

**The English poor laws. : Their history, principles and administration. Three lectures originally given at the University Settlement for Women, Southwark.**

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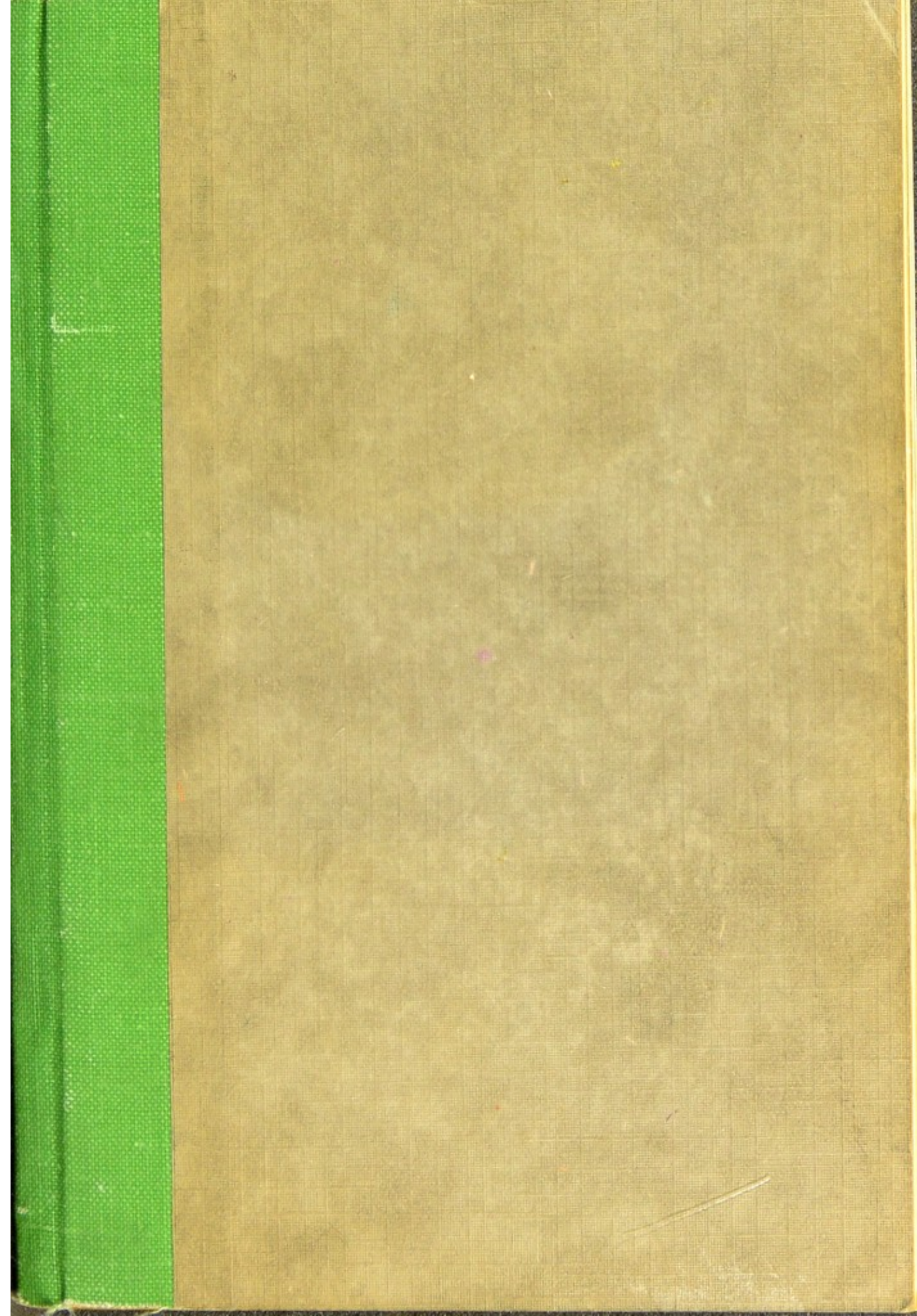
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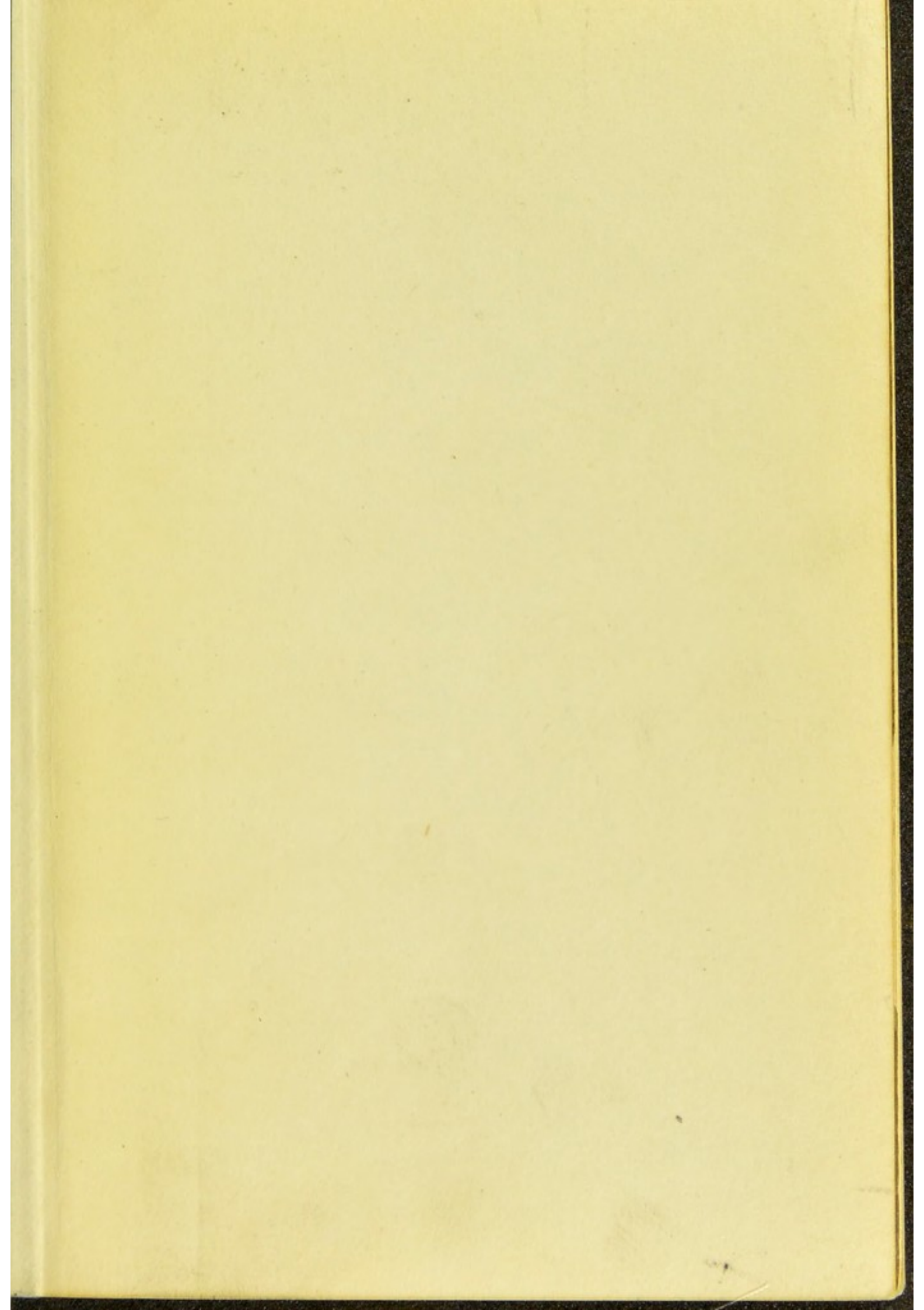


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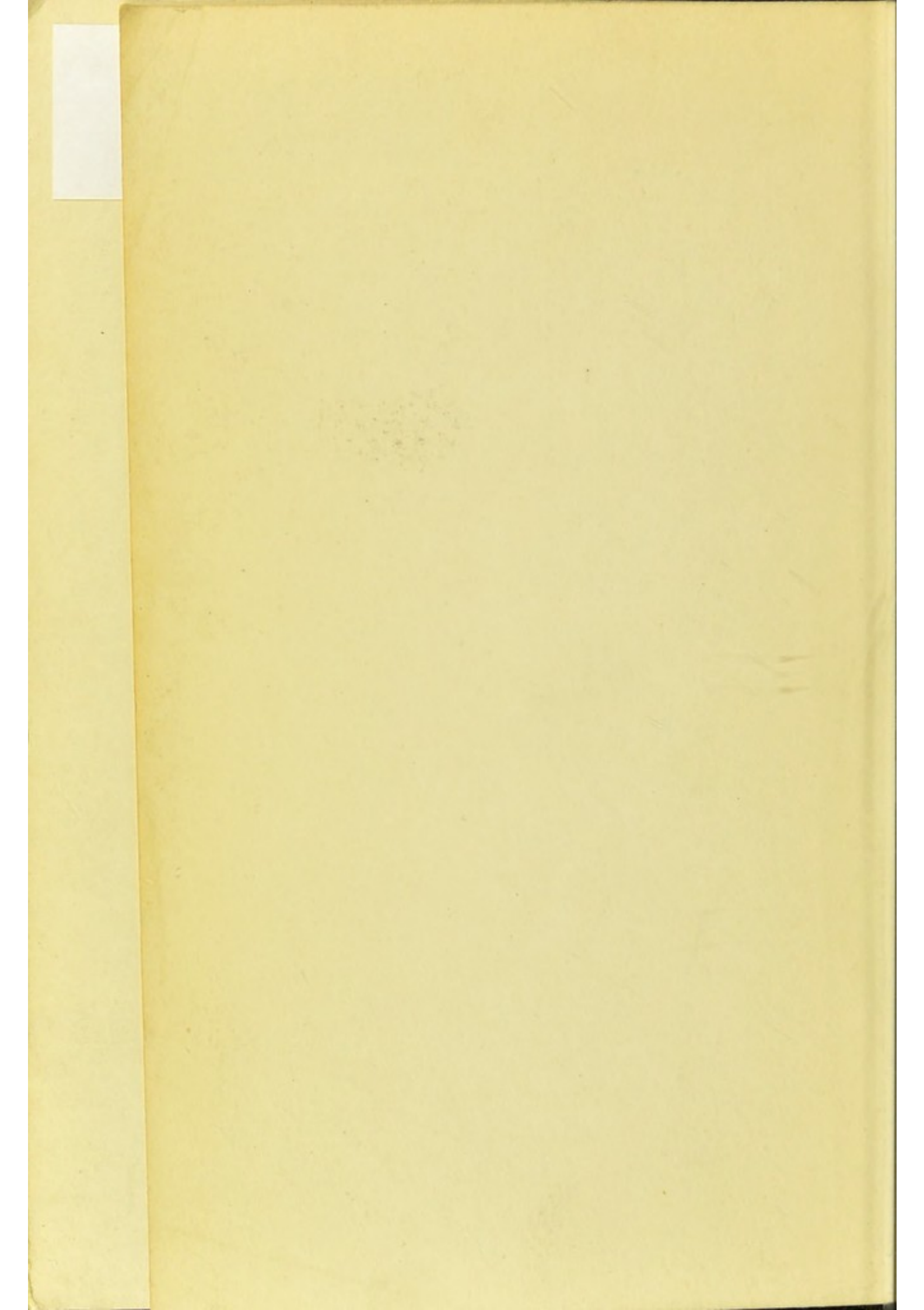


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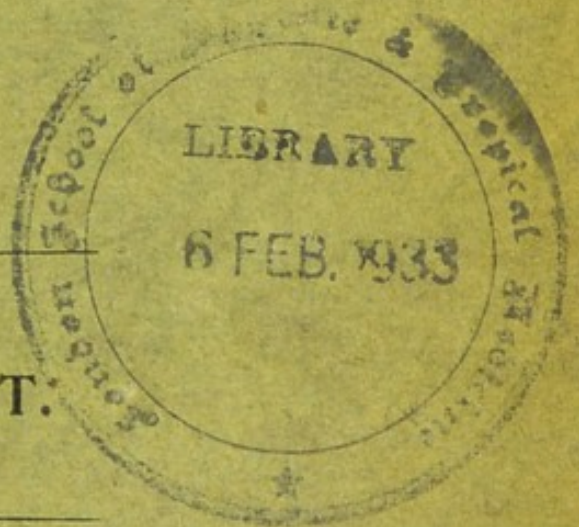


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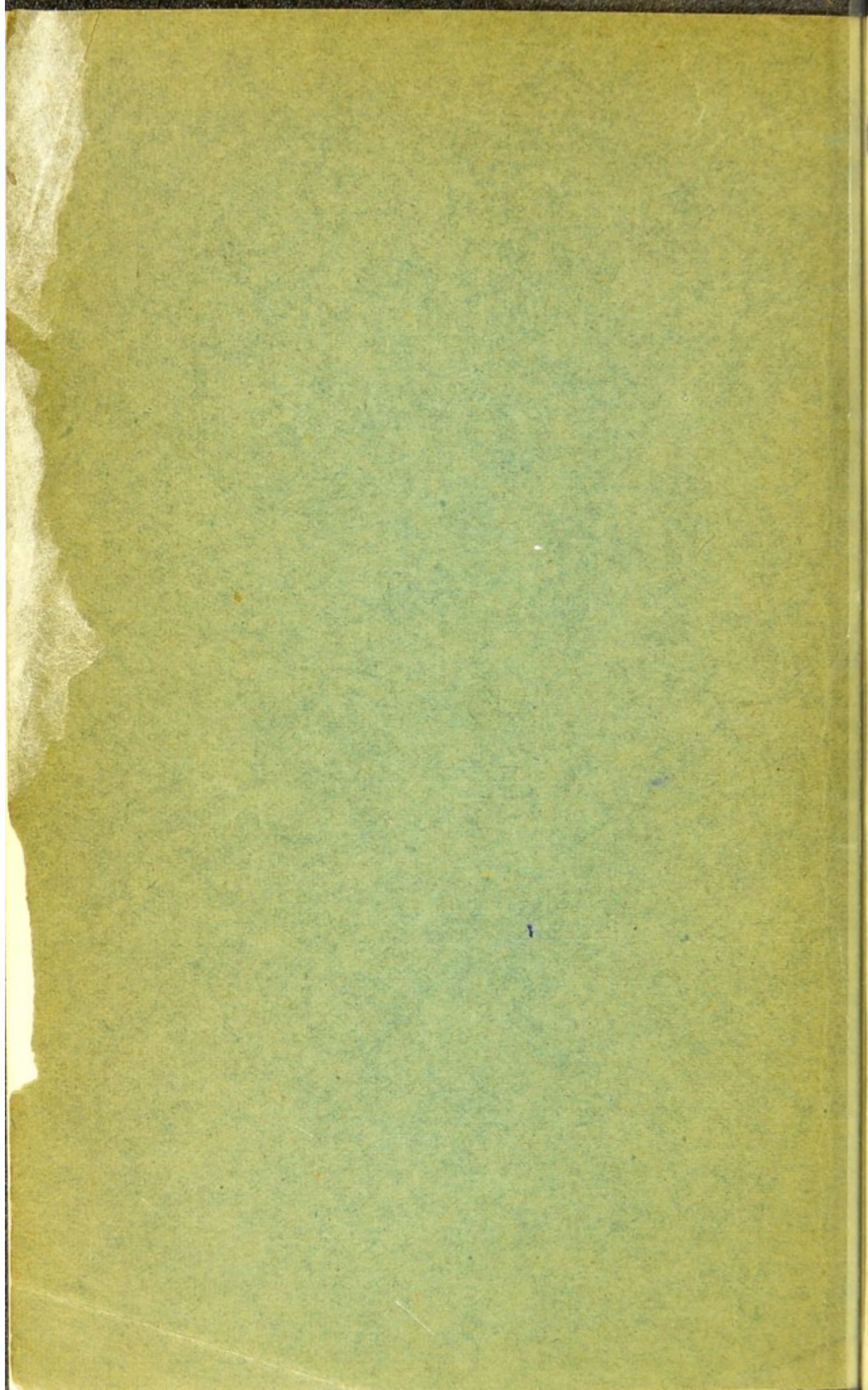
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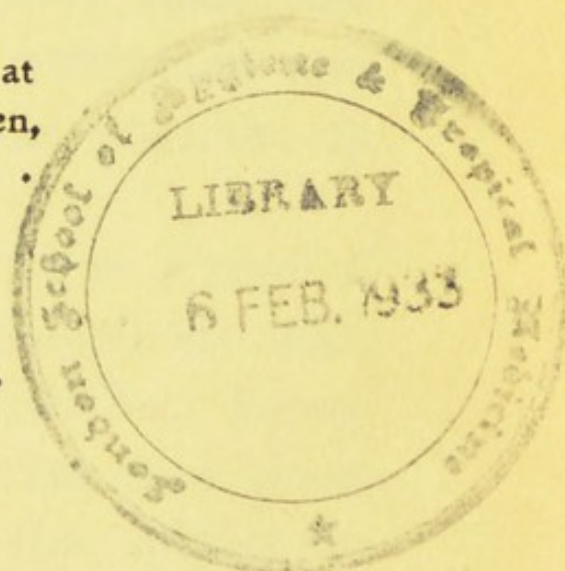
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## PREFACE.

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A THIRD edition of this little book has been asked for ; I have therefore taken the opportunity of making a few corrections and additions to bring it, as far as possible, up to date.

In the space of three Lectures it was of course impossible to deal exhaustively with so vast a subject as the English Poor Laws. My hope is that the bare outline here given may lead some to study the subject in detail for themselves, and that to others who have no time to study, the "little knowledge" here presented may prove not a "dangerous thing" but a useful guide in the complex questions which come before them as Guardians or electors.

Guardians chosen by popular election are frequently not the persons best qualified by



study or experience to serve in that honourable office. If these lectures can help anyone to fill that office worthily, to understand something of the true principles of relief, and to appreciate in some degree the far-reaching effects of what may seem trivial details of administration, they will amply have fulfilled their purpose.

S. L.

*September, 1902.*



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# THE ENGLISH POOR LAWS.

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## LECTURE I.

It is a bold thing to attempt to say anything interesting about our English Poor Laws, and probably there are some here who already know more than I can tell them. But within the last few years much attention has been given to the condition of the poor, and it is hardly possible, I think, to have a right and clear judgment about this unless we have some knowledge of the History, Principles and Functions of the Poor Law. I hope you will not think that in three lectures I shall be able to give you anything like a complete account of it. I shall have to leave out much that is important, and I have had considerable difficulty in making up my mind what would be best and most useful to say to you. The Poor Law is a stiff subject, and I am sure I cannot make it entertaining.

Perhaps the first thing to do is to dispel a very common error—so common, that I think it probable every one here holds it. It is often said that England is the only State which makes provision for the destitute, and it is difficult to say how this very mistaken idea has come into existence. Nothing can really be further from the truth. It is true no doubt that our English Poor Law has some peculiar characteristics of its own; but all civilised States have been forced for their own sakes to consider the subject of destitution, and about twenty-five years ago our Government published a Blue Book of nearly five hundred pages



on the subject of "Poor Laws in Foreign Countries." If anyone cares to know about Foreign Poor Laws, they will find a good deal of information in a little book called "Poor Relief in Foreign Countries," compiled by Miss Twining, in which the contents of the Blue Book may be found a good deal condensed.

The second thing I will mention before actually beginning our subject is that the term Poor Law must be called a very misleading one. "Poor" is, after all, only a relative term. For instance, a dock labourer earning 18s. a week would call you and me rich, while Baron de Rothschild would consider us poor. Edmund Burke refused to call anyone poor who had health and strength to work for his living. The Poor Law ought really to be called the "Law of the Destitute"; and to be destitute means in common talk to be absolutely without possessions of any kind; though the actual meaning is, I believe, to be without a position, without a status.

It is with the Principles which lie at the root of our English Poor Laws, or Laws of Destitution, that I propose to deal first to-day, and then, if we have time, I will say something of their Historical Development.

Now the principles of the Poor Law are not very easy to explain, but I hope I shall be able to make them fairly clear to you. When once we have grasped these Principles, we shall, I think, find many things become plain which have puzzled us, or which we very likely thought hard or cruel in the Administration of the Poor Law. Mr. Fowle has a very interesting chapter on Principles in his admirable little book,<sup>1</sup> which it would be well for anyone to read who takes more than a passing interest in the subject. But I will try and give a short epitome of what he says for those who have neither time nor inclination to study it for themselves.

