

Dr Chuseman of Chatham
1818
N. Y. Soc

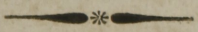
REPORT

OF

A COMMITTEE

ON THE SUBJECT

OF PAUPERISM.



New-York :

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1818.

N. Y. Soc. of Pauperism

AT a meeting of a respectable number of citizens convened at the New-York Hospital, on Friday the 16th of December, to take into consideration the subject of Pauperism, General Matthew Clarkson was appointed chairman, and Divie Bethune, secretary.

On motion of Charles Wilkes, Esq. seconded by Wm. Johnson, Esq. it was unanimously

Resolved, That the citizens present, with those who may hereafter unite in the measure, be constituted a Society for the prevention of Pauperism.

Resolved, That a committee be appointed to prepare a Constitution for the government of the society, and a statement of the prevailing causes of Pauperism, with suggestions relative to the most suitable and efficient remedies; whereupon the following gentlemen were appointed a committee for that purpose, viz. John Griscom, Brockholst Livingston, Garrett N. Bleeker, Thomas Eddy, James Eastburn, Rev. Cave Jones, Zachariah Lewis, and Divie Bethune, who were requested, when ready to report, to convene the society for that purpose.

At a meeting of the society on Friday, the 6th of February, 1818, the following report from the Committee was read: whereupon, it was

Resolved, That 1000 copies of the Report and Constitution be published for distribution, under the direction of the same committee.

REPORT

ON THE

Subject of Pauperism.



*To the "New-York Society for the prevention
of Pauperism."*

THE committee appointed to prepare a Constitution for the government of the society, and a statement of the prevailing causes of pauperism, with suggestions relative to the most suitable and efficient remedies, Report,

THAT we entered upon the duties assigned us, under a strong conviction of the great importance of the subject of Pauperism. We were persuaded that on the judicious management of this subject, depend, in a high degree, the comfort, the tranquillity, and the freedom of communities. We were not insensible of the serious and alarming evils that have resulted, in various places, from misguided benevolence, and imprudent systems of relief. We knew that in Europe and America, where the greatest efforts have been made to provide for the sufferings of the poor, by high and even enormous taxation, those sufferings were increasing in a ratio much greater than the population, and were evidently augmented by the very means taken to subdue them.

We were fully prepared to believe, that without a radical change in the principles upon which public alms have

been usually distributed, helplessness and poverty would continue to multiply—demands for relief would become more and more importunate, the numerical difference between those who are able to bestow charity and those who sue for it, would gradually diminish, until the present system must fall under its own irresistible pressure, prostrating perhaps, in its ruin, some of the pillars of social order.

It might be long indeed, before such a catastrophe would be extensively felt in this free and happy country. Yet, it is really to be feared, as we apprehend, that it would not be long before some of the proximate evils of such a state of things would be perceived in our public cities, and in none, perhaps, sooner than in New-York. Although these consequences are but too apparent from the numerous facts which recent investigations have brought to light, particularly in Great Britain, and in some parts of the United States, yet we are very sensible of the difficulties attendant upon every attempt to provide an adequate remedy for poverty, and its concomitant wretchedness.

The evil lies deep in the foundation of our social and moral institutions; and we cannot but consider it as one of the most obscure and perplexing, and at the same time, interesting and imposing departments of political economy.

While there exists so great a disparity in the physical and intellectual capacities of men, there must be, in every government, where a division of property is recognised by law and usage, a wide difference in the means of support. Such, too, is the complication of human affairs, the numerous connections, and close dependencies of one part upon another, it is scarcely to be presumed, and it would be extravagant to expect, that under the most moral, and the wisest civil regulation to which human society is susceptible of attaining, partial indigence and distress will not be

experienced to an amount that will ever demand the exercise of Christian benevolence.

