

Letter to the Right Honourable William Chambers of Glenormiston, Lord Provost of the City of Edinburgh, on the aims and practical working of the Association, more especially in reference to the employment of the poor / by David Curror.

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EDINBURGH ASSOCIATION FOR IMPROVING
THE CONDITION OF THE POOR.

L E T T E R

TO THE

RIGHT HONOURABLE WILLIAM CHAMBERS

OF GLENORMISTON,

LORD PROVOST OF THE CITY OF EDINBURGH,

ON THE

AIMS AND PRACTICAL WORKING OF THE ASSOCIATION,
MORE ESPECIALLY IN REFERENCE

TO

THE EMPLOYMENT OF THE POOR,

BY

DAVID CURROR,

CONVENER OF THE EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE.



1868.



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L E T T E R.

MY LORD,

I take the liberty of now addressing your Lordship, because schemes of practical benevolence have been the characteristic of your official reign. You are yourself one of the largest employers of labour in the Metropolis, and you have done most, of all men in it, to improve the city, and to maintain the employed in employment. Your Lordship has, therefore, a perfect appreciation of the objects and aims of this Society, which originated with yourself,—and will, I feel persuaded, not deny the Society the trouble of perusing these details, and of promoting, with your usual energy, the suggestions therein made, so far as they commend themselves to your riper judgment.

The more zealous people are, the more firmly do they believe that their particular work is the most important work of all; and the Employment Committee of this Society forms no exception to the general rule; so far, at least, as the members of it believe that their department of the Society's work is the most important of all the Society's operations. In that belief, the Committee purpose to invite a conference with the employers of labour (over which your Lordship has kindly consented to preside), in the hope, by mutual consultation, of getting such light as will guide them on their course of action, and will enable them to succeed in the work which they have undertaken.

As, however, the Society's organization, objects, and operations seem to be misunderstood, and, in consequence, to be

generally misstated even by those who, with a better understanding thereof, would be the first to lend a hand in promoting the good work, it may be as well to look these objections frankly in the face at the outset, and before touching on the more immediate objects for which the conference is to be held.

There are few of the members who have not been met with the remark, that the Society must necessarily become a failure,—and why? Because, say some citizens of acknowledged benevolence, it professes to relieve the lapsed classes; but the lapsed classes are just the legal poor. If the Society relieves them, it relieves the rates. But the funds of the Association do not come from rates, but from benevolence. Practically, then, in carrying out the mission the Society has assigned to itself, it just makes the benevolent rate-payer pay so far the rates of the unbenevolent rate-payer; inasmuch as it relieves the unbenevolent rate-payer of so much money he would legally be obliged to pay, to relieve, through the Poor's Board, the lapsed classes the Society relieves from benevolence. The benevolence of Edinburgh, say they, will stand much squeezing, but the proposal of the Society is so manifestly unjust, that it requires only to be stated to terminate subscriptions and the Association too.

At first sight the objection of these admittedly good and worthy citizens seems formidable. But on a closer examination, it will be found that it is based upon erroneous impressions of what the scope and objects of this Association truly are. Not only can this Association co-exist with the legal poor-rate, but it can, and if carried out in the spirit of its constitution will, become a great help to the proper administration of a legal poor-rate. Not only do this Society's operations not conflict with the legal Poor Law administration, but its practical result—apart altogether from higher considerations affecting the individuals who, but for it, must have become paupers—is to save from pauperism, and with it the rates which the pauperism it saves would have consumed; and as “once pauper, aye pauper,”—the preserving of whole families

to be agents of production who would have become the idle consumers of others industry, and life-burdens on the ratepayers.

