

THE POSITION OF THE HORSE IN MODERN SOCIETY.

IN spite of the inconvenience, as yet on the whole slight, caused by the "horse epidemic," there are but few persons interested in public health and morals who will not be glad of it, if it calls public attention in a serious way to the necessity for some change in our treatment of horses, at least within the limits of great cities. What is the exact nature of the difference between our duty to our fellow-man and our duty to the lower animals, or whether there is any difference at all; whether there is any difference in kind between cruelty to a horse and cruelty to a servant; whether the one can be practised without serious injury to the moral nature any more than the other; and whether, in short, "the beasts of the field" are not entitled to a higher place in systems of morality than has yet been accorded them, are questions which are now at last beginning to receive a good deal of discussion, but we do not purpose taking them up here. We merely wish to point out the striking illustration the prevailing horse disease affords of the importance of the part which this animal has come to play in our commercial civilization, and of the close relation there exists between *his* physical condition and *our* material interests. Our talk has been for so many years of the railroad and steamboat and telegraph, as the great "agents of progress," that we have come almost totally to overlook the fact that our dependence on the horse has grown almost *pari passu* with our dependence on steam. We have opened up great lines of steam communication all over the country, but they have to be fed with goods and passengers by horses. We have covered the ocean with great steamers, but they can neither load nor discharge their cargoes without horses. We have collected at the mouths of our great rivers and at the intersections of our railroads vast bodies of people, covering miles on miles of area with their dwellings and factories, but have left them wholly dependent for their intramural travel and for their regular supplies of food and clothing on horses. More than this, we have within the last few years made horse labor an almost essential condition of the protection of our great cities from fire.

This increase of our industrial and commercial dependence on the horse has, however, been so gradual, so quiet, and has issued so naturally from the state of things prior to the introduction of steam, and has been so completely overshadowed by the great applications of science to industry and locomotion, that little or no thought has been bestowed on its dangers. Indeed, most of us have well-nigh forgotten that the horse was an animal like ourselves—liable to pains and aches and death. We have come to think of him as a machine, on whose endurance we could calculate as on that of an engine, and for whose mortality we could make ample allowance in our business under the head of "wear and tear." We really ought, therefore, to be thankful that the present epidemic has brought us face to face with the startling fact, that the sudden loss of horse labor would totally disorganize our industry and our commerce, and would plunge social life into disorder, would threaten the lives of hundreds of thousands of human beings, especially if it occurred in winter, and might expose our great cities to destruction by fire. In short, we are now for the first time forcibly reminded that a plague might break out among horses, as plagues have broken out among men, which would sweep them away by the hundred or thousand every day, and which would momentarily baffle science. What we would now bring to the notice of the public is, that in our large cities

horses are exposed without let or hindrance on the part of sanitary authorities to just those conditions from which the great pestilences among human beings have sprung and do still occasionally spring. We take precautions in the public interest against overcrowding, filth, and absence of ventilation in tenement-houses, but we take no precautions against the overcrowding, filth, and want of light and ventilation of city stables; and yet every one of the large stables may fairly and properly be called a hot-bed of horse disease.

Light is as necessary to a horse's health as to that of a man, and yet nearly all our horses live, except during their few hours of work out of doors, often in the case of the city horse not over two or three, almost in complete darkness. In the best and most commodious city stables they have nothing more than a twilight. Moreover, the lungs of the horse are just like those of a man—only larger; their functions are precisely the same; the contact of oxygen with his blood is just as necessary for the preservation of his health and strength; nevertheless, nearly all our stables are built and regulated apparently on the theory that the horse does not need fresh air at all. The windows are small, and are either not made to open or are never opened. There are, in the case of horses kept for pleasure, and of horses kept in the country, mitigations of their lot which we need not point out; but in the city the working horse is treated worse than a steam-engine or sewing-machine. He is almost invariably, if his owner be a poor man, shut up during sixteen hours out of the twenty-four in a small, noisome den, every plank and beam in which is impregnated with foul exhalations, and which probably stands in a fetid alley, or behind a filthy yard. If he belongs to one of the great car companies, or omnibus companies, or livery-stable keepers, he is either immured in a cellar several feet below the ground, into which the light and air *cannot* come, and which is probably damp, or else kept in large rooms, with low ceilings and small windows, and in which light and air are not *allowed* to come, and in which he is packed together with several hundred of his fellows, almost as closely as they can stand together, up to his knees in half-rotten straw, and with fermenting manure all around him. The result is that, as any one may ascertain for himself, the stench of these places when the doors are opened in the morning is almost insupportable; and it is as certain as anything can be that the constitution of a horse which passes many nights in them rapidly gives way, and he dies; but he is set down in the books as having been "worn out" by hard work. The fact is, he dies of foul air and darkness and dirt—dies, in short, for want of the ordinary conditions of healthful animal life. If, instead of dying in this way singly, horses should now any day take it into their heads to fall sick by the hundred, and die of an equine "black death," it would serve us right. We could not justly complain of it.

The condition of the horse among us is a disgrace to our civilization. The manner in which we permit him to be used by car companies for local transportation, the pavements with which we supply him to do his work upon, and the dens in which we allow him to be lodged, are worthy of the Dark Ages. Our indifference to these things is like the indifference once shown about the physical condition of workingmen; the result may not be one which will rouse our sympathy or our fears, as the great human pestilences once did, but it may be one from which our manufactures, and commerce, and social life would suffer terribly. We tolerate in this city about a dozen great horse *ergastula*, every one of which not only disgraces us as a civilized community, but as a community which makes a pretence of knowing something of sanitary science; and the only excuse we offer for it is that the victims of these places are merely "private property." We now see that they are not simply private property; they are wheels in our great social machine, the stoppage of which means widespread injury to all classes and conditions of persons, injury to commerce, to agriculture, to trade, to social life; and that the sanitary inspection of horses and their dwellings during their life is just as necessary as sanitary arrangements for the removal of their bodies after death in every well-regulated municipality.