

Glasgow Herald.

THE social condition of this country presents anomalies which puzzle the philosopher, and make the philanthropist, even of the most enthusiastic type, all but despair. There is enormous and ever-increasing wealth, and all the luxuries which belong to it, enjoyed by one section of the community, while at the bottom of the social scale we have a mass of pauperism which actually increases with the wealth of the country, and upon which no effort as yet tried has had any appreciable effect. Midway between the lowest and the middle class there are the operatives, whose position may be described as one of very frequent strife with the capitalists, their employers. Their aim is to share more and more in the riches which the country produces. We have huge manufacturing interests and widespread commercial relations, upon which depend the sustenance of millions of the people, and a slight ruffle in the prosperity of these gigantic industries produces almost in a day incalculable evils. When trade is good, when our wealth-producing machinery is in full operation, the hives of labour swarm with teeming multitudes, the population increases at a rapid rate, and all seems going on prosperously, till some collapse comes from over-production, or from the locking up of capital in consequence of the "delicate marble of our credit" getting broken, and then comes ruin, misery, and the poor-house for thousands upon thousands. Under the wing of all our riches, or rather under the conditions by which they are produced, there is fostered in the great cities a sweltering heap of misery, crime, and pauperism, such as this country probably never witnessed before. Some contend that this is altogether an unwholesome, dangerous, and even barbarous condition of affairs; and that it would be infinitely better for the country were wealth more equably distributed among the population, even though our manufactures, our industries, and our commerce should suffer a great diminution. Better, we are told, a less thickly populated country with universal comfort, than one over-populated, producing fabulous wealth and fabulous poverty, and continually subject to economic convulsions which entail fearful social disasters. Mr Wallace, who has just published a most interesting work on the Malay Archipelago, has been so struck with the social condition of the great mass of the people in this country, as compared with that of the rude races among whom he has dwelt so long, that he does not hesitate to affirm his belief in the failure of our civilisation. As regards the whole community, he says we have not attained any real or important superiority over the better class of savages. Our civilisation—and as far as concerns the mastery over the forces of nature it has made wonderful advances during the last half-century—has been mainly directed towards the accumulation of wealth, in which only comparatively few have shared; but in the tropical regions which the traveller visited the bounties of nature are enjoyed by all in pretty fair proportion. There, there are no millionaires and no paupers.

These are probably morbid views of the social condition of this country; but it can hardly be denied that there is a large ulcerous spot upon our civilisation, which at the present time has a tendency to increase. Setting aside the question of our immense industries, and their effects upon population, pauperism, and crime, it is

asked—Can nothing be done, as things stand, with the surplus population which lives upon the earnings of others? There is a simple answer, which many good people believe to be the only answer, and that is a large and steady emigration to the Colonies which are in want of labour. This does look like an easy solution of the difficulty, because while we have men and women that we do not know what to do with here, there is in these distant regions room enough and to spare for thousands upon thousands of emigrants. The subject was discussed in the House of Lords on Friday night, and, we may say, practically decided in a way which affords little hope for those whose panacea for pauperism is emigration. The difficulty is to get our surplus population away. They are unfortunately of that class who cannot help themselves, who have been brought up under extremely complicated social conditions, and who would be utterly useless in a virgin country. They are just the people that our Colonies do not want, and who if they were transported thither would probably, in nine cases out of ten, be a burden upon the community. If we were suffering from a great plethora of agricultural labourers, of men and women who could turn their hands to the cultivation of the soil, emigration, assisted by Government, under favourable conditions, might be an immense benefit. But people who have been starved out of our manufactories would be like creatures out of their element in a new country. Besides, the Colonies would rebel against such an importation, and we could scarcely blame them, for it would be simply transferring the burden of pauperism from our shoulders to theirs.

Supposing, however, that Government should aid emigration on a large scale, and that the Colonies should agree to take and make the best of those whom we chose to send, it is questionable whether or not this country would be greatly benefited. If we attempted to thin the population by this means, we should assuredly stimulate, by improved trade and higher wages, its increase in the natural way. In other words, the new stream of life that would be poured in would compensate for the drain which went off seaward. With all our emigration during the last twenty years, the population has largely increased, because the increase in our industries has been enormous, and has called labour into existence more rapidly than emigration has floated it away. We see a striking illustration of the different effects of emigration in the case of Ireland and of Great Britain. In the former island, which has not the wealth to increase labour, the drain to America has greatly diminished the population since the potato famine; but in this island our large emigration has just been a stimulus to the reproductive power of the people. It is evident, therefore, that no ordinary scheme of emigration would remedy the social evil of an indigent population so large as ours. If, like Abraham and Lot, when we find the land too small for us, one portion could go bodily off to some new country, we might by such a sudden movement readjust matters, and find ourselves in that delightful condition which Mr Wallace tells us the better class of savages in the Malay Archipelago enjoy. It was thus that the early settlers of the European forests found land and food, and space to grow. But none of these primitive methods of distribution are now open to us. Our population is great, and depends upon our great industries; is, in fact, the product of our wonderful material civilisation. It is only fitted for the conditions in which it finds itself at home, or elsewhere where the same conditions exist. Our great pauperism is, we are afraid, to some extent the necessary waste of this busy, rushing, social life of ours. It is probably true, as was stated in the House of Lords, that it has been greatly aggravated by the operation of the English Poor Law; but it must always continue great in a country in which wealth and labour increase at such a tremendous pace.