The Church and the Poor.

A SERIES OF HISTORICAL SKETCHES.

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XIII.

The Poor Law Amendment Act, 1834.

IN the two previous chapters we have brought the history of our subject down to the close of the reign of George III. In this chapter I propose to deal, first, with the conditions which existed during the years immediately preceding the passing of the extremely important Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834; secondly, with the chief provisions of that law; and, thirdly, though very briefly, with the history of the years immediately following its enactment.

The years which followed the close of the great war with France—that is, from 1815 onwards—certainly witnessed an immense increase in the aggregate wealth of the nation[1]; but they did not witness a corresponding general improvement in the economic and social condition of the poorest classes. I use the term "general improvement" advisedly, because there is evidence to show that among certain sections of the workers there was a very decided increase of welfare during this period.[2] But, speaking generally, the condition, at any rate of the very poor, grew steadily worse and worse as time went on. Eventually it became so evil that, in spite of a growing acceptance of the principle of *laissez-faire* (at any rate, so far as the conditions of trade were concerned), the minds, and to some extent the consciences, of thoughtful people became greatly exercised.

[1] The general trade of the United Kingdom (merchandise only) in 1820 was £81,421,646, or £4 1s. 10d. per head; in 1840 it was £183,973,725, or £6 6s. 8d. per head.

[2] Savings banks were constituted and regulated by 57 George III., cap. 150, and 58 George III., cap. 48. In 1833 there were in England and Wales 408 savings banks, with 425,283 depositors, and balances of £14,334,393.

It became more and more clear that either national bankruptcy or revolution must ensue, unless some drastic change was made both in the nature and the administration of the Poor Law. The evidence of the Commissioners of 1833 upon the first of these dangers is very striking. They state that there are many parishes "in which the pressure of the Poor Rate has reduced the rent to half, or to less than half, of what it would have been if the land had been situated in an unpauperized district, and some in which it has been impossible for the owner to find a tenant."[1] The worst case was that of Cholesbury, in Buckinghamshire, where the collection of the Poor Rate had "suddenly ceased . . . the landlords having given up their rents, the farmers their tenancies, and the clergyman his glebe and his tithes."[2] The evidence of widespread lawlessness—the usual precursor of revolution—is equally strong. The burning of stackyards became appallingly common. Even patrols of soldiers were useless to prevent it, as were also rewards of as much as £500 for the convictions of offenders. These evil conditions were naturally the cause, as incendiarism was the expression, of the existence of the bitterest feelings between the labourers and their employers.[3]

If this was the state of things in the agricultural districts, that in the manufacturing towns was certainly no better. Engel's book upon "The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844"[4] may paint the picture in the darkest possible colours; it may be condemned as an *ex parte* statement—indeed, that to a great extent it is so I am perfectly prepared to admit—but when every allowance or deduction has been made for the writer's predilections and prejudices, the conditions of the slums of Manchester and other large towns which he describes can only be regarded as appalling. In reading his book two things must be remembered: First, that

[1] Nicholls, "History of the Poor Law," vol. ii., p. 238.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*, vol. ii., pp. 283, 284.
[4] Published in German in 1845; in English in New York in 1885; republished in England in 1892.

what he saw in 1844 was the result of a very considerable period of the influence of something even worse than *laissez-faire* on the part of the particular authorities who were then in a position of responsibility; actually the evils he describes had been gradually accumulating ever since the beginning of the "Industrial Revolution." Secondly, Engel is not content with general descriptions or general charges; he gives chapter and verse for his statements, even to the names of the streets and the numbers of the houses. Moreover, his book is full of extracts from official reports, to which he gives exact references, and in case after case he gives both dates and figures. Because my space is limited, and because his book is so easily accessible, I shall forbear from giving any quotations; all I would say is that if anyone wishes to realize how terrible were the conditions of life and health and morality among immense numbers of the poorest strata of the people during, say, the first thirty years after the Battle of Waterloo, let him read carefully what Engel has to tell of the results of personal observation made during several months spent in careful investigation.[1]

The question may well be asked, Why had these evil conditions been permitted to grow until they became so utterly bad? or, Why were they still permitted to exist? A complete answer to these questions would involve a lengthy description of the condition both of political thought and the actual constitution of the Houses of Parliament during this time. Briefly, the chief factors in the neglect were, first, the extraordinary dread of reform by means of legislation which existed during the early part of the nineteenth century; and, secondly, a dominant belief in the principle of *laissez-faire*, which in this particular connection might almost have been interpreted to mean, "Leave things to themselves, and in due time they will work out their own solution." One of the strangest—indeed most paradoxical—features of the period was that side by side

