

P A U P E R I S M.

THE utterly miserable are always unsafe neighbours. In former days, when a barbarous jurisprudence, with its savage disregard of human life, extended to our prisons, and every place of confinement in the kingdom was a stagnant den of filth and wretchedness, the contagious disease originated in these receptacles of horror and suffering, and which from this circumstance bore the name of the jail distemper, frequently burst out on the inhabitants of the surrounding town or village, and carried them off by hundreds at a time. It is recorded, that after a criminal court had been held on one occasion, in the reign of James VI., at which the celebrated Lord Bacon took some official part, a malignant fever broke out among the persons who had attended, which terminated fatally in the case of several of the jury, and of some of the gentlemen of the bar, and that the philosophic Chancellor expressed his conviction that the contagion had been carried into the court-room by a posse of wretched felons from the tainted atmosphere of their dungeon. Self-preservation in these cases enforced the dictates of humanity: the same all-powerful principle enforces them still. It is more than probable that the misery of the neglected classes occasionally breaks out upon that portion of our population which occupies the upper walks in society, in the form of contagious disease,—in the form of typhus fever, for instance: there can be no doubt whatever that it often breaks out upon them in the form of crime.

But where is the true remedy to be found? It was comparatively an easy matter to ventilate our prisons, and to introduce into them the various improvements recommended alike by the dictates of humanity and prudence. But how