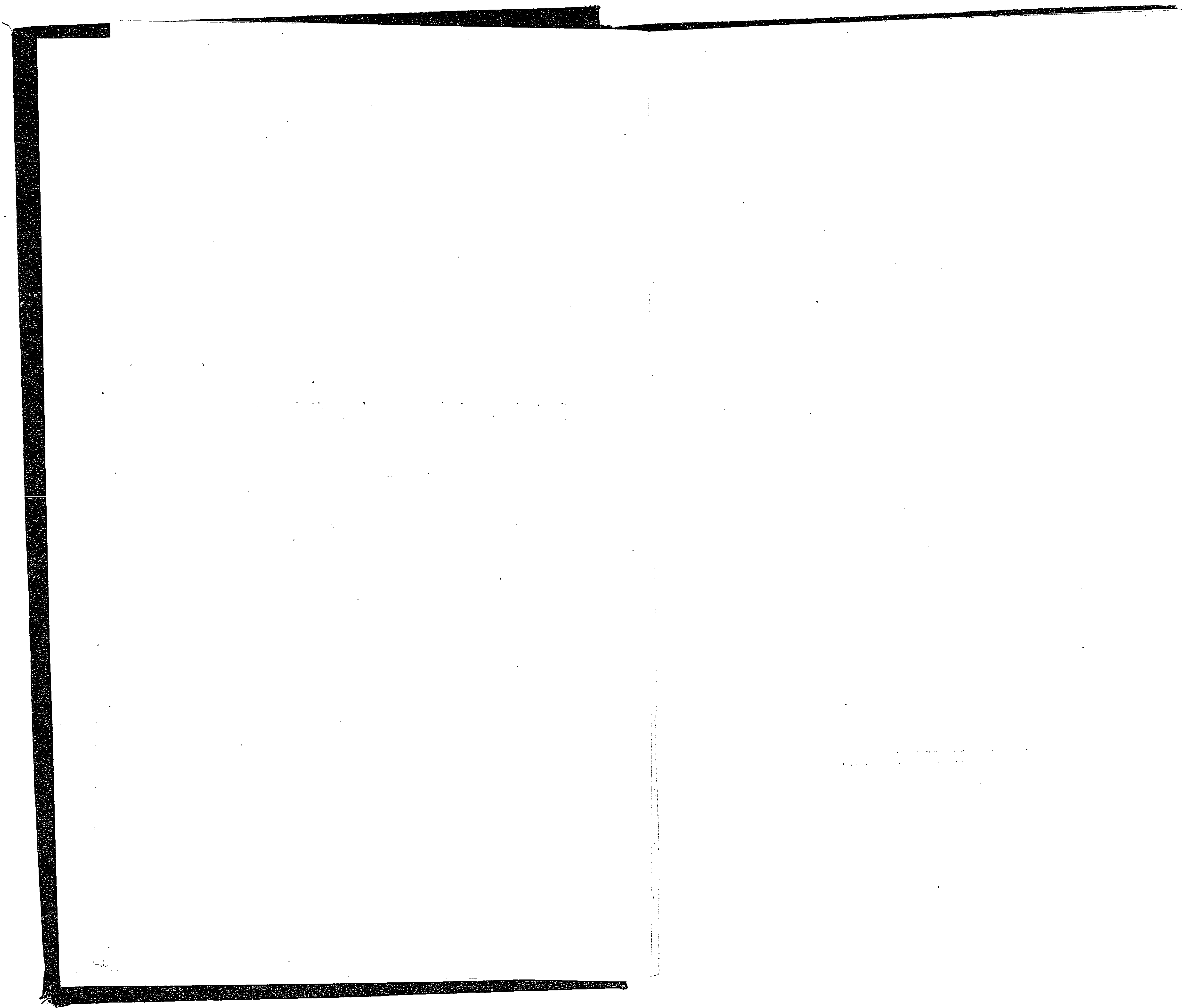


LONDON LABOUR

AND THE

LONDON POOR.



LONDON LABOUR AND THE LONDON POOR:

THE CONDITION AND EARNINGS OF

THOSE THAT WILL WORK, CANNOT WORK, AND  
WILL NOT WORK.

BY

HENRY MAYHEW.

VOL. II.

LONDON STREET-FOLK.



HENRY MAYHEW.

[From a Photograph.]

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LONDON LABOUR

AND

THE LONDON POOR.

THE STREET-FOLK.

INTRODUCTION.

