PAPERS
ON
Out-door Relief and Tramps,
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OUT-DOOR RELIEF.

We may, perhaps, take it for granted that the principle of what is called out-door relief includes two conditions,—first, that the persons seeking such relief have a home or certainly a residence in the community where such relief is to be administered; second, that the circumstances calling for such relief are temporary in their nature.

It will be at once observed that the necessary existence of these conditions will exclude from our present consideration the two remaining classes of paupers, namely, those whose physical weakness or mental infirmity renders it highly probable that they will be permanent paupers, and also those able-bodied persons having no homes and unable to find employment, or unwilling to labor, and familiar to us all as vagrants or tramps.

Out-door relief has hitherto been mainly administered in one of three ways:

1. With funds raised by taxation and distributed by paid officials.

2. With funds raised by taxation and distributed by a municipal board, in accordance with the recommendation of a body of unpaid officials or supervisors selected from reputable citizens. This is now well known as the Elberfeld system of out-door relief. It has been in active operation in the German town of that name, near Dusseldorf, since 1853, has been copied in several of the neighboring towns, and has shown some remarkable results. In 1852, Elberfeld, with a population of about 50,000, relieved 4000 paupers, at an expense of more than $44,000. In 1869, with a population of 71,000, there were less than 1100 persons needing relief, and the expense incurred in supplying their wants was less than $19,000. The characteristic feature of the Elberfeld system is the very minute and constant supervision carried on by unpaid visitors of the best class, selected from representatives of various callings. It is considered essential to the successful prosecution of the system that the district assigned to each visitor should be very small, and the poor under his inspection very few,
(not to exceed at any time four families), so that he can do his work thoroughly, without encroaching upon the hours required for his regular occupation. The visitors are instructed to make a careful investigation of each case, ascertaining what means of support the applicant may have, what relatives are able to contribute to his maintenance, what is his capacity for labor, and all other facts pertinent to the inquiry. The visitor then makes his report to the municipal board, who are to determine whether any relief shall be granted and to what extent. In cases of great urgency, however, the visitor is authorized to give temporary assistance, pending the decision of the board. The relief is always granted for a brief period and the cases are frequently re-heard and revised. Care is uniformly taken that while sufficient aid is furnished, it shall not be given in such generous measure as to make public charity attractive. There are moreover strict police regulations, punishing with imprisonment refusal to work when employment can be had, wasting the relief granted and misspending time in amusement, idleness or drink, in such a manner as to render public aid necessary. The system is still further fenced about with other restrictions and precautions, which, together with its peculiar official machinery, need not be detailed here. The essential and controlling idea of the system is the minute and constant supervision of applicants for relief by intelligent and trustworthy citizens, each having a small number of families under his charge, with this limitation imposed upon their operations, that the aid actually furnished shall be, as a rule, distributed by still another class,—to wit, the paid servants of the municipal board.

3. With funds raised by voluntary contributions, and distributed by unpaid agents.

Now, bearing in mind that the only correct theory of out-door relief is to furnish assistance to families who are not wholly destitute, and therefore are not candidates for the almshouse,—that it is to the last degree desirable, while affording the relief needed for the moment, to avoid, so far as is possible, whatever will tend to create or foster the habit of dependence, and therefore diminish self-respect and the disposition to be self-supporting,—and that it is equally desirable to guide the applicant for aid into the paths of honorable industry, to impress upon him that the relief furnished is intended to provide for a temporary emergen-
But this method of relief is open to the further objection that, even were the malign feature of politics no longer an element in the problem, there remains the incontestable fact that funds raised by the simple process of taxation and distributed by official machinery will never be expended in the wisest manner. For the giving of relief in this way must always be to a greater or less extent mechanical, where it is not mercenary or dishonest. The disbursing official soon comes to discharge his designated duty in a perfunctory, if not careless, spirit. He is animated, not by motives of benevolence, but by an almost inevitable desire to perform as little labor as will satisfy the scrutiny, (usually superficial), of the appointing power. It is far easier to pay to the applicant a regular stipend, or from the caprice of the moment to refuse it, than to make a careful examination into the merits of the case and to repeat this examination at short intervals. If the officer commence his work with a conscience, he soon finds it an inconvenient companion, interfering with his ease by increasing his labor. Day by day he abates his vigilance and relaxes the severity of his rules. He hardens his heart against the timid and easily repelled applicant, while he suffers himself to be deceived by the whining, or wearied into compliance by the importunate, or bullied by the sturdy beggar. Practically, he says to himself, "About so much money will be spent anyhow; let me give it in such a manner as will cause me the least possible distress of mind or fatigue of body." He recognizes no duty to the tax-payer; he is actuated by no desire to diminish the number of paupers; he is stimulated by no sense of what he owes to the calls of suffering humanity. He is by turns a tyrant and a coward—a tyrant to the weak and shrinking applicant, a coward to the bold and unblushing mendicant. He, too, has caught the contagion which infects alike the dispenser and the recipient of the public funds.

