

VII.—*Observations upon a Paper on Poor Relief, by Dr. Dowling, of Tipperary.* By James Haughton, Esq.

[Read Monday, 15th April, 1861.]

THE essay now read seems to me to contain much suggestive matter to thoughtful men—much that should make us pause and seriously consider the consequences of introducing into our country a more general system of out-door relief than is now administered. If, on the one hand, some real objects of benevolence are subjected by the workhouse test to hardship, on the other is there not just ground of alarm lest any considerable relaxation of it should be followed by such a general demoralization of our poor as must prove infinitely more distressing in its consequences? I fear such would be the result, and I am therefore disinclined to out-door relief, except in the case of orphan children; and I look upon the separation of children under 8 or 10 years old from their parents as a practice which should not be continued. The following particulars relative to out-door relief in other places will, I hope, prove interesting to our society.

In the 14th Annual Report of the Board of Supervision for the Relief of the Poor in Scotland, 1859, under the head “Comparison of Pauperism in Scotland and Ireland,” in correcting some errors in their previous Report relative to expenditure, the Board remark, “We consider the relative number of paupers in proportion to the population a matter of much higher importance than the relative expenditure.” And again, “The avowed object of the comparison which we attempted to institute was to estimate how far those moral qualities of the population appeared to have been promoted or impaired in either country by the operation of dissimilar Poor Laws and their administration. This is a question upon the right solution of which may depend the progressive improvement or deterioration of the labouring classes in a considerable part of Scotland, and it was with a full sense of its weight and importance that we originated the consideration of it.”

In May, 1858, the relief in Scotland was to 1 in 23 of the population, or 4.30 per cent. In Ireland it was 1 in 135.85, or 0.80 per cent., or more than five paupers in Scotland for one in Ireland.

On these facts the Board remarks, “There is no ground for supposing that the number of persons disabled from earning a livelihood is greater in Scotland than in Ireland, still less that it is five times as great; neither can it be said that the demand for labour is less, or the wages of labour lower in Scotland than in Ireland. What then is the cause of so great a difference?”

The Board analyzes this cause, and are unable to trace it to any other reason than the different administration of the Poor Laws in each country—in Ireland discouraging, in Scotland encouraging pauperism. Ten years ago the difference did not exist. This tendency was not checked, they say, in Ireland until the workhouse was made available, and they add—“The cruelty of resorting to that mode of relief was then denounced in terms of unmeasured severity; but those who looked not to present popularity, but to the perma-

ment welfare of the people, persevered ; and it may be doubted whether is now to be found one sincere friend of the labouring classes in Ireland who has intelligently considered the subject, and who believes that the industry, the self-reliance, and the power of self-maintenance now exhibited by the people of Ireland could have been developed as it has been in the last ten years, if out-door relief had been there as easily obtained as it now is in the Highlands of Scotland ; or who doubts that the people of Ireland have gained far more by this development than they could have gained by a system of out-door relief, which repressed the growth of these qualities and habits. So, also, it is our opinion that the extension of poorhouse accommodation in well selected localities in the Highlands, and the judicious use of the offer of admission to those houses, would be the most legitimate check on the abusé of out-door relief, and would tend to promote the permanent welfare of the labouring classes in that part of Scotland."

The Board state the expense of poor relief in Scotland to be about 3s. 3d. per head of the population, or four times the rate in Ireland.

While this increased expense is incurred, evil instead of good appears to be the result, in destroying that self-reliance which is one of the best safeguards of the comfort and happiness of any people.

In their 15th Annual Report the Board of Supervision in Scotland show that they are still animated by the same intelligent sentiments, as they still look to an extension of poorhouses in their country as the best mode of administering relief to their destitute poor.

In the Report of the Commissioners of Poor Laws in Ireland for the past year, I find that 19-20ths of the cases relieved in Scotland are out of the workhouse, 6-7ths in England, and 1-30th in Ireland. A few years ago (in 1839, I think), when Mr. Nicholls was engaged in investigations relative to introduction of a Poor Law into Ireland, out-door relief of the poor was administered in England ; but, as my recollection serves me, he then contemplated the speedy discontinuance of that practice there, and he deprecated its introduction into Ireland. In Scotland, as I have shown, it is looked upon as a serious evil in the present day, so that it would seem to be the dictate of reason that we should avoid demoralizing our people by making them generally familiar with such a mode of pauper relief, and placing in their way the temptation to depend less on their own manly exertions for their own and their families' support than on the dole afforded by out-door relief, which is proved in England and Scotland to be productive of evil to a great extent, and the good resulting from which is very doubtful indeed.