May I ask your Lordship to look for a moment at legal pauperism as it is, and at the objects which it professes to relieve, and those which this Association proposes to take under its protection. The country is at present agitated from end to end and side to side with political and social questions. Communities and individual electors deem these questions important or unimportant, according to their particular point of view. May I be permitted, from my twelve years' experience of the Poor Law administration of the metropolitan parish, to say, that one of the questions least mooted in this agitation—I mean pauperism—is, in my opinion, the most important social question of the day. The year after the passing of the Poor Law Amendment Act, 1845, the whole roll of paupers in Scotland numbered 68,541, and there were in addition 26,894 of casual poor relieved during the year. The whole cost to the nation of relieving them was £303,329. The population of the country was, by the census of 1841, 2,620,000. Last year the roll of paupers and their dependents had increased to 164,404, and in addition there were 91,176 of casual poor and their dependents relieved during the year, making the paupers relieved in Scotland for the year to May 1867, 255,580. The cost to the nation of their relief and maintenance was £807,361, 5s. 6½d., and the population at last census was 3,062,294. In a period of peace and great national prosperity, the rapid increase of pauperism and the cost of its maintenance to the nation—out of all proportion to the increase in the population—instructs that the system which thus grows so rankly is radically wrong at the core, and calls loudly for a radical change in its nature and treatment. In other thirty years, under the existing system unameliorated, it is fearful to contemplate the consequences to the nation—the scourge of pauperism has been felt smartly in the past, but if not ameliorated, will drive the nation and its resources to desperation in the future,

and ere long the difficulty may be to distinguish between the rate-payer and rate-recipient.

The existing state of pauperism, and the consequences and the natural result of a legal Poor Law system, have been prophesied, and the prophecy iterated and reiterated since legal Poor Laws were enacted. The system, by creating the object it undertakes to relieve, is self-productive, and hence it must increase. It never can come to an end. This is no new discovery. Mr Pitt, in speaking on the English Poor Law Bill of 1796, said just what is experienced to-day, "The Poor Law had at once increased the burden of the poor, and taken from the collective resources of the State to supply wants which its operation has occasioned, and to alleviate a poverty which it tended to perpetuate." Malthus, writing on the same subject, says:—"The Poor Laws diminish the power and the will to save among common people, and thus weaken one of the strongest incentives to sobriety and industry, and, consequently, to happiness." Sir Francis Eden—"The sum of good to be expected from a compulsory maintenance of the poor will be far overbalanced by the sum of evil which it will inevitably create." Dr Burns says, in 1819, "It has been found from experience to hold true that the number of the poor increase in exact proportion to the legalised provision that is made for them." The Rev. Mr Jerram, who had given much consideration to the English system, says:—"The Poor Law creates the very evil of which it professes to be the remedy, and holds out a premium to idleness, improvidence, and profligacy, by securing all the advantages which would be derived from sobriety, prudence, and industry. It stands directly opposed to the order of nature and the government of God himself, by destroying the connection between vice and its appropriate punishment. It proceeds on the principle of injustice, and in its operations is the most cruel and oppressive; and to crown the whole, it tends to universal pauperism and national ruin." Dr Chalmers, in 1843, just before the Scotch Amendment Act was passed, said the Poor Law "must slacken the

operation of the strongest law of nature, even the law of self-preservation. It tends to supersede the care and industry which, but for its own mischievous and seducing influence, a man might have otherwise put forth, in labouring to realise sufficiency for himself and his children. It is a law of exemption from toil, from prudence, from foresight and economy, from every restraint on the gratification of present and powerful appetites, and from all those busy expedients wherewith a man who is left to depend on himself devises for the security and advancement of his own condition in the world." The Poor Law, which "is a universal guarantee against starvation, operates towards a universal relaxation of industry and providential habits among the families of the land. It is a law in the constitution of the country which, by superseding a wiser and a better law in the constitution of human nature, has depressed the condition of the lower orders in society, and aggravated tenfold the poverty which it had vainly proposed to do away." The present Chairman of the Board of Supervision said, in 1849, that the Poor Law as at present administered, "fosters pauperism, increases poor-rates, and deteriorates the character of the population." And Mr Paterson, the recent writer on National Wealth, says, "the idle poor are a misery to themselves and a burden and a danger to the community. Poverty breeds crime, as well as exacts rates. The more poverty, the more thefts and robbery—the more poor-rates, the more discontent with society—poverty creates a hostile body which wars with the rest of the community. Experience proves that no increase of trade converts any portion of our millions of paupers into productive agents. Every individual raised out of idleness into a productive agent makes the political fabric stronger, the social body happier, and the national wealth greater." Have the prophecies of the past not been fulfilled in the experience of the present? The *system* is bad—wholly bad—and the outcome national ruin if the scourge is not soon stayed. This Society may not be able to stay it in this parish, but it is an honest and zealous attempt at doing so which cannot fail to

