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Welfare

Poorhouses

and

"Charity"



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SOME THOUGHTS ON

Poorhouses and "Charity."

The distribution of poor relief in Ontario has hitherto been largely a matter of private benevolence and neighborly kindness, supplemented, under special conditions, by aid from the municipal council. But with the growth and development of cities there is a tendency to fall back upon the charity methods of the Old World, and to build up, unconsciously, a system that encourages a spirit of thriftlessness and consequent pauperism. In a country with such marvellous resources of forest and mine—not to speak of agricultural advantages—there should be ample employment for all who are able to work, and only the few who are incapacitated by the infirmities of age should need assistance. There is, unfortunately, however, a class who, from inherent laziness, will not work or make any effort to improve the condition of themselves or their children. These people by their appeals to the sympathy of the benevolent manage to impose upon the country a system of poor relief that probably does at least as much harm as good.

In the Toronto papers of May 19th, 1905, the following item was given:

TO ENLARGE POORHOUSE.

CITY WILL SPEND \$10,000 ON AN ADDITION TO THE INSTITUTION.

The Board of Control has instructed the City Architect to prepare plans for an addition to the House of Industry. It will cost about \$10,000.

Toronto's poorhouse is located in the centre of the city, and in the district where the poor are most thickly crowded together. It is therefore much in evidence, and is apt, I fear, to prove a substantial assurance to the foreigners crowding in that they will be taken care of and boarded at the public expense whenever they feel disposed to apply. Not long ago it was doubled in size and now comes the announcement of another enlargement. It is a natural law that such an institution should be frequently enlarged, for the invariable rule in charity is that the more poor relief the more paupers. Charity never permanently relieves distress, but on the contrary aggravates and increases it by taking away the self-respect and independence of the recipient. Anyone having the best interests of the poor at heart cannot help but feel somewhat alarmed at the proposed enlargement, and while all may not agree with these views it will at least not do much harm to call public attention to the danger.

ENGLISH WORKHOUSE SYSTEM.

England is struggling to-day under the tremen-

dous burden of its workhouse system—not alone its enormous cost, for that could be borne, but its undermining influence on British character, breeding as it does a population of spiritless paupers. This system began in a small way and was gradually added to until there are now over one hundred thousand adults maintained in poor-houses, in addition to over fifty thousand children—and the number constantly growing, as it is bound to do so long as the system prevails.

A PERMANENT PAUPER CLASS.

The tendency in Toronto at the present time is distinctly in the line of an extended poorhouse and outdoor relief system, judging by the decision to have a \$10,000 enlargement. In the light of experience elsewhere this certainly means the fastening upon Toronto of a permanent pauper class, augmented by the foreigners now constantly arriving, and, worse than all, the education of their children to live by their wits instead of by manual labor.

WRONG EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN.

Jean Paul Richter, in one of his writings, gave the optimistic dictum that “with each generation of children the history of the world begins anew.” This would be true if the child could be surrounded only with what is good and noble, but so long as

the children are subjected to hurtful teaching and environment it can only be regarded as an excellent theory. For instance, about five years ago I met a girl of twelve with whom I was acquainted walking along with a can of soup and a loaf of bread. When asked where she got these supplies she replied "At the poorhouse on Elm Street." Her mother, though well able to earn a livelihood, was a chronic pauper, demanding and receiving constant aid from various city charities, and she taught the daughter the same trade. And this ordinarily bright, attractive girl is now, at seventeen, a useless street walker, of no economic value to the community—she was infected by the pauper microbe. And this must always be the outcome of such education, for a boy or girl brought up to look to charity and the poorhouse for support can never settle down contentedly to earn an honest livelihood.

DISCOURAGES THE RESPECTABLE POOR.

In the distribution of out-door relief, the visitors for the poorhouse no doubt endeavor to give only to the worthy poor, but the worthy poor rarely make application, preferring to stint themselves rather than sacrifice their independence. In addition to the extensive work carried on by private charities and churches, nearly two thousand families, or about six thousand individuals, are aided annually from the poorhouse, at a cost

in round numbers of from thirteen to fifteen thousand dollars. Frequently respectable and hard-working families are completely discouraged when they see drunken and indolent neighbors given relief that is undeserved. Ladies of the Relief Society have stated to me that it made them heart-sick dealing with the lying and imposition of clamorous applicants for aid—it was like pouring water through a sieve to give them money. food or furniture; money soon spent, furniture sold for drink, and the ungrateful recipient just as clamorous as ever in a week or ten days. It was no use, they found, offering work, for that was rarely accepted.

