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VAGRANCY

IN SPECIAL RELATION TO THE
BERKSHIRE SYSTEM.

A PAPER

READ AT THE

WEST MIDLAND

POOR LAW CONFERENCE,

1882.

BY

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London:

KNIGHT & CO., 90 FLEET STREET.

1882.

VAGRANCY

IN SPECIAL RELATION TO THE BERKSHIRE SYSTEM.

IT will be remembered by many who are now present, that vagrancy was one of the subjects on which papers were read at this Conference last year, and in speaking of "Vagrancy in special relation to the Berkshire system," I fear it may not be easy to avoid drifting off into the general question, and re-opening some matters that were then fully discussed.

Indeed, I must admit having found it necessary deliberately to transgress a little in this respect, since it seems difficult adequately to explain one particular system of dealing with vagrancy, or to point out the advantages claimed for it, without comparing it with other existing systems and their results, and indicating the bearing which it has upon them, and on the numerous suggestions which have from time to time been made.

Assuming the necessity for adopting some more uniform and more efficient method of dealing with vagrancy than has yet prevailed in any considerable part of the country to be generally recognised, the first requisite, unless we are to put off taking any action at all for an indefinite period, is that the plan selected shall be one which is within the powers given by existing laws; a system so framed that it might be

improved and strengthened by increased powers if it should hereafter seem necessary to work for, or possible to obtain them, but which can, nevertheless, at once be organized and efficiently set to work with the law as it now stands. However much we might desire them, it requires an exceedingly sanguine person to expect that our poor bewildered Parliament will find time to make new vagrant laws this many a day to come. We must, therefore, begin by doing the best we can under existing regulations, though I am well aware that the best must be far indeed from perfect.

For several centuries vagrancy has been a source of perplexity to all who have recognised the great evil of it, and it is not likely that we can at once strike out a plan which will provide an entirely satisfactory solution of the difficulty ; but there is no reason why we should not advance much further in a right direction than has yet been done.

There is one alteration in the Local Government Board's Orders which would certainly be desirable as a complement of the system about to be explained, namely a relaxation of the rule that vagrants may not be admitted to the workhouses before six o'clock in winter, or eight o'clock in summer.

A man discharged from a workhouse at eleven o'clock in the morning, and doing what we wish him to do, namely walking straight ahead instead of loafing and cadging, would often arrive somewhat early in the afternoon at the place where he must sleep that night, the next stage being too long ; say at three o'clock on a winter's afternoon, with cold rain or snow falling, or a bitter wind. What on earth is he to do ? There is no place for him to go into before six, he is compelled to idle about, and greatly tempted to beg. Why should not workhouse masters have power to admit a man, say at any time in the afternoon, provided he has done a fair walk and cannot be expected to go on another stage that night, on condition of his consenting to do such work as may be set him ?

The principles on which the Berkshire system is founded are, that provision should first be made for the necessities of all destitute travellers, that the law should then be strictly enforced against all who prove by their conduct that they are not travellers at all, but idlers, and—herein lies its distinctive feature—that the food provided shall be given under conditions which secure this benevolent part of the scheme from abuse.

The arrangements for carrying out these principles are as follows :—

1. When entering the first union in the county, the vagrant, on applying for an admission order to the workhouse, receives from the police a ticket which records his description, the place he comes from, and his final destination. The next union he is ordered to go on to is endorsed on his ticket, and so on throughout the county.

2. Relief offices are named, at police stations between the unions, where a vagrant can obtain a ration of food on producing his ticket, provided he is on the route there specified. The relief stations are so arranged that a vagrant must have done a fair morning's walk before he can get the food.

3. The cost of the food, and every other expense connected with the system, is met by private subscription.

4. The unions are urged to give an uniform task of work as far as possible, to all vagrants who make use of the casual wards.

5. The police apprehend all persons found begging, or otherwise infringing the Vagrant Acts.

6. On conviction, an uniform sentence of not less than fourteen days is given, or of not less than a month if the vagrant has been impudent, or has used threats.