result in some reformation and amelioration of the existing system; and, if sufficiently supported, by thoughtful and zealous men, may attain most of the objects contemplated on its institution.

Such men cannot fail to have observed, that poverty naturally divides itself into three great classes:—(1.) The poor who are poor by the allotment of Providence. That is the “cruicked folk, seek folk, impotent folk, and weak folk,” of the old Scotch Poor Law Act, and embracing in the description “old folk” and “daft folk.” These are the poor that are never to cease out of the land. The burden of their relief is light, and not disagreeable to bear in any Christian community.

(2.) The poor who are poor in consequence of accident, or the visitation of God prostrating their energies for a time, but who were not born to be poor,—such as the working bread winner of a family who meets with an accident at his work, and is laid aside from it for awhile. Nothing is coming in, and the little he had spared from the immediate wants of his family is soon exhausted; and when exhausted, his family, under the Poor Law system, seek relief from the Parochial Board, and get it. Once broken in spirit to seek what he has not wrought for, he continues on the Board, and under the present system he and his become permanent paupers. A family driven to abide in some of the hovels your Lordship is razing from the face of old Edinburgh, may be visited with fever, and the same process goes on till the whole family get upon the poor’s roll, and, as “once pauper, aye pauper,” become permanent burdens on the rates, and so all of them become paupers by accident.

(3.) The third and last class is what may be called self imposed pauperism. These are the sorners, the sturdy beggars of the old Scotch Acts, who are able but most unwilling to work; and to repress whom the old Scotch Acts were passed, and the sturdy pains and penalties therein specified inflicted.

The present Poor Law system deals with these three classes

together generally under one roof, one regimen, and one employment if employed at all, which they seldom are. But enlightened humanity at a glance perceives that the classes are very different, and would prescribe a treatment proper for each class. Here it is that the province of this Society bulks out manifestly, and where the answer to the objection stated at the outset appears.

The first class is worthy of and deserves all the care and attention which enlightened humanity and Christian philanthropy can show them. They are God's legacy committed and commended to their more prosperous brethren. In my view, they and they only are the proper objects of indoor parochial relief, and for their sakes the existing pauper *keeps* into imbeciles' *homes*, where the same care and attention bestowed in the family circle on an aged or imbecile relation would be extended to them. At present, if out of hospital, they are classed mainly according to age and sex, and are kept and fed together on the principle that each class can have but one feeling, one faculty of enjoyment, one sense of taste and calibre of stomach, one dress, one diet, and one destiny. We hear of hard and fast lines; but no lines I know of are so hard and fast, and cold to boot, as those that tie the pauper in the pauper-house. Neither taste nor feeling is consulted, or can be gratified; and, besides, however decent they may individually be, they are massed with and disturbed by the dissolute. Now I say, this is not indicative of the wisdom that commands the blessing, the wisdom that wisely doth the poor man's case consider. "Nice discrimination cannot enter into the operations and practice of officials, or into accounts which must be kept with rigid strictness and wholesale uniformity; nor that fine elastic touch be applied of sympathy and vital charity which discriminates the pulse of misery in its infinite variety, discerns the real seat of the wound and applies the oil and the balm with a truth and a touch as exact, as tender, and as delicate. But all stomachs must be of the same size, all appetites must relish the same

food on the same days of the week, all maladies and sores and accidents of life must be healed by the same medicine. Is such a system creditable to our Christianity"? It is not ; but the suggestion I have ventured to throw out would place the Bible poor in very different circumstances, and would bring them as near up to the mark of rational comfort as in the poors-house system and present state of society, seems practicable. Let the present poors-houses, if continued, then, become homes for the Bible poor, and let Christians consider the case of each and administer accordingly to his wants out of the legal rates, and thereby satisfy the demands of our common Christianity as respects them.