If now, to cover all the possibilities of the problem, we may imagine the case of an official who persists in doing faithful and discriminating work, we shall see a man who received scanty support from those associated with him, if indeed he does not encounter their active opposition, and when he is displaced as inconveniently honest, or voluntarily retires from a position the duties of which are properly discharged with so much difficulty, his place is promptly filled by one who has no such scruples, and the work goes on in the old expensive and harmful way.
cy,—in effect, to bridge over the chasm between enforced idleness and remunerative employment; in other words, to exercise the greatest practicable care that charity shall not be so bestowed as to afford the means of vicious indulgence, or encourage continuous improvidence; keeping in mind all these and kindred considerations, let us examine, very briefly, each of the modes of granting out-door relief which have been indicated.

The first method, i.e., where funds raised by taxation are distributed by paid officials, seems to us to be open to the gravest objections. Its direct and unavoidable tendency is to encourage the pernicious notion that the state is bound to support all who demand assistance; a notion which leads the recipient of relief administered in this way to accept it without gratitude and use it without discretion. The state represents to the professional pauper a vast, intangible body, which somehow owes him a living, which gives without self-denial or sacrifice, and without feeling the burden of maintaining him, and which he can therefore plunder without remorse and with very little danger of detection. The once honest pauper soon catches the contagion and accepts the disgraceful situation. It no longer seems to him sinful to deceive the official who feeds him. To live without labor has become his only aim.

Hence this system not only encourages a confirmed habit of dependence, and, as a natural result, a loss of self-respect and a fatal willingness to belong to the pauper class, but also a habit of pitiful deceit, maturing by rapid steps into positive dishonesty, too often terminating in a career of crime. The family once accustomed to live in willing indolence, without shame, content to be maintained from the public purse at the hands of officials whom it deliberately and systematically misleads, is simply a training school for thieves.

Again, this system tends directly to political favoritism, by putting into the hands of the distributing officers a most powerful engine of corruption. It is surely so notorious as to need no proof that votes are influenced by making the receipt of assistance the reward of political services, in the confident belief, (amply justified by experience), that sins of this description will be readily condoned by the party which derives a temporary advantage from such flagrant dishonesty. That an evil of this magnitude is inseparable from the system would seem of itself to constitute a conclusive reason for discarding it.
condition of the recipient must be re-examined at frequent inter-
vals. Those who are proper recipients for aid one week may not
be so the next. The great danger is that those who have once
experienced the convenience of out-door relief will relax all efforts
in their own behalf and invent excuses for rendering the tempo-
rary relief permanent. Relief acknowledged first as a gift and
gratefully received is at length demanded defiantly as a right."

Now it will not be denied that such frequent visitation, such
constant and close supervision, and especially such intimate and
friendly personal intercourse as we have shown to be necessary
to the best conceivable system of out-door relief, is, if not im-
possible, practically unattainable in the case of paid officials.
For we must always encounter, under this plan of operation, not
only the, perhaps, inevitable tendency of this kind of salaried la-
bor to degenerate into machine work, but also its invariable in-
adequacy in numerical force to do anything like justice to the
large area assigned to each official. If we are told that the force
might be increased indefinitely, the ready and sufficient answer
is that tax-payers would never consent to the burden which
would be imposed upon them by the army of disbursing agents
which would find full employment in such a field.

The second mode of out-door relief, i. e., with funds raised by
taxation and distributed on the recommendation of unpaid visit-
ors, while free from many of the objections which have been
urged against the first method, is still open, at least so far as
this country is concerned, to several objections of a very serious
character. Among them may be mentioned the following:

1. The funds distributed are to be raised by taxation. We
have already indicated some of the evils attendant upon this
form of relief, prominent among which is the danger of encour-
aging the pernicious idea that the state is bound to support its
idle poor.

2. The visitors are directly appointed by the municipal board,
who in their turn are to be elected by one or the other of our po-
litical parties. Until civil-service reform has gained a firm foot-
hold in this country, it is certainly unsafe, in the light of what
has been urged under this head, to entrust, directly or indirectly,
the distribution of public funds in the form of out-door relief to
a body of men dependent for their political existence upon the
popular vote. The fact that this system has worked well in Ger-
And, after all, however faithfully as to frequent visitation and careful investigation of the actual circumstances of applicants, the work, under this system, might in a possible condition of affairs be performed, there would always be lacking the most important element of successful labor among the poor, the element of personal sympathy. Such an official visitor as we have described, at the best, recognizes but one duty—to guard against imposition. The applicant for relief sees him in but a single aspect—that of one who is appointed and paid to feed him out of the public treasury. But the true design of administering outdoor relief includes much more than this. It should aim to preserve the self-respect of the recipient, to encourage him in all honest efforts to maintain himself, and to impress upon him that such aid ought to be withheld as soon as practicable, not merely for the sake of protecting the public purse, but also on account of the evil effect of dependence on the habits and character of the recipient. Indeed, it cannot be urged too strongly or too frequently that the slightest aid, in any conceivable form, which is given to one who is physically able to render an equivalent in labor and who fails from any cause to render such equivalent, is a positive injury to the person so relieved.

