

On laborers' dwellings : successes and failures of efforts to improve them by means of inspection, loans, and public companies, and the expediency of extending to Ireland the compulsory principle in their erection and maintenance / by E.D. Mapother.

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LABORERS' DWELLINGS:

SUCCESSES AND FAILURES OF EFFORTS TO IMPROVE
THEM BY MEANS OF INSPECTION, LOANS,
AND PUBLIC COMPANIES;

AND THE
EXPEDIENCY OF EXTENDING TO
IRELAND THE COMPULSORY PRINCIPLE IN THEIR
ERECTION AND MAINTENANCE.

PRESENTED
by the
AUTHOR.

BY

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DUBLIN :

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1866

square, in which three adults were huddled. Here, however, time has wrought improvement, for there now remains but a heap of rubbish. If I had time, or if it were my province to depict the moral features of the denizens, they would appear of even a more degraded character than the buildings, and of no place could the words of Kingsley be more truly descriptive :—

“ I turned into an alley 'neath the wall—
 And stepped from earth to hell. The light of heaven,
 The common air was narrow, gross and dun—
 The tiles did drop from the eaves ; the unhinged doors
 Tottered o'er inky pools, where reeked and curdled,
 The offal of a life ; the gaunt-haunched swine
 Growled at their christened playmates o'er the scraps.
 Shrill mothers cursed ; wan children wailed ; sharp coughs
 Rang thro' the crazy chambers ; hungry eyes
 Glared dumb reproach.”

In a neighbouring house in Cole Alley some years ago, twenty people were found lying in one room, of whom five were ill with fever, and Mr. N. Robinson has ascertained that in the 171 rooms of this alley there exists an average of over five persons.

56, Bow-lane, West, I have described in a recent report to the Corporation as follows :—Hall and stairs covered with three inches of crusted filth ; first flight so ricketty as to be unsafe ; second without a bannister ; floor of second landing broken into two holes about a square foot each ; dangerous to life and limb ; ceilings of both top floors broken and let in rain ; no lower sash in window of back room, so that it had to be covered with a petticoat nailed over it ; such state would produce colds and rheumatism ; filthy privy, and back yard without a sewer—prolific causes of diarrhœa.

Poverty of the owners is not the cause of the dilapidation of these abodes, for the persons who set them, like many of their class, have raised themselves to comparative affluence by profits thus gained from the poor.

There is much of this kind of property owned by re-

spectable persons who never enter it, but leave it to be managed by the "deputy" or agent who is not usually of an improving spirit. In proportion to space such tenement houses are highly rented, far more so than the gentleman's house.

In Cork things are no better, as we learn from recent reports of the Sanitary Committee. "The overcrowding of the wretched tenements in which they live, each house containing several families, ranging in the aggregate, in some instances, from thirty to sixty human beings, male and female, in each house, for which large rents are exacted by the landlords, who will not spend one penny in the cleansing or improvement of their houses, unless coerced by force of the law to do so. Your committee have learned that a practice prevails amongst poor families occupying rooms in these houses to underlet a portion of their rooms to nightly lodgers—an evil which it appears to your committee might be met by the enforcement of the Lodging House Act." Such were the worst parts of London, undrained, dilapidated, and thinned by pestilence every few years before the fire of 1666, which therefore cannot be regarded from every point of view as a calamity.

The labourers' cottages in such small towns as Chapelizod, Navan, Carrack-on-Suir, or Ennis, are usually built in lanes, and are often placed back to back, excluding all chance of thorough airing, or the provision of sanitary accommodation; they consist of a single room or a living room and a sleeping place of about twelve feet square and eight feet high, which offers for the breathing of the five inmates (the average) and the vagrant, who is almost invariably accommodated with a night's lodging, about 192 feet of space, 1000 being the average in public institutions. This would not be so hurtful if there were any means of renewing the air within it, but from the absence of a chimney in the sleeping room, which is usual, the small size and immovable state of the windows, no ventilation occurs. In such an overcrowded state there can be

no decent separation of the sexes. When a death from contagious disease occurs in such an abode, the retention of the body within it is fraught with fearful evils, and since the abolition of the Vestry Act there were no funds for interment, and if the relatives were unable to provide them they had to beg the amount from the neighbours. Sir Hervey Bruce has, however, obtained an Act this session which empowers poor-law guardians to bear the expenses of interment.