[1] The evidence which Engel produces of the state of the towns may be supplemented by that of "The Hungry Forties" for the agricultural districts.

with this, in the actual administration of the Poor Law this principle was the one last to be applied. Here, so far as administration was concerned, a measure of *laissez-faire* would have been of immense benefit to the poor. In this connection the following sentences from the Report of the Commission of 1833 are of exceptional interest: "Things were not left to take their own course. Unhappily, no knowledge is so rare as the knowledge when to do nothing."[1]

But with the passing of the first Reform Bill in 1832 the period of "legislative quiescence," which synchronized with the domination of the old Toryism, came suddenly to an end.[2] It must not from this be inferred that the change in public opinion was equally sudden; on the contrary, the forces which produced the Benthamite Liberalism, which so strongly marked the next forty years, had been gradually, though surely, gathering in strength.[3] Previous to the appointment of the Commission "to inquire into the operation of Poor Laws and report thereon" in February, 1832, at least two serious attempts to amend the law and its administration had recently been made; and though both the Bills to which I refer failed to obtain the sanction of Parliament, both undoubtedly exercised considerable influence upon the Act of 1834. The first of these two Bills was that of Mr. Scarlett, which was introduced in 1821,[4] but was withdrawn after its second reading in the Commons. There was much in this Bill which was admirable, but the changes which it advocated were too drastic to obtain acceptance at that time. The second Bill[5] was introduced by a Mr. Nolan, who was certainly an authority upon the subject. This Bill was of a far less sweeping nature than Mr. Scarlett's, but, although it was before the House for more than one session, it also failed

[1] Report of the Commissioners made in 1834; reprinted in 1905 [Cd. 2728], p. 121.

[2] Lord Grey became Prime Minister in 1830, and formed the first Whig or "Liberal" Ministry since 1782.

[3] On the "Close of the Period of Quiescence," and on "The Period of Benthamism or Individualism," see Dicey, "Law and Opinion," pp. 110 ff.

[4] Nicholls, *op. cit.*, vol. ii., p. 208. [5] *Ibid.*, p. 212.

to become law. I mention these two Bills in order to show that the subject was not only receiving attention, but that those who had studied it were becoming more and more convinced of the necessity of change, both in the law itself and in its administration.

One factor which undoubtedly most strongly influenced not only the appointment of the Commission of 1832, but also the nature of some of the recommendations of that Commission, was the evidence from Southwell and one or two other places of what a strict and judicious administration of even the existing law could effect. The reforms at Southwell commenced in 1821; in four years the amount expended on relief of the poor fell from £2,006 7s. to £517 13s.; that expended on providing employment for able-bodied labourers, from £292 10s. to nil; that in payment of rent, from £184 18s. also to nil; that expended upon bastardy was reduced to a third; besides these other reforms, the workhouse itself was thoroughly reformed, the sexes were separated, the inmates classified, and the "House" was made what it should be—a test of destitution. The results of these reforms in the administration of the law were made widely known, especially those of the application of workhouse relief, and, as I have just stated, they undoubtedly had an immense influence upon the recommendations of the Commission and, later, upon the framing of the Act of 1834.[1]

The history of the Commission upon whose Report that Act was framed, the chief provisions of the Act, and the beneficial results which followed (wherever the Act was efficiently administered), are so well known—or at least may be so easily learnt elsewhere—that I need not enter into them at any considerable length. The following brief summary will, I hope, be sufficient to indicate the successive steps which led to the passing of the Act:

On February 1, 1832, Lord Althorp stated in the House of Commons "that the general question of the Poor Laws was

[1] Nicholls, *op. cit.*, vol. ii., pp. 227 *et seq.*

a subject of such magnitude, and involved such a variety of important considerations," that the Government had determined to appoint Commissioners to ascertain by means of local investigation how the different systems worked throughout the country. Upon the results of this investigation the future action of the Government would depend." The Commissioners appointed Assistant Commissioners, who visited the various districts. In March, 1833, the Commissioners presented a volume of extracts from the evidence which by that time had been obtained.[1] In this preliminary Report it is stated that maladministration appeared to have spread over almost every part of the country, and that of this maladministration actual intimidation of those supposed to be unfavourable to profuse relief was one of the most extensive sources. On February 20, 1834, the complete Report of the Commissioners was issued, accompanied by an Appendix, in which the evidence collected was given, though much of this evidence was embodied in the Report itself. The Commissioners state that the evidence comes "from every county and almost every town, and from a very large proportion of even the villages in England. It is derived from many thousand witnesses of every rank and every profession and employment . . . differing in every conceivable degree in education, habits, and interests, and agreeing only in their practical experience as to the matter in question." They further state that in their opinion the amendment of the Poor Laws "is, perhaps, the most urgent and most important measure now remaining for the consideration of Parliament."[2]