Now, to emphasize these and similar arguments to be addressed to the pauper, he must know that the visitor is rendering his services without remuneration. He must be made to feel that the person with whom he is dealing can be actuated by no motives but those of pure benevolence. Too much importance cannot be attached in relieving and reformatory labor among the poor, to the immediate contact of unpaid visitors with the applicants for aid. "Everything can be done by personal intercourse with the poor, nothing without it," said one who had taken an active part in the Elberfeld system of out-door relief.

In this way, persons belonging to the intelligent and prosperous classes are brought into close relations with the poor under circumstances where wisely directed sympathy and good counsel will do vastly more than the mere relief doled out to, preserve their manhood and lift them from poverty to a self-supporting condition.

It has been truly remarked that "out-door relief should, so far as possible, be temporary in its character and stopped the very moment it ceases to be necessary. In order to effect this the
charity. True charity, in the form of out-door relief, is just that amount and kind of assistance which is best adapted to the circumstances of the particular applicant. All alms-giving which does not keep this principle constantly in view is ill-advised and injurious.

Second.—The cases in which relief is afforded must be under careful and constant supervision and the relief must be withdrawn the very moment it ceases to be necessary.

Third.—Every effort must be made to preserve unbroken the family status of the persons assisted where this can be done without endangering the morals of the recipients or diminishing their desire to be self-supporting.

Fourth.—While it is highly desirable that the expenses of alms-giving under this system should be reduced to the lowest practicable point, it seems essential that there should be some experienced and competent supervising authority, receiving an adequate salary and devoting all his time to the work.

Fifth.—The area of territory in which out-door relief is to be administered, if too large to be wisely committed to the control of a single charitable organization, should be so exactly apportioned to different relieving societies as to render it impossible for any family to receive assistance from more than one source.
many, furnishes, we have too much reason to fear, no sufficient evidence that it can be successfully introduced into this country.

We come now to the third method of out-door relief, where funds raised by voluntary contribution are distributed by voluntary and unpaid visitors. It will, we think, be readily apparent that the evils which we have shown to be inseparable from the other methods of out-door relief will not attach to this system. An additional reason for preferring the voluntary system deserves to be stated.

It needs no argument to demonstrate that the unpaid visitor, distributing funds raised in this way, will be free from many of the temptations, and will naturally avoid many of the errors to which the visitor under the first and second methods is inevitably liable. He volunteers for the service because he is impressed with its importance, and conscious of his duty to the community in which he resides. He is accepted because he is believed to be competent, trustworthy and unselfish. If he persevere in his undertaking, it is because he is convinced by experience that he is engaged in a wise and beneficent enterprise, conducted according to sound principles of alms-giving. In a word, the voluntary visitor under this system, fully aware that he is simply a steward to disburse with intelligent and careful discrimination funds which have been contributed by charitable citizens, will realize the sacredness of the trust committed to his charge, will perform with ever-increasing fidelity the duties which he has assumed, and will daily gain practical wisdom by varied experience, often depressing to the very verge of despair, but, in the long run, leading to the conviction that there is no more useful field of labor for the enlightened philanthropist than the judicious relief of the deserving poor.

In what has been said, we have purposely abstained from entering into details or prescribing any code of regulations in accordance with which such a system of out-door relief as we have recommended should be carried into execution. We have simply aimed to lay down certain general principles applicable to the topic under consideration. It may be well, however, before dismissing the subject, to indicate some of the points which should always be kept in mind by those who undertake to render out-door relief under what may be called the voluntary system.

First.—It should be remembered that mere alms-giving is not
TRAMPS.

Paupers, or those who are unable or unwilling to provide for their own support, may be divided, broadly, into three classes.

First.—Those who have been reduced to poverty by physical infirmity or mental imbecility or positive insanity, and whose condition renders it practically certain that they will be permanent paupers.

Second.—Persons fairly entitled to out-door relief. Perhaps no better classification of these can be given than is furnished in a paper in the 8th Annual Report of the New York Board of State Charities, prepared by President Anderson, of Rochester University.

"1. Cases of pestilence, failure of crops producing temporary famine, accident, sudden commercial revolutions, or for the maintenance of families of soldiers during war.

2. Where the progress of science and the arts works sudden changes in manufacturing and mechanical processes to which persons in middle life are unable to adjust themselves—as in the case of the hand-loom weavers in England, or the introduction of iron for the construction of ships; or when the raw material of any kind of manufacture fails—as did the cotton supply in our late war; or a freak of fashion suddenly destroys the demand for certain goods, throwing large numbers out of employment in those handicrafts in which alone they are skilled.

3. Cases where the head of a family is removed by death or prostrated by sickness, and where there is reasonable prospect of the mother being able to keep her family together and ultimately maintain them.

4. Cases where aged and infirm persons are dependent upon relatives who are able to care for them, but unable to meet the whole expense of their support.

5. Cases of the sick poor who are too ill to be removed to the almshouse or the hospital."

It will be observed that the recipients of this form of charity are supposed to have homes in which the relief may be administered, and that the circumstances calling for and justifying assistance are temporary in their nature.

Third.—Able-bodied persons without homes and without regular occupation, who are either unable to find employment or are unwilling to labor.
The second subdivision of this third class, the able-bodied paupers who are unwilling to labor, are unfortunately too well known to us all under the familiar designation of "Tramps."