Neither in such a room can ablution of the whole body be accomplished, and I have frequently found persons (especially females) suffering from skin diseases and other maladies, who for many years had never washed any part of their bodies but the face, neck, and hands.

Evictions and the demolition of cabins in the rural districts have driven agricultural labourers into the small towns, and as new abodes in the place of those removed would be subject to taxation, they have not been erected. Besides the fearful overcrowding thus induced, the labourers have to expend their strength in walking long distances to their work. The remedy is that which followed in England last session, upon a masterly demonstration of its necessity by Dr. Hunter, of the Medical Department of the Privy Council—namely, union rating, for which a Bill has been introduced by the Members for Dungarvan and Limerick.

The mud hovel of the Southern and Western peasant is too well known by the sketches of English tourists to need any description here. Planted anywhere, regardless of situation or soil, the low walls, the black, half-rotten thatch, the want of any proper flue or of windows (for the hole filled with an immovable and partly glazed sash cannot be so regarded), the clay floor, which becomes soaked with the pigs' food or more dangerous filth, and the adjacent manure heap, are all highly promotive of disease. From the want of a back door, thorough airing can never be effected.

The admission of domestic animals, the pig especially, has done much to propagate measles and other parasitic diseases, which are afterwards injurious to man when their flesh is used.

Mr. Godwin of the *Builder*, has often quoted the description of the way in which the inmates are disposed, as observed by a medical friend of mine:—"Generally the pigs dwell beneath the beds, the human tenants in them, and the poultry over head; the people can enjoy the prospect of bacon and chickens, which, however, they never taste."

If there be an inner room it is close and stifling, and so ill-lit that when the doctor pays his visit in the daytime a candle is required to permit him to see his patient.

There are in Ireland, according to the last census, 89,374 mud or sod hovels of one room only, and 489,668 mud houses with more than one room, giving an increase in Connaught of 5168 of the latter class since 1841. The average number of persons occupying each of these dwellings is in towns 4.53 and in the rural districts 5.24.

Now, the remedy for this deplorable state does not lie in the labourer's hands, however great his willingness to pay for better accommodation, but with the landlord when he recognizes the duties which appertain to his property. Many diseases are produced, promoted, or rendered more fatal among the poor, and if contagious, spread to the rich by such conditions as I have sketched.

(a.) Fever.—The man who is depressed by the want of fresh air is more liable to catch contagious disease, and in an overcrowded ill-aired room it must spread to others when one is stricken down. During the epidemic of the first quarter of this century the practice when fever seized a cottager was to build off the part of the room in which he lay, and to introduce through the window any food or medicine he required. A more disastrous consequence of the ignorance among the people of the laws of

health perhaps never occurred. One and a half millions of cases were reported in the epidemic of 1818. The fever rate of Irish towns is constantly and fearfully higher than that of English towns, owing to defective house accommodation and the reception of vagrants who spread the contagion.

(*b.*) Diarrhœa must always prevail, and typhoid fever and cholera when introduced must spread, if there be no efficient means for the removal of refuse, and if it be allowed to soak around the dwellings and poison the wells and the atmosphere. Gastric fever is a usual pest of the cottager's children and is produced in the same way.

(*c.*) Convulsions carry off so many infants in Irish towns as to greatly raise their mortality, and this disease is the effect of impure air acting on the susceptible nervous system of infancy.

(*d.*) Consumption and other forms of scrofula are, without doubt, promoted by want of pure fresh air, and are becoming lamentably fatal in many of our northern towns.

(*e.*) Accidental deaths occur likewise by overcrowding; thus during the last ten years, in Liverpool, 828 deaths of infants have been caused by overlying.

The other physical and the moral evils which result from the wretched condition of the habitations of our poor, I shall not now touch on, but they are subjects preëminently important for the philanthropist and the statesman. The evils which neglected dwellings impress on our countrymen are carried with them when they emigrate to British and American cities, in which the term "Irish" applied to a neighbourhood is the synonym for "wretched and filthy;" and galling to our national pride, as the expression is, no candid man can deny that there is some truth in it. It becomes the duty of every man to lend his aid in removing the causes which lead to such universally recognized degradation.

The means which legislation has heretofore provided for

the improvement of the dwellings of the humbler classes have been inspection and the advancement of Government loans.