The great and leading principles, therefore, of every system of Charity, ought to be, *First*, Amply to relieve the unavoidable necessities of the poor; and *Secondly*, to lay the powerful hand of moral and legal restriction upon every thing that contributes, directly and necessarily, to introduce an artificial extent of suffering; and to diminish, in any class of the community, a reliance upon its own powers of body and mind for an independent and virtuous support. That to the influence of those extraneous, debilitating causes, may be ascribed nine tenths of the poverty which actually prevails, we trust, none will doubt who are extensively acquainted with facts in relation to this subject.

The indirect causes of poverty are as numerous as the frailties and vices of men. They vary with constitution, with character, and with national and local habits. Some of them lie so deeply entrenched in the weakness and depravity of human nature, as to be altogether unassailable by mere political regulation. They can be reached in no other way, than by awakening the dormant and secret energies of moral feeling.

But with a view to bring the subject committed to our charge, more definitely before the society, we have thought it right, distinctly to enumerate the more prominent of those causes of poverty, which prevail within this city; sub-joining such remarks as may appear needful.

1st. **IGNORANCE**, arising either from inherent dullness, or from want of opportunities for improvement. This operates as a restraint upon the physical powers, preventing that exercise and cultivation of the bodily faculties by which skill is obtained, and the means of support increased. The influence of this cause, it is believed, is particularly

great among the foreign poor that annually accumulate in this city.

2nd. IDLENESS. A tendency to this evil may be more or less inherent. It is greatly increased by other causes, and when it becomes habitual, it is the occasion of much suffering in families, and augments to a great amount the burden of the industrious portions of society.

3d. INTEMPERANCE IN DRINKING. This most prolific source of mischief and misery, drags in its train almost every species of suffering which afflicts the poor. This evil, in relation to poverty and vice, may be emphatically styled, the *Cause of Causes*. The box of Pandora is realized in each of the kegs of ardent spirits that stand upon the counters of the 1600 hundred licensed grocers of this city. At a moderate computation, the money spent in the purchase of spirituous liquors would be more than sufficient to keep the whole city constantly supplied with bread. Viewing the enormous devastations of this evil upon the minds and morals of the people, we cannot but regard it as the crying and increasing sin of the nation, and as loudly demanding the solemn deliberation of our legislative assemblies.

4th. WANT OF ECONOMY. Prodigality is comparative. Among the poor, it prevails to a great extent, in an inattention to those small, but frequent savings when labour is plentiful, which may go to meet the privations of unfavourable seasons.

5th. IMPRUDENT AND HASTY MARRIAGES. This, it is believed is a fertile source of trial and poverty.

6th. LOTTERIES. The depraving nature and tendency of these allurements to hazard money, is generally admitted by those who have been most attentive to their effects. The time spent in inquiries relative to lotteries,

in frequent attendance on lottery offices, the feverish anxiety which prevails relative to the success of tickets, the associations to which it leads, all contribute to divert the labourer from his employment, to weaken the tone of his morals, to consume his earnings, and consequently to increase his poverty. But objectionable and injurious to society as we believe lotteries to be, we regard as more destructive to morals, and ruinous to all character and comfort, the numerous self-erected lottery insurances, at which the young and the old are invited to spend their money in such small pittances, as the poorest labourer is frequently able to command, under the delusive expectation of a gain, the chance of which is as low, perhaps, as it is possible to conceive. The poor are thus cheated out of their money and their time, and too often left a prey to the feelings of desperation: or, they are impelled by those feelings to seek a refuge in the temporary, but fatal oblivion of intoxication.

7th. PAWNBROKERS. The establishment of these offices is considered as very unfavourable to the independence and welfare of the middling and inferior classes. The artifices which are often practised to deceive the expectations of those who are induced, through actual distress, or by positive allurements, to trust their goods at these places, not to mention the facilities which they afford to the commission of theft, and the encouragement they give to a dependence on stratagem and cunning, rather than on the profits of honest industry, fairly entitle them, in the opinion of the committee, to a place among the *causes of Poverty*.