<sup>1</sup> "The English Poor Law," by T. W. Fowle (English Citizen Series. Macmillan & Co.).



There are three great Principles underlying our English Poor Law, and I will take them in order.

The FIRST PRINCIPLE may be stated as follows :—

*“That the good of the community at large, and not the rights of individuals, is the proper reason for making legal provision for the destitute.”*

It has often been said, and you have no doubt seen it maintained by able writers of the present day, “that every peaceful and obedient member of Society has a right to the means of subsistence.” It is very easy to talk about rights, but it is well to remember that no man from the moment of his birth can enforce any claim to any “rights” except what someone or other or Society itself chooses to allow him. Such rights as Society allows are called legal rights, of which every man and woman who is born in a civilised State has plenty as soon as he or she comes into existence.

At the same time it is true (and this is the real foundation of all Poor Laws) that no civilised State can afford to allow any person to starve. “Whenever,” says Babbage, “for the purposes of Government we arrive in any state of Society at a class so miserable as to be in want of the common necessities of life, a new principle comes into action. The usual restraints, which are sufficient for the well-fed, are often useless in checking the demands of the hungry stomach.”<sup>1</sup> For instance : a starving person has naturally but little respect for the policeman ; a mob of starving people would entail an expensive army of police to maintain order and protect property. Hence it may be expedient, merely from an economical point of view, to supply gratuitously the wants of even able-bodied persons, *if* (and this is a very great “*if*,” as we shall see later on) it can be done without creating crowds of additional applicants. This may seem rather a bald and brutal way of stating truth, but it is none the less truth on that account.

We need not, however, stop here ; there is a further

<sup>1</sup> Babbage : “Principles of Taxation.”



truth which is very well expressed by Mr. Fowle. He says: "Every Society when it gets to a certain stage of civilisation finds it positively necessary for its own sake—that is to say, for the satisfaction of its own humanity, and for the due performance of the purposes for which Societies exist—to provide that no person, no matter what has been his life, or what may be the consequences, shall perish for want of the bare necessities of existence."<sup>1</sup>

In fact, you could not get the public to allow men and women to starve at their doors, even if it were desirable that they should be allowed to do so, which, of course, it is not. The thing is absolutely impossible, and because it was found to be impossible, the public relief of destitution (*not poverty*, remember), with laws for its administration, became a recognised part of the duties undertaken by civilised States. The reason for having Poor Laws has been stated by Mr. Fowle as follows:—

"Every destitute person has a right to relief, not because his miserable condition gives him a title to it, but because the State, entirely for its own purpose, has made a contract to stand between its citizens and death by starvation."<sup>2</sup>

I hope I have made this fundamental principle clear to you, not only because it is very important in itself, but because a good deal follows from it as a natural and logical consequence. If you have grasped its meaning, you will see at once the difference between State Relief and Charity.

Public Relief is meant to meet destitution, whatever the character of the person relieved may be; he may be bad or good, but so long as he is destitute it is bound to deal with him. Voluntary Charity on the contrary should have regard to the personal relations existing between the giver and the receiver. Charity, like Mercy, blesses him who gives and him who takes,

<sup>1</sup> "The Poor Law," T. W. Fowle, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.



but it would be wrong and absurd to require Charity by Act of Parliament. The motive of State relief is perfectly selfish, and it is quite right that it should be so. We shall all, I think, agree that Charity ceases to be Charity if the giver puts his own interests before those of the recipient. The State, the giver of State Relief, is bound to consider its own welfare (that is, the welfare of the whole community, not only a small portion of it) before anything else. Hence there can be no such thing as Legal Charity.

No doubt many of you know that certain persons whose opinion we are bound to respect have considered Poor Laws a great and unnecessary evil. Malthus said in his celebrated book on "Population": "I feel persuaded that if Poor Laws had never existed in this country, though there might have been a few more instances of very severe distress, the aggregate mass of happiness among the common people would have been much greater than at present"; and there are plenty of people in the present day who would like to see our Poor Laws swept away. Still there can be no doubt that, however you may choose to do it, or by whatever name you may call the process, under present circumstances, destitution must be relieved by someone, at the cost of the community. But we must never forget that Malthus and Chalmers, and those who think with them that Poor Laws, or the relief of the destitute by the State, are mischievous institutions, have a great deal of right on their side. Although it is probable that the bad administration of the Poor Law at the time at which they wrote had a great deal to do with the strong opinions they expressed, yet Poor Laws, however well administered, are bound to bring mischief in their train, and this leads us to the consideration of the

SECOND PRINCIPLE of the English Poor Law, which may be stated thus:—

*"The condition of the pauper, the person relieved by the State, shall not be or seem to be more desirable than that of the lowest class of independent labourer."*



The fact is, all civilised nations have to face a choice of evils, and they have agreed to choose the lesser evil of the two. John Stuart Mill points out the consequences which must follow if Society for its own reasons (however good and sufficient those reasons on the whole may be) provides a certain maintenance for all destitute persons.

He says there are two sets of consequences. The first need not keep us a moment: the consequences of the assistance itself, which, generally speaking, are good, beneficial and quite obvious; for instance, relief from death by cold and hunger. But the second class of consequences are by no means so obvious, and they are for the most part bad and injurious.

There are four of them, and I think you may care to note them down.

(1) The knowledge that the necessities of life can be had for the asking naturally induces men who are not really destitute to throw themselves upon the State for aid; hence State Relief inevitably promotes idleness with its kindred vices.

(2) The same knowledge induces men to look forward to being supported by State Relief whenever the time shall come that they are really destitute: whence comes dependence, with all the faults which follow in its train.

(3) The same knowledge quenches natural feelings towards relations or friends, the care of whom is thrown upon the Law by those to whom it properly belongs: whence come inhumanity and selfishness.

(4) The provision of State Relief, especially if those who administer it do not understand the true principles of social or political economy, leads to interference with the natural course of trade and employment.<sup>1</sup>

The more Poor Relief is restricted to cases of present need, and the more it is bound down by strict rules, the less will be the dangers which are inevitably associated with all public relief. The State cannot

<sup>1</sup> "Political Economy," J. S. Mill.



safely consider the interests of that portion of the community alone which has been already pauperised ; it must also consider the effect which the granting of relief (and especially the kind of relief granted) may have on the rest of the community. But on this point I shall have more to say later on. I have only referred to it in passing in order to make the reasons for the second Principle as clear as I can.

I think perhaps it may be made clearer if the matter is put thus :—

The first object of the Poor Law is the provision of relief for the destitute ; the second object is the prevention of the evils and abuses caused by this provision of relief—in short, while the relief should be sufficient, it should not be attractive. You will see what a difficult task it is to attain these two objects, and you will, I am sure, find out when we come to consider the History of our English Poor Laws how very much of failure there has been. Statesmen have had to sail between the Scylla of starvation on the one hand and the Charybdis of national pauperisation on the other, and the channel is wonderfully narrow. The same evils crop up over and over again. It is true that these evils have assumed a different appearance from time to time, but experience has shown that they are only the old bogies dressed up in new clothes. Nor are the evils at all peculiar to our own country ; Belgium and Sweden have very interesting and instructive Poor Law Histories, and experiences much like our own.

The THIRD PRINCIPLE of the Poor Law need not keep us long. It may be stated as follows :—

*“The Poor Law should improve the condition of the Poor by teaching and training the young for work and self-dependence, by teaching morality, and by promoting industry, cleanliness and temperance.”* The various means by which this principle is brought into practice we shall consider later on. In some respects it is, perhaps, the most important of the three. I must, however, confess that it is more properly the work of Charity than of legal enactment. Unfortunately, Charity unorganised



and misdirected has for centuries wasted her Master's goods and her own opportunities, and has allowed her proper functions to be exercised by the State.

The English Poor Law, based upon these three Principles, consists briefly of:—

- (1) Relief measures to support the destitute ;
- (2) Repressive measures to put down the abuses and evils which are sure to be engendered by a system of State Relief ; and
- (3) Remedial measures to prevent these abuses and evils.

It is often said that the Poor Law is socialistic. No doubt in a sense this is true, and if we want a good instance of how dangerous State socialism may be, we have only to point to the History of our English Poor Laws ; as we go on you will see, I think, what a difficult business it has been to avoid the disasters which all schemes of State socialism must bring with them. It is only because the evils of destitution are greater than the evils of this comparatively small amount of socialism that Poor Laws are justifiable. Professor Fawcett says:—"Experience has abundantly shown that a Government in entering so far upon the path of socialism as to guarantee maintenance to all destitute applicants, incurs a responsibility so grave that, if it is not safeguarded with the utmost caution, it may bring the most serious dangers upon the community."<sup>1</sup> On the other hand the Poor Law, properly administered on the principles we have just been considering, cannot accurately be described as socialistic—at any rate, it is hardly to be supposed that socialists would admit it to be so. "Poor Law," says Mr. Fowle, "is, in fact, the exact opposite to socialism—or, more correctly, it acts as a safety-valve expressly designed to allow the forces of competition to work at full pressure without danger of explosion. Socialism claims for each man, as human, a full share of the common good. Poor Law affords to man, as

<sup>1</sup> "Manual of Political Economy," p. 301.



destitute, maintenance under conditions lowering to his humanity and below the average of his fellows.<sup>1</sup>

And now I am afraid I have wearied you with principles. I warned you, however, that the Poor Law was neither a lively nor an easy subject. If, however, I have succeeded in making the three principles tolerably clear to you, I do not think our time will have been wasted, and I hope and believe that the Historical Development of the Poor Law is capable of being made more interesting.

It is difficult to know where to begin in the History of our Poor Laws. Of course I ought to go back to Saxon times, and to the institution of the severe Feudal system introduced by the Normans, and so on through the reigns of the Plantagenets, Tudors, Stuarts, and Hanoverians, to our own time.

I need hardly say I am not going to inflict anything of the kind upon you, not only because our time is short, but because such a task is quite beyond my powers. Any of those here who may have a burning desire to study Poor Law History thoroughly had better read Sir George Nicholls' great book<sup>2</sup> for themselves.

I propose to divide the History of the English Poor Law into four periods, following in this respect Mr. Fowle's plan:—

The first period from 1377 to 1601, or about 225 years.

The second period from 1601 to 1760, or 160 years.

The third period from 1760 to 1834, or 74 years.

The fourth period from 1834 to the present time, or nearly 70 years.

Thus we shall go back rather more than five hundred years, to the beginning of the reign of Richard II., who came to the throne in 1377, and his reign is important because as you will remember, just at the end of the fourteenth century tremendous changes were taking

<sup>1</sup> "The Poor Law," T. W. Fowle, Appendix, p. 175.

<sup>2</sup> "History of the English Poor Law," Sir George Nicholls, K.C.B., 3 vols. (P. S. King & Son).



place. The Feudal System was dying out, a Social Revolution was in progress, and the people who had been held in bondage were struggling to be free. This revolution was very gradual and singularly free from violence, but I think we may safely say that the time from 1377 to 1601 was especially a time of change. We could not expect that such a vast constitutional change as the decay of the Feudal System, or such social and religious changes as the Reformation and the Dissolution of the Monasteries, could be effected without causing a good deal of suffering to the poorer classes.

Legislation during those two hundred and odd years was directed towards keeping the labourer in the state of servitude from which he was slowly but surely emerging. The advance of freedom was attended, like all great changes with a certain amount of evil. You will remember, no doubt, that when the slaves were emancipated in the United States there was a good deal of suffering amongst the negroes; yet the Abolition of Slavery was altogether good. But what I want you to notice, if you will, is this: under the Feudal System the great majority of the people were not only without property—they were themselves the property of other people, who had to provide for them; and you will probably remember that the remains of the Feudal Castles in England show that these buildings were of vast size, because many of the serfs lived in them, and were under the protection of their Feudal Lords. Hence no Poor Law or State Relief was necessary; for to afford relief to the poor under the Feudal System would simply have meant relieving the nobles at the public charge, and excusing them from performing the duties of their station. But you can well understand that while the Feudal System was dying out, many of the poorer people were thrown on the world, and as a natural consequence vagrancy (and with vagrancy crime of all sorts) became a very serious matter indeed. For nearly two hundred and fifty years laws were constantly passed against



vagrancy, although many of these might more properly be called laws against the poor and the rights of labour. To circumvent the unfortunate labourer in all his struggles for freedom seems to have been the first object of the legislation of this period. He was confined to his place of birth, and he was obliged to work for wages fixed either by the law or by the local justices, who were, of course, the chief employers of labour; and if the poor wretch dared to wander from his place, he was liable to the most barbarous punishments.

And here, will you note carefully, that during this time the interests of the great mass of the people were sacrificed to the interests of the nobility and the gentry, whose great object was to restrict the wages of the labourer and keep them as low as possible for the benefit of the employer. It is only fair to our own country to say that the dawn of a better state of things broke earlier in England than in other European countries. The decay, however, of the Feudal System caused, as I have said, a great deal of helpless poverty; I suppose there can be no doubt that a certain number of people died of starvation. The population, we must remember, was at that time, comparatively speaking, small, and therefore poverty could be more easily dealt with then than now.

Professor Ashley points out that one of the chief causes of vagrancy (or rather of destitution leading to vagrancy) was what is known as the Agrarian Revolution. This was, to put it shortly, the great change in agriculture which took place during the last half of the fifteenth century. A great deal of the arable land of England was converted into pasture, and you can readily understand that fewer people would be required to look after sheep and cattle than would be wanted to cultivate corn and other crops; the surplus labourers therefore were turned out with their wives and families to wander about over the country in search of work.

No attempt was made by the State for the Relief



of the Poor until the reign of Edward VI. The work was left principally to the Church, and to the action of religious motives upon the minds of individuals. Acts against vagrancy, however, there were in plenty, and there can be no doubt that the vagrants were a great danger to the community at large. Bands of these sturdy beggars, many of whom were nothing better than violent robbers, roamed about all over the country, and made England anything but a quiet, peaceful place in which to live.

An Act was passed in 1388, prohibiting begging and wandering about the country. "Sturdy vagabonds" and "valiant rogues" were to be punished for the first offence by a whipping, for the second by the loss of their ears, and for the third by hanging. This Act was followed by many others even more severe, but they were all powerless to stop vagrancy, for the simple reason which makes all cruel and harsh legislation fail in its purpose: the magistrates had not the heart to enforce them. I do not think any of these Acts need detain us, except one which was passed in the reign of Henry VIII., in 1536, "concerning the punishment of beggars and vagabonds."

The preamble runs thus:—"In all places throughout this realm, vagabonds and beggars have of long time increased, and daily do increase in great and excessive numbers by the occasion of idleness, mother and root of all vices, whereby hath insurged and sprung, and daily insurgeth and springeth, continual thefts, murders, and other heinous offences and great enormities, to the high displeasure of God, the unquietation and damage of the King's people, and to the marvellous disturbance of the common weal. And whereas many and sundry good laws and strict statutes and ordinances have been before this time devised and made for the due reformation of the premises, yet that notwithstanding, the said number of vagabonds and beggars be not diminished, but rather daily augmented into great routs and companies, as evidently doth appear."



This Act of Henry VIII. contained five provisions:—

1.—That the Justices should give a kind of certificate or licence to impotent beggars, by which they were allowed to beg and live on the alms of the people within a certain prescribed area; if they were caught begging outside these prescribed limits, they were liable to be punished by being put in the stocks. You will remember that Sir Walter Scott introduces into "The Antiquary" a portrait of one of these licensed beggars. Mr. Oldbuck, "The Antiquary," describes Edie Ochiltree as "one of the last specimens of the old-fashioned Scottish mendicants, who kept his rounds within a particular space, and was the news-carrier, the minstrel, and sometimes the historian of the district."<sup>1</sup>

2.—Any impotent person who presumed to beg without a licence might be ordered by the Justices to be whipped, or to be set in the stocks, and after his punishment he was given a licence and a district in which he might beg.

3.—If any person, man or woman, "being whole and mighty in body," were found begging, he or she was to be whipped through the market town, and enjoined on his oath to return to his native place, or where he had last lived for three years.

4.—The Undergraduates of Oxford and Cambridge who went about begging without a licence from the College authorities were to be punished in the same way; for I am sorry to tell you many of these young gentlemen were in the habit of swelling the noble army of "valiant rogues."

But now comes the most curious part of this Act. It was ordered

5.—That anyone who harboured or gave money to any beggars, being strong and able to work, was to be fined. An Act, passed later in Henry VIII.'s reign, forbade the giving of private alms upon pain of forfeiting ten times the amount given.

<sup>1</sup> See also Notes on "The Antiquary."



However, none of these Acts appear to have been successful in putting a stop to vagrancy, for one of the earliest Acts of Edward VI.'s short reign was directed against it. The preamble to this Act, like those of nearly all such Acts, complains that existing laws had failed to check the evil, and contains this significant passage:—"Partly by foolish pity and mercy of them which should have seen the said goodly laws executed, and partly by the perverse nature and long-accustomed idleness of the persons given to loitering, the said goodly statutes hitherto have had small effect, and idle and vagabond persons being unprofitable members, or rather enemies to the commonwealth, have been suffered to remain and increase."

In fact, the feeling about vagrants and beggars at this period, as Mr. Ashley remarks, is pretty well expressed by the old nursery rhyme which probably dates from the beginning of the sixteenth century :

"Hark! Hark! The dogs do bark, the beggars are coming to town,  
Some in rags, and some in jags, and some in velvet gown:  
Some gave them white bread and some gave them brown,  
And some gave them a good horse-whip and sent them out of the town."

Up to the year 1551, then, I think that we may say that all legislation which concerned the labouring classes was bad, while the laws against vagrancy were as futile and useless as they were cruel. But in 1551 an Act was passed which attempted, at any rate, to deal with destitution in a reasonable way.

This Act directed that, in order to provide for the impotent, feeble, and lame ("who are poor in very deed"), two or more collectors of alms were to be appointed in each parish, who were to make lists of those poor people to whom grants were to be made. These collectors, as well as the clergy of the parish, were to "gently exhort and admonish" all parishioners to contribute to a fund according to their means. If any parishioner refused to pay what was expected of him, the Bishop of the Diocese was to exhort him, and



if his admonitions failed to extract the money from his pocket, he was to hale the stingy gentleman before a Justice, who might assess his contribution at the sum which in his opinion was reasonable.

And now we will consider somewhat in detail the Agencies for relief which preceded the introduction of State Relief. There were two principal Agencies, not by any means peculiar to England, which dealt with poverty during the Middle Ages.

First in importance, of course, were the Monasteries or Religious Houses. It has been said that the Dissolution of the Monasteries by Henry VIII. created English Pauperism, and rendered the English Poor Laws necessary. I do not think this is true; but it is a point which has been much discussed. In early times, up to the Reformation and the Dissolution of the Monasteries, the Church had undertaken the care of the destitute. It is difficult at this distance of time to say positively whether the Church fulfilled her self-imposed task well or not. Probably there was a mixture of good and evil in her system: although perhaps an impartial reader of history would be driven to the conclusion that towards the beginning and middle of the sixteenth century evil certainly preponderated.

Fuller, in his "Church History," which was published in 1656 (about 120 years after the suppression of the Religious Houses in England), writes thus: "Their hospitality was beyond compare. Yet some will object that this their hospitality was but charity mistaken: promiscuously entertaining some who did not need, and more who did not deserve, it. Yea, those Abbeys did but maintain the poor which they made! For some vagrants, accounting the Abbey alms their own inheritance, served an apprenticeship and afterwards wrought journey-work to no other trade than begging; all whose children were by their father's copy made free of the same company. We may observe," continues Fuller (who was evidently a gentleman of a pleasant humour and pretty clear-sighted), "that, generally, such places wherein the great Abbeys were



seated swarm most with poor people at this day, as if beggary were entailed on them, and that laziness not as yet got out of their flesh which so long since was bred in their bones."