A Bill embodying the recommendations of the Commissioners was introduced into and read a first time in the House of Commons on April 17, 1834; it was read a second time on May 9, when 299 members voted for it, and only 20 against it; it was read a third time on July 1; on the following day it was read for the first time in the House of Lords, and, finally, it

[1] This was signed by the Bishop of London (Blomfield), the Bishop of Chester (Sumner), Sturges Bourne, Nassau W. Senior, H. Bishop, H. Gawler, W. Coulson, James Trail, and Edwin Chadwick.

[2] Reprint of Report (1905), p. 5.

received the Royal Assent on August 14. During the passage of the Bill through the two Houses it received various amendments, the chief of which were, first, the limitation of the duration of the Act to five years, and, secondly, the limitation of the powers of the three Commissioners under whom the various local authorities were to act, and who were to be at once the final authority and the ultimate court of appeal in all matters relating to its administration."[1]

It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of this measure, not only because it practically revolutionized the administration of the Poor Law, but because, in spite of the Reports of the Commission (appointed in December, 1905) presented to Parliament in 1909, it still remains to all intents and purposes the law under which the relief of the poor is administered to-day.

The two following verdicts, the first relating to the Report of the Commissioners, and the second to the passage of the Bill through Parliament, are worthy of being remembered:

1. "In February, 1834, was published perhaps the most remarkable and startling document to be found in the whole range of English—perhaps, indeed, of all social—history. . . . In the list of nine gentlemen who composed the Commission there is not to be found a single ornamental name. . . . It was their rare good fortune not only to lay bare the existence of abuses and trace them to their roots, but also to propound and enforce the remedies by which they might be cured. It is seldom, indeed, that the conditions of so vast and sweeping a reform are found coexisting. The evils were gross and alarming; there was a Ministry that had been carried into power by an outburst of reforming zeal; above all, there was a readiness to be guided by principles of purely scientific legislation. . . . Success was therefore at once inevitable and assured."[2]

[1] Upon omissions in the Act see Nicholls, *op. cit.*, vol. ii., p. 271. It may be questioned whether the framers of the Act intended that quite so large a discretion should be left the Guardians, as these were afterwards proved to have.

[2] T. W. Fowle, "The Poor Law," pp. 75, 76.

2. "The successful passage of this necessary but, unfortunately, all too limited measure of reform is one of the most remarkable incidents in our constitutional history. There is no other instance in the history of democracy in which a Government has dared to benefit the people by depriving them of a right to participate in a public fund, where also the Opposition, as a party, has refrained from making capital out of the obvious difficulties of the situation. It may be added, that the experiment then succeeded because legislation in detail was taken out of the hands of Parliament, and put into the hands of a non-elective body."[1]

The recommendations of the Commission and the actual contents of the Act were, in the main, so similar, that, at any rate for our present purpose, they may be considered together. So far as the principles are concerned upon which the Act was framed, these may be pronounced excellent. Where the Act has failed, as undoubtedly in many instances, especially in recent years, it has failed, the failure has not been due to wrong principles, but because, as was the case with the previous great Act of Elizabeth's reign, those who have administered it have either forgotten its principles, or have administered it in a spirit which was not in accordance with that of those who framed it. The chief weakness of the Act, as experience has proved, lay in the fact that too much freedom of action was left to the amateurs who constituted the Local Authority; that the latitude permitted to these in the practical (and, I would add, personal) application of the law was too wide. The professional—*i.e.*, the Relieving Officer—has been too often and too much overruled by the amateur, the ignorant Guardian, who apparently had learnt little from the experience of the past, and who declined to administer the law in strict accordance with the wisdom of its authors.