Inspection in towns in Ireland is only allowed in nightly lodging-houses duly registered, and only when the population exceeds 3,000, and the town has been placed under Commissioners by the adoption of the Improvement Act of 1854. In England exemption is only granted for those below 200, and in Scotland below 700. Overcrowding is thus irrepressible in hundreds of towns which fall below that population, and in Parsonstown, Arklow, Kilrush, Portlaw, Roscrea, Macroom, and Boyle, although above it, because they have not adopted any Improvement Act. As an example of a town which is overcrowded by the reception of vagrants at night, I may mention one very near us—namely, Swords. As few of the towns which have adopted the Act of 1854 employ any inspector, it follows that nightly lodging-houses are unregulated in Ireland, except in a few of the larger cities.

Power to inspect the tenemented dwellings of the poor in the same way as common lodging-houses has been advocated by the ablest writers, and first and most forcibly by the Rev. Charles Kingsley, but Dublin is the only city in these kingdoms to which it has been granted.

Such powers were conferred last year under the Dublin Improvement Act, and are now anxiously sought for by London and other English cities, through their health officers and representatives. Under the Improvement Act of 1847, bye-laws were already in force regarding the following matters over nightly lodging-houses:—Registration; inspection; number of lodgers; separation of male and female lodgers; airing and cleansing; notice of infectious disease and disinfection; water supply and domestic accommodation; exclusion of swine and other animals; and the keeping of a copy of the regulations in each room.

Ninety-five such houses were registered and regularly

inspected, and one single fact will prove with what advantage; an average of one case of fever yearly occurred in the whole of them, whereas nearly every tenement house produced a case.

Such considerations induced the Corporation to seek power over tenements set weekly at rents under 3s., and the Lord Lieutenant sanctioned bye-laws respecting the condition of roof, walls, windows, house-drain, and other sanitary requisites, and imposing penalties on the owner for neglect in these respects, and on the occupier for any offence in injuring or abusing such accommodations. The owners of some of these houses, which number about 9000 of the entire houses in the city, at once organized themselves into a body with the grandiloquent and scarcely intelligible title of "The Antipolitical Ratepayers Protective Association," whose object was to protect themselves from the outlay necessary to render the houses fit for human habitation. By representations that the dwellings of the poor were in excellent order, that the Corporation were about to apply the bye-laws for the regulation of furnished nightly lodging-houses to tenement dwellings, by memorializing that body, and threatening many of its members with opposition at the next election, and by appeals to the police magistrates, they have as yet to a certain degree impeded us, notwithstanding the deplorable state of houses, such as I have exemplified, in Gill-square and Bow-lane. On Wednesday last, however (the question having been argued by most eminent counsel), the magistrates decided in favour of the Sanitary Committee, and fined the Secretary of the Tenement Owners Society for not having registered a house kept by him. So determined are their efforts to oppose us in carrying out the sanitary bye-laws that they have lodged an appeal to the Queen's Bench. They complain that the term "common lodging-house" is an opprobrious epithet to apply to houses set in tenements. The difficulties of keeping a

registry of 9000 houses with changing owners are so great, that I trust some future act may declare registration unnecessary for "tenement houses," as distinguished from "common lodging-houses," in which such a system is required.

The bye-laws came into action on the 15th day of September, and the sanitary sergeants forthwith proceeded to enforce them. Those neighbourhoods which from experience were known to be most filthy and unhealthy were first visited, a copy of the bye-laws was posted in each house, and a familiar explanation of their provisions was given to each occupier of a tenement in it. In many instances the improvements which the sanitary sergeants suggested were carried out; in others they were resisted, and the owners were accordingly summoned. The police magistrates, however, adjudged that registration of each of these houses as a public lodging-house was necessary before conviction for any sanitary deficiency could be obtained. The registration of these houses, which number about 9000, has caused considerable delay, and occupied the time of the staff for the first four months. I should mention that the visits of the officers were always most gratefully received by the poor tenants, and the allegation of the house-owners as to their being intrusions on their privacy and liberty were quite unfounded. During the eight months the act has been in operation 8974 houses have been visited, 92,707 sanitary defects discovered, and the larger proportion of them corrected.