In commencing a new volume I would devote a few pages to the consideration of the import of the facts already collected concerning the London Street-Folk, not only as regards the street-people themselves, but also in connection with the general society of which they form so large a proportion.

The precise extent of the proportion which the Street-Traders bear to the rest of the Metropolitan Population is the first point to be evolved; for the want, the ignorance, and the vice of a street-life being in a direct ratio to the numbers, it becomes of capital importance that we should know how many are seeking to pick up a livelihood in the public thoroughfares. This is the more essential because the Government returns never *have* given us, and probably never *will* give us, any correct information respecting it. The Census of 1841 set down the "Hawkers, Hucksters, and Pedlars" of the Metropolis as numbering 2045; and from the inquiries I have made among the street-sellers as to the means taken to obtain a full account of their numbers for the next population return, the Census of 1851 appears likely to be about as correct in its statements concerning the Street-Traders and Performers as the one which preceded it.

According to the accounts which have been collected during the progress of this work, the number of the London Street-People, so far as the inquiry has gone, is upwards of 40,000. This sum is made up of 30,000 Costermongers; 2000 Street-Sellers of "Green-Stuff," as Watercresses, Chickweed, and Groundsell, Turf, &c.; 4000 Street-Sellers of Eatables and Drinkables; 1000 selling Stationery, Books, Papers, and Engravings in the streets; and 4000 other street-sellers vending manufactured articles, either of metal, crockery, textile, chemical, or miscellaneous substances, making altogether 41,000, or in round numbers say 40,000 individuals. The 30,000 costermongers may be said to include 12,000 men, 6000 women, and 12,000 children.

The above numbers comprise the main body of people selling in the London streets; hence if we assert that, with the vendors of second-hand articles, as old metal, glass, linen, clothes, &c., and mineral productions, such as coke, salt, and sand, there are about 45,000 street-traders in the Metropolis, we shall not, I am satisfied, be very far from the truth.

II.

The value of the Capital, or Stock in Trade, of these people, though individually trifling, amounts, collectively, to a considerable sum of money—indeed, to very nearly 40,000*l.*, or at the rate of about 1*l.* per head. Under the term Capital are included the donkeys, barrows, baskets, stalls, trays, boards, and goods belonging to the several street-traders; and though the stock of the watercress, the small-ware, the lucifer, the flower, or the chickweed and groundsell seller may not exceed in value 1*s.*, and the basket or tray upon which it is carried barely half that sum, that of the more prosperous costermonger, possessed of his barrow and donkey; or of the Cheap John, with his cart filled with hardware; or the Packman, with his bale of soft wares at his back, may be worth almost as many pounds as the others are pence.

The gross amount of trade done by the London Street-Sellers in the course of the year is so large that the mind is at first unable to comprehend how, without reckless extravagance, want can be in any way associated with the class. After the most cautious calculation, the results having been checked and re-checked in a variety of ways, so that the conclusion arrived at might be somewhat near and certainly not beyond the truth, it appears that the "takings" of the London Street-Sellers cannot be said to be less than 2,500,000*l.* per annum. But vast as this sum may seem, and especially when considered as only a portion of the annual expenditure of the Metropolitan Poor, still, when we come to spread the gross yearly receipts over 40,000 people, we find that the individual takings are but 62*l.* per annum, which (allowing the rate of profit to be in all cases even 50 per cent., though I am convinced it is often much less) gives to each street-trader an annual income of 20*l.* 13*s.* 4*d.*, or within a fraction of 8*s.* a week, all the year round. And when we come to deduct from this the loss by perishable articles, the keep of donkeys, the wear and tear, or hire, of barrows—the cost of stalls and baskets, together with the interest on stock-money (generally at the rate of 4*s.* a week—and often 1*s.* a day—for 1*l.*, or 1040*l.* per cent. per annum), we may with safety assert that the average gain or clear income of the Metropolitan Street-Sellers is rather under than over 7*s.* 6*d.* a week. Some of the more expert street-traders may clear 10*s.* or even 15*s.* weekly throughout the year, while the

B

weekly profit of the less expert, the old people, and the children, may be said to be 3s. 6d. These incomes, however, are the average of the gross yearly profits rather than the regular weekly gains; the consequence is, that though they might be sufficient to keep the majority of the street-sellers in comparative comfort, were they constant and capable of being relied upon, from week to week—but being variable and uncertain, and rising sometimes from nothing in the winter to 1l. a week in the summer, when street commodities are plentiful and cheap, and the poorer classes have money wherewith to purchase them—and fluctuating moreover, even at the best of times, according as the weather is wet or fine, and the traffic of the streets consequently diminished or augmented—it is but natural that the people subject to such alternations should lack the prudence and tempe-

rance of those whose incomes are more regular and uniform.