The historian Hallam takes much the same view as old Fuller. Hallam says, in his "Constitutional History," that it is a mistake to suppose that the alms of the Monasteries maintained the poor throughout the country, or that the system of parochial relief was made necessary by the Dissolution. He says that no doubt the poor got a great deal out of the monks, but that the blind almsgiving spirit of the Romish Church is notoriously the cause and not the cure of poverty. Then, too, he remarks that the Monasteries were scattered about all over the country by no means at equal distances from each other, and often in very lonely places, and that after a few years had passed it is not at all likely that the labouring classes were really the poorer for the loss of the Abbey alms; and he reminds his readers that, after all, the class to whom the Abbey lands have fallen have always been remarkable for their charity and generosity.<sup>1</sup>

The whole subject of the Relief of the Poor by the clergy and the Monastic Orders in the Middle Ages is most ably dealt with by Mr. Ashley in his "Economic History." If you are not frightened at the title you will find this a most delightful book, full of curious and interesting facts entertainingly put together.

Mr. Ashley quotes the opinion of a German Roman Catholic historian and economist named Ratzinger, who arrives at the conclusion that the Monasteries certainly did not diminish pauperism, and that it was this failure, and the decay of the Hospitals (about which I shall have something to say presently) and other charitable foundations, which made it necessary to transfer the relief of the poor to State authorities. In the fourteenth century, he tells us, and still more in the fifteenth, the monks yielded to idleness and

<sup>1</sup> "Constitutional History," vol. i., pp. 108-9.



luxury, and love of the poor grew cold, and nothing remained but indiscriminate alms-giving at the convent gate.

The Dissolution of the Monasteries began in 1532, and, however much we may dislike the way in which Henry VIII. and Thomas Cromwell managed the business, one cannot help seeing that so far as the poor were concerned it was a good and wholesome thing. Suffering no doubt there was, as there must always be when great changes are violently made, and this particular change caused serious dislocation to the rural economy of the country. The monks were considerable employers of labour, and bought large quantities of articles of commerce, and the principal Abbeys kept great retinues of serving-men; indeed, it was the stock complaint of religious reformers that the Monasteries were full of lazy, worthless fellows. But you must remember that all these men, whatever their character may have been, were suddenly thrown on the labour market, and, although I think there can be no reasonable doubt that in the long run the Dissolution of the Monasteries was a happy thing for the poorer classes, yet for the moment the vagrancy caused by the decay of the Feudal System and the Agrarian Revolution was largely increased.

Professor Ashley sums up thus: "It is a mistake to suppose that the Dissolution of the Monasteries created English Pauperism. The Dissolution rendered more apparent, and also actually increased, the burden of pauperism, for the beggars and loafers who had previously managed to find a livelihood by going from Monastery to Monastery found themselves deprived of their accustomed resources. Many probably died of starvation."<sup>1</sup>

The teaching of the clergy of this period as to alms-giving was most pernicious. Up to about thirty years ago mediæval methods were still in force in Italy, and

<sup>1</sup> "Economic History," W. J. Ashley, p. 316.



no one who has spent any time in that country can have any doubt as to the bad results of the teaching of the Romish Priests with regard to alms-giving. The doctrine taught was, that any gift to a person who seemed to be poor was an alms, and every alms-giving was for the soul's good. A divine named Crowley, who wrote in rhyme an amusing account of the beggars in 1550, after describing the artful tricks by which they obtained the alms of the faithful, ends up quite seriously thus :

" Yet cease not to give to all  
Without any regard ;  
Though the beggars be wicked,  
Thou shalt have thy reward."

That this was not the teaching of the early Church is conclusively proved by reference to the Fathers, who in several instances condemned wholesale careless giving without enquiry (St. Basil was, I believe, specially great on this topic) ; and we shall, I think, agree that such giving as this, where the givers certainly put their own interests before those of the recipients, could hardly be called Charity.

It is probable, too, that the teaching of the Friars, many of them most degenerate disciples of St. Francis of Assisi, may have added to the confusion of thought which existed at this time as to the holiness and meritoriousness of a beggar's life. Beautiful and applicable to all ages as was the spirit of the teaching of the great Saint, the letter was capable of being distorted by unworthy followers, and this led to consequences which he never contemplated. His teaching was essentially the Gospel of Works, and Holy Poverty meant with him doing work without money—a very different thing to doing no work and living on other people, which was practically what Holy Poverty meant with the later Franciscans.

The second mediæval agency for the Relief of the Poor, about which I shall not say much, although there is much to say, is the Hospital.



We are so accustomed to thinking of Hospitals as asylums for the sick, that it is necessary to explain that the Hospital of the Middle Ages was a place for the reception of destitute and feeble old people. There were four hundred and sixty of these charitable institutions in England, and some of the foundations were exceedingly wealthy, as almost every well-to-do citizen remembered them in his will. But corruptions crept in by degrees, and the Hospitals became nice, comfortable berths for the Priests who were appointed to be their Masters or Wardens, and who too often provided for themselves at the expense of the inmates; in fact, they were looked upon as endowments for the clergy, much as good livings were a few years ago. A scurrilous pamphlet, written about 1529, was probably not far wrong when it said, speaking on behalf of the poor:

"What remedy to relieve us, your poor, sick, lame, and sore bedemen? To make many Hospitals for the relief of the poor people? Nay, truly, the more the worse, for ever the fat of the whole foundation hangeth on the priests' beards."<sup>1</sup>

There were many other ways in which the poor were helped. The poor members of the Guilds or Crafts were assisted by contributions from their more fortunate brethren, and these Guilds often founded Hospitals for the use of their members. Then, too, the private charity of the great prelates and nobles assumed huge proportions; they often provided food daily for scores and even hundreds of persons, with double or triple alms on the great festivals; many of them had their "dealing days" three times a week, when doles were distributed at their gates to all who applied for them; and alms-giving of this kind must have had all the evil consequences of the charity of the Monasteries. Professor Ashley says of these various agencies:

"The Relief of the Poor in the Middle Ages was marked by the following characteristics. No attempt

<sup>1</sup> A "Supplication for the Beggars" (pub. 1529).



was made by the State as a whole, or by any secular public authority to relieve distress. Nearly all the assistance that was given to the poor was in the form of alms-giving: alms-giving by magnates ecclesiastical and lay, by Monasteries, by Hospitals, by Guilds, by private persons; and alms-giving that was in the vast majority of cases practically indiscriminate. No attempt was made by any public authority, secular or ecclesiastical, to take a large view of the situation and to get the various agencies to co-operate. The reckless distribution of doles cannot have failed to pauperise in many places, by making it easy for those who did not care to work to live without. But it has been well said that if the Poor Relief of the Middle Ages did too much in some directions, in others it did far too little. Voluntary charity always has the defect of being more abundant in districts which need it least, and least abundant where there is most want. The towns get more than their share, while unhealthy or barren regions are left unprovided for. Thus the shameless beggars of the sixteenth century, who wandered about in search of alms, had an easy life, while the honest, hard-working poor, who either would not or could not leave their homes, too often found no relief."<sup>1</sup>

I have devoted some time to these mediæval plans for the relief of the poor, for two reasons: first, because I want you to have some idea of the state of things which led to the introduction of Poor Laws in this country; secondly, because we cannot help seeing that there is, in certain quarters at any rate, a disposition to return to these rude and archaic methods of relieving the poor.

I think perhaps the following conclusions may fairly be drawn from the History of the English poor during this First Period, extending, as I have said, from the end of the fourteenth to the end of the sixteenth century:—

(1) The whole attitude of the upper classes towards

<sup>1</sup> "Economic History," W. J. Ashley, p. 338.



the lower classes was fundamentally wrong ; the poor were looked upon as a necessary evil to be kept down as much as possible.

(2) The legislation of the period, so far as the poor were concerned, was repressive, ineffectual and cruel.

(3) Vagrancy was created by the decay of the Feudal system and the Agrarian Revolution, but increased and fostered by the action of the clergy and the Religious Houses.

(4) Though the Dissolution of the Monasteries caused a great deal of suffering, it brought things to a head and forced the State to consider the whole question of the Relief of the Poor.

How difficult and complicated the question was I think you must see. But the Statesmen of that day, the great Statesmen of the Reign of Elizabeth, not only grasped the difficulties, but the remedy they provided was worthy of the men and of the great age of which they were a chief ornament. It is pleasant to turn from the mass of selfish, stupid, futile legislation, and the wasteful, ineffectual, clumsy methods of Poor Relief, which we have been considering, to the glorious reign of Queen Elizabeth. It is true that the great Poor Law Act (known as the 43rd of Elizabeth) was passed quite at the end of her reign in 1602. But I believe it is also true that during the whole of her reign the attention of the brilliant company of Statesmen who surrounded her throne was given to the solution of this terrible problem of vagrancy. I think we may say that in the reign of Elizabeth, discrimination, a rare virtue, was first recognised as a necessary preliminary in dealing with the lower orders.

Perhaps you will forgive me if I digress a little, because it is just possible that many of the difficulties relating to our dealings with the poor in the past and at the present time are solved by that word discrimination. You constantly hear people talking about the "poor," the "rich," or the "unemployed," as if they were great classes of people, the members of each class all run into one mould, like the bundles of



candles we see hanging up in the chandlers' shops. Is not this the tone of many of the articles in newspapers and magazines on social questions? These great classes must all, apparently, be treated exactly alike, and if the prescribed treatment happens to disagree with any individual, so much the worse for the individual. Now surely this is not reasonable; is it not true that the more you can treat people as individuals, and the less like droves of sheep or cattle, the better for them and for everyone?

Will you observe that the spirit of the age of Elizabeth was totally different from that which had preceded it—not only, as you all know, in literature and philosophy, but also in the general feeling about the poor. It was not an age of repression, but of expansion: an age of justice, and justice to all classes. For the first time for many years England was governed by an exceedingly able Sovereign, who had the advice of great Statesmen, and was anxious to promote the real welfare of all her subjects.

It is thought that we owe the great Poor Law Act of Elizabeth to Sir Francis Bacon; and, however this may be, it certainly was no sudden effort of genius, but the result of patient, observant study, "and gradually framed," as Sir George Nicholls says, "on the sure ground of experience." Several Acts were passed during this reign which dealt with the Relief of the Poor, all, however, leading up to and culminating in this Act of 1602, which is a perfect model of what all Poor Laws ought to be.

The Poor Law of Elizabeth certainly was a very important Act, for it is the foundation and text-book of our present Poor Law. It is the opinion of some of the older Poor Law Reformers, such as Sir G. Nicholls, that if succeeding generations had been sensible enough to appreciate its wisdom and had left it alone there would now have been but little pauperism in England, perhaps none at all.

On the other hand some modern Poor Law Reformers will tell you that the Poor Law of Elizabeth was a



failure, that it was unworkable, an economic blunder, and that as a matter of fact it never came thoroughly into operation. If you wish to know more of this view of the question, I recommend you to read the "Public Relief of the Poor," by Mr. T. Mackay.<sup>1</sup>

There can, however, I think be no doubt that the wise Statesmen who framed this Act saw three things very clearly.

First of all, they saw (and this they could not well help seeing) that vagrancy was a curse to the country and must be got rid of and suppressed at any cost.

Secondly, they saw that all the savage laws of the preceding reigns were powerless to stop it.

Then, thirdly, they saw (and this is the point I hope you will especially observe) that the only way to stop vagrancy was to remove the excuse for it.

This great Act, like nearly all great things, was wonderfully simple. It had no wordy preamble setting forth what a shocking thing vagrancy was, and how wicked vagrants were, and what capital laws there were already if only they could be got to work, but it went straight to the business in hand.

It recognised only two classes of persons who come legitimately within the province of Poor Laws; but, instead of treating vagrants in a mass, it discriminated between

- (1) The Idle who would not work;
- (2) The Impotent who could not work.

The Poor Law of Elizabeth was very severe with the idle who would not work. They were made to work and sent to prison if they did not perform the tasks given to them.

The impotent who could not work were subdivided into two classes:

(a) Children whose parents could not maintain them. They were to be taught to work and apprenticed—the boys up to the age of twenty-four, the girls till they were twenty-one or married.

<sup>1</sup> "The Public Relief of the Poor," T. Mackay (J. Murray).



(b) The sick and infirm, lame, blind, etc. These were to be placed in Poor-houses (not Work-houses), but certain near relatives were made responsible for their maintenance, while those who brought illegitimate children into the world had to keep them.

Each parish had to support its own poor, and there was a compulsory rate levied on householders, which was administered by overseers and wardens. There were no harsh penalties in this Act against beggars, although if able-bodied men and women were idle they were made to work.

You will recognise at once the three great Poor Law Principles : I. *Relief* : in the really tender treatment of the old, infirm, and sick ; II. *Repression* : in the severe but just treatment of the idle, immoral and undutiful ; III. *Remedy* : in the education and careful training of the young.

And here we must stop for to-day. I will only add that it has been the aim of the most enlightened Poor Law administrators to carry out to the fullest possible extent this last principle of Remedy. If the wise provisions of that Act had been carried out, there can be little doubt that pauperism would long ago have been almost eradicated, and England would not occupy, as she unfortunately does now, the unenviable position of being one of the most pauperised of civilised States.



## LECTURE II.

BEFORE beginning our subject of to-day, I will run through as quickly as I can the heads of last week's lecture.

You will remember that we first considered the misleading term "Poor Law," and how "Law of Destitution" would be the more correct title.

Next, we saw that, though the English Poor Law has certain peculiarities of its own, all civilised States have Poor Laws of some kind or other.

We then considered the three great Principles of our English Poor Law :

I.—That the State *entirely for its own purposes* and in self-defence provides against destitution.

II.—That it is not for the *general good* that State Relief shall be easy to get, or, being got, pleasant.

III.—That the Poor Law should not only relieve and repress, but should be *remedial*.

I told you we should divide the History of the Poor Law into four periods, and we considered the first period from 1377 to 1601, and the great changes in the condition of the labouring classes brought about by the decay of the Feudal System, the Agrarian Revolution, the Reformation and the Dissolution of the Monasteries. We saw the result of these changes in a natural but alarming increase in Vagrancy, leading to disturbance and crime, and we considered some of the cruel and ineffectual legislation of the earlier Tudor reigns.

We also considered the chief mediæval agencies of relief, notably the Monasteries, Hospitals, and Guilds.



Then we came to the Poor Law of Elizabeth, founded on the three Poor Law Principles, and this brought us to the end of our first Historical Period.

To-day we have first to consider the Second Period, from 1601 to 1760.

The principles on which the great Poor Law was founded were more or less adhered to for about 160 years, although during this period three changes were made, two of which were certainly mischievous, and the third was made necessary only because of the mischief brought about by the second.

The first change was what is known as the Act of Settlement passed in the reign of Charles II. I cannot do better than quote what Mr. Fowle says about this wicked and selfish piece of legislation: "Philosophy," he says, "knows how to make excuses for mistakes, or even for what appears to us wickedness, when it grows out of the spirit of the age in its advance towards a better state; but philosophy is thrown away upon such a reign as that of the second Charles, the wickedness of which was due to a deliberate reaction against all that had been best and worthiest in preceding reigns. In the sphere of the Poor Laws another attempt was made to reduce the working classes to practical servitude. By this Act of Settlement of 1662, itself a confused and illogical medley, it was enacted, at the instance chiefly of the Members for London and Westminster, that at the complaint of the Overseers the Justices might, within forty days of any person's coming to live in a strange parish, order him to be removed back to his own place of settlement, unless he could give security to the new parish against becoming chargeable to it—that is to say, persons could be removed not merely when they *were* chargeable, but on the chance that they might *become* so. The reason for this almost incredible violation of the rights of liberty was: 'that poor people are not restrained from going from one parish to another, and therefore do endeavour to settle themselves in those parishes where there is the best stock.' By this Act it may with truth



be said that the iron of slavery entered into the soul of the English labourer."<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, if the Act of Elizabeth was famous, this Act of Charles II. was infamous. Dr. Aschrott (a learned German who was sent over to England by the Prussian Government to study and report upon our Poor Laws, and has written a most valuable treatise upon them) says: "If in the Act of Elizabeth we recognise the strong and enlightened rule which strenuously maintained the interests of the commonwealth, the Law of Charles II. is a reflection of that unhappy time which was characterised by party spirit and selfish designs, when a weak and despicable monarch, who only regarded his own interests, was ready to sacrifice the good of the community to the selfish wishes of particular classes and parties."<sup>2</sup>

Now for the practical results of this precious Act.

"The fear, of course, was that the poor would betake themselves to rich places, in order to share the prosperity there. The willing, industrious workman who wished to advance himself was hindered from choosing the place where he could work best and most profitably for the general good. Thus many able-bodied men were forced to remain where their work was not wanted, and hence many of them became paupers simply from want of work in their own parish. Then, too, in apprenticing boys, the great thing was to find not masters who were able to teach their trade, but masters living in other parishes, because the apprentice obtained a settlement in the parish in which he was bound."<sup>3</sup>

The next change was very small—one of those "tinkerings," if you will allow me to use the expression, which are often very mischievous, and more dangerous than big alterations, because they are so

<sup>1</sup> "Poor Law," T. W. Fowle, p. 63.

<sup>2</sup> "The English Poor Law System," Dr. P. F. Aschrott, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> "History of the English Poor Law," Sir George Nicholls, K.C.B., 3 vols. (P. S. King & Son).

Apprenticeship still gives a settlement in forty days.



small no one notices them, or if they do, think they cannot make any difference.

I think you will admit that when you have not only a very delicate but a very intricate machine to deal with, designed by a genius or a great mechanic, which has been proved to do well the work for which it was intended, it is only a very ignorant or foolish person who will venture to say, "It can't do any harm to alter such and such a spring or lever." A new clock was put up in one of our Cathedrals not long ago, and just at first it went very oddly. It had been made from the designs of a great clockmaker, which had been proved to be good, because other large clocks had been made from them which had gone well. The designer came and looked at the clock, and was naturally angry when he found that the firm of clockmakers who had actually made it had altered his designs the least bit in the world, so little that they thought "it could not possibly matter." The man whose designs had been spoilt had a decided difference of opinion with those clockmakers, and the result was they had to eat humble pie and to restore the original design, and I believe the clock has gone well ever since.

Now in 1691 a little "tinkering" Act was passed which did a wonderful amount of harm. It was found that the Overseers of the Poor, whose duty it was to administer relief under the Act of Elizabeth, had in many cases become careless and lax; it was therefore ordered by this innocent-looking little Act that a register should be kept of the paupers in each parish, with the amount of relief given, that this list should be examined by the Vestry Meeting every Easter, and that no person's name should be added to it except at that one time in the year. Now this was a good plan if only the Vestry had met a little oftener; but of course it was soon found that once a year was too seldom; therefore it was enacted that relief might be given at other times *by the authority of one Justice*. I do not suppose anyone foresaw in the least what the result of this very small alteration would be, but what



really did happen was this. An idle or vicious person had only to pick out a kind-hearted, easy-going Justice, who was quite ready to be generous with other people's money, and to tell him a piteous tale, in order to wheedle relief out of him. The consequence of this was that the rates increased to a most alarming extent, and this rise in the rates led to the third change.

When the rates rise the ratepayers generally get into a fright, and those ratepayers of 1691 were terribly frightened. I remember hearing a great Poor Law reformer, Mr. Albert Pell, say: "Rates are like playing for money at whist. If you don't put any money on the game, your opponent will say: 'Let's see, who won the last rubber? We did, didn't we?' Well, you might have forgotten; but if you can show your opponent his half-crown in your hand, the thing is clear; and so the rates are useful to mark the points—they show which way the game is going." Those seventeenth century ratepayers were practical men, and they thought the game was getting just a little bit too exciting, so they stopped the fun by building the first Workhouse at Bristol, in 1697, by special Act of Parliament; and this being used as a test of destitution produced such excellent results that another Act was soon passed allowing all parishes to provide houses for the indigent, and ordering "that no poor who refused to be lodged and kept in such houses should be entitled to ask or receive parochial relief." This was the celebrated "Workhouse Test." Now in these days this would be called "very hard." What an outcry there would be supposing the Guardians of a Union were to say: "There will be no more Out-door Relief given here; if you want State Relief you must come into the Workhouse." Why, the Guardians of that Union would be called hard-hearted and cruel, and all the bad names in the English language would be showered upon them. I shall have something more to say about this next time; I only want to point out three things to you now.