The second class are the appropriate objects of this Society's care, and it is to the relief of them the machinery of the Association applies. See the aid such a Society as this could bring to these sufferers, to the ratepayer, and to the nation at large ! The poor working man breaks his leg, and is taken to the Infirmary, where everything that medical science can do for him is done. He remains there till cured. A week, or a month, before he is able to go to work again, his all has been consumed by his wife and family at home. He cannot work as yet for them, but, with true Scotch independence, is ready so do so the moment he is able. The family cannot starve till he is able, though only for a week. They go to the parish, and get an allowance for the wife and each of the children. Once there, they never forget the way back. The bread winner recovers, but in the meantime his spirit is broken—his family have found a way of living without incessant toil from him. He is not so able to work. He becomes not so willing; by accustoming himself to a pauper's dole, and the whole family become permanent paupers on the roll. But it is the province of this Society to step in, by their visitors, at the outset, to enquire into the circumstances of the family, to tide them over their present necessities. The visitor sees the family, reports who of the lads and lasses are fit to do some light work. The members of the Association see their names in the Society's books, and employment is found for those that

are able, while help is afforded to those who are unable, and sincere and seen sympathy is felt for all. The industrious man, as he recovers, has his name recorded in the Society's books also, and fitting work is found for him as soon as he can undertake it. His spirit is unbroken. His children have not known a pauper dole, and the brand of pauperism is not on them. He is restored to his family in a condition equal—it may be better than he left it, and he and his house continue on their way rejoicing, and all become worthy and productive labourers in the world's vineyard. Is there not a mission, and a great mission, for this benevolent Society then—the mission of simply helping the poor, who are poor by accident, to help themselves? And in discharging that mission, besides other and higher considerations, have they not the satisfaction of knowing that they are making the political fabric stronger, the social body happier, and the national wealth greater. This, then, is the appropriate province of this Society. In saving such families from the pauper roll, they are saving the sufferers, the rate-payer, and the nation. If, in their visitations, the visitors find cases appropriate only for the Poor's Board, they are bound by their constitution to refuse them relief, but bound also to see that they get the relief the law gives them. There is no conflict between the legal Poor Law and the laws and practice of this Association. They become essential and material helps when properly understood, the one to the other, and therefore the objection stated at the outset is an objection based on lack of knowledge of this Society's province and range of operations, which the light of fact at once dispels.

The third class are the worst of all the classes to manage, and have formed the plague of legislators for centuries, and of all parochial boards since they came into existence. But there is a mode of management with reference to them too—a test which, if applied in sincerity and honesty, will, in my humble apprehension, cure them to a very great extent of their besetting disease, and make them also productive agents—at least prevent them from continuing idle consumers, to the same extent

as at present, of the industry of other people. But, as it is in this class that all the difficulties of the situation centre, I must ask consideration to some general principles which have obvious application to the class, and to the benevolent, before indicating the reformation proposed. Christians have the best authority for holding, that if a man, who is able, will not work, neither should he eat. They have the same authority for holding that, if a man works in quietness, he will eat his own bread, for there is much food in the tillage of the poor. Here then these general principles are established—(1) that, if the able will be idle, he ought to starve; and it follows that it is not benevolence to reverse the Apostolic injunction, and (2) that if the idle, who are able, will work, he will not starve, but eat his own bread; and it follows that true benevolence truly and best discharges itself of its obligations in reference to the idle, when it finds them work; and, having done so, all legitimate demands on it are satisfied.