And as we utter the word Tramp, there arises straightforward before us the spectacle of a lazy, shiftless, sauntering or swaggering, ill-conditioned, irreclaimable, incorrigible, cowardly, utterly depraved savage. He fears not God, neither regards man. Indeed, he seems to have wholly lost all the better instincts and attributes of manhood. He will outrage an unprotected female, or rob a defenceless child, or burn an isolated barn, or girdle fruit trees, or wreck a railway train, or set fire to a railway bridge, or murder a cripple, or pilfer an umbrella, with equal indifference, if reasonably sure of equal impunity. Having no moral sense, he knows no gradations in crime. He dreads detection and punishment, and he dreads nothing else. Whether a refusal to comply with his demands will be followed by murder or a muttered curse depends solely on his chance of a safe retreat. Practically, he has come to consider himself at war with society and all social institutions. He acknowledges no allegiance, he asks no protection, he feels no gratitude. He has only one aim—to be supported in idleness. He has only one fear—to be deprived of his liberty. Therefore, the offences which he commits are almost invariably those which require no labor in preparation and call for no skill in execution. They are inspired by no motive except a momentary impulse of gain, or lust, or revenge. The sight of a watch dog or the suspicion of a revolver will at any time turn him from his cowardly purpose and send him on a safer errand of villainy.

The strength and sacredness of family ties, the love of mother or wife, or child, have often restrained, and sometimes reclaimed a hardened criminal, to whom the idea of home was still a present reality. But this possible refuge of respectability is wanting to the tramp. He has no home, no family ties. He has cut himself off from all influences which can minister to his improvement or elevation. His only associates are men and women of his own stamp. His only occupation is a lazy, loitering pursuit—if pursuit is not too strong a word—of food and lodging by begging or stealing. His only amusement is an occasional debauch. Insolent and aggressive when he dares, fawning and obsequious when he thinks it more prudent to conciliate, but false, treacherous, ungrateful and malignant always, he wanders aimlessly from
suspicion on any member of the little community. The conclusion then seems forced upon you that the offence was perpetrated by some one of the tramps so recently seen in the village; but what tramp? Arrest one of these sons of Belial—the one to whom vague suspicion most plainly points—and what will you be able to prove against him?

Possibly he can be identified, with tolerable certainty, as having been seen in the village within a few hours of the time when the crime was discovered. Beyond this, there is in many or indeed in most cases, no reliable evidence.

But this only tends to show that it is physically possible that he is the guilty man. I need not remind you that this falls far short of the evidence necessary to procure conviction. At the most you have only proved opportunity. You have not shown—in nine cases out of ten, you cannot show—any especial motive applicable to the particular case. The burden of proof is upon you, and you can offer no evidence of the defendant's past history, or of any malign intent in visiting the town, or of any previous grudge or expression of ill feeling against the sufferer—or indeed of any fact legally tending to confirm your suspicions of the guilt of the accused.

You will find his photograph in no portrait gallery of thieves. The police authorities are unable to recognize him as an old offender. He has no home to which he can be traced. There is no clue by which the skilled detective can follow him to his accustomed hiding place. He is simply a tramp. In other words, he belongs to that vast horde of idle and unprincipled vagrants, who, by the fatal indulgence or apathy of our criminal legislation, are permitted to roam, unchecked, throughout the length and breadth of our land.

Ordinarily, flight from the scene of crime is an important element in the prosecutor's case. But here the instant disappearance of the alleged culprit has little or no weight in the scale of presumptive evidence against him. It is only the customary course of the professional tramp. To wander from place to place is his daily habit.

Not to multiply, with undue prolixity, the reasons for our position, the dilemma is as follows—unless the stolen property can be found in the possession of the accused tramp or unless the sufferer from his larceny or his lust or his violence can positively
city to city, from town to town, from hamlet to hamlet, wherever he goes, a positive nuisance and a possible criminal.

If in the cities he is sometimes and somewhat restrained by wholesome awe of a vigilant and adequate police, in the country he has become the daily and nightly dread of all well-disposed persons. Indeed his frequent presence in our village communities, has again and again transformed their quiet, peaceful life into a reign of terror. Murder, outrage worse than murder, arson, highway robbery, felonies of all kinds and petty offences without number, have marked the passage of this unclean beast.

The innocent little maiden on her way to school, the farmer's wife busied about her household cares, the aged couple living remote from the habitations of their fellow men, are alike the victims of his homicidal or licentious violence. Neither pity for helpless and trusting childhood, nor respect for gray hairs stays for one moment his brutal hands.

As Dickens has said of the English tramp—and many of these cruel and cowardly monsters are contributions from the "mother country"—"the pitiless rascal blights the summer road as he maulders on between the luxuriant hedges, where even the wild convolvulus and rose and sweet briar are the worse for his going by, and need time to recover from the taint of him in the air."

Do you ask why the aid of the law is not invoked, and why prompt punishment is not visited upon these high-handed offenders?