(1) You see what came of making it easy for the labouring classes to get State Relief in the pleasantest form: how hard it was on the ratepayers. (2) The ratepayers applied the Workhouse Test in its most severe form—that is to say “the Workhouse or nothing,” simply in self-defence. I do not think they thought about the good of the poor at all; I am afraid they acted from a perfectly selfish motive, the motive of saving their pockets, and quite involuntarily they benefited the poor even more than themselves. The rates fifty years after the passing of this Workhouse Act were £200,000 less than in 1698, in spite of the increase in the population; but what is far more important even than this saving of public money is (3) that the beginning of the eighteenth century (the reign of George II.) is fixed upon by Hallam and the best authorities as one of the most prosperous times in the history of the working classes; and Professor Fawcett tells us that about this period there was less pauperism in England than in any other country. “It appeared,” he says, “not unlikely that pauperism would in the course of a few years be almost exterminated.” “Unfortunately, however,” he goes on to say, “instead of persevering in a policy which had produced such happy results, the authorities began to fancy that as there was so little pauperism they could afford to play fast and loose with State Relief, and become what was supposed to be liberal and kind-hearted.”<sup>1</sup>

Before we consider the Third Period (a short period of only seventy-four years, but a most important and disastrous time in our Poor Law History—the time, that is, between 1760 and 1834), I think it would be well to point out to you that another very great change had taken place in the general feeling about the poor. If I have been able to make myself clear to you, you will, I hope, have seen that before the passing of the great Act of Elizabeth in 1602, the prevailing idea was to keep wages down as low as possible for the

<sup>1</sup> “Manual of Political Economy,” p. 586.



benefit of employers. During the 160 years which followed the passing of that Act the world had, on the whole, been gradually growing more humane—public opinion had been veering round, until about the middle of the eighteenth century, when George III. came to the throne. Then the great idea was that agricultural wages must be artificially maintained (if they could not be maintained naturally) at a certain level, whether the employers could afford to pay them or not. That is to say, if they were not considered high enough, they were to be “pumped up,” or rather “filled up” by the State.

Now I do not think it can be necessary to explain to you that both these extreme views were equally wrong, and I had almost said equally disastrous, to the poor. Of the two views, however, I think there is really no doubt the last was in the long run the more fatal to the prosperity of the people. “People in these days,” said the late Lord Derby, “talk slightly of economic laws; but economic laws are only reason applied to a particular department of human affairs. You may ignore them if you like, as you may ignore the law of gravitation, but they will operate all the same. Popular talk did not make them, and popular talk will not unmake them. No man outside a lunatic asylum has ever said (as is now often imputed) that they ought to be taken as the sole guides of life; but no wise man will affirm, on the other hand, that they can safely be disregarded.” You will often hear people declare in these days that the laws of Political Economy have been relegated to the planets of Saturn and Neptune. You may relegate them to the furthest bounds of space if you please, but that they will revenge themselves from there, and speedily too, you may be perfectly certain.

There is no more instructive period of English History than this reign of George III. If the reign of Elizabeth was remarkable for common sense, the reign of George III. was remarkable for false sentiment. You cannot read a great deal of the literature of the



latter part of his reign without finding out what a terribly sentimental age it was. Sentimental literature is bad enough (though one need not read it unless one likes), but sentimental Acts of Parliament are far and away worse, because they are apt to do such irreparable mischief. It may safely be said with one notable exception which I will mention presently, that the Poor Laws of this Third Period were altogether bad, demoralising and ruinous. They were considered very humane at the time, and no doubt the intentions of those who framed the pernicious Acts were humane enough; only I hope as we go on you will observe what comes of statesmen allowing their hearts to run away with their heads. A great deal of the foolish Poor Law legislation of George III.'s reign was really the outcome of the sentimentalism of the age, and the opinion of that time was "that it was the duty of the State to provide whatever might be considered a proper subsistence for the working classes."

It is quite true that there were statesmen who knew better than this. The great Edmund Burke, one of the most clear-sighted and far-seeing men who ever lived, as well as a great orator, wrote a celebrated pamphlet called "Thoughts on Scarcity," in the year 1795, in which he said: "To provide for us in our necessities is not in the power of Government. It would be vain presumption in statesmen to think they can do it. It is in the power of Government to prevent much evil; it can do very little positive good." Those words are probably just as true now as the day they were written, and when one hears people calling out for more legislation and expecting it to work miracles, as if Parliament were a political Lourdes, one cannot help thinking of those wise words of Edmund Burke.

But in spite of men like Burke, Adam Smith and Bentham, all sorts of wild ideas were prevalent as to what the State ought to do for the labourers. Even Mr. Pitt, who knew much more about economics than most of the statesmen of his day, wanted to bring in



a Bill authorising allowances to the labourers out of the public rates, including the present of a cow or some other domestic animal. Then the Berkshire magistrates invented a plan by which all poor and industrious families were to be helped out of the rates by weekly allowances, the amount of the allowance being regulated by the price of wheat; and the example of Berkshire was cheerfully, even eagerly, followed in many other counties.

Mr. Fowle expresses himself somewhat forcibly about these plans: "All the injury," he says, "inflicted upon the labouring classes in the times of the Tudors was but as dust in the balance compared with what they suffered from the benevolent measures of some of the best men who have ever ruled England. The poor might well say: 'We can deal with our enemies, only save us from our friends.'"<sup>1</sup>

I said there was one exception to the universally bad and disastrous Poor Law legislation of this time, and it is rather a large exception. An Act was passed in 1795 repealing that severe, selfish and stupid Act of Settlement of Charles II. You remember that under that Act people were removed to their birth-place before they became chargeable to the rates, unless they could give security. Sometimes persons were moved in a dying condition and actually died on the road. Under this new Act of Settlement of 1795, chiefly due to Edmund Burke, who emptied the vials of his righteous indignation on the cruelties of the old Act, persons could not be removed until they had actually come on the rates, and not then if a Justice of the Peace considered they were too ill to be moved. This is, I think, the only good piece of Poor Law legislation of this Third Period, unless you are advocates of what is known as the Boarding-out System; if so, it may interest you to know that in George III.'s reign pauper children were ordered to be sent not less than five miles out of London to be

<sup>1</sup> "Poor Law," T. W. Fowle, p. 6.



brought up, and "Guardians," answering no doubt to our modern Boarding-out Committees, were appointed to look after them.

In 1782 a very important Act was passed, which is known as Gilbert's Act. It was an experiment—that is to say, it was not compulsory; it was open to any district to adopt it or not as it pleased. Mr. Gilbert was M.P. for Lichfield, and parts of his Act are still in force. Under this Act, England was divided into Unions, and the Justices were to appoint Visitors and Guardians. The Visitors were Honorary Officials, and the Guardians were paid, and really answered to our modern Relieving Officers. So far, so good; but now come the mischievous parts of Gilbert's Act. None but the old, sick, and infirm were to be sent to the Workhouse. Out-door relief (allowances of money) was to be given to the able-bodied in their own homes, and the Guardians were ordered to find work for these able-bodied labourers near their homes. It seems odd that Mr. Gilbert, who had really given his mind to studying Poor Law, should not have taken to heart and profited by the lesson which those seventeenth century ratepayers had paid so heavily to learn. But it is a curious fact that people seem incapable of learning from history, and that is perhaps one of the reasons why history so often repeats itself; it certainly is a most difficult thing to get people to learn from the experience of others. At any rate, Mr. Gilbert's Act was a very expensive experiment, costing the country many millions.

One of the most mischievous parts of the Act was the clause ordering the Guardians to find work for the labourers near their homes, and as it seems likely that Guardians may now at any time be called upon by the Unemployed to find work for them on the roads and elsewhere, perhaps it may be well to point out what the results were of complying with just such a demand in 1782. Gilbert's Act, you see, took it for granted, first of all, that there was always to be plenty of work, and profitable work, two big assumptions to start with; then, secondly, the unfortunate Guardians



had to find work near the labourer's house. Why, if there was work to be had near the labourer's house, that labourer should not have found it for himself without having a Guardian to do it for him one does not quite see. Then, next, that unhappy Guardian had to bargain for wages for the labourer. Just see what this meant. Other occupations might be uncertain; the farmer, the lawyer, the doctor, the merchant, however industrious and active, were liable to uncertainties in their callings; but the labourer was to bear a charmed life. You see it did not in the least matter whether he were hard-working and careful, or whether he were idle and wasteful—he could equally throw himself on the parish and be kept. What better plan could have been devised to sap the independence and industry of the working classes?

You will very likely see this dear old bogie of finding work (or, worse, "making" work) for the Unemployed, coming out of her eighteenth century cupboard with an entirely new outfit of clothes, as lively, plausible and mischievous as ever; only she will call herself "State Employment," and will be welcomed not only by Guardians of the Poor, but by County, District, and Parish Councillors. Now, unless the demand for "State employment" is firmly met by the offer of work *inside the precincts of the Workhouse alone*, it is terrible to think what misery and suffering may be caused to the Working Classes. This subject ought of course to have a lecture to itself, and there is no time now to enter into all the reasons why State Employment for the Unemployed is so dangerous and hurtful. It cannot however be too often repeated that, whatever charitable individuals may think it right to do, the State cannot consider one class apart from others without great danger to the Commonwealth. If the State should so far forget or ignore her duty as to provide work for those who cannot find it for themselves (except as I have said combined with the Workhouse Test), it will simply mean robbing Peter (the independent, self-supporting, self-respecting Peter)



to pay the idle, incompetent, worthless and even drunken and vicious Paul. Terrible consequences have followed in other countries where statesmen have attempted to carry into practice the pernicious doctrine that it is the duty of the Government to find work for people who cannot find it for themselves. The Municipal Workshops were responsible for the deaths of 12,000 working-people in Paris in 1848, and State Employment has caused much distress in some of our Colonies in recent times.<sup>1</sup>

It is true that the Act of Elizabeth ordered that work should be found for the idle, but this was really what we should now call a labour test, and probably did not affect the general labour market at all. The restrictions imposed upon the able-bodied paupers were so severe that few except the impotent poor applied for relief. The relief given in return for the work done was very small—probably only enough to keep body and soul together; and the punishment was very severe if the task of work was not completed. The work provided by the State was thus made so exceedingly unpleasant that idle paupers were glad enough to find work for themselves on any terms.

But, though this subject is interesting and most important, we must pass on to another fatal Act, another piece of sentimentalism, which I suppose really wrought more mischief than any Act of any Government of any age or country. That sounds rather a strong thing to say, but I think it is justified. This was an Act passed in 1796, by which for the first time the granting of Out-door relief to the able-bodied was made general. That is to say, the provisions of Mr. Gilbert's mischievous Act were made universal all over England.

I suppose it is quite impossible to exaggerate the evils which were brought upon the unhappy labourers by this measure, but, as they seem to be in danger

<sup>1</sup> For an account of the Municipal Workshops, see "Occasional Paper," No. 29, written by the late Dr. Bradby, published by the London Charity Organisation Society.



of being forgotten just now, it may be as well to tell you what they were. It really looks as if the English people might be induced by ignorant or unscrupulous leaders to learn that same expensive old lesson all over again, and if this should be the case it is quite impossible to foretell what we may have to pay for it, not in money alone, for it may cost us whatever is best and worthiest in our national character. It is possible that education may enable this generation of English men and women to learn the lesson quickly; but it is more than probable that there will be a good deal of that familiar process known as "burning of fingers," which though painful is effectual. There is a rather rude proverb which describes the process, "Experience keeps a dear school, but fools will learn in no other."

After the passing of this miserable Act of 1796, "the nation," says Mr. Fowle, "could but look on in a kind of paralysis at the inordinate growth of moral abuses, of industrial disaster, of ruinous expenditure." I do not want to inflict figures upon you, but I do not see how I can show you how utterly disastrous this indiscriminate Out-door relief was, unless I quote a few. In 1783 the annual Poor Law expenditure of this country was, in round numbers, £2,000,000. In twenty years it had doubled, but in 1817 it had risen by leaps and bounds to the perfectly appalling sum of nearly £8,000,000, the whole population of the country being at that time only 11,000,000.

But those millions had their value; they showed both statesmen and people, as nothing else would have done, the tremendous pace at which England was being ruined, morally, socially, financially. They certainly paid handsomely for their lesson then; but remember the expense was the very smallest part of the evil, and indeed it was really the only thing which saved the nation and brought it to its senses. The demoralisation of the people was increasing every year; land went out of cultivation because the rates were so heavy the farmers could not afford to pay them. In one unhappy little place the Poor Rate which



had been £10 in 1801, in 1832 was £367, and bankrupt villages were not at all uncommon. Many landowners were ruined, and the labourers were the most miserable, pauperised individuals on the face of the globe.

For some time past writers such as Malthus and Harriet Martineau had been denouncing the iniquities of the Poor Law administration, and trying to arouse the public conscience, but still things went on from bad to worse till at last something had to be done, and in 1832 something was done.

As you probably know, a Whig Ministry was in power at that time (although I think both Whigs and Tories were agreed that some reform was necessary), and they appointed a Royal Commission to investigate the working of the Poor Laws. The then Bishop of London, Bishop Blomfield, heads the list of the members of this Commission. He was chosen not because he was Bishop of London but because he was a man of great wisdom and sagacity. Mr. Nassau, Senior, and Mr. Chadwick were prominent members of the Commission. The evidence brought before them revealed a most disastrous state of things, and in May, 1834, their famous Report was issued. This Report is perhaps the most remarkable and startling document to be found in any social history. It opens thus:—

“It is now our painful duty to report that the fund which the 43rd of Elizabeth directed to be employed in setting to work children and persons capable of labour, but using no daily trade, and in the necessary relief of the impotent, is applied to purposes opposed to the letter, and still more to the spirit, of that law, and destructive to the morals of that most numerous class, and to the welfare of all.” The Report goes on to declare that “the independence, integrity, industry and domestic virtue of the lower classes were in some places almost extinct,” and the great source of evil was shown to be the relief given to the able-bodied in aid of wages. Then, too, the Workhouses were mismanaged. Better food and lodging were provided for idle paupers than working people could get, better



indeed in some cases than the unfortunate ratepayers could afford.

I have mentioned the burden upon property as one of the evils which came from this bad administration of the Poor Law; but there were others which I should like to point out.

I.—*The burden upon independent Labourers.*—Now, you will hardly believe it, but the fact was that steady, good workmen who tried to keep themselves could not get employment because, as the able-bodied paupers had to be kept somehow, it was thought a certain amount of work might as well be got out of them. Farmers were forced to employ pauper labour, which was a most terrible burden to them, and the employer was required to give work to a prescribed number of poor labourers whether he had work for them or not. In one parish the rector had to employ sixty-two men at weekly wages of ten shillings each, besides paying a Poor Rate of £420. One farmer told the Commissioners that he had tried hard to keep two excellent labourers, but he was obliged to discharge them because the authorities forced him to take on two paupers instead, one of whom was an habitual drunkard, the other a dangerous thief. Even when they were not paid high wages (and sometimes the authorities insisted on the paupers being paid more than the market rate of wages) the labour of paupers was most costly, because it was unskilled; they were very lazy, and they had to be worked in gangs so that they could be watched.

In fact, the able-bodied adult looked on the parish as a paymaster; a part of the year he might be supported by wages, a part on wages and parish pay, and part on parish pay only. In any case the parish was his refuge if he were out of work, or if he feared the uncertainties of employment. The Poor Law Commissioners thus summed up the economic position:—"Such allowances by making the labourer dependent on the parish, and giving him the slave's security against want, whether his labour were good



or bad, deteriorated the quality of his labour ; secondly, by this deterioration of labour, the amount of produce, or the fund from which wages as well as profits, rates and taxes could be repaid, was diminished ; thirdly, that the unproductiveness of labour thus caused diminished the motives to the investment of capital, and the employment of labourers in that branch of industry in which allowances in aid were made. In other words, it was shown that the allowance in aid of wages in reality operated as a grievous tax in diminution of them." At a small village in Buckinghamshire, the Commissioner found that although there was plenty of work to be got on the London and North Western Railway which was being made a few miles away, the able-bodied men refused to go there to work, and went instead to the overseer of the parish, who gave them relief.

II.—*The burden on the poorer Ratepayers.*—In many instances they earned less and worked harder than the paupers whom they were supporting in luxury and idleness.

III.—*The demoralisation of the Officials.*—These gentlemen appear, from the Commissioners' Report, to have feathered their own nests very successfully. Indeed, it has been well said that a pauperised parish was like the Turkish Empire—a prey to rapacious administrators. For instance: it was an excellent thing to own cottage property, because the landlords could get the rents paid out of the rates; they used to attend the Vestry-meeting and vote relief to their own tenants, which relief they took very good care to get themselves. The small shop-keeper used to vote relief to persons who owed him money, and this naturally found its way into his till.

But the worst of all was:

IV.—*The deterioration of Morals.*—Professor Fawcett has a most telling passage on this point in his "Manual of Political Economy" which I will quote. "The extent to which the industrial classes were demoralised by the relaxations of the Poor Law soon became only



too evident. Men were virtually told that no amount of recklessness, self-indulgence or improvidence would in the slightest degree affect their claim to be maintained at other people's expense. If they married when they had no reasonable chance of being able to support a family, they were treated as if they had performed a meritorious act, for the more children they had, the greater was the amount of relief they obtained. A woman obtained from the parish a larger allowance for an illegitimate than for a legitimate child."<sup>1</sup>

Married couples were actually known to go straight from the marriage ceremony in church to the work-house, where they passed their married life, and we may suppose lived happily ever after, and there their children were brought up; or sometimes the young man the day after his marriage would call with his bride on the Overseer and ask to be put on the relief list.

"Another abominable abuse was the pauper marriages corruptly promoted by overseers with the view of shifting the settlement of paupers from one parish to another. Some wretched man was given a sum of money to marry some still more wretched woman. The details of the bargain were sometimes debated even on the altar steps. This chicanery and other disputes about settlement led to what one of the Commissioners has happily called a *dirty warfare*, continually waged between upwards of fifteen thousand parishes all trying to shuffle off their responsibility, and willing to resort at times to the meanest stratagems."<sup>2</sup>

Payments were often made out of the rates to children for looking after sick or aged parents, for that wholesome clause in the Act of Elizabeth which ordered that the impotent were to be kept by their relations was very seldom enforced. In fact, children in some cases declined to nurse their parents in illness unless the parish paid them for doing so. Here is a nice

<sup>1</sup> "Manual of Political Economy," p. 587.

<sup>2</sup> "Public Relief of the Poor," T. Mackay (John Murray).



little bill presented by the Overseers of the Poor to be paid out of the rates in 1834 :—

	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>
“ To Elizabeth W. a present for her kindness to her father . . . . .	5	0
To Lucy A. for looking after her mother when ill . . . . .	3	6
To Mary B. for sitting up at night with her father . . . . .	2	0.”

The Overseer's wife, herself a mother, saw nothing wrong in this, “as for children to be dutiful to their old and sick parents was a great hindrance.”

“At the time of my journey,” says one of the Assistant Commissioners, “the acquaintance I had with the practical operation of the Poor Laws led me to suppose that the pressure of the sum annually raised upon the ratepayers, and its progressive increase, constituted the main inconvenience of the Poor Law system. The experience of a very few weeks served to convince me that this evil, however great, sinks into insignificance when compared with the dreadful effects which the system produces on the morals and happiness of the lower orders. It is as difficult to convey to the mind of the reader a true and faithful impression of the intensity and malignancy of the evil in this point of view, as it is by any description, however vivid, to give an adequate idea of the horrors of a shipwreck or a pestilence. A person must converse with paupers, must enter workhouses and examine the inmates, must attend at the parish pay-table, before he can form a just conception of the moral debasement which is the offspring of the present system; he must hear the pauper threaten to abandon his wife and family unless more money is allowed him, threaten to abandon an aged bedridden mother, to turn her out of his house and lay her at the Overseer's door, unless he is paid for giving her shelter; he must hear parents threaten to follow the same course with regard to their sick children; he must see mothers coming to receive the reward of their daughter's ignominy, and witness



women in cottages quietly pointing out, without even the question being asked, which are their children by their husband, and which by other men previous to marriage ; and when he finds that he can scarcely step into a town or parish in any county without meeting with some instance or other of this character, he will no longer consider the pecuniary pressure on the rate-payer as the first in the class of evils which the Poor Laws have entailed upon the community."

Medical relief, too, was claimed as a right. The contracts made with the medical men for supplying it were made for "the poor" generally. In some districts the whole mass of the labouring population were medical paupers.

The Commissioners describe the effect of all this relief on the people in the following words :—" Drink and dissipation, indolence and insolence, deception and dependence have become the familiar characteristics of the English labourer." And they add : " We do not believe that a country in which the distinction between the pauper and the independent labourer has been completely effaced, and every man insured a comfortable subsistence, can retain its prosperity, or even its civilisation."