I therefore entirely concur in the opinions so forcibly expressed by Dr. Dowling in his very able paper, and I unite with all who disapprove of any further extension of the powers given to Boards of Guardians respecting out-door relief in Ireland, except in very extreme cases bordering on famine, and where labour is given in return ; save as regards orphan children, whom I should like to see placed under the care of nurses in the country.

Since I wrote the foregoing I have received an appeal from the

“City of London Temperance Association” to their fellow-citizens, which contains some evidence strongly corroborative of the opinions I have just expressed, as the following short extracts will prove. They have reference to the hard frost of the past winter :—

“While the late severe visitation lasted, we felt it a duty not to say one word that might check the tide of benevolence that was setting in on the shores of want and privation ; but now that the more immediate necessities of the case have been met, a little wholesome ventilation of the subject may not be considered irrelevant.

“The question arising to every thoughtful mind is this,—Is it a necessity that when severe weather sets in there should always be some thousands of people on the very brink of starvation? Can these people not earn as much in the fifty-two weeks as will support them all the year? It would indeed be a reflection on the commercial and manufacturing firms of this great city if this were not the case. We are happy to say the fault is not with them.

“The existing system of affording relief, however guarded, is anything but effective, innumerable cases having come under our own observation where tickets for coals and bread have been turned into gin, at the frightful reduction of 150 to 200 per cent. ; and the public generally are opening their eyes to the fact that a large portion of the charity lately dispensed has passed into undeserving hands.

“Besides, the system fosters a pauperising spirit in the people ; they know well enough when winter comes that if they clamour for relief, a few kind-hearted people will make an appeal for them through the *Times* ; the chord of benevolence that vibrates through the philanthropy of the nation will be struck, streams of sovereigns will pour in, and their wants will be supplied ; they trust in this, and become paupers. Instead of indulging in this dishonourable and un-English spirit, if the 3d. a day spent in beer or gin was deposited in a Penny Bank, then when the cold weather came they would find they had £4 1s. 3d. to their credit, which, no doubt, would meet all the exigencies of the inclement season, and enable them to *stand erect*, and not cringe under the debasing feeling necessarily associated with pauperism.”

Let us do all that we can to save Ireland from the humiliation and injury of out-door legislative relief on any large scale.

I annex some notes taken from Mr. Senior's Report on poor relief in other lands, which point out the necessity for the exercise of great prudence and wise caution in making improvements in our Poor Laws in Ireland.

The following extracts are taken from Mr. N. W. Senior on Foreign Poor Laws, 1835 :—

*The Massachusetts Commissioners' Report*, speaking of the States' poor, says :—  
 “They have been made what they are by the State's provision for them. We scarcely know whether the call is loudest to the pity we should feel for them, or the self-reproach with which we should recur to the measures we have sanctioned, and which have alike enlarged their numbers and their misery.”—p. 15.  
 “And above all, if compulsory charity in any form had never been established by our laws would there have been a twentieth part of the wandering poor, &c. ? Your Commissioners think not.”—p. 17. “In New York children are appren-

ticed out, and parents are not told where they are. This harsh rule is considered useful."—p. 19.

*Sweden.*—"The Swedish artisan is neither so industrious nor so frugal as formerly. He has heard that the destitute able-bodied are in England supported by the parish; he claims similar relief, and alleges his expectation of it as an excuse for prodigality or indifference to saving."—p. 28.

*Denmark.*—"The paupers are 1 in 32. Stringent measures are adopted to prevent pauperism, and with apparent success; yet it is stated that the Poor Law has a bad effect on industry and frugality, and that it encourages early and thoughtless marriages."—p. 42.

*Wurtemberg.*—"Rich hospitals make the poor more numerous, and encourage idleness and crime."—p. 64.

*Berne.*—"Experience has clearly proved that the number of paupers increases in proportion to the resources created for them, &c."—p. 77.

The foregoing countries have a system of compulsory relief similar to that of England, and in them, Mr. Senior says, "the existing system appears to work very well." This he explains on the ground that there is a good demand for labour, and consequently little excuse for pauperism, and that the position of the pauper is rendered very disagreeable, &c.

In the following countries no legal right to relief appears to be given to the poor; but pauperism and destitution are largely relieved by bequests and public contributions:—

*Hamburg.*—"Injury done by much indiscriminate relief."

*Bremen.*—"Results more favourable; the workhouse, &c., doing good."

*Lubeck* appears a model of comfort. "Every able-bodied man is supposed capable of providing for himself, and no such work or relief is afforded him." The very destitute are relieved to a small extent.