I answer, that your question touches one of the most trying aspects of this painful social problem, viz: the difficulty of detection. The tramp has become such a common feature of our daily life, that he excites little remark. To-day, there are two or three seedy, sunburnt, ragged, dirty loafers, lounging about your streets or begging from door to door. Usually, you give or withhold your misnamed charity, as your fears or your easy good nature or the caprice of the moment may dictate, your motive, in most cases, being to get them out of your sight as soon as possible. To-morrow they are twenty miles away and their places are supplied by as many more, with nothing to distinguish them, in the eyes of the untrained observer, from the villainous visitors of yesterday.

Meanwhile an atrocious crime has been committed in that quiet neighborhood. Instant and vigilant investigation fails to fasten
identify him as the actual offender, the chances are that he will go unwhipped of justice, with no result from the investigation but to produce a fresh feeling of insecurity in the community and to extend to the real culprit an implied license to pursue, unmolested, his career of crime. Meanwhile, another case has been added to the long and ghastly catalogue of undetected and unpunished outrages against person or property.

Have I magnified the existing danger, or made my condemnation of a recognized class too sweeping? Are all vagrants to be ranked with actual or possible criminals? Is there not among them a considerable portion of deserving poor?

The more accurate criminal statistics of England lead us to turn first to that country for confirmation of our statements. The returns of 1869-1870 show that about 60,000 persons were then wandering through England, Wales and Scotland, of whom 40 per cent. were computed to belong to the criminal class, and only about six per cent., by the largest and most liberal estimate, —and by some put as low as one per cent.,—were deemed to be honest wayfarers.

One intelligent and experienced English police officer has said that 99 out of every 100 professional mendicants are likewise professional thieves, and practice either trade as occasion serves. The same competent authority attributes to persons of this character the greater number of burglaries, highway robberies and petty larcenies that take place, and gives it as his opinion that if the present system of permitting professional tramps to wander about the country were done away with, a great deal of crime would be prevented.

In the summer of 1870, I visited, at different times, various casual wards in London, at the hour when tramps or casuals apply for a night's lodging.

Each applicant is examined by a police officer or detective, and the answers are taken down.

The inquiries are according to the following formula:

What is your name?
How old are you?
Where were you born?
What is your occupation?
Where did you sleep last night?
Where are you going to-morrow?
These inquiries are made because prescribed by law, but not the slightest credit is ever given to the answers. The tramp can have no conceivable motive for lying, and must lie from sheer force of habit. Nearly all had the stereotyped, professional, indescribable air of habitual laziness, and a majority were more or less in liquor.

They were, almost without exception, able bodied men and women. I conversed with many of them. Each one told a very plausible story, with great fluency and much show of earnestness. They were willing and even anxious to work and had worked until within a day or two, being idle only because it was impossible to find employment. But, when compelled by the officer to show the palms of their hands, it was at once apparent that a long time had elapsed since they had performed any manual labor. They certainly were not "horny-handed sons and daughters of toil." Indeed, whenever on the occasions to which I have referred, I encountered a collection of casuals, I was informed by the detective in attendance, that there was not among them a single deserving person.

To my unpractised eye, there was, at one of these interviews with the casuals, an applicant whose appearance led me to believe that he might be an exception to the general rule. His occupation, as he informed me, was that of a "translator." He was a young man, with a mild, modest, rather intelligent and generally prepossessing face. I said to myself: "Here is, perhaps, a precocious but unfortunate linguist, suffering the too frequent fate of unappreciated genius." It was, however, explained to me that the translation was not of some master piece of human thought from a foreign into our English tongue, but of old boots, (begged or purchased for a trifle), into shoes. I was subsequently informed that much money is often made in this way, sometimes from twenty to thirty shillings per week. The young "translator" confessed to having been occasionally "on the loose," but said that he was tired of leading the life of a tramp and would gladly go to work again if he had money with which to purchase the tools of his trade.

There was so much pathos in his tone, so much sadness in his tearful face, so much apparent sincerity in his professions of a desire to reform, that I could not help believing that I had found at last a genuine case deserving assistance. The detective shook
his head, cautioned me against the danger of being imposed upon, and even went so far as to say that the man was a palpable fraud, but I still held to my more benevolent belief. Accordingly, I informed the youth that if he would call on me at a given hour on the following day, with any one of the numerous testimonials to previous good character which he stated his ability to produce, I would give him such assistance as he needed to set him up in business once more. He was profuse in his expressions of gratitude, but he did not keep his appointment and I have never seen him since that first conversation.

It is certainly unnecessary to prove that the same general principles, with reference to tramps, hold good in this country, which are applicable to Great Britain. If such proof were demanded, I have only to appeal to the observation and experience of every one who has paid any attention to this phase of pauperism in the United States.

Recent investigations by the State detective force of Massachusetts have led to the conclusion that the great body of tramps are professional thieves. Moreover, these officials have reason to believe that such vagrants are formed into organized gangs, under the direction of skillful leaders, with general head quarters in the western part of the State, where their plunder is deposited and divided.

