

Most of our readers have doubtless read in the works of Ainsworth, Dickens, and others, graphic descriptions of the life and occupations of the degraded classes of London who have their haunts about "Saint Giles" and other kindred quarters of the great metropolis, and who have given a fearful history to the "Mint" and other places of equally dreadful repute. Many have read the terribly elaborate details, given by Sue, of the scenes enacted in "La cite," the most squalid quarter of the French capital—and have wondered that such dens of misery could exist in the very heart of a great city like Paris. All of our readers have heard of the Five Points in New York, and of the famous "Old Brewery" which has so lately been relieved of its wretched occupants and razed to the ground. All these things are familiar to most Philadelphians; but many are ignorant of the fact, that in our own city, within a few squares of our most fashionable thoroughfares, there is, we honestly believe, quite as much misery, degradation and crime in proportion to the size of the city which contains the plague spot, as in the most squalid scenes described so graphically by Dickens, Ainsworth, and Sue, and so strongly dwelt upon of late by our New York contemporaries. The majority of our citizens are aware that we have a Baker street and a Small street in Philadelphia, and the local columns of the newspapers occasionally contain paragraphs headed significantly, "Death from want"—"The result of intemperance"—"Murder in Moyamensing"—and even, at times, the terrible words "Death from starvation!" The scenes which furnish the material for these paragraphs are laid in this wretched neighborhood, but our citizens are not much startled by the shocking facts disclosed, and they are too prone to console themselves with the reflection that such things are not of very frequent occurrence, that the suffering wretches are but few in number, and that the quarter infected by them is not of wide extent. How sad a mistake.

We have taken some pains to explore the chosen haunts of vice and misery in our city, and have had evidence of how widely they are extended—There are in Philadelphia thousands—absolutely thousands, who rise in the morning without knowing where they are to obtain a mouthful of food, or where their wretched heads are to rest at night. These creatures prow about during the day, on the look-out for what they may pilfer while begging or gathering refuse for an ostensible employment, but depending mainly upon the pickings, in the way of plunder, which may fall in their way. At night, they gather in their appropriate quarter and squander away their earnings or stealings by indulging in the most vile and brutish appetites. When nature requires rest, the poor wretches swarm into hovels which are not fit to be the abiding places of swine, and there lie upon the filthy floors of cellars and rooms which are mere dens, and scarcely fit for the abiding places of the vilest beasts.

The quarter thus infected is not confined to a few streets and alleys. It occupies an area of many acres, and comprises in its bounds many streets, scores of alleys, and courts, almost without number. If we were required to fix the lines of demarcation between this diseased spot, and the healthy parts of the city, we would say that almost all that part of the city proper, the district of Southwark, and the district of Moyamensing, comprised within the bounds of Fifth street to Eighth, and Lombard street to Fitzwater, was more or less infected. Within the bounds defined above, there are many worthy citizens, and also some elegant dwellings, but they are exceptions; the district is a cancerous sore, and its roots permeate adjacent comparatively healthy portions of the city, threaten to infect and poison other parts, and spread still wider the foul blot.—We have visited many of the dens of misery referred to above, in company with a competent guide, and we have had opportunities afforded us of seeing their inmates in their haunts, in the enjoyment of their peculiar pleasures, and in the every-day routine of their terrible lives. Without further preface, we will attempt to describe the infected district, the hovels it contains, and the habits and character of their occupants.

We will first furnish our readers with an idea of the names of the courts and alleys through which we passed, all of which are crowded with wretched dens of misery. Among these places are Gillis' alley, Mary's alley, Nanny Goat alley, Ram-cat alley, Ram's-Horn alley, Shirker's alley, Yenger's court, McClusky's court, Stewart's court, Dougherty's court, and Baker, Bedford, Small, Hurst, and St. Mary streets. In these squalid lanes and thoroughfares, there are immense numbers of low grogeries which are certainly the foundation of the misery among which they rankle. Some of these taverns, although occupying tumble down rickety hovels, have been dubbed by the same names as the most fashionable hotels. We accordingly find the Astor House, the Girard, the United States, the Columbia, &c. &c. There are others which bear titles more consistent with the *patois* of the quarter in which the establishments are located. In the addition to the high sounding names just enumerated, we also find the Break o Day House, The Moonlight House, The Morning Glory, The Rising Sun, The Haven of Rest, The Weary Tra-