To place the above facts clearly before the reader the following table has been prepared. The first column states the titles of the several classes of street-sellers; the second, the number of individuals belonging to each of these classes; the third, the value of their respective capitals or stock in trade; the fourth, the gross amount of trade done by them respectively every year; the fifth, the average yearly takings of each class; and the sixth, their average weekly gains. This gives us, as it were, a bird's-eye view of the earnings and pecuniary condition of the various kinds of street-sellers already treated of. It is here cited, as indeed all the statistics in this work are, as an approximation to the truth rather than a definite and accurate result.

DESCRIPTION OF CLASS.	Number of Persons in each Class.	Gross amount of capital, or stock in trade belonging to each class.	Gross amount of trade annually done by each class.	Average yearly receipts per head.	Average weekly gains.
<b>COSTERMONGERS<sup>a</sup>.</b>					
Street-Sellers of Wet Fish . . .	30,000 <sup>b</sup>	£25,000	£1,177,200	£60	8s.
"    "    Dry fish . . .			127,000		
"    "    Shell Fish . . .			156,600		
			1,460,800		
"    "    Green Fruit . . .			332,400		
"    "    Dry Fruit . . .			1,000		
"    "    Vegetables . . .			292,200		
			625,600		
"    "    Game, Poultry, Rabbits, &c. . . . .			80,000		
"    "    Flowers, Roots, &c. . . . .			14,800		
	2,181,200				
<b>STREET-SELLERS OF GREEN STUFF.</b>					
Watercresses <sup>c</sup> . . . . .	1,000	87	13,900	13	3s. 6d.
Chickweed, Groundsell, and Plantain <sup>d</sup> . . . . .	1,000	42	14,000	14	5s.
Turf-Cutters and Sellers . . . . .	40	20	570	14	5s. 6d.
<b>STREET-SELLERS OF EATABLES AND DRINKABLES . . . . .</b>					
	4,000	9,000	203,100	50	10s.
<b>STREET-SELLERS OF STATIONERY, LITERATURE, AND THE FINE ARTS . . . . .</b>					
	1,000	400	33,400	30	8s.
<b>STREET-SELLERS OF MANUFACTURED ARTICLES of Metal, Crockery and Glass, Textile, Chemical, or Miscellaneous Substances . . . . .</b>					
	4,000	2,800	188,200	47	10s.
	41,040	£37,529	£2,634,370	£60	8s.

<sup>a</sup> The definition of a Costermonger strictly includes only such individuals as confine themselves to the sale of the produce of the Green and Fruit Markets: the term is here restricted to that signification.

<sup>b</sup> This number includes Men, Women, and Children.

<sup>c</sup> The Watercress trade is carried on in the streets, principally by old people and children. The chief mart to which the street-sellers of cresses resort is Farringdon-market, a place which but few or none of the regular Costermongers attend.

<sup>d</sup> The Chickweed and Groundsell Sellers and the Turf-Cutters' traffic has but little expense connected with it, and their trade is therefore nearly all profit.

Now, according to the above estimate, it would appear that the gross annual receipts of the entire body of street-sellers (for there are many besides those above specified—as for instance, the vendors of second-hand articles, &c.) may be estimated in round numbers at 3,000,000l. sterling, and their clear income at about 1,000,000l. per annum. Hence, we are enabled to perceive the importance of the apparently insignificant traffic of the streets; for were the street-traders to be prohibited from pursuing their calling, and so forced to apply for relief at the several metropolitan unions, the poor-rates would be at the least doubled. The total sum expended in the relief of the London poor, during 1848, was 725,000l., but this we see is hardly three-fourths of the income of the street-traders. Those, therefore, who would put an end to the commerce of our streets, should reflect whether they would like to do so at the cost of doubling the present poor-rates and of reducing one-fortieth part of the entire metropolitan population from a state of comparative independence to absolute pauperism.