The inner history of the recent disgraceful and disastrous riots in some of our principal cities reveals the fact that to large detachments of our great standing army of professional tramps, and not to the so-called "strikers," is mainly due the causeless and criminal destruction of most valuable property. It is indeed a significant circumstance that Pittsburg, which, doubtless from some good or bad reason, had long been the favorite rendezvous of these wandering hordes, was the principal sufferer from their reckless outrages. But the destruction of property was not the sole or the most dangerous indication of the evil which has justly excited public alarm. The many wanton murders which give a darker coloring to this sad picture of lawless violence, find their only adequate explanation in the baleful presence of the vagrant class.

Now there can be no practical difficulty in the mind of any thoughtful citizen in pronouncing such people as I have been describing dangerous to the peace of the community and deserv-
ing such treatment as will put it out of their power to continue their individual or organized warfare upon those rights which society is bound to protect.

But, harsh as it may seem at first blush, there is no escape from the conclusion that when those who honestly desire employment but can find nothing to do, are reduced to the necessity of begging from door to door, they must, to all intents and purposes and with reference to the remedy to be applied to their unhappy circumstances, be classed with those who are unwilling to labor. In other words, all able bodied beggars having no homes must, so long as they remain in that condition, be treated as vagrants.

If this view of the case seem uncharitable and unnecessarily severe, let me invite your attention to a few considerations which, in my judgment, fully warrant the position I have taken.

First.—It must be remembered that in this country, it is, fortunately, very rare that employment furnishing some remuneration cannot be obtained by all who are really anxious to secure work.

Second.—It should be borne in mind that the really deserving poor can usually find friends or acquaintances familiar with the causes which have reduced them to poverty, and who, if not able to assist them, will, at least, be willing to recommend them as worthy objects of private charity.

Third.—(To quote from the tenth annual report of the New York State Board of Charities), “Examination has made it clear that by far the greater number of paupers have reached that condition by idleness, improvidence, drunkenness, or some form of vicious indulgence.”

Fourth.—It is of the utmost importance, on every sound principle of moral and political economy, that the habit of begging should be promptly and effectually discouraged.

The desire, active or dormant, to evade the consequences of the primal curse: “By the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread,” is a well recognized and ever existing fact. If active, and stimulated by homelessness, poverty and a dissolute life, the genuine tramp is ready made. If dormant, a very few instances of injudicious alms-giving will prove a temptation to habitual vagrancy which is rarely resisted. That is not true charity, but a short-sighted and most harmful weakness which
withdraws or suspends all motive for legitimate labor. It has been well said that "a tramp is one who wishes to live by the sweat of another man's brow." The slightest aid, therefore, whether in the form of food or money which is not earned by an equivalent amount of labor, only fosters a tendency to improvident idleness which may be said to be inherent in human nature.

The evils resulting from much of the so-called charity of the present day cannot be too strongly emphasized. One man assists the beggar at his door because he fears to offend him, another, because he dislikes to turn away a possibly deserving case, another, because he has neither leisure nor inclination to ascertain the truth of the pitiful story which has excited his surface sympathy; and yet in every instance in which assistance has been rendered he has, probably, only confirmed the applicant in his determination to live without labor.

"He tells you of his starving wife,  
His children to be fed,  
Poor little, lovely innocents,  
All clamorous for bread—  
And so you kindly help to put  
A bachelor to bed."

But if we indulge ourselves in the violent supposition that the applicant tells a true story of absolute destitution caused by no fault of his, is it wise in the long run or justifiable on any correct principle of alms-giving, to afford relief without exacting a labor equivalent? Does not the assistance furnished, without any suitable return costing the person aided some honest exertion, injure rather than benefit the recipient? Are we not manufacturing tramps while we believe ourselves to be simply helping the unfortunate poor? The truthful answer to these pertinent inquiries is not far to seek. Careful and minute observation has demonstrated, beyond all reasonable doubt, that it is difficult to exaggerate the demoralizing influence of homeless mendicancy or the rapidity with which the descent from decent, self-respecting industry to shameless laziness is effected.

The honest, reluctant beggar of to-day, telling his sad story of undeserving suffering and enforced idleness, in a very few weeks matures into the professional tramp, coining his unblushing falsehoods as fast as he can talk, receiving alms without gratitude and ready to "turn again and rend" the hand held
out to help him—and all this, mainly, if not solely, because he has learned the fatal lesson that he can always find careless or credulous listeners, who are practically willing to aid and abet him in his efforts to live without labor.

Two questions remain to be answered:

First (and in less general terms than those which we have been using): Who are vagrants?

Second, What shall be done with vagrants?

I do not know any better definition of vagrants than the one given in the Massachusetts Statutes for the year 1866—viz.—*All idle persons, who, not having any visible means of support, live without lawful employment: all persons wandering about and visiting tippling shops and houses of ill fame or lodging in groceries, outhouses, market places, sheds, barns, or in the open air, and not giving a good account of themselves; all persons wandering abroad and begging or who go about begging from door to door, or place themselves in the streets, highways or other public places to beg or receive alms, shall be deemed vagrants.*

Accepting this definition, if you please, as sufficiently accurate for our present purpose, our next inquiry is What shall be done with vagrants? The evil, as we have seen, is one of enormous magnitude, and unless speedily arrested threatens the very life of society. It therefore calls loudly for heroic treatment.