8th. HOUSES OF ILL FAME. The direful effects of those sinks of iniquity, upon the habits and morals of a numerous class of young men, especially of sailors and apprentices, are visible throughout the city. Open abandon-

ment of character, vulgarity, profanity, &c. are among the inevitable consequences, as it respects our own sex, of those places of infamous resort. Their effects upon the several thousands of females within this city, who are ingulphed in those abodes of all that is vile, and all that is shocking to virtuous thought, upon the miserable victims, many of them of decent families, who are here subjected to the most cruel tyranny of their inhuman masters—upon the females, who, hardened in crime, are nightly sent from those dens of corruption to roam through the city, “seeking whom they may devour,” we have not the inclination, nor is it our duty to describe. Among “the causes of poverty,” those houses, where all the base-born passions are engendered—where the vilest profligacy receives a forced culture, must hold an eminent rank.

9th. **THE NUMEROUS CHARITABLE INSTITUTIONS OF THE CITY.** The committee by no means intend to cast an indiscriminate censure upon these institutions, nor to implicate the motives, nor even to deny the usefulness, in a certain degree, of any one of them. They have unquestionably had their foundation in motives of true Philanthropy; they have contributed to cultivate the feelings of christian charity, and to keep alive its salutary influence upon the minds of our fellow-citizens; and they have doubtless relieved thousands from the pressure of the most pinching want, from cold, from hunger, and probably in many cases, from untimely death.

But, in relation to these societies, a question of no ordinary moment presents itself to the considerate and real philanthropist. Is not the partial and temporary good which they accomplish, how acute soever the miseries they relieve, and whatever the number they may rescue from sufferings or death, more than counterbalanced, by

the evils that flow from the expectations they necessarily excite ; by the relaxation of industry, which such a display of benevolence tends to produce ; by that reliance upon charitable aid, in case of unfavourable times, which must unavoidably tend to diminish, in the minds of the labouring classes, that wholesome anxiety to provide for the wants of a distant day, which alone can save them from a state of absolute dependance, and from becoming a burden to the community ?

In the opinion of your committee, and in the opinion, we believe, of the greater number of the best writers, of the wisest economists, and of the most experienced philanthropists, which the interesting subject of Pauperism has recently called into action ; the balance of good and evil is unfavourable to the existence of societies for gratuitous relief :—that efforts of this nature, with whatever zeal they may be conducted, never can effect the removal of poverty, nor lessen its general amount ; but that indigence and helplessness will multiply nearly in the ratio of those measures which are ostensibly taken to prevent them.

Such are the consequences of every avowal on the part of the public of a determination to support the indigent by the administration of alms. And in no cases are measures of this kind more prolific in evil, than where they are accompanied by the display of large funds for the purposes of charity ; or where the poor are conscious of the existence of such funds, raised by taxation, and of course, as they will allege, drawn chiefly from the coffers of the rich.

How far these evils are remediable, without an entire dereliction of the great christian duty of charity, is a problem of difficult solution. The principle of taxation is so interwoven with our habits and customs, it would, perhaps, in the present state of things, be impossible to dispense

with it. But while our poor continue to be thus supported, to prevent the misapplication and abuse of the public charity, demands the utmost vigilance, the wisest precaution, and the most elaborate system of inspection and oversight.

To what extent abuses upon our present system of alms are practised, and how far the evils which accompany it are susceptible of remedy, we should not at present, feel warranted in attempting to state. The pauperism of the city is under the management of Five Commissioners, who, we doubt not, are well qualified to fulfil the trust reposed in them, and altogether disposed to discharge it with fidelity. But we cannot withhold the opinion, that without a far more extended, minute, and energetic scheme of management than it is possible for any five men to keep in constant operation, abuses will be practised, and to a great extent, upon the public bounty; taxes must be increased, and vice and suffering perpetuated.

LASTLY. Your committee would mention WAR during its prevalence, as one of the most abundant sources of poverty and vice, which the list of human corruptions comprehends. But as this evil lies out of the immediate reach of local regulation, and as we are now happily blest with a peace which we hope will be durable, it is deemed unnecessary further to notice it.