veller's Home, and a great variety of titles equally fanciful and quite as inappropriate. To describe one of these dens is to describe them all. We visited several, and explored them from the cellar to the loft, and found them alike in all essential particulars. As these hovels are in reality lodging houses, and ostensibly designed for the rest and entertainment of human beings, our readers will doubtless expect to read of accommodations in the way of beds and other furniture, but he will not of course expect to find such princely arrangements as distinguish some of our first class hotels; in the latter respect the surmise of the reader will be realized; but if he expects to hear of furniture of some description, he will be doomed to disappointment, for we declare, without the slightest exaggeration, or distortion of the naked truth, that in scores of lodging rooms which we visited, there was not a single article of furniture, neither bed nor bedding—not a crazy table, nor even a rickety stool. The walls and floors were invariably bare of every thing but filth and a few dirty rags. The glass was generally broken out of the sash, and the apertures were filled with rags to exclude the biting frost. No article but a broken stove or a cracked furnace was in the rooms in which human beings are nightly gathered in clusters. A bundle of straw for a bed would be a luxury of the first class in comparison with the utter destitution exhibited in these scenes. Foreign writers, in describing similar scenes in Europe, usually speak of mean furniture of some description, with which their dens are furnished. From this fact we infer that the denizens of the wretched locality we are attempting to picture, are even worse off than the same class in Europe, for here there is absolutely nothing afforded them except barely sufficient to prevent their perishing. When we visited the squalid neighborhood the weather was intensely cold, and had the wretches been deprived of almost any article they possessed, even to a single shred of their filthy rags, they must inevitably have frozen to death, so near were they to that point of utter destitution at which nature gives up the struggle in despair, and the creature dies!

We will essay a description of a hovel we visited which was kept by a hideous looking Irishman known as Jimmy Quinn. The house is a tavern and lodging house and is located in Small street above Fifth. It is a two story frame of quite a small size, but it is nevertheless divided into a number of rooms which are about ten by twelve feet in dimensions. The bar room is in front on the ground floor. With the exception of this apartment, no other part of the house contained a single article of furniture, except some damaged furnaces and miserable stoves. The walls were discolored by smoke and filth, the glass was broken from the windows, chinks in the frame work let in the cold air, and every thing was as wretchedly uncomfortable as it is possible to conceive. Yet in every one of these apartments, including the cellar and the loft, men and women—blacks and whites by dozens—were huddled together promiscuously, squatting or lying upon the bare floors, and keeping themselves from freezing by covering their bodies with such filthy rags as chance threw in their way.

In the bar room a somewhat different scene presented itself; there were several casks of vile rum; a few bottles and glasses; a bucket of water and a tin cup secured by a chain; a bench or two and a red hot stove, around which men and women of both colors clustered to warm their shivering frames. Those of the wretched beings who could procure tobacco were enjoying the luxury of pipes, and assisting to make the foul atmosphere of the room still more dense and unwholesome. A solitary candle, stuck upon the end of a long stick to prevent its being capsized in a sudden fight, furnished the only means by which the ragged wretches could be distinguished in the murky gloom, and enabled the unearthly looking creature, who presided over the orgies to ply his unholy traffic. One cent was the price charged for a full glass of rum, and those of his squalid customers, whose means would enable them to purchase the coveted luxury, were eagerly swallowing the villainous compound. We almost despair of being able to draw a fair portrait of the proprietor of the place. Imagine the filthiest, ugliest and most uncouth of hunchbacks; fancy a sinister, villainous expression of countenance, with an eye in which cunning, avarice, sensuality and cruelty are indicated; surmount the whole with a mass of tangled dirty locks, and you have as good a portrait as we can furnish of Jimmy Quinn, the proprietor of a Small street groggery.

The cellar of this den is nightly filled with lodgers who lie upon the bare floor. We descended into it, determined to see and judge for ourselves. It contained a cluster of male and female whites and negroes. The steps leading to this underground abode were so broken that but a single step was left in a space of about six feet; yet down this dilapidated passage the debased occupants were compelled to pass to reach their quarters.

The description we have given of this "crib" will answer for all the others; nearly every house is a lodging house, and about one half of them are grogeries. All are conducted upon the same principle, and all are of the same standard in respect to character. Many of the proprietors of these places own the hovels they occupy, and it is not unfrequently the case that they possess other property in the same quarter. Their plan of renting is somewhat peculiar.—A capitalist will rent a small room for 12½ cts. a day, payable invariably in ad-

vance. This operation is a speculation: he looks about him for lodgers to whom he underlets sleeping room upon the floor—each lodger pays two cents for this privilege; this enables the speculator to start a fire in the stove, and furnishes him besides with a little rum money, after paying the first cost of the investment.