Briefly, the following may be regarded as the root-principles of the measure: A clear distinction must be made between "the poor" and "the indigent," and it must be understood that the

[1] "History of the English Poor Law," T. Mackay, vol. iii., p. 151.

latter "alone come within the province of the Poor Law.' Relief must be so administered to the indigent "that their condition shall in no case be so eligible as the condition of persons of the lowest class subsisting on the fruits of their own industry." This principle, which, unfortunately, has often been disregarded in practice, is essential, if people are not to be tempted to become paupers, if they are to be encouraged to use any measure of self-effort. In practice, it was found that when out-relief was withdrawn or diminished in any district, the wages paid immediately increased.[1] There was also a diminution in the number of improvident marriages, and also in the amount of crime.[2] Another principle asserted by the Report, and embodied in the Act, was "that the practice of giving relief in well-regulated workhouses, and the abolition of partial relief to the able-bodied, having been tried and found beneficial, be extended to all places."[3] As showing the continuity of our English Poor Law, it is interesting to notice that there was appended to this assertion the following words: "This being the only means by which the intention of the Statute of Elizabeth[4] can be beneficially carried into effect." At least the implied ground for an application for public assistance should be the inability to maintain life or existence, at any rate by lawful means. Hence, such an applicant must accept relief on the terms which it has been shown from experience that the common welfare requires. It is, of course, "the exceptional case" which is a difficulty, and which evokes a sympathy which is tempted to legislate for such a case as if it were typical rather than exceptional. The wisdom of the Commissioners is seen in the following words: "The bane of all pauper legislation has been the legislation for extreme cases. Every exception, every violation of the general rule to meet a real case of unusual hardship, lets in a whole class of fraudulent cases, by which that rule must in time be destroyed. Where cases of real hardship

[1] Reprint of Report, pp. 237 *et seq.*
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 241 *et seq.*
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 262. An exception is made in regard to medical attendance.
[4] 43 Elizabeth, cap. 2.

occur, the remedy must be applied by individual charity—a virtue for which no system of compulsory relief can be, or ought to be, a substitute."[1]

The value of the "Workhouse Test" is, as the Report explains, "a self-acting test of the claim of the applicant," for by this the "line between those who do, and those who do not, need relief is . . . drawn perfectly." Pauperism among the greater number of the able-bodied "has originated in indolence, improvidence, or vice, and might have been averted by ordinary care and industry."[2] To give out-relief, even in small amounts, to such people is only to pander to idleness or thriftlessness. The offer of the "House" will, it is proved by experience, induce many whose wants arise from idleness to earn the means of subsistence; it represses fraudulent claims for support, and frequently calls forth the aid of assistance from friends. Another great principle for which the Commissioners most wisely contended was "the removal from the distributors of all discretionary powers, and thereby diminishing abusive administration."[3] Unfortunately, experience has proved that, with all their care to effect this, the actual working of the Act has not achieved the object which the Commissioners had here in view. The "discretionary powers" left to the Guardians are still very considerable, and are frequently most unwisely used. The Report speaks of "the increased liability to every sort of pernicious influence" to which local distributors of relief, popularly elected, are subject. One of the most pernicious forms of influence is that of intimidation—*e.g.*, of small tradesmen from their customers; the Guardian who is a publican is particularly open to this.

The real crux of the problem in 1834, as in almost every reform suggested or legislative change enacted for the better relief of the poor, lies in the *administration* of the law. The Commissioners were fully alive to this danger. As they say: "The instances presented to us throughout the present inquiry of the defeat of former legislation . . . often by an adminis-

[1] Reprint of Report, p. 263. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 264. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 294.

tration directly at variance with the expressed will of the Legislature, have forced us to distrust the operation of the clearest enactments, and even to apprehend unforeseen mischiefs from them, unless an especial agency be appointed and empowered to superintend and control their execution."[1] Much is also said upon "the want of appropriate knowledge," "the short duration of the authority," "the inadequacy of motives to support a correct administration," "the strength of interests in abusive administration" on the part of popularly elected distributors of Poor Relief.