Observe then:

Vagrants are paupers and therefore need relief.

They are able-bodied and are therefore competent to contribute to their own support.

They are, as a class, disposed to prey upon the community, and the community is entitled to adequate protection from their lawless violence.

It seems to follow, therefore, that they should be placed in a situation which will,

First: Provide for their necessities.

Second: Compel them to perform useful work.

Third: Prevent them from committing crime.

Fourth: Render it impossible for them to propagate paupers.

This, of course, involves the idea of confinement, with enforced labor and separation of the sexes. Now, such confinement with enforced labor may be under the immediate direction and control of the town or county or state authorities, and for a longer or shorter period.
The laws of Massachusetts on this point, recently enacted, permit each town or city within its borders, to give temporary relief to vagrants under such regulations as to labor, with certain limitations, as the authorities of such town or city may see fit to prescribe. Wherever this plan has been thoroughly tried, it has greatly diminished the number of vagrants infesting that particular locality. *

The plan, already legalized in Massachusetts has been for years pursued to some extent in England, under the charge of the guardians of the poor districts. But, owing to the expense of providing facilities for work, and the very small amount which can be earned in this way, (the kinds of labor enforced being almost exclusively oakum picking and stone breaking,) many districts have made no arrangements for what is called "the labor test."

It is, however, easily apparent that this mode of dealing with the vagrant problem, although, perhaps, good so far as it goes, is wholly inadequate to the suppression or very material diminution of the evil complained of.

For, 1st: The avails of such labor are merely nominal in amount.

2d: The vagrant has no opportunity of learning any useful trade or occupation.

3d: The vagrant is let loose upon the community for a considerable proportion of the working hours of each day, with the added privilege of roaming at large during the entire day and night, if he elects to avoid a temporary seclusion from general society; and,

4th: This mode of relief leaves it optional with cities and towns, whether they will put this, at best, inadequate remedy into practical operation.

These and other kindred objections, apply, it will be observed, to any system of affording temporary relief, accompanied by temporary labor.

* When the city of Springfield, which imposed upon wandering paupers to whom it furnished lodging, the task of breaking stone till 11 A.M. of the following day, housed five vagrants nightly, the city of Hartford, Conn., less than thirty miles distant, with about the same population, was giving nightly shelter to about one hundred tramps, and, as the Hartford authorities could not well turn applicants away when there was room for them in the lockup, they are said to have been driven to the pitiful device of keeping the windows open during the coldest season of the year.
But, if cities or towns should under legislative sanction and authority, attempt, however thoroughly, to deal with vagrancy as an offence, to be punished by confinement with labor for a term of months, it would result in the establishment of a great number of small work-houses, with an immense aggregate outlay for salaried officers, and, in every way, a very large disbursement, to be met by greatly increased taxation. The smaller towns would naturally seek to evade the enforcement of a law which entailed so much expense, and thus this poor remedy would have only partial application.

Again, the mere fact that a vagrant is found in Pigsgusset to-day, and, if not arrested there, will be in Hardscrabble tomorrow, certainly furnishes no good reason why Pigsgusset, although, perhaps, a thriving village, should be obliged to afford him a home, and a sufficient support. Moreover, the inevitable result of such a system would be, that those towns which are situated on main lines of travel between great business centres, would be compelled to sustain the lion’s share of taxation.

Once more, if the arrangement of the matter under this system were committed to the several counties of each state, the plan would, in many of the smaller states, be open to the same objection. There would still be an unnecessary and wasteful multiplication of work-houses and salaried officials.

If I may venture to assume that the reasons which have been urged against entrusting to cities or towns or counties the application and enforcement of laws in restraint of the tramp nuisance are valid and controlling, we will proceed to consider, very briefly, the only agency remaining to be examined—viz: the States.

So far as I am aware, the wisest and most feasible plan yet devised for dealing with the vagrant dilemma is contained in a Bill prepared and offered to the last Assembly of the state of New York by the “State Charities Aid Association.” Omitting for the sake of brevity many minor, but most essential details, its main features are as follows:

Adopting the existing judicial districts of the state as the basis of distribution, it provides for the appointment of a board of seven managers for each district, such managers to be reimbursed for their actual and necessary expenses while employed in the discharge of their official duties, but to receive no compensation
for their time or services. It is, moreover, expressly provided that no member of the several boards of managers shall be interested, directly or indirectly, in leasing or hiring buildings or land under the 4th Section of the act or in any contract for repairing or furnishing any of the buildings to be used as district-workhouses, or in any contract for supplying food, raw material or other merchandise for any district work-house.

It is made the duty of each board of managers, within six months of the time of their appointment, to hire buildings suitable for the confinement and employment of vagrants.

Proper provision is to be made for the separation of the sexes, by placing them, respectively, in buildings so far removed from one another that all inter-communication is practically impossible.

It is, moreover, wisely prescribed that no female officer or subordinate shall be employed in any building designed for men, and no male officer or subordinate in any building designed for women.