However unsatisfactory it may be to the aristocratic pride of the wealthy commercial classes, it cannot be denied that a very important element of the trade of this vast capital—this marvellous centre of the commerce of the world—I cite the stereotype phrases of civic eloquence, for they are at least truths—it is still undeniable, I say, that a large proportion of the commerce of the capital of Great Britain is in the hands of the Street-Folk. This simple enunciation might appear a mere platitude were it not that the street-sellers are a *proscribed class*. They are driven from stations to which long possession might have been thought to give them a quasi legal right; driven from them at the capricious desire of the shopkeepers, some of whom have had bitter reason, by the diminution of their own business, to repent their interference. They are bandied about at the will of a police-officer. They must "move on" and not obstruct a thoroughfare which may be crammed and blocked with the carriages of the wealthy until to cross the road on foot is a danger. They are, in fine, a body numbering thousands, who are allowed to live in the prosecution of the most ancient of all trades, sale or barter in the open air, *by sufferance alone*. They are classed as unauthorized or illegal and intrusive traders, though they "turn over" millions in a year.

The authorities, it is true, do not sanction any general arbitrary enforcement of the legal prescription of the Street-Folk, but they have no option if a section of shopkeepers choose to say to them, "Drive away from our doors these street-people." It appears to be sufficient for an inferior class of tradesmen—for such the meddlers with the street-folk generally seem to be—merely to desire such a removal in order to accomplish it. It is not necessary for them to say in excuse, "We pay heavy rents, and rates, and taxes, and are forced to let our lodgings accordingly; we pay for licences, and some of us as well pay fines for giving short weight to poor people, and that, too, when it is hardly safe to give short weight to our richer patrons; but

what rates, taxes, or licences do these street-traders pay? Their lodgings may be dear enough, but their rates are nominally nothing" (being charged in the rent of their rooms). "From taxes they are blessedly exempt. They are called upon to pay no imposts on their property or income; they defray merely the trifling duties on their tobacco, beer, tea, sugar, coffee" (though these by the way—the chief articles in the excise and customs returns—make up one-half of the revenue of the country). "They ought to be put down. We can supply all that is wanting. What may become of *them* is simply their own concern."

The Act 50 Geo. III., c. 41, requires that every person "carrying to sell or exposing to sale any goods, wares, or merchandize," shall pay a yearly duty. But according to s. 23, "nothing in this Act shall extend to prohibit any person or persons from selling (by hawking in the streets) any printed papers licensed by authority; or any fish, fruit, or victuals." Among the privileged articles are also included barm or yeast, and coals. The same Act, moreover, contains nothing to prohibit the maker of any home-manufacture from exposing his goods to sale in any town-market or fair, nor any tinker, cooper, glazier, or other artizan, from going about and carrying the materials of his business. The unlicensed itinerant vendors of such things however as lucifer-matches, boot-laces, braces, fuzces, or any wares indeed, not of their own manufacture, are violators of the law, and subject to a penalty of 10l., or three months' imprisonment for each offence. It is in practice, however, only in the hawking of such articles as those on which the duty is heavy and of considerable value to the revenue (such as tea, tobacco, or cigars), that there is any actual check in the London streets.

Nevertheless, a large proportion of the street-trading without a licence is contrary to law, and the people seeking to obtain a living by such means are strictly liable to fine or imprisonment, while even those street-traders whom the Act specially exempts—as for instance the street-sellers of fish, fruit, and vegetables, and of eatables and drinkables, as well as the street artizans, and who are said to have the right of "exposing their goods to sale in any market or fair in every city, borough, town-corporate, and market-town"—even these, I say, are liable to be punished for obstructing the highway whenever they attempt to do so.

Now these are surely anomalies which it is high time, in these free-trade days, should cease. *The endeavour to obtain an honest and independent livelihood should subject no man to fine or imprisonment; nor should the poor hawker—the neediest perhaps of all tradesmen—be required to pay 4l. a year for the liberty to carry on his business when the wealthy shopkeeper can do so "scot-free."* Moreover, it is a glaring iniquity that the rich tradesman should have it in his power, by complaining to the police, to deprive his poorer rival of the right to dispose of his goods in the streets. It is often said, in justification, that as the shopkeepers pay the principal portion of the rates and taxes, they must be protected in the exercise of their business. But this, in the