I have by no means exhausted the evils of the Poor Law administration of this period, but if anyone cares to know more about the really dreadful state of things which existed in England at this time, they will find an interesting account in Mr. Fowle's valuable little book, which is published in the English Citizen Series at a cost of half a crown ; and the Commissioners' Report which has lately been reprinted is well worth study.

Things were bad outside the Workhouse, and they were little better inside. The old people were shamefully neglected, the sick and dying were ill-cared for ; in the smaller Workhouses, the children were put with the old people. The only classification was that the sexes were nominally kept separate, although this was by no means strictly enforced, and some of these Workhouses were, as you can imagine, sinks of iniquity.



"In by far the greater number of cases," said the Commissioners, "the Workhouse is a large Almshouse in which the young are trained in idleness, ignorance and vice; the able-bodied maintained in a sluggish sensual indolence; the aged and more respectable exposed to all the misery that is incident to dwelling in such a society, without government or classification; and the whole body of inmates subsisted on food far exceeding both in kind and in amount not merely the diet of the independent labourer, but that of the majority of the persons who contribute to their support."

The insane and idiotic were terribly neglected and ill-used; indeed, common sense and humanity were entirely banished from Poor Law administration at this time, and in their stead a sickly sentimentalism swayed the minds of statesmen and justices.

Perhaps I have said enough to show you that anything like a return to the old system would be a great national calamity, far worse even than a great war. War, terrible and awful as we know it to be, develops high moral qualities both in individuals and in a nation, such as courage, endurance, unselfishness, obedience, devotion to duty, patriotism, and others which we can all think of. But I can think of no moral qualities which are developed by State petting, or rather State meddling. On the contrary, it may (nay, almost certainly will) destroy such virtues as family affection, industry, sobriety, thrift and manly independence. Now, when you hear people abusing our modern Poor Law, and calling Guardians who will not give outdoor relief hard names, just remember what came of relaxing that stern but wise and wholesome Poor Law of Queen Elizabeth.

The result of this Royal Commission and the Report was that a new Poor Law Act was passed in 1834, not a day too soon to preserve the safety and solvency of England. Nothing shows so plainly the urgent need of a change as the fact that the second reading of this Bill was passed in the House of Commons by 299 votes to 20, and in the House of Lords by 76 votes to 13.



We are naturally accustomed to think of Waterloo as the greatest of the great Duke's achievements. But it was surely an act of extraordinary moral courage to tell the Tory party, as he did, that he would have nothing whatever to do with stopping or opposing the passing of this Act, and England owes him a debt of gratitude for this conquest of his own party.

There is little difference in fundamental principles between this Act and the Act of Elizabeth. Other Acts have been passed since, but I think I am right in saying that they have left the three great principles undisturbed. No higher tribute, surely, could have been paid to the wisdom of the great statesmen of the reign of Elizabeth than this re-adoption of those principles after an interval of 200 years.

This new Poor Law Act, as it is still called, of 1834 created an entirely new central authority. Parish authorities, Justices of the Peace and Overseers, were no longer to be allowed to pauperise the working classes at their pleasure. For some years this Central Authority consisted of three Poor Law Commissioners, whose names deserve to be remembered with gratitude, the Right Hon. Thomas Lewis, Sir John Shaw Lefevre, and Sir George Nicholls. These three men were given by this Act enormous and almost unprecedented powers. Whatever they chose to order had to be done. It is only another instance of the fact, of which there are plenty of examples in history, that when the affairs of a nation get into a hopeless mess (and undoubtedly the rural economy of England was in a mess) an autocracy is necessary for a time, if things are to be got straight, and those first Poor Law Commissioners were certainly complete autocrats. Is it within the bounds of possibility that the country may at some future date, perhaps not far distant, once more thankfully seek salvation from corruption, jobbery and popular demoralisation, in a temporary autocracy? If so, let us hope men such as those who saved our country in 1834 may be raised up to come to the rescue.



It was only natural that the Commissioners' efforts at reform should have met with violent opposition. They had ranged against them in full battle array all the selfishness, cupidity, obstructiveness and stupidity of utterly corrupt officialism, doing its very best to rouse a regular storm of popular rage and fury which it was confidently hoped would sweep away those audacious Commissioners and their unpleasant reforms. But those three Commissioners were not easily to be swept away; they were strong men, and they did their duty to their country in spite of abuse. They had one great advantage—they were not in Parliament, and thus were perfectly independent of votes. They cared nothing for being called "Bashaws of Somerset House," "tyrants," "concentrated icicles," and the pretty names which all reformers may expect to have thrown at their heads, and although tremendous efforts were made to get rid of them, happily for the country they were, quite unsuccessful. The Commissioners were firmly in the saddle, and no kicking or plunging was of any avail. Fortunately for them and for England, the country was once more thoroughly frightened at the burden of the rates (those useful counters), or it is probable the Commissioners, wise and strong though they were, would never have been able to carry out their wonderful reforms. It is no exaggeration to say that these reforms simply saved the country from bankruptcy and moral ruin.

The chief changes made by the new Poor Laws were:

- (1) The appointment of a Central Board in London.
- (2) The appointment of Local Authorities.
- (3) All relief to the able-bodied, except in well-regulated Workhouses, was declared illegal, but this provision was only gradually and very carefully enforced. There is, however, no doubt whatever that the Commissioners expected Out-door relief to cease entirely after a few years.
- (4) The formation of Unions of Parishes, the Guardians of each Union to provide and build a common Workhouse for each district.



(5) The accounts of all Unions to be audited by auditors appointed by the Central Board.

Other less important changes were made, but I do not think we need consider them.

The Central Authority consisted at first, as I have said, of the three Commissioners; but when they had completed their reforms, they were succeeded in 1847 by a Poor Law Board, with a responsible Minister at its head, who was called the President of the Poor Law Board. In 1871 this Board was turned into the Local Government Board, which, as you know, controls not only Poor Law Administration but such matters as public health and local taxation.

Now, although we may talk about the new Poor Law having saved the country, the fact is it was the Central Board which saved it. This Board has issued from time to time what are called Poor Law Orders, or nowadays Local Government Board Orders, which have practically all the force of Acts of Parliament. Sometimes these Orders are worded pretty sharply, and tell the local authorities that they "must" do certain things (or, perhaps more often, that they mustn't). But generally they are worded politely, and say that Guardians "may" do this, that and the other. For instance, in 1844 the Poor Law Commissioners issued a stern mandate absolutely forbidding Out-door relief to the able-bodied, except under exceptional circumstances. Then, a few years ago an order was issued saying that Boards of Guardians "might" appoint Committees of Ladies to visit Workhouses.

Besides issuing these Orders from time to time, the Local Government Board has a number of Poor Law Inspectors, who attend meetings of Boards of Guardians, inspect Workhouses, investigate complaints, give advice and report what they see and hear to the Local Government Board. Then, as I have said, this Board sends auditors to audit the accounts of all Unions every half-year. This, to a great extent at any rate, prevents fraud on the part of officials.

The Board can discharge any local official—that is



to say, it has power to dismiss any Master or Matron of a Workhouse, Medical Officer, Chaplain or Relieving Officer. Boards of Guardians, though they appoint all these officials, cannot discharge them, although the Local Government Board of course gives full attention to any complaints which Boards of Guardians may make about an official, and if necessary, sends an inspector to enquire into these complaints.

I could say a great deal more about the Local Government Board, which has become one of the most important Government Departments within the last few years. One thing is perhaps worth knowing: it is open to any person, whether man or woman, whether a ratepayer or not, to write a letter of complaint to the Board, and if the complaint appears to be reasonable an inspector is sent to enquire and report.

But, besides this Board, which possesses, as I think you will see, very considerable powers, the Act of 1834 established Local Authorities. The whole country was divided up into 647 Unions, fresh Unions being formed from time to time. Under the new Act of 1894 each Union has a Board of Guardians consisting of Elected Guardians who may co-opt from outside the Board four persons including the Chairman and Vice-Chairman. These persons must be qualified to be Guardians. A Guardian must be either a Parochial Elector of some parish within the Union, or must have lived within it for twelve months.

I think there is no doubt we are face to face with what may prove to be a very great national danger, greater because it is unrealised by the large mass of our countrymen and countrywomen. Our unhappy experiences before the year 1834 are forgotten, perhaps not even known by many people; while some of those who remember and know will tell you that human nature has changed since then, and that things may safely be done now which proved disastrous then. For this cheerful theory I do not think there is any foundation in fact. Pauperism since 1834 had gone steadily down, with, of course, some fluctuations in times of



special distress; the year 1871 was a bad year, for instance. But in 1841 the population of this country was nearly 16 millions, and the number of paupers was over one million, so that roughly speaking every sixteenth person you met was a pauper. In 1880 the population was 25 millions, and the number of paupers was only 800,000. About 37 per cent. fewer children received relief on January 1st, 1894, than on January 1st, 1871; 38 per cent. fewer able-bodied persons; 18 per cent. fewer aged and infirm persons. To put it shortly, we have about half the pauperism we had thirty years ago. "The advance," says Mr. C. S. Loch, "has been wonderful. It will be an almost irreparable injury to the nation if now, regardless of restraints and restrictions, we make our Poor Relief a system of largesse, multiply our paupers, and reduce our poor to the pauperism from which step by step they are emerging."

His words are I think borne out by the returns of Pauperism for some Central London Unions as set forth in the Report for 1901 of the Local Government Board, bearing in mind that matters have become worse and not better since the publication of the Report. I take the figures from a paper called "Metropolitan Pauperism"; they refer to the proportion of Paupers to Population on January 3rd, 1891, and January 5th, 1901, respectively, and are based on the Population Returns according to the estimate taken in those two years.

	Increase or Decrease of Population.	Number of Paupers per 1000.	
		Jan. 3, 1891.	Jan. 5, 1901.
Strand ... ..	— 7,305	65·0	83·3
St. Giles' ... ..	— 5,183	36·2	25·7
Paddington ... ..	+ 9,460	11·6	10·2
St. George's, Hanover Square ... ..	— 7,479	22·5	26·9



The most startling figures are those of the Strand Union, where there are now 83·3 paupers per 1,000 of the population instead of 65 per 1,000 as in 1891. There are "congested areas" of poverty in the district, but far fewer than ten years ago. The wealthy population in the hotels has increased, employment is plentiful. The neighbouring Union of St. Giles, with a similar poor population, has in the same ten years reduced its pauperism from 36 to 25 per 1,000.

By way of contrast turn to Paddington, where in these ten years pauperism has gone down from its already small figure of 11·6 to 10·2 per 1,000. Paddington is no doubt a wealthy parish, but its population is increasing, and principally in the large poor area to the North of the District. St. George's (Hanover Square) is an equally rich parish, and is losing many of its poorer inhabitants by improvements at Westminster. Yet here in the ten years pauperism has gone up from 22·5 to 26·9 per 1,000. To what can we attribute these startling contrasts? Surely only to difference of administration.

You may be perfectly certain that what is called, but ignorantly and falsely called, a "hard" administration of the Poor Law is really in the long run the best for the happiness, prosperity and general welfare of the labouring classes, and would, if persevered in all over the country, in a very few years, almost if not altogether eradicate pauperism.



## LECTURE III.

WE considered last week the changes made in the Poor Law of Elizabeth during our second Historical Period, which were, you will remember, three in number. Two of these were mischievous—the Act of Settlement of Charles II., and the Act which allowed one Justice of the Peace to order relief. The third change was the introduction of the celebrated Workhouse Test in 1697; the result of which was that the rates were greatly reduced, pauperism was almost exterminated, and the working classes were remarkably prosperous. We also considered the Third Period—that is to say, the reigns of George III. and George IV.; and we saw that statesmen, influenced by the sentimentalism of the day, were induced to pass the disastrous Act known as Gilbert's Act, which allowed out-door relief to be given to the able-bodied in aid of wages, and the Act of 1796 which made the pernicious practice universal. You will remember the terrible demoralisation, as well as the enormous expenditure caused by these Acts and others like them, and that Parliament, appalled at the moral and financial condition to which the country had been reduced, was frightened into appointing a Royal Commission of Enquiry. The revelations contained in their Report startled statesmen into providing a desperate, almost heroic, remedy, the new Poor Law Act of 1834, which established an autocratic Board of Commissioners with practically unlimited powers. These gentlemen (who were possessed of at least as much wisdom as power) proceeded to cleanse with severity and care the "Augean Stable of the Poor Laws," as Sir Walter Scott calls it in one of his letters.



These reforming autocrats were succeeded by the Poor Law Board, which is now called the Local Government Board, while Local Authorities called Boards of Guardians were appointed in every Union in England.

To-day we will consider the English Poor Law System at the present time, and please do not think I shall be able to tell you everything there is to know about it in one Lecture; we shall have to leave out a great deal.

We will imagine ourselves in the Board Room of a Union at a meeting of the Board, and seated round a table are the Guardians of the Poor. What sort of persons should Guardians of the Poor be? "They should be able to decide with knowledge, impartiality, and discretion in cases of relief. They should be fitted to manage large institutions with carefulness and insight, and therefore they should have a knowledge of business and housekeeping which will prevent waste and mischief in the Workhouse and Infirmary. A good heart and sympathy are not sufficient by themselves, for Guardians are not charitable almoners but public trustees. Guardians should be persons of common sense, who know what life is and its duties, and they should be honest persons who will not try to dispense relief in order to win popularity and influence. In a word, Guardians should be men and women who combine with sympathy knowledge and conscientiousness."<sup>1</sup>

The Clerk to the Guardians is an important official, and should be able to give any legal advice which may be wanted. A really able man can often do a great deal towards leading the Board to wise decisions. The Chairman (who is elected to that office by his brother Guardians every year) can get, as you may suppose, a great deal of power if he is a strong, capable man, and I think I am right in saying that he may in a few years' time make the administration pretty much what he pleases.

<sup>1</sup> Circular addressed to London Electors, December, 1894.



The procedure at the meetings of Boards of Guardians varies somewhat in different Unions. In most country Unions, after the usual preliminaries of an ordinary business meeting, the Master of the Workhouse makes his statement. He tells the Guardians how many inmates there are, if any deaths have occurred, or anything out of the ordinary routine; he complains of any inmates who have been refractory, and sometimes they are ordered to appear and are reprimanded by the Chairman before the whole Board, or the Guardians may order them to be punished by solitary confinement for not more than twenty-four hours. The Clerk then brings any general business before the Board; sometimes this lasts a long while, especially if any building operations are in progress.

The Relieving Officers then read their reports, which consist of all the fresh applications for relief within the Union. It is the duty of the Board to decide in each case whether relief shall be given, and if so what form it shall take. In the Metropolitan Unions the Guardians appoint certain of their number as a Relief Committee.

Now, roughly speaking, there are two methods by which Poor Law Relief is administered: (1) In-door Relief, (2) Out-door Relief. But these two kinds of Relief are dispensed under various forms.

There are five principal forms of In-door Relief:—

I. THE WORKHOUSE.—This is, as you know, a building varying in size according to the needs of each Union, and it really is now misnamed the Workhouse, because the Workhouse Test has proved so efficacious that the number of people inside the House who can work is very small, and the Workhouse has become the permanent home of persons disabled in some way, either by age or infirmity. I think if you were to ask any Workhouse Master he would tell you there are not enough able-bodied men and women in the House to do the necessary out-door work, cleaning and needlework of the Institution. This is the case all over the country, and, of course, it is quite right



that it should be so. A Workhouse, if it is properly arranged, is divided into at least seven parts.

Wards are provided for (1) Aged and infirm men, (2) Able-bodied men, (3) Boys above 7 and under 15, (4) Aged and infirm women, (5) Able-bodied women, (6) Girls above 7 and under 15, (7) Children under 7. Guardians may sub-divide still further according to the moral character or previous habits of the inmates, but this can only be done in large Workhouses. It does seem to be a hardship that old men and women who are in their right minds should be obliged to sit cheek by jowl with those in various stages of imbecility or senile dementia; but the difficulty of arranging differently in a small Workhouse is great. Old married couples over 60 who may wish to live together have a right to do so, and the Guardians are obliged to provide each old couple with a separate room should they ask for it; but it is a curious fact that the demand for separate rooms is not large, and that in some Workhouses where the Guardians have provided really very nice married quarters they have never been used. I was going over a very well-ordered country Workhouse not long ago, and the Matron showed me two charming rooms, which she told me were the married quarters. I asked her if they had ever been used. "Never," she said, "and, what's more, they never will be." I was taken over Paddington Workhouse a short time ago, and was shown the married quarters there. Nothing could have been nicer or more comfortable, but there was only one couple in possession, and the Matron told me the rooms were hardly ever asked for, "the old people," as she expressed it, "having had enough of each other by the time they got to the Workhouse." This, I think, is on the whole satisfactory, as it shows (what indeed any Guardian of experience will tell you) that the very respectable poor seldom come to the Workhouse.

Children under seven have a right to be with their mother, and over that age they may see her at reasonable times while they are in the Workhouse.



Any pauper can leave the Workhouse ("take his discharge," as it is called) on giving reasonable notice, and his family must go with him. The Guardians of the Westminster Union used to allow able-bodied married men to go out for a few hours each day to look for work, in the hope that the husbands would return when they had found it and take out their wives and families; but they have had to give up this plan, for the gentlemen used to go out and omit to return, leaving their belongings to be supported by the ratepayers, while they led a gay, unencumbered bachelor life in common lodging-houses or Salvation Army Shelters, where it was almost impossible to catch them.

There are several Officials connected with the Workhouse. First in importance is the Master. He has a great deal of power; Mr. Fowle says as much power as a captain of a man-of-war on his quarter-deck. He is bound, however, by his articles of war, the strict rules laid down by the Local Government Board; he is responsible for the proper regulation of the Workhouse; and no one can go in or out of the House without his leave.

The Master has to supervise the classification of the inmates, their employment, their food, their clothes; he has to maintain discipline and to keep an accurate record of all that goes on. He is helped by the Matron, who is almost invariably his wife. She has the supervision of the female inmates and the children under seven years old. There should be no kind of communication between the different wards, although persons in one ward may be employed as attendants on those in another. The daily routine is laid down once for all; the inmates must get up and go to bed at fixed hours, must take their meals and perform their tasks; and for each class there is a special dietary approved by the Local Government Board. In the case of the sick the Medical Officer may order special food, and also spirituous liquors, otherwise intoxicating drinks are strictly forbidden, except on Christmas Day, when the inmates are usually allowed a glass of beer



with their dinner. I need hardly say that the friends of the inmates very often try, and sometimes successfully, to bring in spirits. As for visitors, there is generally a day fixed once a week by the Guardians when they may see inmates; but in cases of serious illness visits from relations are always allowed, and the Master and Matron practically have power to allow visitors at any time. I could say a great deal more about the Workhouse, but I will only mention three other officials.

(1) The Chaplain.—His duties are to read prayers and preach a sermon to the inmates every Sunday, Good Friday, and Christmas Day; to catechise the children who belong to the Church of England at least once a month, and to keep a record of the moral and religious condition of the inmates; to visit the sick paupers and to administer religious consolation to them when applied to for that purpose by the Master and Matron.

(2) The Medical Officer.—His duties are, besides undertaking the medical treatment of the sick, to see that their diet, and that of the children, is suitable; and to report to the Guardians if he thinks the food, ventilation, or sanitary arrangements of the Workhouse and Infirmary are not good; he has to examine the newly-admitted, and to say whether the pauper lunatics may safely be left in the Workhouse or whether they should be sent to the Lunatic Asylum.

(3) The Porter.—He keeps the gate and is supposed to prevent the entrance of objectionable things or persons into the Workhouse, and to help the Master and Matron in every way.

The second form of In-door relief is:—

THE INFIRMARY.—For a long while the sick were put into the infirm wards, not into separate buildings, and you may still find this system in force in country Workhouses; but, of course, as you know, large separate buildings are the rule in London and other towns, arranged like an ordinary Hospital. Nothing has improved so much as Workhouse Infirmary nursing during the past thirty years; before that time, even in



London, the state of the sick wards was often a disgrace to civilisation, not to speak of humanity. The nursing was almost entirely done by old pauper men and women, who were, of course, quite unskilled, and I am afraid there can be no doubt that many cruelties (some of them probably quite involuntary) were inflicted on the helpless patients. At last the Local Government Board woke up. I think Miss Louisa Twining, whose name is no doubt well-known to you as a Poor Law Reformer, stirred their wooden conscience. She went on working away at them until in 1897 they issued an Order forbidding the employment of pauper nurses. In Infirmarys where several nurses are employed a superintendent nurse must be appointed who has had three years' training.