Such are the causes which are considered as the more prominent and operative in producing that amount of indigence and suffering, which awakens the charity of this city, and which has occasioned the erection of buildings for eleemosynary purposes, at an expense of half a million of dollars, and which calls for the annual distribution of 90,000 dollars more. But, if the payment of this sum were the only inconvenience to be endured—trifling, indeed, in comparison would be the evils which claim our attention.

Of the mass of affliction and wretchedness actually sustained, how small a portion is thus relieved ! Of the quantity of misery and vice which the causes we have enumerated, with others we have not named, bring upon the city, how trifling the portion actually removed, by public or by private benevolence ! Nor do we conceive it possible to remove this load of distress, by all the alms doings of which the city is capable, while the causes remain in full and active operation.

Effectually to relieve the poor, is therefore a task far more comprehensive in its nature, than simply to clothe the naked and to feed the hungry. It is, to erect barriers against the encroachments of moral degeneracy ;—It is to heal the diseases of the mind ;—It is, to furnish that alimment to the intellectual system which will tend to preserve it in healthful operation.

But can a task of this nature come within the reach of any public or any social regulation ? We answer, that to a certain, and to a very valuable extent, we believe it can. When any measure for the promotion of public good, or the prevention of public evil, founded upon equitable principles, is supported by a sufficient weight of social authority, it may gradually pass into full and complete operation, and become established upon a basis as firm as a law of legislative enactment. And in matters of private practice, reformation which positive statute could never accomplish, social and moral influence may thoroughly effect.

The present tranquil state of the public mind, and the almost total absence of political jealousy, indicate a period peculiarly favourable to internal improvement and reformation.

We therefore proceed to point out the means, which we

consider best calculated to meliorate the condition of the poorer classes, and to strike at the root of those evils which go to the increase of poverty and its attendant miseries.

We hold it to be a plain fundamental truth, that one of the most powerful incitements to an honest and honourable course of conduct, is a regard to reputation: or a desire of securing the approbation of our friends and associates. To encourage this sentiment among the poor, to inspire them with the feelings of self respect, and a regard to character, will be to introduce the very elements of reform. In the constitution which we shall offer for the government of this society, the means will be provided for effecting, or endeavouring to effect, the following regulations, as soon as the society shall become sufficiently large and weighty to proceed therein. But we wish expressly to state, that in whatever measures the society shall engage, it will be proper, in our opinion, that the managers endeavour to obtain the sanction of the corporation of the city, and in every case which requires it, the authority and cooperation of that body.

1st. To divide the city into very small districts, and to appoint from the members of the society, two or three visitors for each district, whose duty it shall be, to become acquainted with the inhabitants of the district, to visit frequently the families of those who are in indigent circumstances, to advise them with respect to their business, the education of their children, the economy of their houses, to administer encouragement or admonition, as they may find occasion; and in general, by preserving an open, candid, and friendly intercourse with them, to gain their confidence, and by suitable and well timed counsel, to excite them to such a course of conduct as will best promote their physical and moral welfare. The visitors to keep

an accurate register of the names of all those who reside within their respective districts, to notice every change of residence, whether of single or married persons, and to annex such observations to the names of those who claim their particular attention as will enable them to give every needful information with respect to their character, reputation, habits, &c.

It may fairly be presumed, that if this scheme of inspection can be carried into full effect; if visiters can be found, who will undertake the charge, from the pure motive of philanthropy, and if, on the principles of active concert, a reference be always had to the books of the visiters, before charitable relief is extended to any individual, by any of the institutions already established, and due notice taken of the information they afford, a change will soon be perceived in the aspect of the poor. Finding that they have real friends, that their conduct is an object of solicitude, that their characters will be the subject of remark, a sense of decency, and a spirit of independence will be gradually awakened, the effects of which, must eventually be perceived in the diminution of the poor rates of the city.