It is most gratifying to know that in the amended sanitary legislation which the Government have promised this session the power of regulating tenement houses will be extended to all other Irish towns as well as the power to prevent overcrowding as at present possessed by English acts. The act for the inspection and regulation of lodging-houses in England, obtained by Lord Shaftesbury, was followed in 1851 by the act to encourage the establishment of lodging-houses for the labouring classes, which

provided that in towns of 10,000 inhabitants the local authority might borrow money from the Loan Commissioners for the purpose of building wholesome dwellings for the labouring classes. The desire to improve the condition of the operative classes in English towns is so general that I was surprised and disappointed to find that the act has been only taken advantage of in one instance during the fifteen years it has existed. In that instance (Huddersfield) the success has been remarkable. In 1864 it provided for 40,928 nightly inmates at a profit of £90 14s. 1d., and in thirty years the establishment will be the property of the Town Council, principal and interest having been paid. This act being thus a dead letter, the "Labouring Classes Dwellings Act" (just passed through the efforts of Mr. Childers) extends the granting of loans for this purpose to public companies and to individuals, who can offer fit security at 4 per cent., and repayable over forty years. A similar bill for Ireland, introduced by Mr. Childers and the Attorney-General, has obtained a third reading, and it possesses a valuable additional clause, providing that buildings, ruinous or dilapidated because of defect of title, may be sold in the Landed Estates Court.

Such acts are perfect as permissive enactments, but for reasons I will just now mention I fear that, as in the case of the Act of 1851, the supineness of municipal bodies and landed proprietors will to a great extent render them nugatory.

In 1855 Sir W. Somerville and Mr. G. A. Hamilton obtained an act which much facilitated the improvement of labourers' dwellings by granting the power to the landlord to recover possession under the Summary Jurisdiction Act of any tenement or cottage of a labourer, which, having been previously provided with every sanitary appliance had fallen into dilapidation. The same member, after some unsuccessful efforts, procured the enactment of the statute sanctioning the granting of loans on most

favourable terms to landed proprietors for the erection of agricultural labourers' dwellings, and the Commissioners of Public Works, to whom the management of the statute was entrusted, published regulations and specifications for the work. They also offered plans for the buildings, to which, however, the proprietors were not bound to adhere. No loan was to be granted for repair of old houses, the sum was to range between £200 and £1000 for any one person, and no larger sum than £60 was granted for each cottage, one-fourth that sum being added by the landlord, who was also obliged to provide for each dwelling a properly-drained privy, ashpit with puddled walls, and yard. Most glowing anticipations were entertained as to its effects in improving the wretched habitations of our peasantry, but I regret to say that they have been realized to a very inconsiderable extent. More than half the time of the act has run (for it is to cease in 1870), yet, according to the last report of the Commissioners (1865) but nine loans, amounting to £4,900, has been sanctioned for dwellings completed. If £60, the usual loan, be divided into this, it may be supposed that about 80 cottages have been erected. Considering that there were in 1861 at least 200,000 cottages requiring to be rebuilt, and that the overcrowded state of labourers' dwellings is so notorious, it is much to be deplored that landed proprietors have not taken advantage of this admirable enactment in a degree at all adequate to the wants of their tenants. From the same report it appears that eighteen loans, amounting to £6,290 were sanctioned, but not proceeded with, and that sixteen, amounting to £8,800, had been about half completed.

A stroll over the Hill of Howth will practically convince any one of the advantages of the act; in few parts of Connaught could more wretched hovels be discovered than existed here some years ago. Now, their places are taken by several neat and wholesome dwellings for the labourers, which are set at highly remunerative rents. The cottages are kept in excellent order, and the same gratifying report

may be made of many others of those erected under the act.

Many counties, for example, Galway, Mayo, Leitrim, and Roscommon, or nine-tenths of the western province, which most sadly require improved dwellings, have never had a loan granted, no application, I presume, having been made by the owners of the soil.

In the working of the Act there is a serious difficulty, which, I trust, may be removed by future legislation. I can best explain it by an example. A landed proprietor in the south having a large tract of unimproved land, let it to good tenants in small holdings, and granted long leases. His property has been vastly improved and his tenants aided in the safest way. Instead of being rewarded, however, by the benefits of this act, he is ineligible from receiving loans under it by the fact of having given leases, and further, the tenants are incapacitated by the smallness of their holdings from seeking the responsibility of a loan of £200, the least to be advanced under the Commissioners regulations. Scotland has enjoyed a similar act, which has been largely taken advantage of by land owners there. Until Mr. Childer's Act of this Session landed proprietors in England had not similar privileges.