7. Placards showing the relief stations are hung up in all casual wards.

8. The public are invited by circulars, etc., to co-operate with the Committee, and to refrain from giving either money or food to vagrants.

In Gloucestershire, it is our intention to send circulars to all the clergy, with permission of the Bishop, as well as to ministers of all denominations, inviting them to make known the existence of the food stations and our other regulations to their parishioners or congregations. We rely a good deal on this step for securing the co-operation of the classes who are the vagrants' easiest prey; it will also afford a means of collecting small sums from many who would like to subscribe sixpence or a shilling towards food for the vagrants at the station in their neighbourhood, and who would then take much greater interest in the success of the plan.

Briefly, the system may be described as one of strictness, tempered with benevolence (a principle for which there is the best authority that can be had for anything), with due precautions against the abuse of the benevolence.

The employment of the police as assistant relieving officers is an essential part of the Berkshire system, both on account of its being important that they should become acquainted with the appearance and movements of all vagrants passing through their district, and because it is found that if the tickets are filled up at the workhouses only, the master often makes over the job to the porter, who cares nothing about the matter, and who fills up the ticket in a slovenly manner, leaving out half the details, or perhaps does not fill it up at all, and thus paralyses the system.

From enquiries recently made, I find that there are 27 counties in which the police are employed as assistant relieving officers. In only nine of those counties are they so employed for all unions, whilst of the others, eight employ them for more than half the unions, seven for less than half, and in three they are said to be "partly" so employed, the number of unions not being given.

In one of the Poor Law districts, containing in all 37 unions, of which 18, ~~police assist~~ relieving officers, I
(employ the police as assistant)

find that the whole district shows an increase of 31 per cent. in 1880, whilst the increase in the 18 police-employing unions is 24 per cent.; and in 1881, the whole district only shows a decrease of one-fourth per cent., whilst the police-employing unions show a decrease of 18 per cent.

Separate cells also, though not a part of the system itself, are strongly recommended to all unions, and there can be no doubt that they are highly desirable, both upon moral grounds and for the maintenance of proper discipline. It must not be taken as certain that they will much reduce the number of casuals, though they generally have the effect.

In the South Wales district, 12 unions have separate cells, 8 have associated wards, and 6 have no wards. Comparing 1878 and 1880, the increase for the whole district is $6\frac{3}{4}$ per cent., whilst the 12 cell unions show a decrease of 5 per cent.; the 8 unions with associated wards an increase of $13\frac{1}{2}$ per cent.; and the 6 unions without wards an increase of 26 per cent.

Strangely enough the two unions which have wards at the police stations show an increase of 30 per cent. No doubt there are special circumstances to account for this fact, but I have not yet received the explanation. One of the places is a town in the centre of a district which would be particularly affected by the dullness of the coal trade.

Information received from 24 counties as to the number of unions having separate cells, shows that in six of these, no unions have them; in five, more than half have them; in thirteen, including three counties in which there is only one union with separate cells, less than half have them. Gloucestershire, in which 12 unions out of 17 have either got cells or will have them completed in a few months, shows the largest proportion.

Before going further into the working of the Berkshire system, or dwelling on its advantages, I will allude to the other two distinct systems which exist,

and to their results in some counties where they are or have been in force ; and I think it will appear that a consideration of these plans is closely connected with our special subject, since it is by observation of the points in which they fail, that the strength of the Berkshire system is made most evident. The difficulty is to get any standard by which to test the comparative excellence of different systems, or the results of any one system by itself.

In the first place, there may be considerable difference of opinion as to what is or is not a satisfactory result ; but if this were agreed upon, the difficulty of finding a test of real value—even if one could obtain all the information that might be given—is great.

The only returns published for the whole country are those showing the total number of occupants of all the casual wards on 1st January and 1st July, the mean between these being supposed to represent the average number of casuals in all the unions on any one day. But it does not really represent this. For instance, the total number of vagrants relieved in Somerset, in 1881, divided by 365, gives a daily average of 63, but the “mean number,” according to the Local Government Board’s Report, is 87. In the same way the daily average for Leicestershire, in 1881, is 41, whilst the “mean number” is 65. There are other instances in which the “mean number” is as much below the average as in these instances it is above it.