first place, is far from the truth. As regards the taxes, the poorer classes pay nearly half of the national imposts: they pay the chief portion of the malt duty, and that is in round numbers 5,000,000*l.* a year; the greater part of the spirit duty, which is 4,350,000*l.*; the tobacco duty, 4,250,000*l.*; the sugar duty, 4,500,000*l.*; and the duty on tea, 5,330,000*l.*; making altogether 23,430,000*l.*, out of about 50,000,000*l.* Concerning the rates, however, it is not so easy to estimate what proportion the poor people contribute towards the local burdens of the country; but if they are householders, they have to pay quota of the parish and county expenses directly, and, if lodgers, indirectly in the rent of their apartments. Hence it is evident, that to consider the street-sellers unworthy of being protected in the exercise of their calling because they pay neither rates nor taxes, is to commit a gross injustice, not only to the street-sellers themselves by forcing them to contribute in their tea and sugar, their beer, gin, and tobacco, towards the expenses of a Government which exerts itself rather to injure than benefit them, but likewise to the rate-payers of the parish; for it is a necessary consequence, if the shopkeepers have the power to deprive the street-dealers of their living whenever the out-of-door tradesmen are thought to interfere with the business of those indoors (perhaps by underselling them), that the street-dealers, being unable to live by their own labour, must betake themselves to the union and live upon the labour of the parishioners, and thus the shopkeepers may be said to enrich themselves at the expense, not only of the poor street-people, but likewise of their brother ratepayers.

Nor can it be said that the *Street-Sellers* are interlopers upon these occasions, for if ancient custom be referred to, it will be found that the Shopkeepers are the real intruders, they having succeeded the Hawkers, who were, in truth, the original distributors of the produce of the country.

But though no body of Shopkeepers, nor, indeed, any other class of people *individually*, should possess the power to deprive the Hawkers of what is often the last shift of struggling independence—the sale of a few goods in the street—still it is evident that the *general* convenience of the public must be consulted, and that, were the Street-Traders to be allowed the right of pitching in any thoroughfare they pleased, many of our principal streets would be blocked up with costers' barrows, and the kerb of Regent-street possibly crowded like that of the New Cut, with the hawkers and hucksters that would be sure to resort thither; while those thoroughfares which, like Fleet-street and Cheapside, are now almost impassable at certain times of the day, from the increased traffic of the City, would be rendered still more impervious by the throngs of street-sellers that the crowd alone would be sure to attract to the spot.

Under the circumstances, therefore, it becomes necessary that we should provide for the vast body of Street-Sellers some authorized place of resort, where they might be both entitled and

permitted to obtain an honest living according to Act of Parliament. To think for a moment of "putting down" street-trading is to be at once ignorant of the numbers and character of the people pursuing it. To pass an Act declaring 50,000 individuals rogues and vagabonds, would be to fill our prisons or our workhouses with men who would willingly earn their own living. Besides, the poor *will* buy of the poor. Subject the petty trader to fine and imprisonment as you please, still the very sympathy and patronage of the petty purchaser will in this country always call into existence a large body of purveyors to the poorer classes. I would suggest, therefore, and I do so after much consideration, and an earnest desire to meet all the difficulties of the case, that a number of "poor men's markets" be established throughout London, by the purchase or rental of plots of ground in the neighbourhood of the present street-markets; that a small toll be paid by each of the Street-Sellers attending such markets, for the right to vend their goods there—that the keeper or beadle of each market be likewise an Inspector of Weights and Measures, and that any hawker found using "slangs" of any kind, or resorting to any imposition whatever, be prohibited entering the market for the future—that the conduct and regulation of the markets be under the direction of a committee consisting of an equal number of shareholders, sellers, and working men—the latter as representatives of the buyers—and that the surplus funds (if any, after paying all expenses, together with a fair interest to the shareholders of the market) should be devoted to the education of the children of the hawkers before and after the hours of sale. There might also be a penny savings'-bank in connection with each of the markets, and a person stationed at the gates on the conclusion of the day's business, to collect all he could from the hawkers as they left.

There are already a sufficient number of poor-markets established at the East end of the town—though of a different character, such as the Old Clothes Exchange—to prove the practicability of the proposed plan among even the pettiest traders. And I am convinced, after long deliberation, that such institutions could not but tend to produce a rapid and marked improvement in the character of the London Hawkers.