Throughout this country there are a few large landed proprietors who have interested themselves in the improvement of their labourers' dwellings before this Act had been passed for Ireland, and the pretty and healthful cottages at Loughcrew, Clermont-park, Enniskerry, and Santry, occur to me in illustration. The Royal Agricultural Society has aided the good work by offering several gold and silver medals for the erection of the greatest number of newly-built labourers' cottages, or of improved cottages, in each province, or county, or district of its local branches. There is also the Leinster challenge cup for the person who, during the year, shall have erected the greatest number of improved labourers' cottages in any part of Ireland. Stimulated by these rewards some hundreds of

cottages have been built and put in competition, as appears from the yearly reports of the Society.

With regard to the plans on which these dwellings should be constructed, I will not, of course, attempt to enter into details, but I exhibit these models from the Agricultural Museum of our Society representing some which have been erected, and these elevations and plans for a pair of labourers cottages have been drawn by my brother, Mr. Dillon Mapother, C.E., of Louisville, U.S. They are adaptable for a small or large family by extension of the partitions, and as all ornament is omitted, the expense would range between £60 and £75 each, every sanitary requisite being provided.

These other plans are being carried out on the premises of Messrs. Walpole and Webb, and at Bray under the direction of Mr. C. Geoghegan, architect, and are intended to accommodate four families in each building.

There are also on the table several valuable plans which have been kindly lent to me by Mr. Barry, Commissioner of Fisheries, who has laboured longer and more energetically on the subject than any one with whom I am acquainted. A friend has informed me that cottages are made for a very small sum in France, by moulding in wooden shapes the scrapings from the streets, but I fear that, like the mud cabins, they would not allow permeation of air. In London and other great cities the greatest advantages with respect to health, prosperity, and morality, have followed the erection of improved lodging-houses and family dwellings for the working classes. They have been in many instances highly remunerative, even up to 14 per cent. on the outlay. In other cases where the noble benevolence of Mr. Peabody and others justified a greater expenditure than could be recouped in rents, the return has been as low as 3 per cent. Perhaps the Cromwell, Tower, Cobden, and Stanley buildings of the Industrial Tenement Company, which accommodate 200 families on the open staircase principle, may be taken as a medium.

The profit from these has ranged from six and a half to nine per cent.

Much has been done in London towards providing fit dwellings for the humbler classes; but so great is the aggregation of people reared in the country, and so vast the demolition by railway and other works, that overcrowding is most excessive and typhus is yearly increasing. Mr. Thomas Hughes was, therefore, justified in moving this week on Committee on Railway Clauses Bill that compensation should be given to tenement holders where more than fourteen houses in a parish have been removed, and that the company should provide wholesome dwellings in place of those removed, and should have compulsory power of taking sites for the purpose. He is favourable to the system of providing dwellings out of the city, the railways to provide cheap trains. This principle has been largely adopted in France, and, as far as it has been tried in London, it has succeeded. In Irish cities the condensation of population is not so great as to need this. In that most comprehensive and delightfully written book, "The Homes of the Working Classes," by Mr. Hole, there are most interesting descriptions of Saltaire, Akroydon, the familistery at Guise, and the cités Ouvrières of Mulhouse, where most admirable villages have been constructed for manufacturers workmen.

In Edinburgh, 16 buildings accommodating 847 families have been erected, and they have all been pecuniarily successful.

In this city something in this direction is at last about to be done; the Industrial Tenements Company (limited) has just been established with a most influential directory, who have entered into the movement in a spirit of commercial enterprise, which alone can make the project remunerative, and on a scale adequate to the wants of our labouring population. From their prospectus I make the following extracts:—

“This Company has been formed for the purpose of remedying an evil that exists in the city of Dublin, and of providing for the poor and labouring classes tenements in every respect superior to their present unhealthy and miserable dwellings.

“The Company propose to acquire, by purchase or lease in the city of Dublin, old but substantial houses, which, owing to the decline of the locality in which they stand, can now be purchased or obtained on lease for long terms of years on advantageous terms, and by an economic outlay fit up these houses in tenements, providing each set with all sanitary requirements, thereby ensuring to the labouring man the elements of health, cleanliness, and comfort.

“The Company also contemplate erecting improved dwellings on the principle adopted with such signal success in London, Edinburgh, and all the leading cities of Europe.