I have seen it asserted somewhere, and with some authority, that give an able-bodied willing man work, materials, tools, and space, he will, without over-exerting himself, work for the food of nine. And there are many families where the returns from the work of one man provide food and raiment for as many mouths, without grumbling on the part of either giver or receiver.

Keeping these general principles in view, take these facts along with them. During the year to May 1867, there were in the City Poors-house altogether 4,135 souls—the daily average being 604. During the course of that year, the gross returns from the productive labour of these inmates amounted to £498, 5s. 2½d., being a gross produce of 2s. 2½d. for the labour of each soul in the house during the year, or 15s. 2d. of a gross produce from the year's work of each of the 604 who, on an average, were daily maintained in it. 15s. 2d. is about 10 days' wages of an ordinary out-door female worker, so at present an ordinary out-door female worker makes as much in 10 days as a Poors-house inmate makes in 365 days. The most of the pauper children are boarded out, but there are

always a few in the house, and there are also a number falling under class No. 1, who, from old age and infirmity, are as unable to work as the children. Estimating the numbers who are truly unable to work, at one-third of the whole inmates, we have 400 left, able to do something, and who would be much better employed than idle. Given work, materials, tools, and space, probably one-fourth of them would work with ease to the value of their own food ; another fourth could work for the food of himself and another ; and the remaining 200 could work 200 days each per annum, and make the wages of an out-door female worker, or say 1s. 6d. a-day. Throwing out of view meantime the returns from all but the 200 last mentioned,—had work, tools, and space been given them during the last year, they would have made towards their own support and that of the house the no inconsiderable sum of £3000, and would have saved just £2500, or 10 per cent. of the rates, to the parish. So employed, self-imposed pauperism would aid in its own support, save rates, secure personal happiness and contentment to the worker and to the government of the house, and increase the national wealth. But more self-imposed pauperism would meet with a salutary check. The idle and dissolute, made sensible that he must work to live *in* the house, would rather work for payment *out* of it ; and though he squandered what he made, which is very likely, he would only squander his own, and not the produce of others' industry, as at present. Moreover, he would learn to work in the house, and he would take his education with him out of it, and if he did work when out he would not need to return ; and in this way the work *in* the house would work him *out* of the House and *off* the rates. It is thus seen that true charity is directed to starve the idle, who are able and who will not work, to find work for the eident who want it, and that—work, tools, and space being found—the result is self-support and national wealth.

At first sight, then, the course of duty would appear clear—find work, materials, tools, and space, and self-imposed pauperism (class No. 3) will sustain itself, and the demands on

charity be discharged. But there are objections first to be met before some will take that for granted.

The first objection is, our Scotch system is different from the English. The English relieve able-bodied poor. The Scotch do not. The Scotch have no able-bodied inmate, or, if they have, he should not be in the house—he ought to be discharged. There is no work among Scotch paupers worth employing, beyond hair or oakum teasing; and therefore the idea, feasible as it may appear, is impracticable with, and inapplicable to, the class of *thowless* mortals in Scotch Poor-houses. Now, this objection is based on a simple matter of fact, which any one has the means of satisfying himself of by a visit to the Poors-house of this parish any day of the week. I have been through many of the English workhouses, and I could not distinguish between the classes in them and the classes in the City Poors-house. They are exactly the same sort of individual, their powers in some respects impaired, but most of them able to work a good hand's-turn, who are adults and out of hospital. Glancing over the people in the City Poors-house on a New-year's morning, when all are assembled, will be found rows upon rows of males and females able if willing to work, and who might be employed profitably for themselves and the parish—those who have been tradesmen at the work of their own trade, and those who have learned no trade in digging the earth, or in other out-door field labour; while the women are mostly able to sew, knit, wash, dress linen, and many other female occupations. I maintain, without fear of being contradicted by the fact when seen, that the proportions I have stated of those able if willing to work is under, and not over, the mark. The fact seems to be that the house is filled more with those who are unable to weather society out of it through weakness of mind than weakness of body, and, like all else in nature, the weaker are thrust to the wall to let the stronger pass. It is not so much the want of physical power to work, as the want of mind to direct the work they are fit for, and where to get it, that has drawn our inmates from the outer world indoors.