The "British Medical Journal" appointed a special Commissioner a few years ago to enquire into the administration and nursing of provincial Workhouse Infirmarys. Some of the Reports in this paper were dismal reading, and it is to be hoped that they were somewhat highly coloured. At Bath, for instance, we read: "Amongst others in the Infirmary are four cases of pneumonia, four bad cases of phthisis, seven of heart-disease, all requiring most tender and careful nursing; sixty patients in all. There is one fully trained nurse with two untrained assistants." We were told that a poultice had been left on a pneumonic chest for twenty-four hours without being changed. "At Festiniog there were," says the Commissioner, "three women in bed. One with a fractured thigh-bone was lying on a straw bed, and had no support for the clothes. A harmless lunatic danced up to the Master and professed her great friendship for him; she had been sitting on the edge of the bed of the patient with the fractured thigh-bone. No one appeared to be in charge of the ward but an imbecile old woman." The "British Medical Journal" did good service in calling the attention of the Local Government Board to the scandalous state of Provincial Workhouse Infirmarys. The destruction of



valuable appliances and bedding by untrained nurses and ignorant paupers was very considerable, and, although, of course, this was of minor importance compared with the comfort of the patients, still it was hard on the ratepayers whose money was wasted. The difficulty of getting a sufficient supply of trained Nurses in the Rural Workhouses is very great. The Local Government Board has appointed a Committee to enquire into the subject, and no doubt they will make practical recommendations which if carried out may, to some extent at any rate, meet this difficulty.

III. LUNATIC ASYLUMS.—I will not say anything about this form of Indoor Relief for the good reason that I know nothing about it, and perhaps Asylums hardly come within the scope of these lectures.

IV. SCHOOLS.—Under this heading I propose to tell you what the Poor Law does for pauper children. It has lately been the subject of much criticism and discussion, for perhaps the treatment and training of children is the most important part of Guardians' duties, and it should be the result of keeping in mind the third great Poor Law principle of Remedy. Pauper children are very likely to grow up into pauper men and women unless they are wisely treated.

Now there are many different ways in which Guardians may deal with children who are orphans or deserted, or who have come into the Workhouse with their parents.

(1) *The Workhouse System*, which is, I am sorry to say, too common a plan in Country Unions, by which the children are brought up in the Workhouse and go to school within its walls. And yet there are objections to this plan, for, however careful the officials may be, the atmosphere of a Workhouse is not a proper one for children. They can mix and talk with adult paupers, many of whom are thoroughly depraved. Unfortunately, a certain number of children are often brought up in the Workhouse, such as those who are hopelessly diseased, and those whose parents are inmates and wish their children to stay there. Where,



however, the children are placed in a separate building within the Workhouse walls under a careful mistress, the plan answers well. The Local Government Board is, however, discouraging it, and plan 2 is becoming more and more widely adopted.

(2) The plan by which *the children live in the Workhouse but attend an ordinary Elementary School*. This is better than the first in some respects, because they associate with other children and see something of the outside world, but in others it is not so good. Where the children are sent to school outside, the Guardians naturally do not keep any master or mistress for the children; hence, out of school-hours there is no special person to look after them, and they may get into mischief. Some Boards, however, appoint an industrial trainer who has charge of the children when school is over.

(3) Another plan is to send as many children as possible to what are called *Poor Law Schools*. Now where these schools are well managed, I believe this is an excellent system, especially for boys. I say this after fully considering all that has been lately said against them. No one who fairly studies the question and the wonderfully good results obtained in these Schools can come, one would think, to any other conclusion. "The proof of the pudding is in the eating," and if these Schools had really been, as they are accused of being, the means of perpetuating the "pauper taint," our Workhouses would now be crowded with able-bodied young paupers. This, however, is notoriously not the case. In one instance, the Liverpool Union, the results of this plan have been compared with those of the boarding-out system, and it was found that the percentage of children who grew up into self-supporting citizens from the schools was higher than it was among children who were boarded-out. It must be remembered, too, that while it is practically only the "pick," morally and physically, of our pauper children who can be boarded-out, the schools are obliged to receive any children sent



to them by Guardians. Schools are good for this reason: the lads get a thorough industrial training, they are taught trades by experienced master carpenters, tailors, bootmakers, and so forth. Then the *Exmouth* Training Ship is a Poor Law School, and boys are trained there for the Royal Navy. Of course, I do not deny that some Poor Law Schools may be bad, in which case the sooner they are reformed the better, and it is distinctly the duty of Inspectors and Guardians to see that they are properly conducted; but there can be no doubt that, generally speaking, they are far better than most charitable orphanages and institutions of the kind.

(4) *Cottage Homes*.—This is perhaps the best system of all, but it is so exceedingly costly that it is hardly likely to become at all general. By this plan the barrack system of the Poor Law Schools is avoided, and yet excellent industrial training is given. A village of cottages is built, and in each cottage a workman and his family are established, who look after a certain number of pauper children; a school, and in some instances a church, is attached. In this way something like a real home is provided, while the children, especially the boys, learn a trade properly.

(5) *Scattered Homes*.—This is a new and, so far, almost an untried plan, for it is a development of the Cottage Home System, and is like it in being exceedingly expensive to carry out. Houses are built or hired by the Guardians in various parts of a town or Union, and the management is the same as in the Cottage Homes.

(6) *Boarding-Out*.—Next to Cottage Homes, perhaps the Boarding-out system seems to commend itself as a sensible plan. A child may be boarded-out either beyond or within the limits of the Union.

Boarding-out beyond the Union is managed by Committees of ladies appointed by the Local Government Board, who undertake to find suitable homes in country villages for pauper children, the Guardians of the Union to which the children belong paying a certain



weekly sum. Only orphan and deserted children under ten years old can be boarded-out, although a child when once it is placed out remains with its foster-parents until the age of fifteen. The boarded-out children are supposed to be treated exactly like the other children in the family. Each child is visited once in six weeks by a member of the Ladies' Committee, who has to report upon the moral and bodily condition of the child. The children are also inspected from time to time by the Inspectors of the Local Government Board for boarding-out, who are ladies. The difficulties are of course to find really suitable homes and ladies competent to visit and to report carefully. Boarding-out within the Union may be managed either with or without a Committee, and in neither case are the children inspected by the Local Government Board. Where there is no Committee the duty of looking after the children falls on the Relieving Officer and Medical Officer alone. There are many objections to this form of boarding-out, and I cannot help hoping that the Local Government Board may either put an end to it altogether, or at any rate place the children under the supervision of their Inspectors. The chief advantages of the system at its best are: (1) That if the children are boarded-out when quite young they know nothing of pauperism, they are brought up like labourers' children, become absorbed in the general population, and the "pauper taint" is supposed to be eradicated. (2) They get individual care and attention which are simply impossible in a Workhouse or Poor Law School. (3) The foster-parents in many cases become exceedingly fond of the children, while there are many pleasant stories told of the affection shown by the children to their foster-parents; and in short it is a natural instead of an artificial life.

As for the objections raised about the children being ill-cared for, of course every system which is not properly worked is liable to abuses. What can possibly be worse than a bad Board of Guardians, for



instance? Every kind of bad thing may go on in the Workhouse and out of it, if you have a careless, ignorant set of Guardians; and of course if you have inefficient Boarding-out Committees you get ill-chosen homes, neglected or even ill-treated children, and the whole Boarding-out System is very unfairly condemned. It is, too, a fact that in certain parts of the country the supply of suitable homes is very limited. Boarding-out is attracting a great deal of attention just now, and I do not wish to say anything that can possibly be construed into depreciation of the system itself. There is, however, a serious danger attaching to any system which has become the hobby of the hour, and the danger is, that we are apt to imagine that a good system will absolve us from responsibility and from the necessity of doing our best and taking pains about details. In the opinion of experts the Boarding-out System requires more care and constant supervision than any other if grave abuses are to be avoided. No system will work itself, but there is just now a tendency to exalt Boarding-out in any form, with or without safeguards, as if it were a panacea for all child pauperism. This thoughtless, wholesale advocacy is really the chief enemy of the system, and threatens its very existence. If, however, Boarding-out is used in a reasonable way, with reasonable precautions and with reasonable expectations as to what it is likely to effect, it will, there can be little doubt, prove to be one of the best ways, side by side with others, for dealing successfully with our Poor Law children.

(7) *Certified Homes*.—Guardians may send children to schools under private management, which are maintained by voluntary subscriptions, provided that they are certified by the Local Government Board as fit to receive pauper children. There are a great many of these schools, some of them being for children who have some physical or mental defect (blind, deaf and dumb). Some are Church Institutions, and a good many are Roman Catholic Homes.



(8) *Emigration*.—It certainly is at first sight most tempting and fascinating to ship off our surplus children to Canada, and to think no more about them. There is a great deal to be said for this plan. (i.) We are told children are wanted out there. (ii.) It is delightfully cheap.<sup>1</sup> (iii.) It severs a child entirely from his pauper relations.

Against this plan it may be urged: That a very high standard is required by the Canadian Government, which refuses to take any but healthy, well-conducted children. In fact, a child that is good enough to be sent to Canada is pretty sure to do well in England.

Thus you see every one of these plans for dealing with pauper children has its drawbacks. Perhaps the most practical way of treating our children is by a combination of systems: boarding-out such girls as can be boarded-out; sending the boys to a school where they will be taught a trade, or to a Training Ship (if they have a taste for the sea) where they will learn to defend their country instead of impoverishing it; the feeble-minded, deaf, dumb and blind to special Homes where they can be taught to maintain themselves.<sup>2</sup>

V. THE VAGRANT WARD.—This is the last form of Indoor Relief. No class has caused more trouble from the earliest times than the Vagrants, and you will remember what a torment they were in the times of the Tudors. Their numbers are said to be increasing, and I am certainly not prepared to under-rate the serious evils of vagrancy, but whether the increase is out of proportion to the natural growth of the population is perhaps a little doubtful. You must remember, too, that vagrants are somewhat like the

<sup>1</sup> The usual cost of sending a child to Canada is £12, including travelling expenses, outfit, etc. The charge for an annual inspection by the Canadian Government varies according to the age of the children.

<sup>2</sup> I should like to recommend those who wish to study this important question fully to read Sir W. Chance's book called "Poor Law Children."



army at a theatre, where you see apparently vast bodies of troops marching in never-ending array across the stage. When, however, you examine them closely, you become aware that this imposing display is ingeniously produced by some thirty or forty men passing before you again and again, possibly with some change of dress or accoutrement, but the same individuals. This is the case in some degree with our Vagrant Army. At times an actual increase takes place caused by a depression of trade; not that there is any evidence that tramps are respectable working men looking for work—there are several reasons why this is not likely. In the first place the Trades Unions mostly have funds out of which the travelling expenses of their members are paid if they are *bonâ fide* in search of work; the Benefit Societies, too, have travelling funds for their members. But supposing a man is neither a member of a Trades Union nor of a Benefit Society? Well, he at once sinks rather low in the social scale; but even so, if he is a respectable man, his mates will help him if he has a prospect of work, and in these days of cheap railway fares a few shillings will probably take him where he wants to go. In the second place, whenever tramps have been tested in any way, either by offers of regular work or by enquiry, the percentage of respectable men who really want work has been quite ridiculously small. You certainly cannot judge by the appearance of the man, and if any self-satisfied official, policeman or tramp-master, tells you he knows what a man is by his manner, by his hands, by his having tools, or by the look of his clothes, do not believe him. The really experienced officials who have taken the trouble to enquire into the past history of homeless men will say they cannot tell by appearances. The outer fringe of the population is thrown out of work by the depression of trade, the loafers and idlers of the large towns who live by doing little services for the working classes are short of a job, because the working people do them for themselves when they are working short time, and these “cadgers”



have to "mark time" until trade gets better; this they do by roaming about the country.

The real cause, however, of vagrancy, at any rate the great mass of it, is the action of the public, chiefly of the labouring classes, who are bullied and cajoled by these "valiant rogues" (as Edward VI. would have called them) into giving relief which they can often but ill afford, but are afraid to refuse, while the well-to-do give from thoughtlessness or indolent good nature. It is apparently of no sort of use to prove to these well-meaning but mischievous persons that the tramps on whom they bestow coppers and scraps of food are often thieves, bad characters and kidnappers, and that rightly or wrongly by the law of England no one need starve. They either think you a monster, or they do not believe you, or they quote the Bible to you, or they say they feel they "may come to it themselves." The consequence is that low lodging-houses and shelters flourish, and are hot-beds of vice and disease. It seems hopeless to try to put a check on vagrancy, so long as the public will make it possible for a man to earn £2 or £3 a week at this wretched trade, perhaps dragging about a woman and two or three miserable children with him. You probably know, by the way, that to take children about for purposes of begging is absolutely illegal, and if anybody will do a very disagreeable thing and hand over any children they may see begging to the nearest policeman, they will be performing a really charitable act, and possibly may be the means of rescuing the unhappy little creatures from a dreadful life. At any rate, one would think it ought to be made impossible for a man or woman to take their own (too often other people's) children on a perpetual walking tour, to grow up without education or training of any kind—a curse to themselves and the nation. Of the countless number of shelters, refuges, "Moral Elevators" as their promoters call them, it is difficult to speak with moderation. Yet one cannot doubt that the motives and intentions of their founders are excellent. Neither, alas! can one doubt that they



are largely responsible for the increase of vagrancy in London and our large towns. Many of these places are dirty, insanitary, and a disgrace to civilisation, and the worst of our Casual Wards is a Paradise in comparison to them. "Perhaps," write the Charity Organisation Committee of St. Marylebone, who have exceptional opportunities of studying this question, "the saddest of all the various groups of cases passing before us is that of the young men harboured by scores or hundreds in 'shelters,' 'refuges' and the like. Instead of being rescued, the 'submerged tenth,' so-called, has been during the last few years lamentably increased in number. It is matter for the dreariest speculation how many young fellows, originally perhaps leaving home from no worse motive than boyish love of change, have been degraded or ruined by the miserable facilities now granted for leading a wandering, useless life of semi-beggary."

Vagrant wards may be either large rooms with plank beds arranged in them, or they may be divided up into separate cells. The last is certainly the best system, because the tramps cannot then have any communication with each other. The vagrants are given a certain amount of food, and are not allowed to go away in the morning until they have completed a task of work. If the Guardians choose to do so, they can keep the vagrants two nights, and this has had the effect of diminishing their numbers in some places.

An excellent Lady Guardian of Marylebone has spent a great deal of time in picking out some of the more hopeful cases from the Tramp Wards of her Workhouse. She has been able to rescue a few young vagrants, some of whom had only just begun the tramp life, or who had really taken to it by accident. Some were young boys and girls, who perhaps had left home in a fit of temper, whom she was able to restore to their friends, and she has been able to find employment for others; but she says those for whom it was possible to do anything were a mere sprinkling.

And here may I digress and say a few words about



being satisfied with small results? In these days of monster philanthropic schemes, which their promoters confidently assert are to have monster results, it may be well to remind ourselves that it is only given to a very favoured few to achieve great things, and that if we are so fortunate as to be able to help one family or even one person effectually, it is more than we have any right to expect. When we have found by painful experience how much trouble and thought it requires (not to mention better things) to pluck one brand from the burning, it becomes increasingly difficult to believe in monster schemes and their monster results.

And now we must consider the various forms of Out-door relief which it is open to Guardians to grant. First let me say a little about that very important person the Relieving Officer. He has a most responsible post, and should be a man of great tact, firmness, sound judgment, and of course experience. He has to receive all applications made for relief within his district, he has to examine into the circumstances of every case by visiting the house of the applicant, and by making all the necessary enquiries, and to report the result to the Guardians at their next meeting. He is probably the best abused man in the parish, and I am not going to say that he may not sometimes be hard. But I should like to ask you whether if you were told lies from Monday morning till Saturday night you might not get a little hard? That is perhaps one of the great evils of Out-door relief, the really awful amount of lying it causes. It is considered perfectly legitimate by the vast majority of the poor, though of course there are exceptions, to lie to the Relieving Officer, and to cheat and deceive him if they can, although they know, or ought to know, that false statements to the Guardians through their Officers is an offence punishable by law. Then the Relieving Officer has generally far more to do than any one human being can attend to properly, which in itself is exceedingly trying to the temper. No Relieving Officer ought to have more than two hundred and fifty



to three hundred paupers on his list (some authorities go so far as to say not more than a hundred), but he often has twice as many. He ought to be able to know the circumstances of the persons relieved, and he cannot possibly do this if he has an overwhelming number to look after. The Guardians ought to see every fresh applicant themselves, and if each case is thoroughly enquired into, it is wonderful how the number of would-be paupers is diminished. Unfortunately, the cases are too often not thoroughly investigated, because, as I have said, the Relieving Officers have too much to do, and Guardians frequently do not care to enter into details. I have heard ten or a dozen applications disposed of in as many minutes with the inevitable result of extravagance or injustice.

The decision of the Board is entered in a book, and the Relieving Officer has to carry it out. He may give relief in urgent cases in kind (not in money) without bringing the application before the Board, or he may give an order for the Workhouse. In any case of sickness or accident he must get medical assistance, and he has to give his opinion to the Guardians as to whether an applicant is able-bodied or not, and this is often a difficult question to decide.

The Relieving Officer is liable to criminal proceedings if he refuses or delays relief to persons to whom it ought to be given, and on the other hand he may be called upon by the auditor to refund anything which he spends contrary to Acts and Regulations. The order for the parish doctor must be got from the Relieving Officer, or it may be given by the Board of Guardians; but Overseers and Justices can also give an order, as they can for relief in any sudden or urgent necessity. If a lunatic has to be taken to the Asylum, the Relieving Officer has to manage the business, and it is often a very unpleasant and even dangerous task.

I am sure you will see in what a very responsible position this man is, and how very much the poor are in his hands. Of course he is bound to bring every application for relief before the Board of Guardians, but they are



naturally very much guided by what he says of each case.

Now as to the forms which Out-door relief may take:—

I.—GIFTS IN MONEY, and II.—GIFTS IN KIND.—These are generally allowances given once a week to the aged and infirm, to widows during the first six months of their widowhood, and to the children of widows under age. But there are certain things which Guardians are absolutely forbidden to do. They may not pay rent (although they may give a sufficient allowance to cover rent), redeem tools, nor buy clothes (except in very urgent cases), and they are not allowed to give Out-door relief to able-bodied persons. How comes it then that so much Out-door relief finds its way into the homes of the able-bodied? The reason is this. The Order which forbids Out-door relief states: "That Out-relief is permitted to the able-bodied in all those cases of distress which are of most frequent occurrence—such as sickness, accident, bodily or mental infirmity in themselves and in their families."<sup>1</sup> You see the door was left ajar by the Central Board, and, in spite of its warnings and exhortations, the local authorities too often maintain the unthrifty and the careless at the cost of their more provident neighbours, and thus it is that we are still a pauperized nation.

III.—EMPLOYMENT is a form of Out-door relief; I said something about this last time, and there is a great deal more to be said about it; it is perhaps the most dangerous form, and, if largely indulged in, would undoubtedly inflict a most grievous injury on the working population. Up to the present time, however, since 1834, very little has been done in this way. In most town Unions, Boards of Guardians in times of distress may open Labour Yards, where able-bodied men may be employed, but half the payment for the work done must be in kind.

Public attention has during the last few years been

<sup>1</sup> Out-door Relief Prohibitory Order, 1844.



specially drawn to the Unemployed, and so many different plans have been suggested for dealing with them that I think I must refer to out-of-work cases here. Any scheme to have a chance even of success must surely recognise in the first place that the Unemployed are not all exactly alike. The Unemployed may be divided into many classes, and the more these are sub-divided the better are the chances of being able to deal with them effectually. Mr. Crowder, a member of the St. George's-in-the-East Board of Guardians, has devised a scheme which has been found to work well in times of exceptional distress in the districts where it has been tried; it is as follows:—

Men out of work are divided into three classes—

(1) *The thrifty of good character.*—These should be dealt with, if necessary, entirely by well-considered, thoughtful, sympathetic and adequate charity. Such men should not be allowed to drift into pauperism, and every effort should be made to keep them from coming on the rates. For a proof of thrift, membership of a good Sick Club is suggested, or £5 or £10 worth of pawn tickets. The help given would be various, as, for instance, assistance in migration or emigration, temporary but sufficient allowances where there is a reasonable prospect of return to employment after a short time. All experience shows, however, that this class is no difficulty. It does not follow that because a man is out-of-work he is therefore in distress. I have known men who have been out of work a whole winter who have not been in distress at the end of it. A respectable man has savings, his friends help him, his credit is good at the shops where he deals, his Benefit Club may have an out-of-work fund. Many of the Trade Societies have very large out-of-work funds. In the year 1900 they paid over £260,000 to their unemployed members and the amount paid in one year, 1893, was over £467,000.