This is the only way evident to me of meeting the evil of our present street-life—an evil which is increasing every day, and which threatens, ere long, almost to overwhelm us with its abominations. To revile the street-people is stark folly. Their ignorance is no demerit to them, even as it is no merit to us to know the little that we do. If we really wish the people better, let us, I say again, do for them what others have done for us, and without which (humiliating as it may be to our pride) we should most assuredly have been as they are. It is the continued forgetfulness of this truth—a truth which our wretched self-conceit is constantly driving from our minds—that prevents our stirring to improve the condition of these poor people; though, if we



VIEW OF A DUST-YARD.  
[From a Sketch taken on the Spot.]

knew but the whole of the facts concerning them, and their sufferings and feelings, our very fears alone for the safety of the state would be sufficient to make us do something in their behalf. I am quite satisfied, from all I have seen, that there are thousands in this great metropolis ready to rush forth, on the least evidence of a rising of the people, to commit the most savage and revolting excesses—men who have no knowledge of the government of the country but as an armed despotism, preventing their earning their living, and who hate all law, because it is made to appear to them merely as an organised tyranny—men, too, who have neither religious nor moral principles to restrain the exercise of their grossest passions when once roused, and men who, from our very neglect of them, are necessarily and essentially the dangerous classes, whose existence we either rail at or deplore.

The rate of increase among the street-traders it is almost impossible to arrive at. The population returns afford us no data for the calculation, and the street-people themselves are unable to supply the least information on the subject; all they can tell us is, that about 20 years ago they took a guinea for every shilling that they get now. This heavy reduction of their receipts they attribute to the cheapness of commodities, and the necessity to carry and sell a greater quantity of goods in order to get the same profit, as well as to the increase in the number of street-traders; but when questioned as to the extent of such increase, their answers are of the vaguest possible kind. Arranging the street-people, however, as we have done, into three distinct classes, according to the causes which have led to their induction into a street-life, viz., those who are *born* and *bred* to the streets—those who *take* to the streets—and those who are *driven* to the streets, it is evident that the main elements of any extraordinary increase of the street-folk must be sought for among the two latter classes. Among the first the increase will, at the utmost, be at the same rate as the ordinary increase of the population—viz.,  $1\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. per annum; for the English costermongers and street-traders in general appear to be remarkable rather for the small than the large number of their children, so that, even supposing all the boys and girls of the street-sellers to be brought up to the same mode of life as their father, we could not thus account for any *enormous* increase among the street-folk. With those, however, who *take* to the streets from the love of a "roving life," or the desire to "shake a free leg"—to quote the phrases of the men themselves—or are *driven* to the streets from an inability to obtain employment at the pursuit to which they have been accustomed, the case is far different.

That there is every day a greater difficulty for working men to live by their labour—either from the paucity of work, or from the scanty remuneration given for it—surely no one will be disposed to question when every one is crying out that the country is over-populated. Such being the case, it is evident that the number of mechanics in the streets must be daily augmenting, for, as I have before said, street-trading is the last shift of an unemployed artizan to keep himself and his family from the "Union." The workman out of work, sooner than starve or go to the parish for relief, takes to making up and vending on his own account the articles of his craft, whilst the underpaid workman, sooner than continue toiling from morning till midnight for a bare subsistence, resorts to the easier trade of buying and selling. Again, even among the less industrious of the working classes, the general decline in wages has tended, and is continually tending, to make their labour more and more irksome to them. There is a cant abroad at the present day, that there is a special pleasure in industry, and hence we are taught to regard all those who object to work as appertaining to the class of natural vagabonds; but where is the man among us that loves labour? for work or labour is merely that which is irksome to perform, and which every man requires a certain amount of remuneration to induce him to perform. If men really loved work they would pay to be allowed to do it rather than require to be paid for doing it. That occupation which is agreeable to us we call amusement, and that and that only which is disagreeable we term labour, or drudgery, according to the intensity of its irksomeness. Hence as the amount of remuneration given by way of inducement to a man to go through a certain amount of work becomes reduced, so does the stimulus to work become weakened, and this, through the decline of wages, is what is daily taking place among us. Our operatives are continually ceasing to be producers, and passing from the creators of wealth into the exchangers or distributors of it; becoming mere tradesmen, subsisting on the labour of other people rather than their own, and so adding to the very non-producers, the great number of whom is the main cause of the poverty of those who make all our riches. To teach a people the difficulty of living by labour is to inculcate the most dangerous of all lessons, and this is what we are daily doing. Our trading classes are increasing at a most enormous rate, and so giving rise to that exceeding competition, and consequently, to that continual reduction of prices—all of which must ultimately fall upon the working man. This appears to me to be the main cause of the increase of the London street people, and one for which I candidly confess I see no remedy.

#### OF THE STREET-SELLERS OF SECOND-HAND ARTICLES

I HAVE already treated of the street-commerce in such things as are presented to the public in the form in which they are to be cooked, eaten, drank, or used.

They have comprised the necessaries, delicacies, or luxuries of the street; they have been either the raw food or preparations ready cooked or mixed for