Some of the lodging houses are conducted on a more extensive plan than the one we have described. The Astor House, or Duffy's Arcade, kept by a fellow named Patrick Duffy, is one of the most extensive; it was built purposely for the use made of it, and seems to be an experiment as to how much misery a human being can bear without yielding up the ghost. In this den the rooms are not more than seven feet square; there are no fire-places, no windows, not even a pipe hole for ventilation; all the light obtained in the sleeping cells is from a single pane of 8 by 10 glass set in the door. This place has been the scene of much infamy and vice. It was recently presented by the Grand Jury as a nuisance, and has been kept closed since by the proprietor.—Duffy has a brother who is also engaged in the same infamous business.

There is a groggery, kept by a man named Myers, at the corner of Seventh and Marv streets; it is known as the "Hoodle," a slang phrase, meaning a negro den.—This place is also the resort of the abandoned of both colors and sexes; like the other places of the same kind rum is retailed here at one cent a glass. We are not aware that it is a lodging house. There are hundreds of similar grogeries in the neighborhood: they are the resort of thieves and beggars, and of rag and bone gatherers. We have already mentioned the most conspicuous, and will spare our readers the infliction of any further enumeration of them.

In our explorations we witnessed many shocking scenes. We saw men and women lying on the bare ground in cellars, suffering with fevers, and destitute of fire, food, drink or medicines. The poor wretches were covered with any bit of carpet or canvass they could procure. One man, who appeared to be dying with the prison fever, had no bed but the bare floor, no covering but a manilla coffee bag, and no fire, food, or attendance whatever! We saw little children, pale, sickly and emaciated, crouching in rags around a smouldering fire, while their parents lay drunk upon the ground. We descended into a filthy cellar, in Baker street, where eight or ten wretches were huddled together around a stove, filled with glowing anthracite; no article of furniture, except the stove, was in the cellar; the occupants, of both sexes and colors as usual, were making themselves as comfortable as they could for the night. One man had taken the stove-pipe for a pillow, and the poisonous gas was pouring out of the stove and filling the den with its stifling fumes. We made our visit there very short. Stoves and furnaces without pipes are very usual. We saw in several places fires burning, which were fed with wood, coal, cinders, old shoes, or any other trash that could be gathered from the streets. The smoke and gas had no way of escape except by the crannies in the walls, and the wretches who occupy the hovels were obliged to inhale the vitiated atmosphere.

In Baker street loud cries emanated from a house we were passing. We ventured in and found a young man weltering in gore, and writhing with pain. A bloody knife lay upon the floor; a wound had been inflicted by a woman, and the fatal instrument had just been drawn from its human sheath as we entered the apartment. Police officers came, and the woman who had committed the deed was taken, with the other inmates of the room, to prison. A physician was sent for, who probed the wound and pronounced it fatal. The sufferer was carried to the hovel of his father, hard by, and we left the dreadful scene.

We visited the house of an astrologer in Small street, below Seventh. "Crazy Nancy" is the soubriquet borne by an old negro woman who professes to "read the stars," and perform charms. She occupies a cellar under a rag and bone shop. We found the crone chattering over a stove which, with the exception of a rickety bedstead, was the sole article of furniture in the place. A tin coffee pot stood upon the stove, and its contents—the astrologer's supper—were simmering in it. "Crazy Nancy" had found an original candlestick; her tallow dip was actually stuck in the spout of the pot in which her coffee was simmering. There was a bedstead in the cellar, and a dirty straw mattress, but there was not a shred of clothing upon it. The damp gathered in drops on the wall, and trickling down formed puddles on the floor. Close to the wall, on the bare damp floor, a sick man lay, wrapped up in a piece of old rag carpet. "Crazy Nancy" takes in lodgers, besides reading the planets. She also ferrets out thieves for the police, and traces stolen property. Besides all this, Nancy drives a brisk trade in charms, and makes a good many sixpences by making "lucky bags" for the superstitious and credulous negroes to wear around their necks. Nancy fills the bags with herbs, and after pow-wow-ing them she is firm in her faith of their efficacy.

It has been estimated that there are from four to five thousand of these miserable wretches who haunt the localities we are describing, and who live mostly by begging and stealing. Babies are hired for begging purposes, and sickly infants are at a premium. The mother is always entitled to one half of the proceeds of such expe-