The administration of the Act was placed in the hands of three Commissioners, who were empowered to appoint nine Assistant Commissioners (whose places in 1847 were taken by the Poor Law Inspectors). The powers placed in the hands of the Commissioners were very extensive, the chief of these being that of making and issuing "rules, orders, and regulations for the management of the poor, for the government of workhouses, and the education of children therein . . . for the guidance and control of all guardians, vestries, and parish officers, so far as relates to the management of the poor, and the keeping, examining, auditing, and allowing or disallowing of accounts . . . or any expenditure for the relief of the poor, and for carrying this Act into execution in all other respects, etc."[2] It will at once be realized how extensive these powers were; but upon the admirable manner in which they were used by the first Commissioners there cannot be two opinions. In 1839 the term for which they were appointed came to an end, but this was renewed annually until 1842, when it was further renewed for a period of five years. In that year a change was made by a ministerial department responsible to Parliament being constituted, the Minister responsible being named the President of the Poor Law Board. Finally, in 1871, the name of the department was changed into the "Local Government Board," which was placed under one responsible head.[3]

[1] Reprint of Report, pp. 280, 281.
[2] Section 15. Nicholls, *op. cit.*, p. 273.
[3] Fowle, "The Poor Law," p. 104.

From the date of the passing of the Act of 1834 to the present time the organization and administration of Poor Relief has been in the hands of the Central Board, which has freely exercised the large latitude given to it by the Act. The chief instrument used by the Board has been the Poor Law Orders, which it has so frequently issued, and which, under the Act, may be said to constitute the law under which the relief of the poor is now administered. Many of these Orders are of very considerable importance. For instance, the so-called "General Prohibitory Order," issued in 1844, prohibiting out-relief to the able-bodied, and the "Consolidated Order" of 1847, which laid down strict regulations in regard to the meetings of Guardians, the management of workhouses, and the duties of officers. Besides these Orders, the Local Government Board from time to time issues "Circulars," which are practically declarations of policy — in other words, "exhortations" — to the local authorities. These cannot be enforced by law; they are obeyed by some and disobeyed by other authorities. Hence there has arisen a state of things which is contrary to both the letter and the spirit of the Act of 1834—namely, a wide divergence in certain matters of administration.[1]

In considering the immediate effects of the Poor Law Amendment Act, we must remember that the Commissioners had two kinds of obstacles to overcome.[2] The first kind arose both from the Local Authorities and from the recipients of relief. The Guardians were in some cases, from motives of economy, slow in providing effective workhouse buildings, and in a few places there were riotous proceedings, mainly on account of the rule requiring that half the relief given to able-bodied paupers should be given in kind. But on the whole the obstacles purposely raised against the measure were far less than might have been expected. The second class of obstacles, which were due to circumstances entirely beyond the control of the Commissioners,

[1] See Majority Report of 1909, 8vo. edition, pp. 120 *et seq.*

[2] On this subject see "History of the English Poor Law," vol. iii. (Mackay), chap. xii., pp. 257 *et seq.*

were far greater and more serious. The autumn of 1836 was very wet, and the following winter one of such great severity that outdoor employment was for a time entirely suspended. In the following year there was a bad harvest, a great rise in price of the necessaries of life, and, in addition, a very serious mortality from an exceptionally severe and widespread epidemic of influenza. In 1838 and 1839 the high prices of food and a general stagnation of trade continued, as was the case more or less for at least five years after this time. During all this time much hardship and privation were undoubtedly suffered by the poor. A period of still greater distress began in 1845, when a cold spring and a wet summer was succeeded by a severe outbreak of potato disease, both in that year and the following one. Wheat advanced from 54s. to 75s. the quarter, and the price of other provisions rose in proportion. To add to the trouble, the winter of 1846-47 was also one of unusual severity. On the top of these difficulties there was a very considerable immigration of Irish poor, owing to the famine in that country, into all the western ports of England, the number arriving in Liverpool alone during three months in the spring of 1847 being upwards of 130,000. When we remember all this, we cannot wonder that the administration of the new law was attended with peculiar difficulties, and it says much for the administrative ability of both the Commissioners and their assistants that they weathered the storm as successfully as they did.

It is important to bear the fact of these "lean years" in mind—the "hungry forties," as they have been termed—not only because they greatly accentuated the difficulties which naturally met the Poor Law reformers of those days, but because they were the years which immediately preceded the work of Maurice and the earlier "Christian Socialists." They were also the years of the Chartist agitation. The England which nearly broke the tender and sympathetic heart of Maurice, and which called forth the bitter invectives of "Parson Lot," was the England of these terrible years. Undoubtedly the new Poor Law came only just in time. What would have happened had

not public relief in those days been under the wise administration of the men who were then responsible for the manner in which it was distributed we know not; but we can well imagine that the condition of the poor, dreadful as it was, might have been infinitely worse. It said much for the new law that its promoters were able, in the midst of such overwhelming difficulties, to pursue the path which they felt sure was for the ultimate benefit of the people. Had the administration of the Poor Law since that time been consistently carried out in the spirit in which its promoters intended that it should be, the condition of the poorest classes in England would to-day be far more really prosperous than what it actually is.[1]