2nd. To encourage and assist the labouring classes to make the most of their earnings, by promoting the establishment of a Savings Bank, or of Benefit Societies, Life Insurances, &c. The good effects of such associations have been abundantly proved in Europe and in America. Boston, Philadelphia, and Baltimore have each a Savings Bank.

3rd. To prevent, by all legal means, the access of paupers who are not entitled to a residence in the city. The plan of inspection before described will furnish the means of entirely preventing those disgraceful encroachments up-

on the charity of the city, which it is believed have been practised to no inconsiderable extent.

4th. To unite with the corporate authorities in the entire inhibition of street begging. There can be no reasonable excuse whatever, for this practice, more especially if the course of inspection, now recommended, be kept in operation.

5th. To aid, if it shall be deemed expedient, in furnishing employment to those who cannot procure it, either by the establishment of houses of industry, or by supplying materials for domestic labour.

Although this mode of relieving the necessitous, may appear to be entirely exempt from the evils arising from gratuitous aid, it will undoubtedly require a judicious course of management, lest it produce a relaxation of concern on the part of the poor to depend on their own foresight and industry, and the same consequent increase of helplessness and poverty. Yet it must be expected, that numerous cases will occur in which employment will furnish by far the most eligible kind of relief. Among the female poor, these cases will be the most numerous. Women have fewer resources than men; they are less able to seek for employment; they are more exposed to a sudden reverse of circumstances. Of the wants and the sufferings of this class, their own sex are the best judges. Hence, we are of opinion, that the "society for the promotion of industry" deserve the thanks of the community, and that the disinterested and well directed efforts of that society, ought to receive an adequate and extended support.

6th. To advise and promote the opening of places of worship in the outer wards of the city, especially in situations where licentiousness is the most prevalent. This subject is considered as one of vital importance. If, as we believe,

nine tenths of the poverty and wretchedness which the city exhibits, proceeds directly or indirectly from the want of correct moral principle, and if religion is the basis of morality, then will it be admitted, that to extend the benefits of religious instruction, will be to strike at the root of that corrupt tree which sheds dreariness and penury from all its branches. That there is a lamentable deficiency of religious observance, is extremely obvious. It is questionable whether one man or woman in fifty, of the indigent, enters a place of worship three times in a year. The means are not provided for them, and they are unable to provide them for themselves. Now it has been remarked, that in the immediate vicinity of a church, it is rare to find a house devoted to lewdness or depravity. One half of the sum *annually* expended in the maintenance of the poor, would be sufficient to build three houses for public worship.

Further, if wretchedness proceed from vice, and vice, among the poor, be generally the offspring of moral and intellectual darkness, is it not a most reasonable, social duty, which the enlightened portions of society owe to the ignorant, to instruct before they condemn, to teach before they punish? Can there be a more painful reflection in the mind of a humane juror, than the thought of consigning to death, or to perpetual exclusion from the enjoyments of virtuous society, a fellow-creature, for crimes that have evidently resulted from that condition of vicious ignorance, to which he has ever been exposed, without any attempts on the part of the community to rescue him from it?

The committee would, therefore, submit to the society, the proposition of endeavouring to effect, as the means may accrue, the gradual erection of buildings for public worship, in those parts of the city where they are the most

needed, until every citizen may have an opportunity of attending divine worship.

7th. To promote the advancement of First day, or Sunday School Instruction, both of children and adults. We cannot but regard this kind of instruction as one of the most powerful engines of social reform, that the wisdom and benevolence of men have ever brought into operation.

8th. To contrive a plan, if possible, by which all the spontaneous charities of the town may flow into one channel, and be distributed in conformity to a well regulated system, by which deception may be prevented, and other indirect evils arising from numerous independent associations, be fairly obviated.

It appears highly probable, that if the administration of the charities of the city were so conducted, as to obviate all danger of misapplication and deception; those charities would flow with greater freedom, and that funds might occasionally be obtained, which would afford the means of erecting houses for worship, opening schools, and employing teachers, and thus direct, with greater efficacy, those materials which alone can ensure to the great fabric of society, its fairest proportions, and its longest duration.