WHY THE FUEL CLUB FAILED.

Beverley Jones, who has been engaged in charity work in Toronto for thirty years past, told at the Charities Conference of his efforts to establish a fuel club among the poor of St. John's Ward. Each family contributed so much a week in the summer, a contract was entered into and cheap coal for the winter was assured. Nearly \$3,000 was saved from their earnings in one year by the members. The plan would have been a success, but, unfortunately, when a hard winter set in the drunken and indolent families who saved nothing were supplied with free coal by the House of Industry, and the fuel club was broken up in disgust. This was charity with a vengeance.

When will it be realized that the poor cannot be helped with money they have not earned! Doles to the poor by public agencies are degrading to the individual; it is a pernicious education for the young, and it is a grave wrong to the thrifty, honest, self-respecting class of working people struggling to maintain their good name and independence. The proper and only relief that should be given is work at fair wages, sanitary homes, small parks and playgrounds, and protection against the oppressor, who in various forms and disguises is always seeking to wrong the poor and the lowly.

PRIVATE HOMES FOR THE AGED.

It is used as an argument that the poorhouse is an absolute necessity for the care of aged people. My experience is that it is not infrequently a loafing place for men fifty to sixty-five years of age, who sit around all day smoking and spitting and indulging in disgusting talk. Such men should be at work on a farm instead of hanging around a poorhouse in the heart of the city. Respectable aged people are better taken care of under private benevolent and religious auspices, and the municipality would be wise to abandon the enterprise altogether, maintaining only a wayfarers' lodge, in which to provide labor for tramps and other undesirable visitors. Public

charity has ever been a cold and cheerless thing, productive of no lasting good, because in the nature of things devoid of the soul and the consecration that alone can comfort and assuage genuine distress.

FRIENDLY HELP INSTEAD OF MONEY.

The Associated Charities, by the system of special investigation now pursued, has shown up dozens of impostors. It is organized along modern lines of scientific thought, and, if given reasonable encouragement, can demonstrate the possibility of helping the poor to help themselves without any lavish expenditure of money. And as for the miserable impostors who now live on charity, they would soon be forced either to work or go to gaol.

MISTAKEN KINDNESS.

The greatest harm to the poor is done by the kind-hearted, over-sympathetic people, who say that every beggar should be given what he asks for fear one deserving case should go unaided. To give a beggar on the street a quarter without investigating his story is equal to giving him a kick downwards, for so long as he can get money thus easily he will never work or endeavor to gain a respectable position, but will simply encourage other lazy drunkards to emulate his example. Thus every cent that is given in indis-

criminate charity not only injures the individual but strengthens the detestable system of begging and imposture which every citizen should unite to stamp out.

FOR THE CHILDREN'S SAKE.

After advocating strongly at a public meeting the abolition of all out-door relief by the municipality through the House of Industry, a well-known clergyman called me up by 'phone to express surprise that I should have so little sympathy with the poor. I tried to explain that I spoke in that way because I had more than the average amount of sympathy for the respectable poor, and because the majority of those aided were drunkards and idlers who could support themselves if compelled to do so. "But the children," he replied, "would you allow them to starve. It is for their sake we give the relief." This he considered an all-powerful argument, but, strange to say, it was exactly on that account I desired to see the charity supplies cut off. Children educated in a pauper home seldom amount to anything. At an early age they become adepts at deception, lying and thieving, vices that are hard to eradicate, and, if left to their own resources, will seldom be found following any useful occupation in later life. The evil is one that cannot be temporized with. Like the surgeon's knife, there may be some pain in effecting a cure.

but the total abolition of charitable aid is the only way of saving these families to an honest and industrious way of living. Pauperism exists only because of charity and would soon pass away if almsgiving ceased. Surely this is a thought worth pondering!

WHERE THE MONEY WOULD DO GOOD.

If the city authorities wish to do some good work, why not divide the \$10,000 between the Associated Charities and the Children's Aid Society, the two organizations that approach most nearly the modern ideal? The former gives relief only after the most careful investigation, seeking to rehabilitate the applicant by securing him a home, employment, and a chance to better his condition; while the latter society aims to protect the children and by friendly visiting encourage them to grow up useful and honorable citizens. What one neglected child can do to upset a community has been painfully demonstrated this week. The Children's Aid Society properly officered could save many neglected children at present uncared for.

J. J. Kelso.

Toronto, May 23rd, 1905.