But, moreover, for want of work and space within the present City Poor-house, 2000 paupers are now receiving outdoor relief, the most of whom would be better indoor, and all of whom (with, it may be, a rare exception) are able to work for their meat. The objection, then, is removed by the fact on which it is based being the opposite of that assumed.

The next objection is, "Well, well, there may be work in them, but they won't work; they would destroy more than they would turn to good account: And it would be throwing away money to provide shops and materials for such a class of incorrigible idlers." I don't believe in this. Man is naturally lazy, I admit; but there are spurs to exertion out of the house that could be applied in. The industrious inmate will be provided with many little luxuries that the idler won't have. He will be entitled to a good solid meat diet when the idler will be served with skerry. They eat their food at the same table. The luxuries earned will be enjoyable and enjoyed, the skerry will become most unenjoyable beside the better fare; the lout that won't be driven to what is right will be drawn by his stomach, and I am very much mistaken in my notions of the class, whose stomach has brought the most of them to need the house, if very many of them will long withstand the temptation to become industrious, thus seen and felt three or four times every day. My ideas of the class may be wrong, but the attempt is worth making, seeing the benefit to the country to arise from even a percentage of them becoming productive agents. But, even if the attempt should fail, you will see by and by a compulsitor suggested to meet that contingency.

Meantime, assuming that the attempt to convert idle consumers into agents of production is worth trying, is there a field on which to try it? There is. Not only is there abundant space, but there is abundant work for skilled and unskilled paupers also, and the parish can surely find materials and tools. Moved by considerations something like those I have already attempted to state, and urged on by the Board of Supervision, who, if they did not absolutely condemn the

present Poors-house, made it perfectly plain to the Parochial Board, that they would not long sanction so very insufficient a house as a Poors-house under the Act, the Parochial Board of the City Parish resolved to seek a site for a new house out of the city, where, for a reasonable sum, they could get large space. Accordingly, two years ago, the Board acquired the estate of Craiglockhart within a mile of Edinburgh, and have now all but finished the erection of a new and spacious house in the centre of a forty-acre field for the reception and entertainment of the legal poor. It seems very absurd, but nevertheless it is the fact, that in this mansion every modern sanitary arrangement that can add to the health and bodily comforts of the inmates is to be found. The house itself is situated in one of the finest localities for any house, away from public works and other sources of impurity to the air, and is to be surrounded with gardens bearing fruits and flowers in their season. And this house, so constructed and situated, has been erected for the reception of whom? To no inconsiderable extent of the idle and dissolute destroyer of other people's industry; and by whom? To some extent, at least, by the horn-fisted hand labourer of the parish, who is himself doomed to occupy a miserable ill-aired and confined house in the Old Town. In connection with this house are to be erected washing-houses, with bleaching and drying-greens, and workshops for skilled labour. There will be 30 acres around the house in garden ground under cultivation. Besides that, there are 150 to 200 acres which can either be farmed, let to the public for grazings, or disposed of, as thought best and most advantageous to the parish. The property is now parish property. There is abundant space, then, now at the public disposal for satisfying our Bible poor, and for also employing 200 and more sturdy beggars in fitting productive industry. And they can never run out of work suitable to the strength and working power of each, be it but a remnant of what it once had been. Take a turn through the present house, and what do you see? Strings of thowless mortals without thought or object. No employment—"unavoidable idleness—a waste of human life

and energy. Walk up and down the dreary wards—observe the listless faces of the inmates. Count their numbers—ask their histories, and then come to the conclusion, if you can, that the country is doing the best it can for the poor.” Take a turn through the new house and grounds, when opened and in operation, and what may you expect to see?

The pauper baker baking the bread of the house.

The pauper cook cooking the victuals.

The pauper weaver weaving the cloth.

The pauper tailor making the garments.

The pauper shoemaker making the shoes.

The pauper mason pointing the walls.