9th. To obtain the abolition of the greater number of shops, in which spirituous liquors are sold by license.

We trust that four fifths, if not the whole of the intelligent portion of our fellow-citizens will unite in opinion, that the present extension of licensed retailers is equivalent, or very nearly so, as it respects the morals of the city, to the entire abrogation of the law which requires a dealer in liquors to take out a license. While the number of places in the city remains so excessively great, which afford to the poor and ignorant, not only so many facilities, but so many invitations and temptations to spend their mo-

ney "over the maddening bowl," reformation will be greatly impeded; poverty and ruin must increase and abound.

If each of the 1600 retailers in the city, sell, upon an average, to the amount of 250 cents per day, an estimate which we presume all will consider within the truth, the aggregate amount for the year, is \$1,460,000. This enormous sum, extorted from the sweats of labour, and the tears and groans of suffering wives and children, would be sufficient to build annually, 50 *houses of worship* at \$20,000 each, and leave a surplus that would be more than sufficient to erect school houses, and amply provide for the education of every child in the city. When, with a single glance of the mind, we contrast the difference in moral effect, between the appropriation of this sum to the support of the buyers and sellers of strong drink, and its appropriation to the support of honest and industrious mechanics, employed in the erection of buildings, which would improve and ornament the city, and to the diffusion of religion and useful learning, who will not rise and exert his strength against the encroachment of so mighty an evil?

Various other subjects and modes of relief, tending to the same great object, might be enumerated, but we forbear any further to enlarge our report, by the recital of them.

In the Constitution which we herewith submit for the organization and government of the society, a door is opened for the adoption of any measure which the society may deem it expedient to pursue, in conformity to the principal design of its institution.

To conclude, the committee has by no means intended, in the freedom with which it has thus examined the causes of pauperism, and suggested remedies, to encourage the expectation that the whole of these remedies can be speedily

brought within the power and control of the society. A work of so much importance to the public welfare cannot be the business of a day: but we nevertheless entertain the hope, that if the principles and design of this society shall, upon mature examination and reflection, receive the approbation of the great body of our intelligent fellow-citizens, and the number of its members be augmented accordingly, it will be able gradually to bring within its operation, all the important measures suggested in this report. By what particular mode these measures shall be encountered, whether through the agency of large and efficient committees of this society, or by auxiliary societies, each established, for a specific purpose, under the patronage of the parent institution, and subordinate to its general principles, we leave to the wisdom and future decision of the society.

On behalf of the Committee,

JOHN GRISCOM, *Chairman.*

New-York, Second-month 4th, 1812.

Proposed Constitution.

ARTICLE I.

THIS society shall be known by the name of "The New-York Society for the prevention of Pauperism."

ARTICLE II.

Its objects shall be, to investigate the circumstances and habits of the poor ; to devise means for improving their situation, both in a physical and moral point of view ; to suggest plans for calling into exercise their own endeavours, and afford the means for giving them increased effect ; to hold out inducements to economy and saving from the fruits of their own industry, in the seasons of greater abundance ; to discountenance, and as far as possible, prevent mendicity and street begging ; and in fine, to do every thing which may tend to meliorate their condition, by stimulating their industry, and exciting their own energies.

ARTICLE III.

Any person signing this constitution, paying one dollar at the time of signing, and one dollar annually, shall become a member of this society.

ARTICLE IV.

The business shall be conducted by a Board of Managers, consisting of thirty members, to be chosen at the annual meeting of the society, to be held on the last Tuesday in October, in each year, and nine of whom shall constitute a quorum.

ARTICLE V.

Its officers shall be a President, two Vice-Presidents, a Treasurer, and Secretary, to be appointed by the board of managers.

ARTICLE VI.

The corporation of this city shall be entitled to appoint any five members of their body, who, when so appointed, shall, *ex officio*, be members of this board of managers.

ARTICLE VII.

This constitution shall not be altered, except at an annual meeting of the society, and by two thirds of the members present.