It is strange that no returns should be published of the total number of cases relieved in the vagrant wards of all the counties ; the figures must be in possession of those who compile the Local Government Board’s Reports, and such information would be most valuable. To obtain it in any other way is not easy : Chief Constables can sometimes give it, and the Poor Law Inspectors could no doubt give it in many cases. I am much indebted to some of them who have given me these and other items of great interest and value, but a large proportion of these gentlemen are of opinion that some

fearful thunderbolt will be launched against them from "The Office," if they venture to give to an outsider any indication as to the state of vagrancy in their districts.

But, whatever information we had as to the numbers who use the casual wards, we should still be much in the dark as to the real number of men who are tramping the country with no trade but begging, unless returns were also published showing the numbers who have used the lodging-houses, and what proportion of the inmates could, on better evidence than their own assertion, be considered to be self-supporting.

The fact that those who lodge in workhouses form quite a small part of the whole number is too often overlooked. The "mean number" of vagrants in the workhouses for 1881 is given as just under 6,000, whilst it is estimated that the number of persons in the lodging-houses at the same time would be from 24,000 to 30,000. Perhaps a fifth part of these might be "residents," having no home but the lodging-houses of their town, and of the others, probably about half depend entirely upon begging for their maintenance; whilst those who generally support themselves, as drovers, pedlars, rag and bone dealers, etc., fall back upon begging whenever trade is bad.

It is obvious that any returns which leave this large class out of the reckoning are of but partial value, and that a scheme which aims at being thoroughly efficient, must not omit to take them into consideration. At present, the only available test of the working of a system is the increase or decrease of vagrants relieved in the workhouses where it is in force; a most insufficient one, for it gives no clue to the consequents of the men where numbers have diminished. It does not tell us whether they have gone back to work, or are swelling the numbers in some other part of England.

There is one fact which I should here like to point out. It will no doubt be admitted that before a system, the theory and principle of which are excellent, can be

said to have been fairly tested by experience, it is necessary that it should have been tried for at least several years over a considerable area—a much larger area than that of any single county—though this would not apply to a system which, when tried in a small district, has exhibited defects, or shown itself liable to abuses, from which it obviously would be no better secured if extended over a much larger area. Now, so far as I am able to learn, not only have there never been any three adjoining counties in which the same system was in operation at the same time, but there have never even been three adjoining counties in which it could at the same time be said that any organized system whatever, whether similar or not to that of its neighbours, was in force.

How, then, can it as yet be shown that there is any necessity for the adoption of measures involving wide changes in the vagrant laws, such as have been frequently proposed during recent years?

Some few moderate alterations in the Orders under which we act—such, for instance, as would enable us to make our way-tickets better worth carrying—would, no doubt, much facilitate the efficient working of a sound vagrant system; but that is a different thing from an entire change of principle in dealing with the class.

I remember hearing it proposed in this room that Government centres of labour, of remunerative labour, should be set up, to which persons convicted under the Vagrant Acts, and who said that the one only thing they prayed for was work, should be sent to do it; though I do not remember that it was quite clearly explained in what way the labour was to be made remunerative. It has been proposed to revert to the old law of punishing all who give to beggars; I almost think it has been proposed to punish those magistrates who do not sufficiently punish the vagrants. It has been proposed to draft all able-bodied vagrants into the army, and, so helped, our regiments might no doubt

cease to be out-numbered on parade by their own bands, even if they were not any use in battle. There is also a widely-approved proposal that all vagrants should be detained for some considerably longer period than is at present possible. The adoption of these several proposals, or the many others that are made, might be beneficial or might be injurious—to express any opinion as to that, would be just now beside the point; but until the best system which is possible under existing laws and regulations has been arrived at, and fairly tried in several adjoining counties at the same time (or, better still, in all counties, if that is not too much to hope for), I maintain that no case can be made out for the necessity of such sweeping changes in the law. Nor, until this has been done, can it be discerned to what extent the evil might cure itself, and the loafers absorb themselves into the workers, without our having to set up a new kind of prison, or to entrust the honour of our country to men whose one object has been to avoid doing any honourable work.