(2) *The non-provident with decent homes.*—The best of this class might also be dealt with by charity, but



efforts should be made to get the men to join Clubs. It may in some cases be well to pay the entrance fees for them, so as to give them a start. Much may be done by collecting savings from house to house during the summer months when work is plentiful. The rest of this class should be dealt with by the Guardians of the Poor under what is known as the "Modified Workhouse Test Order," for which special application must be made by a Board of Guardians to the Local Government Board.

This Order is as follows :—The Guardians may give Out-relief to the wife and family of an able-bodied man if *he* enters the Workhouse. With the consent of the Guardians he may absent himself to look for work for not more than twenty-four hours in the course of a week, during which twenty-four hours he, as well as his family, may receive Out-door relief. In some Unions the relief to the family during the time the man is in the House is supplied by Charity.

The reasons why this plan is good are :—

(a) It acts as an efficient test and a lesson in providence to the man and his neighbours, yet the home is not broken up. (b) The relief is adequate to the wants of the whole family. (c) The burden of sacrifice is thrown on the improvident man, who fairly enough should be put in a less advantageous position than the provident man of Class I. ; and it is not, as in most other schemes, thrown on the wife and family. (d) It withdraws from the market the superfluous labour which is gradually absorbed again as the demand arises.

If it be objected that it is pauperising to allow any man to go to the Workhouse, the answer is that it is not relief in one place rather than another which pauperises in a moral sense. *That which pauperises is a policy which teaches the poor that others will provide for them and that they need not provide for themselves*, and these lectures will have been given in vain if I have not shown you clearly the danger and evil of abolishing tests when State Relief is asked for and granted, or in any way making it easy and pleasant.



(3) *The idle or vicious*.—These should be offered the Workhouse with their families, while those who appear to be anxious to mend their ways might be referred to Reforming Agencies.

If you suggest that by this scheme our Workhouses would be flooded and the strain on the Poor Law Authorities greater than could be borne, the answer is that this plan has been tried in the poorest Unions in London and has been successful. Further, some years ago in Nottingham, Relief Works were suddenly closed on account of an adverse report; 1,396 men were discharged and referred to the Guardians. Not one went to the Workhouse, and only twenty-seven accepted the offer of Out-relief, subject to a labour test. If the plan seems hard, I would suggest to you that what seems hard is very often kindness in disguise.

The real truth is, we may at any time be brought face to face with the old difficulty which the Poor Law Commissioners had to meet, and met successfully, in 1834. They were, as you saw last week, wonderfully clear-sighted and courageous men. They found this country on the verge of bankruptcy and hopelessly puzzled as to what to do with the Unemployed. The Commissioners said: "Do no more for these men except under the Workhouse Test," and the difficulty came to an end. Have we resolution and wisdom enough to leave the Unemployed to the working classes and the Poor Law? If so, there is good ground for believing that the difficulty will end. This is Miss Octavia Hill's opinion; she says: "I think I should leave this distress to the operation of the Poor Law. My personal experience is that people refuse Poor Law help and that no great harm comes of it; I have never found people starving in consequence."<sup>1</sup>

It is urged by some that the Poor Law is unpopular, and that the duties which Guardians now fulfil towards

<sup>1</sup> Evidence before Mansion House Committee, 1893.



the destitute should be delegated to Municipal Authorities and Boards of Works. What would be gained by this? Any department which did its duty to the public in dealing with the question of the Unemployed would certainly become unpopular in a week; and it surely would be an absurdity to relieve Boards of Guardians who have ample powers, or can easily get them from the Local Government Board, and whose proper business it is to deal with the matter, in order to hand it over to some other authority which has its own work to do.

IV. MEDICAL ATTENDANCE.—This is a form of Out-door relief which is much abused. Every Union has several Medical Officers to attend on the Out-door paupers. Unfortunately, as I venture to think, Out-door Medical Relief does not legally pauperize; that is to say, a man who gets what is called a Medical Order for the Parish Doctor does not lose his vote. A respectable working man generally belongs to a Sick Benefit Club or to some Provident Dispensary, and thus provides against sickness and a doctor's bill. His drunken or improvident neighbour coolly sends to the Relieving Officer for a Medical Order when he or any of his family are ill, and in a badly administered Union he gets his doctoring free, but at the cost, remember, of the provident, sober working men. In some carefully managed Unions all Medical Orders are given on loan, and the money is recovered if the Guardians think the applicants are in a position to pay. Many Relieving Officers, however, are not fond of this plan, as at first it is often troublesome to recover the loans or to take proceedings in the County Court. The applications, however, for Medical Orders where this system is in force become so very few and far between that in a short time the Relieving Officer's duties are very much lightened. In one country Union where this plan was adopted, membership in Doctors' Clubs increased by 152 per cent., and in Friendly Societies 148 per cent.; the Medical Orders have been reduced from 700 in 1872 to 36 in 1901.



Medical Orders are said by Guardians of experience to be the thin end of the wedge; people begin with them, find out how easily they are got, and then go on to ask for Poor Law Relief in other forms.

V. BURIAL.—This is the last form of Out-door relief. It is still considered a disgrace to be buried, or to allow your friends to be buried, by the parish. It is too often thought to be no disgrace to live and die a pauper, but to be buried as one is intolerable.

Now there are two distinct Schools of Poor Law Administrators.

(1) That which advocates Out-door relief as cheap and humane; (2) That which condemns it as being extravagant and cruel.

Both Schools we cannot doubt (at any rate up to the present time) are equally in earnest in desiring the real welfare of the poor.

The advocates of Out-door relief argue thus:

(1) They say, and with truth, that it costs more to keep a pauper inside the Workhouse than out of it. I suppose an indoor pauper costs almost three times as much as an out-door pauper.

(2) They say further, that it is an intolerable hardship to break up a home, and force people to go into the Workhouse. Family ties, they say, are dissolved, and the incentive to independence lessened. There is also the danger of moral degradation by association with the other inmates of the Workhouse.

The advocates of In-door Relief (who are chiefly Poor Law Inspectors and Guardians of long experience) will tell you that reflection and observation have taught them that Out-door relief is neither cheap nor humane, although they have generally begun by thinking the contrary.

They say: (1) though it is true that it costs more to keep an individual pauper inside than outside the Workhouse, yet Indoor relief is far cheaper than Out-door for this very simple reason—experience shows that Indoor relief is nearly always refused, while



Outdoor relief is eagerly accepted. Supposing a Board of Guardians had twenty fresh applications on one day for relief, and the Workhouse were offered in every case, perhaps one out of the twenty might accept that offer. But if Out-door relief were offered, the whole twenty would take it. It is a very easy sum in arithmetic which a boy in the fourth standard would laugh at, but it is quite curious how many Guardians, some of them educated persons, are quite unable to master it.

I will give you an instance. Bradfield Union is a very ordinary agricultural Union in Berkshire. Mr. Bland Garland, a man who spent his whole life in working for the poor, was Chairman of the Board for many years. He began, as I believe many Guardians begin, by thinking the more Out-door relief the better; "such a capital way of keeping the Workhouse empty!" But being clever as well as philanthropic, and after some months of quiet observation at the Board, he began to feel a little doubtful about the good which the Out-relief was doing, so he set his wits to work, and, after consultation with his fellow Guardians, he got them to agree that Out-door relief should not be granted to any fresh cases. They did not cut off those who were already having Out-door relief, unless they were drunkards or immoral, but they simply let the system die out gradually. That was in 1871. Well, in 1871 there were 1,258 paupers in the Bradfield Union, of whom 259 were in the Workhouse, 999 were out-door paupers. In 1901, exactly thirty years after, there were 125 paupers, 107 indoor and 18 out-door, although the population had increased by nearly 3,000. The expenditure in 1871 was just over £11,000—but in 1901 it had dropped to £2,251, a saving of nearly £9,000. In 1871 the Poor Rate was 2s. 4½d. in the pound, in 1901 it was just under 4d., and in other country Unions where the plan has been tried the results have been equally good. But you may fairly ask: "Did not this stoppage of Out-door relief cause a good deal of suffering to the poor?" Mr. Bland Garland feared that it might, so he put aside



out of his private income £100 a year, to be used for hard cases. The first year he spent £20, but after that year, when the people realized that there would be no more Out-door relief, they made other arrangements, and no doubt charity was ready to do her proper work; at any rate, after the first year Mr. Bland Garland's fund was hardly touched. I think this is a conclusive proof that there was no great amount of suffering caused by the cutting off of Out-door relief at Bradfield.

The fact is, *Out-door relief manufactures paupers and fills the Workhouse*. There are two Unions close together in London; one is the very rich City Union with a very small proportion of poor people in it. It had in 1901, a population of 27,617. It had 1,270 in-door paupers and 865 out-door paupers, 2,135 in all. Whitechapel, a very poor Union as you may suppose, had a population of 78,646 or 51,000 more than the rich City Union. It had 1,670 in-door paupers and 404 out-door paupers, 2,074 in all, or nearly 500 less than the richer and smaller City Union.

It is surely matter for very grave reflection that during a time of almost unprecedented prosperity, when employment has been particularly abundant, pauperism should have remained stationary in many parts of the country, and in London has actually increased. Certainly the prospect looked far brighter and more hopeful ten years ago than it does now. Before the passing of the Local Government Act of 1894, it looked as if Pauperism might gradually be dying out. A steady decrease had set in, and Poor Law workers congratulated themselves on the satisfactory progress made. The able-bodied were practically emancipated, the children were being rescued, even the aged were being slowly but surely delivered from the slavery of pauperism. There had been a blot upon the national scutcheon, for the richest nation in Europe had also been the most pauperized, and it seemed as if this blot might be wiped out. These hopes, however, were destined to be cruelly disappointed. The following



figures taken from the returns of the Local Government Board, show the actual increase in the pauperism of London from 1893 to 1900.

	Indoor.	Outdoor.	Total.
Jan. 1, 1893 ...	63,473	51,058	114,531
Jan. 1, 1900 ...	70,105	55,223	125,328
	+ 6,632	+ 4,165	+ 10,797

This increase of pauperism in London is greatly due to the reckless administration in some six or eight only of the twenty-nine Metropolitan Unions.

If Guardians have done these things in the green tree of peaceful times, prosperous trade, and plentiful employment, what, we may well ask, will they do in the tree whose gloomy shadow is already stretching over our country, that dry tree whose fruits are heavy war taxation, depressed trade, scarcity of employment, and increased expenditure in almost every department of the State.

*Now, who pay the rates?* Well, really the working people. If the rates are high, rents invariably rise. Now, supposing the Parish Councils, District Councils, and Boards of Guardians take to being extravagant, the labouring classes may be surprised to find that their rents will rise in proportion with the rates, and what is more, their wages will go down.

Another important point is this: Guardians of the Poor are not charitable almoners, but Trustees of public money. Their duty is to relieve destitution, not poverty. How are Guardians to know if a person is really destitute or not? They can only know by applying the Workhouse Test. If the Workhouse is offered and accepted, that is almost certainly a proof of destitution. But if two shillings and a loaf is offered and accepted that is no proof of destitution, in fact it is a proof that the person applying is not destitute, for no one could live on 2s. 4½d. a week with house-rent and



coals to pay for ; the person applying must have other means. Again the offer of the Workhouse, as I have said, is refused in nineteen cases out of twenty. These nineteen cases are not destitute. Guardians have absolutely no right whatever to treat the rates as a charitable fund ; it is exceedingly easy, and saves a great deal of trouble at the moment, to be charitable with other people's money, but this is not the purpose for which Guardians are elected. Half the bad Poor Law Administration in England comes from Guardians mixing up destitution and poverty in their minds, and it partly comes, I believe, from their being mis-called Guardians of the Poor. They should be called Guardians of the Destitute. Their duty as laid down by the Local Government Board, and constantly emphasized by its inspectors, has always been held to be to relieve destitution, not poverty. In August, 1900, however, a fresh departure in Poor Law Administration was made by the Local Government Board in the form of a Circular Letter, commonly known as "Mr. Chaplin's Circular." For the first time Guardians are commended for granting Out-door relief to the "Aged Deserving Poor." They are told that this form of relief, adequate in amount, is the right treatment for those who, in the vague language of the circular, "have habitually led decent and deserving lives." This circular has made it virtually impossible for a Board of Guardians to abolish out-relief, and the responsibilities of Guardians have thereby been increased. There is moreover a real danger that if this circular is acted upon, the conversion of our aged poor into paupers will be promoted and facilitated.

I think you must be satisfied that Out-door relief is not *cheap*, whatever else it may be. But I hope you will not go away from this Lecture with the idea that the chief objection to Out-door relief is that it is expensive. If it were right that the money should be spent thus, I hope as good citizens we should pay it cheerfully. But the opponents of Out-door relief say : (2) That it is *inhumane*.



Of course it would be sufficient to go back to first principles, which tell us that Poor Law Relief is not given for humanitarian reasons, but is administered simply and solely in the interests of the whole community. That, you will remember, is the first Poor Law Principle; therefore if the Workhouse Test reduces pauperism (as it undoubtedly does and always has done), and as pauperism is a great source of national weakness, we ought to abolish Out-door relief.

You hear it said: "It seems hard to drive the poor old people into the Workhouse." "Certainly," say the opponents of Out-door relief, "We quite agree with you, it would be exceedingly hard; but then they are not driven in." There were 259 paupers in the Bradfield Workhouse in 1871, but only 107 in 1901. That does not seem as if stopping Out-door relief had driven the old people in. Canon Bury, the late Chairman of the Brixworth Union, where, up to the year 1895, there had been no Out-door relief for twenty years, wrote a letter to his fellow parishioners, in which he said this: "Thirty years ago the actual number of those relieved in the Workhouse during one half-year was 177; the actual number relieved in the Workhouse during the last half-year was 106, a decrease of 71. Does not this look as if it were the Out-door Relief System which brought people to the Workhouse?"<sup>1</sup> We must remember too that the old people are far better treated in Workhouses now than they were twenty years ago.

But the opponents of Out-door relief go further than this, they declare it to be most inhumane. It is inhumane because it is inadequate. How would you like to live on threepence a day? Could you call it living at all? Yet that is the *average* for each person. Once or twice when two shillings and a loaf, or some such wretched sum, has been granted by my own Board to a luckless old man or woman, I have ventured to ask "How can

<sup>1</sup> "Out-door Relief and a 'More Excellent Way.'" Canon Bury.



they possibly live on that?" and the answer has been "Oh! they'll get on *somehow*." I am afraid "*somehow*," very often means slow starvation. I should like Guardians of this kind to try how they could "get on" on two and fourpence halfpenny a week. Some few years ago the Guardians of an East-end London parish felt that their old people were being starved on this wretched threepence a day, and they told their Officers that all the old Out-door paupers were to have a shilling a day. Seven shillings a week is £18 4s. 0d. a year, so the Guardians required a high standard of character before they would grant such large sums. The result was they soon got a very short list of respectable old paupers, and it dwindled so much that private charity, acting by the advice of the Guardians, was quite able to deal with these exceptional cases, and they got taken off the rates altogether. "But," you may say, "this is all very well in a town, how about the country?" Well, Mr. Albert Pell is a member of the Brixworth Board of Guardians, and when they abolished Out-door relief, then of course came the question of the respectable old people. He said to the squires and the richer rate-payers, "You know your poor-rate used to be twenty-four pence in the pound; now it's fourpence. You can afford to keep the very few old people who are proper objects of charity; and" he adds, "we find that argument very effectual."

As for the old people in our Workhouses, I say with Canon Bury, "Go and look for yourselves." I can only think of one old person in the Workhouse where I am a Guardian, to whom it may be a hardship, and I think if you were to talk to her you would not find her unhappy. The old people have many little privileges and comforts, and they thoroughly enjoy the gossip of the place.

Is a crowded cottage with noisy grandchildren (to whom they often have to act as nursemaid), with perhaps a tipsy son-in-law or a sharp-tongued daughter-in-law, a very cheerful, restful home for old people?



Of course I know they dread the Workhouse, and that dread is a great safeguard to the poor if they only knew it. But sometimes positively the best thing they can do is to "go in," and when the agony (for agony it often is) of the actual going in is over, they settle down and are happy and comfortable, because for one thing, all anxiety as to their future is at an end. Contrast the inmates of a clean, warm, bright Infirm Ward of one of our Workhouses with a miserable old woman, starving alone on that cruel two shillings and a loaf, helpless, liable to fall into the fire with no one to pick her out, and in an indescribable state of dirt. And remember, in spite of all Mr. Chamberlain may say, it is not true that any large number of respectable poor people come to the Workhouse. The Report of the Royal Commission on the Aged Poor has destroyed that fallacy at any rate. But if any of you come across poor old helpless creatures with no one to care for them, do not, I entreat you, do anything to keep them out of the Workhouse; rather exert any influence you may have to get them to go in.

"But," say the advocates of Out-door relief, "how about widows? You surely are not so brutal as to want to drive poor widows and their children into the Workhouse?" "No," say their opponents, "most certainly not." At Bradfield there are three widows and five children dependent on them in the Workhouse, and two of these women are persons of bad character or they would not be there. The other is weak-minded and subject to fits. A gentleman, who is not I think famous for great ferocity, the Bishop of Lichfield, is firmly persuaded that to give Out-relief to widows is not humane. He was Chairman of the Lewisham Board of Guardians for many years. I believe I am right in saying that he began Poor Law work thinking Out-door relief a very good thing, and he will tell you now that experience has shown him it is a very bad thing. Another Bishop, who was Rector of Whitechapel for many years, and probably knows more about the poor than most



people, said at a public meeting that he wished with all his heart the system of Out-door relief could be put an end to. Perhaps one reason why he spoke so strongly was that since it was done away with in Whitechapel, the Public-house trade has gone down very much. Mr. Bland Garland, of Bradfield, said, not long before his death, that one of the things he could look back upon with satisfaction was, that he had been able to make the position of the poor widows in his Union so much better. Still there is no doubt that the controversy rages at its hottest over widows.

(a) There is the old difficulty of giving *adequate* Out-relief because the applicants very rarely tell all their sources of income, so the Guardians rely on this and give the average of threepence a day.

(b) There is the discouragement to thrift. A widow if she has been left unprovided for receives an allowance from the rates, and she may be then as well off as the widow of a man who has saved.

(c) There is the fact that a widow who has to work hard for her living is not able to look after more than two children properly without overtaxing her strength. I cannot tell you how many instances I know of poor widows who have been given that cruelly insufficient allowance of a shilling and a loaf for each child, whose children are poor little half-starved creatures, anæmic, with ricketty bones from want of proper food, and bound to grow up utterly unfit for the battle of life, who will in all probability in after years come upon the rates in some form or other. Then, too, if they are boys they nearly always get into mischief because the mother has to be out all day at work; when she comes home she is tired out, the boys "get the mastery," become insubordinate, get into idle ways and often enough into the Police Court, from whence, if they are lucky, the Magistrates send them to an Industrial School. It is really far better for the Guardians to take a certain number of the children off the mother's hands and send them to a Poor Law School, leaving her with two children to bring up, and



the Guardians of the best-administered Unions do this. Of course it may be said that it is hard to separate mother and children. This is true, but children in all ranks of life have to go to school, and you will very often find that mothers are only too happy to let their children go to a charitable orphanage (which is probably nothing like so well-managed as a Poor Law School), so that really the objection is often based upon maternal pride rather than maternal solicitude.