The history of the Poor Law since 1847—the date of the dissolution of the Commission—is one rather of difficulties of administration than of new legislation; indeed, it would be true to say that since the Act of 1834 there has been no measure of outstanding importance dealing with the Poor Law placed upon the Statute-Book. One reason for dissolving the Commission was that it had no representative in Parliament; hence there was no one who was primarily responsible for administering the law and at the same time able in Parliament either to answer questions or refute criticisms. By the Act[2] of 1847, which dissolved the old Commission, all the powers of this were transferred to the new Commission. By the same Act it was ordered that aged couples were not to be separated in the workhouses, and that Visiting Committees for these institutions must be appointed by the Guardians. In 1847-48[3] the amount expended on Poor Relief, especially so far as related to the able-bodied, reached a relatively high figure. This was doubtless in part due to the evil conditions of the poor at this time, with which I have already dealt; but it also shows that already the original purpose of the Act was to some extent being lost sight

[1] This period is dealt with at length by Mackay, *op. cit.*, chap. xiv.

[2] 10 and 11 Victoria, cap. 109.

[3] In 1848 the amount expended for relief and maintenance of the poor was £6,180,675, against £4,954,204 in 1846. The rate per head of population in 1848 was 7s. 1¾d., against 5s. 10½d. in 1846.

of, and that the intentions of those who framed it were not being carried out by the local authorities responsible for its administration. There can, I think, be little doubt that Mr. Mackay is correct when he states that "it should be remembered, in justice to those who conceived the Act of 1834, that central control meant to them the gradual supersession of local empiricism by introducing the rule of salaried experts responsible to a central authority, and merely inspectable, to use Bentham's word, by the local authority."[1] Apart from such questions as those connected with "settlement," "vagrancy," and "rating" (which may be regarded as belonging to definite sections or departments of the law), the chief difficulties which have arisen in connection with the Poor Law during the last eighty years have been due to the fact that by the Poor Law Amendment Act too great a power was still left in the hands of the amateur administrator; and that term is certainly not too strong a term for the average member of the ordinary Board of Guardians.

When we consider the conditions existing at the time, especially in regard to administration, the Act of 1834 probably went as far as it was then possible to go. The Commissioners felt obliged to recommend that at least some measure of responsibility should be left to the Local Authorities, though they realized that these were hardly fit to exercise this. The failure of the law during the last half-century to accomplish what it might have done has been due chiefly to three causes: First, to the ignorance of many Guardians; secondly, to the inability of these to resist pressure from outside influences; thirdly, to greatly altered circumstances. However far-sighted a body of legislators may be, they can hardly be expected to foresee the immensely altered conditions which may arise nearly a century hence. That the principles upon which the reformers of 1834 acted were right we cannot doubt; indeed, it will be an evil day for the permanent welfare of the poor of this country should different principles be substituted for them, and a Poor Law, or

[1] Mackay, *op. cit.*, p. 267.

a substitute for this, be enacted which disregards these principles, whose truth and usefulness have been proved by experience.

In saying this I am not condemning an opinion, which has already been largely expressed in practice, that much which eighty years ago was regarded as coming within the province or jurisdiction of the Poor Law Authority should be so regarded no longer. During recent years, from a variety of causes, the province within which governmental agencies enter into the daily life of the people has been much extended, and the nature of this interference has become much more complex. Other authorities—such as those of the municipality, including, for instance, the authorities dealing with the public health and with education—now to a certain extent overlap by doing work which is also done by the Guardians. Whatever be our opinion as to which is the best authority to do a certain work, we must be agreed that overlapping—which means waste, if not friction—should be avoided.[1] In any prophecy as to the probable future functions of the Poor Law, or as to the direction in which this may develop or be curtailed, this fact must be remembered, as also must the growing conviction that the day of the amateur administrator is over. Inefficient administration is too expensive for those who have to find the funds; also, in spite of the most excellent intentions, because it so often does harm rather than good, it is ultimately terribly expensive to those who are the objects of its activities.

[1] The Minority Report of 1909. The chief proposal of the Minority was that all the various functions of the Poor Law should be handed over to the existing authorities which were now overlapping its various departments.