The pauper painter ornamenting them.

The pauper slater on the roofs.

The pauper plumber upholding the rhones.

The pauper wright making the various utensils required in the house connected with his craft.

The pauper smith sweating at the anvil.

The pauper gardeners working and weeding.

The pauper farmer sowing and reaping.

The pauper old wives keeping the infants.

The pauper young wives washing, or working in the garden or fields.

And the unskilled labourers, male and female, weeding, reaping, and at many other turns which an intelligent management will readily find and point out; and, in the midst of all the joyous song of industry, displacing the sulks of the City Poorhouse. But there may not be work for so many. Why not? The mechanical arts need not be limited to the house's necessities. In the wrights' shops may be produced in a substantial form, tables, chairs, barrows, troughs, gates, implement handles, and numerous other useful articles, at all times commanding a price in a country place. In the smith's shop, the number of useful articles that might be made, in white and black iron, suitable to country work, are many. The shoemaker, tailor, and weaver might produce for the public, while the females might wash and dress, sew and knit

for them also; and the gardeners and farmers might produce fruits and vegetables sufficient to supply the City New Markets and all who frequent them; and, finally, if other unskilled labour did run out, there is everlasting granite in Craiglockhart hills to convert into road metal. There is work then for all; and, although there was not on Craiglockhart, there will at all times be in the neighbourhood, and there is no reason why the farmers should not, when such labour is required, employ what can be had in the Poors-house, seeing that their doing so would be a saving in rates, inasmuch as the proceeds of their labour would go to reduce rates. An example of this kind would be worthy of the metropolitan parish. Other parishes would follow it. The mass of poverty in the country would soon fall into its proper class, and be appropriately treated and cared for; and one result would be that, while begging would become unknown in Scotland, as it is in some parts of the Continent, sturdy begging would be repressed, the Bible poor cared for in a manner worthy of our Christian profession, and the poor, who are poor by accident, would be sustained in their citizenship and kept from lapsing into pauperism.

I am aware of the objection that has been raised to so employing paupers,—viz., that their work would compete with the work of the rate-payer, and reduce the price in the market. The notion seems very absurd. What tradesmen deserving of the name would fear the competition of Poors-house mechanical produce? But, although it did, the ratepayers are to get a greater benefit; and, if the parish could make or mend cheaper than the ordinary tradesman, why should not that tradesman send in his work to be made cheaply too, and while the public would get the benefit of the cheap labour, his legitimate profit need not be impaired. I admit that, in husbandry and gardening, Poors-houses have always been able to compete, and generally to beat the best products of the outsider; and I hope the Craiglockhart market gardens will produce in quantity enormous, and in quality most excellent; so that this great city may never want for

the best fruits and vegetables the country can produce, at moderate prices, and the profits be such that poors-rates among market gardeners may become unknown. But the objection seems to me unworthy of serious thought. This is not the age to return to trade protection in the sense indicated.

My Lord, I have taken you a long road, but I hope your Lordship will excuse the journey for the sake of the blinks of the healthy and wholesome which have glinted across our path by the way. Our terminus, however, is here. There is a great mission for the parochial boards of this country—the mission of tending and staying the Bible poor, and of making productive agents of sturdy idlers. And there is a great mission for this Society also—the mission of sustaining the poor by accident, and their dependants, and of extending to them that greatest of all practical benevolence—the help that is needed to help them to help themselves. The machinery of the existing Poor Law Act is, or may be made, fitting for the parochial missions, while the constitution of this Society is peculiarly well adapted to meet the demands of its own mission. There is no conflict—there may be great mutual help—but, rightly understood, there need be no collision.

It has been objected to this simple, common sense, and practical view of pauper treatment, that the sturdy will not work, and there is no power of compulsion. I am not so sure of that—the old Scotch Acts are amended, but not repealed. But, were it necessary, the requisite power would not be denied by the Legislature in the new Parliament; and fears of that sort need not stand in the way of the attempt being now made to effect a thorough reformation and amelioration of the existing Poors-house system, a system that entails upon the industrious the burden of maintaining his idle fellows in idleness, in one of the finest mansions in the best locality of this city of palaces, while he himself may be doomed to occupy the ill-constructed, worse ventilated, and confined upper rooms of a confined tenement, in a confined close, it may be, in the Old Town.