(d) There is too, the undoubted fact that Out-door relief given to widows reduces women's wages; or as Professor Bryce says very truly "kindness to the individual is cruelty to the class." It is difficult to account altogether for the terribly low wages of women in any other way. It stands to reason that a woman who is getting three or four shillings a week from the Guardians can afford to work for less money than a woman who is getting nothing from them. Even a small number of women in receipt of parish relief can pull down the rate of wages. Mr. Crowder, a Guardian of St. George's-in-the-East, where no Out-door relief is given, says the wages of charwomen have risen in consequence; and after all it is an undoubted fact that where Out-door relief is refused, *widows and their children do not come into the Workhouse.*

There is a cruel uncertainty about Out-door relief. It depends so much on whether certain Guardians happen to be present at the Board on a particular day or not. Perhaps one day, "kind-hearted" Guardians will be there who are willing "to give to him that asketh;" while another day a few "hard-hearted" Guardians will be present, who will probably ask inconvenient questions about suppressed resources and able-bodied sons and daughters, and will not be satisfied with a slap-dash, wholesale "ladling-out" of shillings and loaves. The disappointed applicants go lamenting and begging to various Guardians asking them to "stand their friend," and perhaps at the next meeting of the Board the relief which had been



refused (probably for excellent reasons) is granted, so that really there is often great injustice and unequal dealing. The only proper answer for a Guardian to make to applicants outside the Board Room is: "Your case will be considered by the Board at its meeting." It is a very common but erroneous opinion that the Guardian of the particular parish to which the applicant belongs should decide as to the kind or amount of relief to be given. No doubt individual Guardians may sometimes be able to supplement the information given by the Relieving Officer, but the final decision rests with the Board of Guardians as a whole.

There is, too, injustice to the small ratepayers. In the winter of 1894—1895, the Guardians of the St. Olave's Union, in South London, who pledged themselves at the election of December, 1894, to give large Out-door relief, were faithful to their election promises, and their efforts at pauperizing the district met with great success. It is really surprising how much mischief a single Board of Guardians can do. Loafers were attracted from every part of London, and even from the country. The number of paupers increased by several thousand, while the rates rose in the most alarming way. Since 1891 the number of paupers in this Union has increased by more than 50 per cent. What wonder that the value of house property has been depreciated, and that those ratepayers who could afford to move left the district; while those who for various reasons could not fly from this scene of pillage, had to make up their minds to sit still to be robbed and possibly ruined.

What I think must be considered a convincing proof of the fallacy of both the arguments used by the advocates of Out-relief has been furnished by the recent and somewhat startling experience of the Brixworth Board of Guardians. Mrs. Calverley, a member of this Board, has published a little pamphlet,<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "'Looking Back:' Records of the Brixworth Union," by Mary Calverley (R. Harris & Son, Bridge Street, Northampton), price 2d.



to which, so far as I am aware, no answer has been made. It is difficult, indeed, to see what reply could be made as the facts are chiefly taken from the Report published by the Brixworth Guardians themselves. Brixworth was, up to the year 1895, what is known as an "In-door Union," that is to say hardly any Out-door relief was given. In 1895 the policy of the Board was reversed, and Out-door relief since then has been freely given. It was confidently predicted by the Out-door relief party that the rates would go down. The exact contrary has happened. On January 1st, 1893, there were 79 in-door paupers to 46 out, total 125. £888 was expended on in-door relief, £151 on out-door relief, making a total of £1,039.

In 1900, there were 67 in-door paupers and 185 out-door paupers, total 252. The expenditure on In-maintenance was £716, on Out-door Maintenance £983, total £1,699, or an increase of £660, notwithstanding a slight decrease in the population.

Another reason for getting rid of Out-door relief is this:—

The Guardians can then give their undivided attention to making the Workhouse and the Infirmary as good as possible, and their officers will be properly paid. As a rule where much Out-door relief is given, the in-door arrangements are bad and the officers are under-paid. Of course the Union cannot afford to burn the candle at both ends, and therefore the Guardians in too many cases burn it at the popular but wasteful end. But the general prosperity of the population in a district where Out-door relief is not given is remarkable, and the working-people (especially up in the North of England where they are hard-headed) are beginning to find this out for themselves. I was glad to see that Mr. John Burns had been warning a large meeting of working-men against Out-door relief, and telling them what a curse it was to them.

I will just give you two instances of the sort of people who may get Out-door relief. They are



instances taken from my own Union, and I do not for one moment suppose that this Union is worse than many others where lavish Out-door relief and a lax administration are the rule :—

A widow with several children was in receipt of Out-door relief. A few months ago she was prosecuted for keeping a disorderly house, was convicted, and sent to prison. Her children have been taken from her and are now being supported by the ratepayers or by charity.

Another case is that of an old drunken widow and her unmarried son. He lived with her and could perfectly well have maintained her if he had chosen to work ; but being a sagacious youth he did nothing of the kind, for the Guardians allowed her Out-door relief. I used to see him constantly lounging at a street corner, or loafing into a public house. A few years ago the old mother became crippled with rheumatism and entered the Workhouse, whither she was followed by her son, who died there of disease brought on by drink at the age of forty.

I could give you plenty more instances of this kind, but time will not allow of it. Of course I do not mean that all persons in receipt of Out-door relief are bad characters ; very far from it. I only say that it is wrong, and little short of a scandal, that any public money should help to support immorality, drunkenness and idleness.

I hope what I have said may show you that Out-door relief, if allowed at all, should be very carefully and cautiously given. It should under no circumstances be granted in cases—

- (1) Where one or other parent drinks, or any member of the household is leading an immoral life ;
- (2) In which a livelihood is gained by begging in the streets ;
- (3) In which the applicant is living with children and grandchildren under conditions of improper crowding ;
- (4) In which the home is dirty and insanitary ;



(5) In which young, able-bodied members of the family live at home without work ;

(6) In which relations legally liable are not doing their duty ;

(7) In which it enables applicants to undersell neighbours engaged in similar work (such as char-women) ;

(8) In which the applicants are incapable either from old age, illness, or infirmity of looking after themselves and have no one to care for them.

I need hardly say that the Administration of the Poor Law ought not to be made a political question. One cannot help seeing that certain members of all political parties are inclined to do this just now. No greater misfortune could possibly befall the country than that a large number of Members of Parliament should be returned pledged to abolish Workhouses, and to the granting of universal Out-door relief. This is a bait greedily swallowed by the agricultural labourers, who in their ignorance have no qualms as to the wisdom of a change which tends to destroy the independence of the working classes and to lower wages.

"In the next few years it will be seen," says a man who has spent his life in studying these problems, "whether the Poor Law will be so administered as to prevent pauperism, or whether it is to become once more merely an ill-administered relief association, maintained out of the rates—to cheat distress with doles, and to degrade the poor into paupers."

In spite of all I have said about the disadvantages of Out-door relief I should like to point out that where it has been freely given in a Union, it would be impossible suddenly to reverse the policy.

In all the Unions, with only one exception, where indoor relief is now the rule, the reform has been gradually accomplished after many years' steady, hard work on the part of the Guardians of those Unions, and it is more than probable that any hasty or violent change would only lead to a backward swing of the pendulum. The excellent results at Bradfield, for



instance, are due to the persevering efforts of thirty years.

If any Guardian wishes to begin the work of reform in his Union, may I advise him before doing anything else to get "The Better Administration of the Poor Law"<sup>1</sup> by Sir William Chance? It is the best modern book on this subject.

Guardians who merely sit round a table for a couple of hours once a fortnight to hear cases rattled through by their Relieving Officer, at the average speed of three or four a minute, will neither effect reforms nor reduce rates. It takes personal labour to do such things. But even if three or four Members of a Board show they are in earnest they may in time carry conviction to the minds of the others. The figures and facts are all on the side of In-door relief, but the sums must be worked out before each individual Board of Guardians, and the facts must be proved by specific cases actually in hand. Perhaps after years of labour some fruits may be seen, but they can only be the reward of a large measure of Faith in the goodwill and the good intentions and motives of our fellow-workers, of endless Hope in the possibilities of human nature, and infinite Charity towards God and man.

And here we must stop. Many important things have been left out, and as I warned you at first, it is of course impossible in three lectures to give you a complete account of our English Poor Laws. But if I have made myself clear to you, I hope you may have come to certain conclusions.

(I.) That it is far easier to create distress than to relieve it or remedy it.

(II.) That any person, whether in a private or public capacity, who in any way saps the independence of the labouring classes incurs a very serious responsibility.

(III.) That no State can afford to consider one class

<sup>1</sup> "The Better Administration of the Poor Law," W. Chance (Swan, Sonnenschein & Co.), 6s.



apart from another, and that legislation which aims at benefiting one portion of the community at the expense of the others, must be disastrous to the commonwealth.

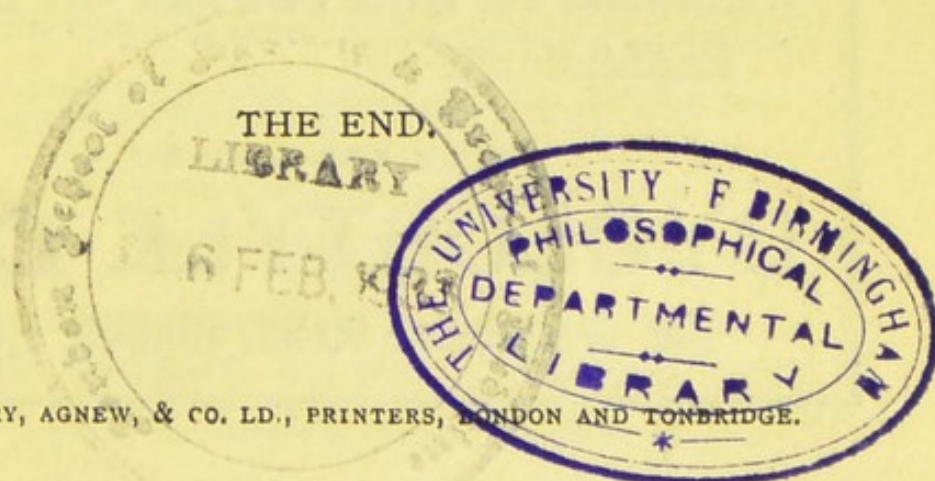
(IV.) That a State or a Union may have just as much or as little pauperism as it chooses to pay for, neither more nor less.

But the conclusions to which the working classes may come, and alas! too often do come, where there is a careless, thoughtless, and ignorant administration of State relief, are expressed in the following lines :

"What's the use of savin' when they help yer if ye're ill?  
Four 'bob' every week, Jemmy, and pay yer doctor's bill!  
There's some as abuse them Guardians, and say they're as  
hard as a stone,  
But folk comes to like 'em better, Jemmy—better the more  
they're known."

"What's the use o' savin', wi' Parson close at the door,  
And allays soup in the kitchen, and he so good to the poor.  
And a reg'lar lady up yonder wi' a sight o' money and land,  
And cold meat had for the askin', and the purse never out of  
her hand."

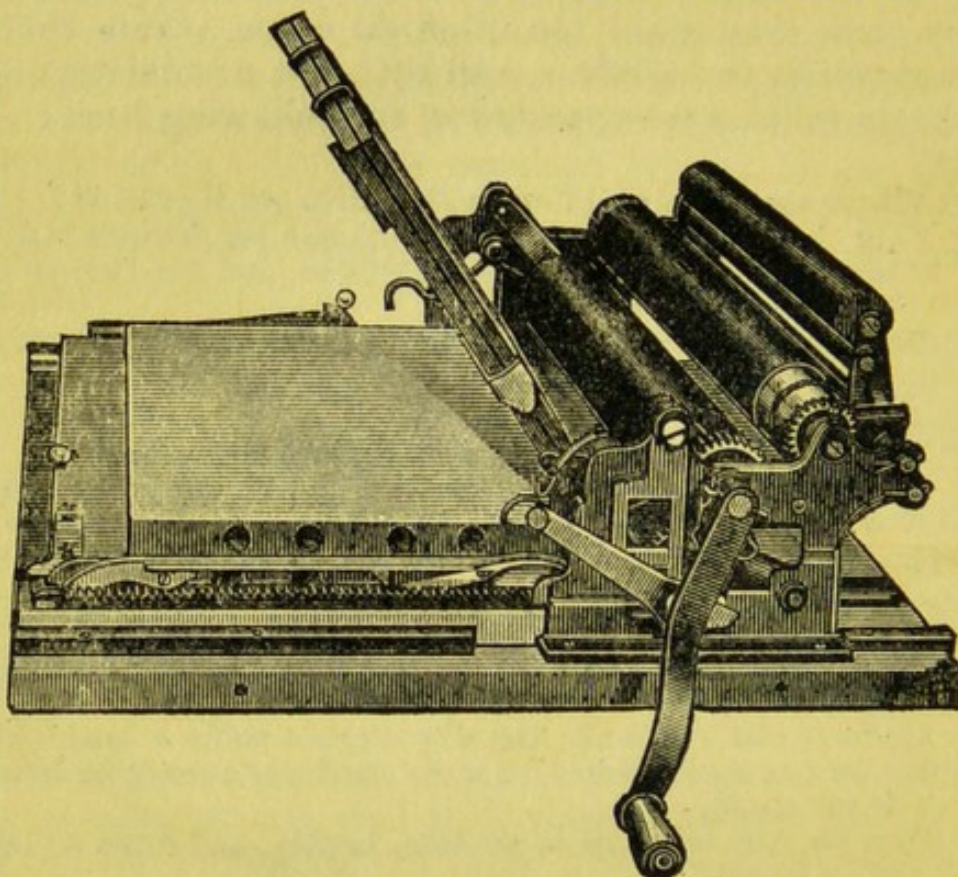
"Then what's the use o' savin'? And they bury yer too when  
ye're dead;  
Coffin o' elm, that's all; but who wants a coffin o' lead?  
So yer cannot be better for savin', and yer cannot be worse  
if yer spend,  
And its jolly o' nights to sit here, Jemmy, and drain a glass  
wi' a friend."





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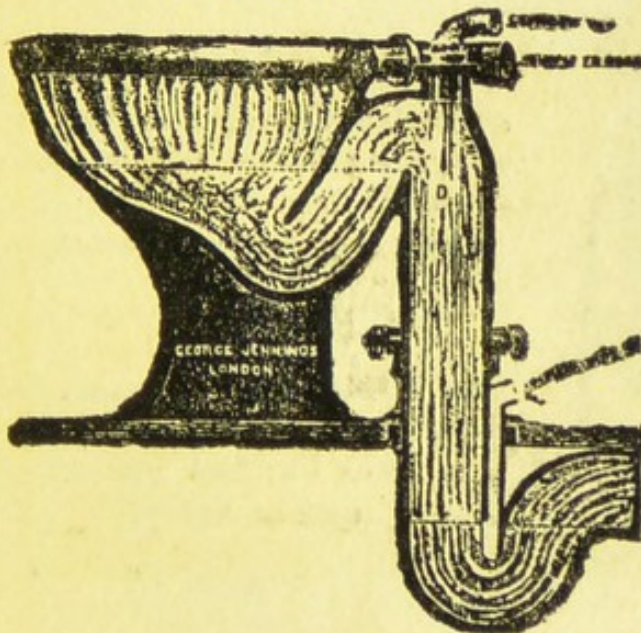
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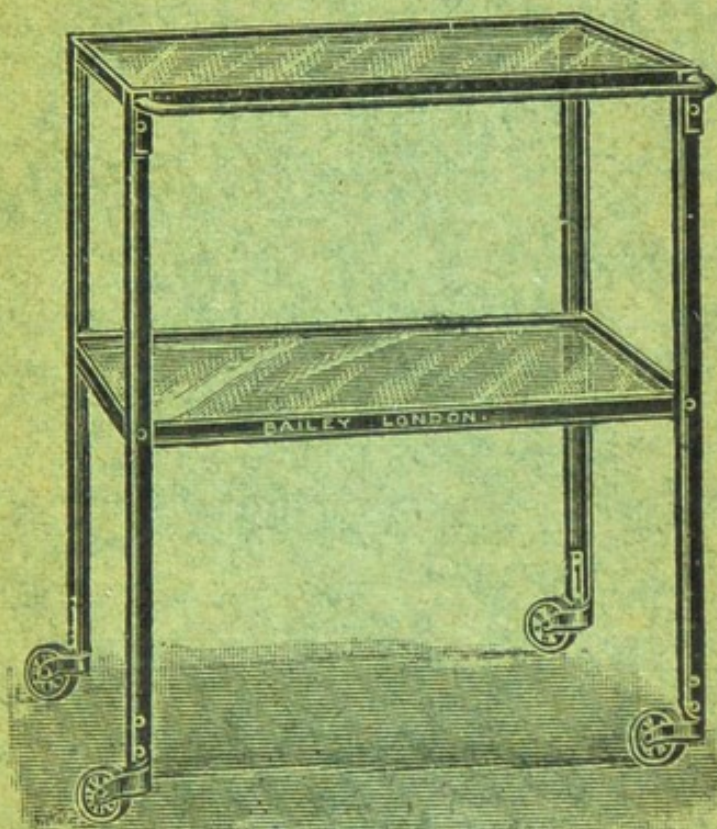
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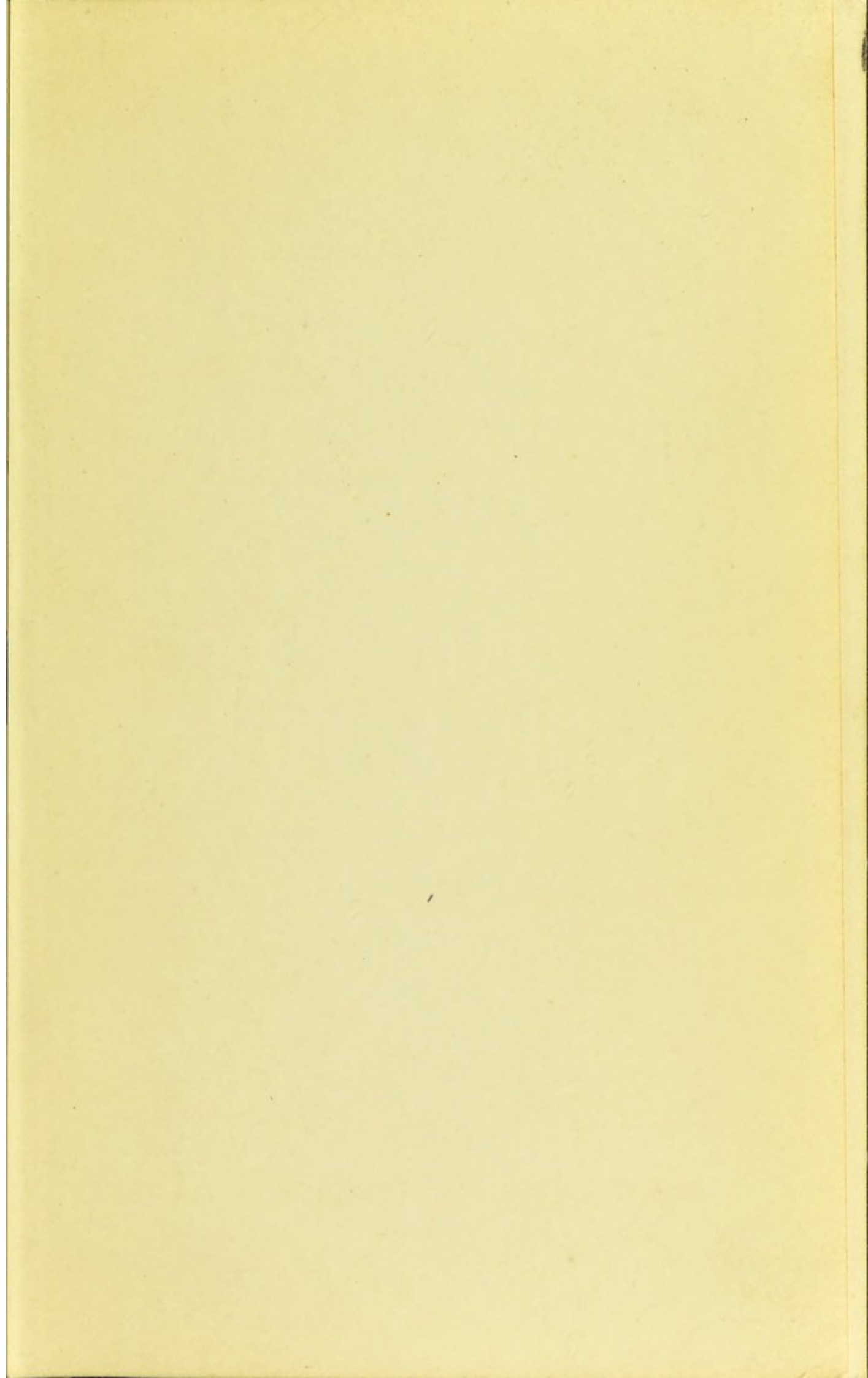
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