“There are at present 9000 houses let in tenements throughout the city of Dublin, in very few of which (if any) is the sanitary condition of the occupant cared for, and in nearly all of which the common decencies of life are lost sight of, whilst in most cases the rents paid for these tenements are exorbitant for the accommodation afforded.

“From the working of the improved dwelling companies in London, it has been found that the artisan and labouring classes are most punctual in the payment of their rents, and that every vacant tenement is eagerly sought after.

“The Company have ascertained that there are most suitable lots of houses in the city of Dublin that can be obtained on advantageous terms.

“The preliminary expenses are confined to the actual outlay incidental to the formation of the Company, no promotion money or any payment of a like nature being sanctioned by the articles of Association.

“The promoters have been induced to divide the capital into £10 shares, in the hope of inviting the artisan to invest his savings in the undertaking, and thus give him an additional incentive to promote the prosperity of the Company.”

The financial success of improved dwellings erected in

this city by Mr. Thomas Vance, Dr. Evory Kennedy, and Mr. Lindsay, has been remarkable, and there are always many eager applicants for tenements when vacant, which facts augur well for the success of the company.

The most important measure in regard to the subject ever introduced is that which Messrs. McCullagh Torrens, Locke, and Kinnaird brought in on the 20th of February. It is entitled, "a Bill to Provide better Dwellings for Artisans and Labourers," and applies to any borough or district in England to which the Public Health Act has been granted, or any place in the metropolis governed by a vestry. It provides that upon application of twenty rate-payers of any town, parish, or district, or by resolution of the local authority whenever the death-rate for three successive years shall have been over 3 in the 100, the Home Secretary shall send an inspecting architect to inquire into the sanitary state of any street, the number of persons living in it, the space and accommodation afforded, and the steps necessary to obtain sufficient healthful houses for the inhabitants. His report shall be laid before the local authority, published within fourteen days, and unless within a month the local authority shall prove to the Home Secretary that the improvements are not needed, he shall order them to be executed within a reasonable time. The dwellings to be constructed in lieu of those condemned shall be built with every sanitary accommodation, and so as to afford 350 cubic feet of space for every occupant. For these buildings the Loan Commissioners may advance money on the security of the rates at three and a half per cent., to be repaid within thirty years by equal yearly instalments. The local authority is to have power to take land or sites for buildings, giving compensation to the owners, and is to manage the improved dwellings. From this latter responsibility they will be relieved after three years by a clause which Mr. Torrens has undertaken to insert. I think some clause empowering the authorities in very condensed populations to convert the sites of the

condemned houses into open spaces is very desirable, the displaced inmates to be provided for in suburban districts connected with a railway at penny fares.

The compulsory principle on the occurrence of a fearful death-rate is the peculiar and valuable feature of this Bill, and without it no considerable amount of improvement will be achieved in the dwellings of the industrial classes. This is conclusively shown by the facts, I have before mentioned—namely, that the Loan Act in England has in fifteen years procured the building of one house, and the Irish Loan Act has in six years been instrumental in the building of some eighty cottages. As the former failure and the want of sanitary improvements in Irish towns is attributable to the apathy and mistaken parsimony of local authorities, I rejoice that in the Labouring Classes Dwellings Ireland Act, it is provided that loans may be also granted to public companies and estated individuals. So ill understood and so uncared for is the condition of the humbler classes in towns, that when that mild and permissive measure was passing through committee it was characterized as “a monstrous bill” by an Irish county member. Mr. Torrens’ bill has been referred to an admirably chosen Select Committee who have not as yet reported. Meanwhile thirty-seven bodies have petitioned in favour of it, and two against. The Dublin Corporation and the Irish Medical Association have petitioned for its extension to Ireland.

A joint Committee of the Society of Arts and the Social Science Association has prepared a bill entitled, “The Improvement of Dwellings for Labourers and Artisans Act, 1866,” which Mr. Charles Buxton is to introduce. It gives compulsory powers to Corporations to take land and build dwellings, the Home Secretary sanctioning the steps and the advance of loans for the purpose. It contains the usual selfish clause, “This Act shall not extend to Scotland or Ireland.” It seems to me

but to complicate attempts at legislation, for Mr. Torrens' Bill better provides for the same objects.