Objections too, are never wanting to any scheme that has the appearance of novelty in it. But there is no novelty here. It is a fair application of the spirit of the Poor Law Acts. It is just the mode of treating the poor adopted in France, where a beggar is not to be found. There every soul who cannot point to his home and industrial occupation, is at once taken before the magistrate, and sentenced to labour for the parochial boards. Two or more parishes unite, and take or purchase a farm, and to that farm he is sent, where labour is provided for him. By the expiry of his sentence he has learned to work, and he can ever afterwards point to his home and industrial occupation, and is no longer liable to be had up by the police.

I see that emigration has been suggested as the universal cure of idleness. But it has been suggested, on the other hand, that emigration is no cure. It spreads the disease world-wide. There is, it is said, work enough in the United Kingdom for all the idle poor. Let idlers be taught to work before sending them elsewhere, and there is work for them. Thousands of acres might be reclaimed from bog and mire, and as many more from the sea. Let Government prepare systematic plans of operations, and employ the million of paupers in the nation in carrying these out systematically and bit by bit. In a short time, work, food, and the means of increasing it, would, some think, be found in company with peace in Ireland. Follow the example of Holland, and go systematically to work, and reclaim tracts of land from the sea, and, in a few years, thousands of acres, now producing nothing, would grow food for the people, and might be sold to repay the cost to the country. The idle would become workers, the works would enlarge the national borders, and would bring the workers food. The political fabric would become stronger, the social body happier, and the national wealth greater.

In carrying out the mission committed to the Employment Committee of this Association, they have invited a conference with all employers of labour. With hearty co-operation on

the part of the employers of labour, and especially of juvenile and unskilled labour, the Committee apprehends no difficulty in succeeding with their department of the Society's organisation. Their mode of operations is simply to keep a record in the office, into which the names of all applicants desiring employment should be entered. A remit will be made in every case to the Society's visitors, who will make a strict enquiry into the antecedents of the applicant, particularly as regards the trade he has been employed in, the employers he has served, and his character, especially as regards honesty, sobriety, and industry. The visitor's report will be entered in the register opposite the applicant's name, and employers will be invited to select from that register such applicants as appear suitable. In this way the employer would have such guarantee as a strict enquiry by the visitors would give of the character and qualifications of every individual on the Register, before entering into any engagement with him. Such a Register would also be a check on the workman, as his name would be liable to be removed from it, should he at any time misconduct himself.

These, my Lord, are the objects sought to be attained; and, with the aid of the employers of labour and the public, they are attainable. The Committee, accordingly, invite the cordial co-operation of all; and, that secured, there is secured with it the exercise of the truest benevolence to the poor by accident, who were not born to be paupers, and who, if success attends the effort, never will be paupers, but honest independent members of Society, earning their own bread, and filling their proper station in the social scale. The end to be gained is worthy of some exertion. May I be permitted to commend it to the best attention of your Lordship, and of all other truly benevolent and sensible members of the community; and, at the same time, invite the frankest expressions of all opinions, however different from those indicated, on the best means of securing employers for the unemployed, especially of those on the books of this Association. Willingly will the Employment Committee, over which I have the

honour to preside, accede to any suggestions calculated to attain that object. The Committee's sole and only end is to ascertain, and then do what is right in spirit and in practice, and their best thanks will be due and accorded to all who may be instrumental in lighting them to it.

I have the honour to remain, with expressions of sincere regard,

MY LORD,

Your Lordship's humble Servant,

D. CURROR,

*Convener of the Employment Committee
of the Association for Improving
the Condition of the Poor.*

25 NORTHUMBERLAND STREET,
October 16, 1868.