Now, as to the other systems. The earliest, known as the Cumberland system, consists simply in a strict enforcement of the Vagrant Acts, every person found begging or otherwise infringing them being apprehended, the magistrates agreeing invariably to give a sentence of not less than 14 days on conviction, and the police acting as assistant relieving officers, and thus inspecting every vagrant. There are few counties in which this system can be said to be really in force, that is to say in which the police and the magistrates both fully carry out their share of it, and support each other, without which co-operation the system has no strength. For instance, in Lancashire the police are active, but are discouraged by finding that 34 per cent. of the persons charged by them under the Vagrant Acts are “dismissed,” whilst only 22 per cent. receive a sentence of 14 days. Cumberland itself is, I believe, the only county in which the employment of the police as assisting relieving officers has been abandoned; so

that, to this extent at all events, the system must be said to have fallen through in its native place, and I doubt if the other parts of it are now fully carried out there. Northumberland adopted the system some six or eight months ago, with certain additional recommendations from the magistrates; but it is too early yet to see with what effect. Bedford and Rutland seem to give uniform sentences, but I have not been able to obtain such returns as would indicate the result.

Hants employs the police in all unions but two, and I think claims to be firmly carrying out the system; yet the sentences are far from uniform. The number of vagrants in Hants increased 134 per cent. from 1872 to 1880. Lincolnshire tackles its vagrants with a will, and though the police are not employed as assistant relieving officers, and there is no definite agreement amongst magistrates as to sentences, seems to be acting up to the spirit of the Cumberland system more nearly than any other county. Let us see with what results. My informant in that county, whose position gives him the best opportunities of knowing, says, "In no county has vagrancy been more resolutely dealt with; if tramps were in all cases taken into custody, and dealt with as in Lincolnshire, their numbers would seriously decrease; vagrancy here is kept down with a strong hand." But on referring to the statistics for the county, I find that in 1877 the number of persons arrested for begging in Lincolnshire was 987; in 1878 it was 1,193; in 1879 it was 1,465; in 1880 it was 1,701; and then, 1,700 having been arrested for begging in 1880, and vagrancy thus "kept down with a strong hand," it was nevertheless found necessary to arrest 2,000 persons for the same offence in 1881. The explanation given of these figures is increased energy on the part of the police, and that "the county is popular with tramps as a fruitful district, the labouring classes being well off as a rule." From which facts put together I think it is justifiable to draw the conclu-

sion that the severity with which the vagrants are treated enlists the sympathy of the population on their side, and they come in ever increasing numbers, willing to run the risk of imprisonment for the sake of the plunder which can be drawn from such a fruitful district.

I think it possible that, if full returns could be obtained, some of the counties which resort to strict measures only, might be able to show that the numbers relieved in their unions during the past few years have not increased at so great a rate as for the whole country ; but unless we could also obtain returns of the numbers who had made use of the common lodging-houses in those counties, the diminished numbers in the workhouses would be open to the explanation that severity had enlisted the sympathy of the people on the side of the tramps, who consequently got more money, and were not obliged to make use of the casual wards. But supposing that severity alone will suffice to reduce the numbers—to drive them into other counties—what then? Are we to be satisfied with that? and to think that we have only to extend one uniform system of severity over the whole country, and so get rid of our bugbear, and trouble our heads no more about him? Surely not! In the first place that plan has been tried generations ago—tried many times—and failed conspicuously ; it will not succeed, and if it would, I do not think it is a plan which we may dare to try. The object of a good vagrant system must be, not simply to scare away the numbers who now infest our roads and crowd our casual wards, careless what becomes of them so long as they will give our own county a wide berth, it must aim at no less than to alter the whole lives of these men ; to lead them, if they will be led, and if not to push them, to drag them, to compel them—by ways which show that we have some little care for the spending of our common life—into a less pitiable form of existence.

