till late at night, and, by the loss of all things, gain the miserable pittance that barely keeps them from starvation.

The plain unvarnished tale is told, and the sigh of relief is followed by a burst of genuine and unusual applause. Then, when the outlines of a Bill to remedy these frightful wrongs, and to affect the entire agricultural population of every county,