The metropolis, Liverpool, Birmingham, and other large English towns possess local Acts for the complete regulation of their buildings, and the smaller towns are similarly provided for under the bye-laws of the Local Government Act, 1858. Under these powers no house can be built unless its walls be of certain thickness proportional to height, unless sufficient space be allotted for a yard, unless the lower storey be efficiently drained, unless the roofs and chimneys be properly and safely constructed, and unless every habitable room be of a certain height. These provisions are placed under the supervision of the District Surveyor. Such a Bill for Dublin, on a very comprehensive scale, was prepared in 1863 with the aid of our Borough Engineer, but was never introduced. That it is required, a single example out of hundreds of ill-constructed, unimprovable buildings will show.

In Stephen's-place, which leads from Upper to Lower Mount-street, the houses are built back to back, without any thorough airing, yard, or privy. Filth must be therefore cast on the roadway. The clergymen and inhabitants of that aristocratic neighbourhood have justly complained, but the remedy is not easy. The placing of a water-closet, which the poor would soon disarrange is not safe in an unaired house, and as the houses are owned by different persons, the Corporation can scarcely require that one shall be converted into a privy for the use of the occupiers of all the others, as we have done where one person owns several cottages. In other houses without yards or accommodation, filth has been accumulated to a vast extent in the cellars or back kitchen.

The Local Government Act is most useful with regard to new buildings, but does not interfere with those already erected, no matter how unwholesome, so that this addition would be desirable if the Act is extended to Ireland.

In Glasgow many of the courts and houses are very ill

constructed, and so overcrowded are they as to allow but the average of three square yards to each person. A bill, however, for improvement, with compulsory power, has passed unopposed through Committee, by which the rate-payers consent to tax themselves at 6d. in the £1 for five years, and 3d. for the ensuing ten years. It is provided that the improvements shall not go on so fast as to render houseless the present occupants, but that reconstruction shall go on *pari passu* with demolition. In Liverpool under the Sanitary Amendment Act, 226 houses in 189 courts were removed or altered during last year. As many other great sanitary improvements have been achieved, the only circumstances which seem to account for the still excessive death-rate of that city is the extreme condensation of its population. There should be also some efficient controlling authority for the laying out of towns and streets. While the rectangular form, with due regard to meteorological circumstances, so common in American cities, is most healthful, our towns, as will be seen from these index maps, consist of angular streets of such devious courses as to appear rather the result of chance than design, and blind courts, which are most insalubrious. As yet scarcely any town in Ireland can boast of a wide street planted with trees.

In France the dwellings of the operative classes, as well as all other sanitary matters, are directed by a special branch of the state, named "Commission de Salubrité Publique," and a most effective machinery is organized to see that all houses are built on proper plans, and are preserved in good order.

Some very conclusive arguments have been put forward that Public Health Committees of the Privy Councils of these kingdoms should be charged with the control of town authorities, as the Poor-law Boards are with that of the local guardians. As precautions are often neglected during freedom from epidemics, inspection is then needed to a greater degree than even they are among us.

But in many places it is only when the selfish fear of contagion creates a panic, or when the pestilence has already invaded, that active measures are taken, and in the latter case their usefulness is very doubtful.

I will sum up in a very few words what I hope for as necessary to improve the dwellings of the poor, and thereby raise immensely the standard of public health:—

1st. The constitution of a central controlling authority for local government and sanitary improvement.

2nd. The enactment of a comprehensive building code; the passing of local acts being expensive is often avoided.

3rd. That our sanitary laws should be compulsory in cases of flagrant neglect; the permission to act is now very generally construed as permission not to act.

4th. A generally diffused desire on the part of employers and land owners to provide for the healthful wants of their dependents, and this will grow according as our nation prospers, and according as the masses are educated in the knowledge of the laws which regulate the well-being of their own bodies.

That the subject I have thus so imperfectly submitted to you is closely connected with our prosperity, cannot be more forcibly expressed than in the words of the Devon Commissioners, which are painted in large letters over the entrance of our Agricultural Museum: "While the dwellings of the general body of the people are surrounded by the elements of disease, and are damp, cold, dirty, and comfortless within, so long will the country be destitute of even the semblance of general prosperity."

An interesting discussion followed, in which the Chairman, Dr. E. Kennedy, Mr. Daly of the Dublin Building Society, Mr. Jephson, Mr. Thomas Begg of London (who has been the ablest advocate of the subject in England), Mr. Dillon Mapother, and Dr. Steele took part.