*Holland.*—"The pecuniary relief afforded is very small, and can only be considered as in aid of the exertions of the poor to earn their own support, being limited to a very few pence per week, &c. In general, the funds of all charitable institutions have greatly diminished."—pp. 102 and 103. "About £500,000 annually expended in relief of the poor."—p. 106. "Numbers of poor steadily increasing—202,015 in 1822; 279,730 in 1831."

*Belgium and France.*—Bureaux de Bienfaisance administer out-door relief. The funds are supplied by public exhibitions and voluntary contributions. The sums necessary for out-door relief in each commune are directed to be raised by the local authorities."—p. 119. "Children under twelve nursed in the country."—p. 121. Persons seen begging sent to the Dépôt de Mendicité, where they are subject to severe punishment.

*Belgium.*—M. Lebeau, in his report, says:—"Enfin chez nous, nul peut exiger de secours en vertu de droit." "But it must be admitted that these provisions, if not constituting a right in the pauper to relief, give at least a right to the managers of the dépôts to force the parishes to relieve either at home or in the dépôt, &c."—p. 131.

The hospitals for the sick are very numerous, and nearly every commune possesses its Bureau de Bienfaisance for out-door relief.

*Antwerp.*—"Necessitous individuals of the labouring and indigent class, who do not attempt to go a begging, and also the members of their families, are provided for at their own dwellings by the Bureau de Bienfaisance."—p. 139.

"The indigent persons relieved by the Bureau de Bienfaisance receive only the strict necessaries of life to feed and support their families, and no more, and their life is a very miserable one. The drunkard and those given to every excess alone look upon this resource to sustain them."—p. 142.

*Gaesbeck.*—"This village is quite a model; little need of relief, and little given. Crime is rare, no one committed to prison for twelve years. What a contrast is exhibited by this picture of moral, contented poverty, with that of a pauperized English village."—p. 147.

*France, Brittany.*—"No such thing is known as a legal claim for assistance from public or private charities. The principal cause of misery is inebriety; its frequency among the lower orders keeps them in poverty. The wine and brandy shop absorbs a great portion of their earnings. Women as well as men drink."—p. 162.

*Nantes, Loire Inferieure.*—"In times of political commotion, of unforeseen

events, of rigorous seasons, &c., the civil administrations create temporary workshops," &c.

"The effect of these institutions is said to create a disposition to idleness and debauchery, although a fixed rule governs the distributors, which is, to give as small an amount of relief as possible."—p. 168.

*Basses Pyrennees, Bayonne.*—There are no public or private establishments or relief afforded to the destitute able-bodied or their families; but this description of pauper is seldom to be met with in this department.

*Piedmont.*—"No establishment for destitute able-bodied. One attempt of the sort made years ago at Raconis, which failed. Convents still give food, but the practice is said to be deplorable, and most injurious on the Genoese coast, where the mendicant orders are most numerous, and the poverty the greatest. No relief given in kind, or money by government."—p. 182.

Most of the foregoing extracts are taken from replies to queries put by our Government to the various authorities; the answers to which, Mr. Senior thinks, constitute the fullest collection that has ever been made of laws for the relief of the poor. They indicate the necessity of great caution in the enactment and administration of such laws, as the universal tendency of relief without work appears to be the demoralization of the recipients.

The habit of prudence and foresight has descended from the higher to all other classes of society, and has been the main cause of that great accumulation of wealth, which, from the foundation of its independence, and in spite of the severe reverses it has sustained, has made this kingdom so remarkable.

#### VIII.—*Co-operative Societies.* By Frederic W. Connor, Esq.

[Read Monday-evening, 20th January, 1862.]

In one of his earliest essays, Lord Macaulay remarks—"This is the age of societies. There is scarcely one Englishman in ten who has not belonged to some association for distributing books or for prosecuting them; for sending invalids to the hospital, or beggars to the treadmill, for giving plate to the rich, or blankets to the poor." Now, in the active associate spirit which meets us on every side for bettering the condition of our social organization, no where do we observe this spirit more energetically at work than in the improvement of the working classes. Special evils have been sought out, and by a commendable division of moral labour specially attacked. That many and great evils, fraught with great danger to general society, exist in the economy of our industrial system, no one ventures to deny; but in the employment of remedial measures we have to confront, as in the general practice of medicine, divers and contradictory modes of treatment. There is no lack of practitioners in this science of moral medicine—no want of zealous volunteers, but who, unfortunately, too often jeopardize healthy systems of treatment by the obtrusion of their own theories and conceits. Of all classes of society, the operative class, from their numbers, and from their being the great producers of wealth, commend themselves primarily to our serious attention. Their losses are our losses—their gains our gains. For general purposes, we might describe the defects of the working man's character in two words—improvidence and intemperance—defects, which as they spring from his own individuality, can only by himself be cured. How is this