It is made the duty of the Board of Managers in each district to decide upon the kind of employment suitable for the persons committed to each district work-house; to provide for their necessary custody and superintendence, and, in such provisions for safe keeping and employment, to have due regard to the formation of habits of self-supporting industry in the inmates, and to their mental and moral improvement. All powers requisite to the carrying into effect of these provisions are conferred upon the Managers.

The Managers are to open an account with all vagrants duly committed by the local magistrates to the work-houses in their respective districts, charging them with all the expenses incurred by the Managers for their board and maintenance, and crediting them with a fair and reasonable compensation for the labor performed by them, and at the expiration of their terms of sentence, paying to them such balance as shall be found due to them at the time of their discharge.

The "contract system" is strictly prohibited, and no person is to be allowed to oversee the labor of the inmates who is not employed and paid by the Managers.

So soon as the work-house in any district shall be prepared to receive inmates, it shall be the duty of the justices of the peace,
police justices, or other magistrates of such district, (any law to the contrary notwithstanding), to sentence and commit all persons convicted of being vagrants under any existing or future law of the state, whether such law shall apply to the whole state, or to any special county thereof within which said person shall be convicted, to the district work-house of the judicial district in which such conviction shall take place, for a term not less than ninety days or more than six months on the first conviction, and for a term not less than six months or more than one year on a second or any subsequent conviction.

It is also made the duty of every magistrate, justice, and court which examines, or convicts, or commits any person, under authority given in this act, to cause a record to be kept of the name, age, birthplace, occupation, last place of residence and kind of employment, of all persons so committed by them, together with the reasons given for, or the particulars of the vagrancy charged. A copy of said record is to be transmitted upon the official order of the commitment of said persons to the superintendent of the district work-house as a part of the paper or order which shall accompany each person to the work-house, and the superintendent of such work-house is to enter and keep in a book of record all these and such other facts as are by law required concerning the inmates of poor-houses.

It is further provided that the Managers of each district, having hired two or more buildings and land suitable for the confinement and employment of vagrants, shall make an estimate of all necessary expenses to be incurred in establishing, equipping and maintaining said work-house for the year ensuing, and shall then apportion the expense, so estimated, among the several counties composing the district for which said Managers were appointed, pro rata, to the property tax of each county, as the same shall be determined on.

An explanatory appendix to the Bill, of which we have given, as already indicated, only the salient points, defends its general design and predicts the beneficent results to be expected from its adoption and enforcement, in said clear and cogent language, that we make no apology for quoting it without abridgement.

It should be added that this “appendix,” as well as the Bill, whose wise provisions we have been considering, proceeds from that most useful organization, the State Charities Aid Association of the State of New York.
"Having learned that the impression prevails among members of the Assembly that the establishment of District Work-houses, as provided by Assembly Bill, No. 79 (reported favorably by the Judiciary Committee), will entail expense on the people of the State, we wish to call your attention to the fact that it is, on the contrary, a measure of the wisest economy, for the following reasons:

1. Because it proposes to transfer from the county jails, where they spend the time of their sentence in absolute idleness, all persons convicted as vagrants, and place them in work-houses, where they will be compelled to support themselves. The counties will thus be relieved of the burden of maintaining thousands of idle and vicious persons while they are undergoing punishment.

2. A system of reformatory treatment will be carried on in the work-houses, and it is believed that a portion of the inmates will by this means be rendered permanently self-supporting.

3. The proposed discipline will become irksome to incorrigible vagrants, many of whom will leave the State, and thus the work-houses will, both by reformatory and deterrent influences, materially diminish the vicious population of the State.

4. The actual expense of establishing the work-houses will not be great, since the members of the Board of Managers are to receive no salaries, and the bill provides only for the hiring of buildings, and the purchase of furniture, tools and raw material for the employment of the inmates.

As no buildings are to be erected, the number hired can at any time be diminished, should the diminished number of vagrants warrant such a step."

Another consequence which we may reasonably hope would result from the passage of this bill or one embodying kindred provisions and embracing the same general principles, by any of the States of our Union, deserves to be noticed. We have, I think, a right to infer that such a legislative enactment, rigidly enforced, would drive from beyond the confines of the State, so protected, all tramps who succeeded in escaping arrest, and disperse them over adjoining States where no such laws had been adopted.

The communities so invaded would soon be driven in self-defence to resort to similar legislation, until at last there would be no State, in which able-bodied vagrants would be permitted to roam at large, disturbing the good order of society, stealing or destroying the property of law-abiding citizens, wantonly taking or endangering human life and generally bringing a grievous reproach upon our boasted civilization by the daily, spectacle of lawless violence unchecked and brutal crimes unpunished.

If it be urged that the professional tramp is rarely reclaimed
and returned to the ranks of honest labor, we reply that the at-
tempt at reformation has never yet been made under hopeful
conditions. When punitive measures have been put in force, the
term of sentence has always been so brief as to exclude the pos-
sibility of genuine amendment or of acquiring any knowledge of
such trade or occupation as will not only maintain the vagrant
while in confinement, but also teach habits of self-supporting and
self-respecting industry.

Surely, alike on moral and economic grounds, such an experi-
ment is well worth being put to the test of a thorough trial.