I do not think it is even just that we should use

severity alone : for these men are not all alike. Undoubtedly there are amongst them some—as to whether there are few or many opinion differs vastly—but there are some whose first object is to get work, and who only tramp because they cannot help it. Others there are who have sunk to such a state that, with the best will in the world, they could not get employed as strangers. There may or may not be enough work in the country for this number of additional hands over and above those who remain in their own homes—that is a difficult question—but how many masters would employ the ragged, soft-handed, drink-stained bundles of misery whom it is too common to meet upon the roads? In their own place they may get taken by the hand and given one more chance by some who knew them before they sank so low ; but on the road, such men cannot get work even if they would. And since we are in some measure responsible for having allowed such a class to grow up, we cannot justly meet out to them severity alone, but must say, “here is food enough if you will go straight to any destination that you choose, and it is only if you will not *try* to pass into a more settled life that we will punish you as vagabonds.”

There is a system, other than the Berkshire, which provides bread for all destitute wayfarers on the road, known as The Dorset System. Under this plan, bread stations are provided at baker's shops—some five miles apart along all the main roads—at which any applicant, not resident in the neighbourhood, can obtain half a pound of bread in exchange for a ticket ; the tickets being supplied to subscribers, or sold in sheets to non-subscribers, and by them given to any vagrant who asks for assistance. This provision for their wants having been made, the law is strictly enforced, and there is a careful supervision of all vagrants by the police, reports of those to whom they have given admission orders for the workhouses, with descriptions, being forwarded daily from each police district to the next.

In this arrangement there seems to be one inherent defect, namely, that though it is part of the system that all who beg are to be apprehended, a vagrant must beg of someone—is invited to do so by the system—before he can get a bread ticket. If a vagrant happens to beg of that benevolent-looking person, a policeman in plain clothes, the officer must be rather perplexed to know whether he ought to give the man a ticket first and arrest him afterwards, or arrest him at once, and when safely lodged in the cells, supply him with food obtained in exchange for the ticket which he might have given him.

This system has also been tried in Kent, West Sussex, Hereford, Leicester, and Northampton, but I fear cannot be said to have succeeded in any of these counties. In West Sussex it was established in 1875, and was soon found to be costing £300 a year, whilst the number of vagrants enormously increased. The same vagrant, if he had many tickets, managed to get many rations of bread in the same place, which were afterwards found in the pig-tubs of publicans; resident beggars also managed to get the bread, and the system was dropped as a failure in 1878. In Kent, opinion is divided; some authorities pronounce the system to be a failure, whilst others think that it is worth trying longer. In Leicestershire it was started in 1880, but is now only in operation in a small part of the county, and there imperfectly; the number of vagrants having meanwhile increased considerably. Northampton established the system in 1878, but it broke down in 1879, the numbers having greatly increased. In Herefordshire the system was established in 1876, but broke down in 1880 for want of funds; it was started again in March 1881, but is only in operation in about half the county, as a good many people refuse to support it, saying that there is a regular traffic in the tickets. From the "Caution" which appears at the head of their sheets of bread tickets, it appears that there are a number of persons who "make it their business to go

out of the towns into the country to collect tickets for disposal to others."

In Dorsetshire itself there seem grounds for thinking that the system is doing its work well, and that careful and efficient management have saved it from abuse. It is true that the number of vagrants relieved in the Dorset workhouses increased considerably during the years 1878-79 and 1880, but in explanation of this, the Chief Constable, Captain Amyatt, says the knowledge that no beggar can possibly want for food has so entirely spoilt their market—*i.e.*, has so completely done the work (by the ²system) aimed at that they can get nothing, and are all obliged to enter the workhouses; whereas in other counties there would be at least as many professional vagrants in the lodgings as there were in the workhouses. Thus, in its own birthplace, and under exceptionally energetic management, it seems that the Dorset system can be and is a great success, so that it would not be fair to attribute its breaking down elsewhere altogether to defects in the system; something must be allowed for a failure to understand its true principles, for the apathy of the public in the matter, and in some cases for deficient organization and supervision. Still it must be admitted that the system is open to abuses which the result in other counties shows are sufficient to wreck it. For one thing, the bread stations are all at bakers' shops. It is true that the bakers receive strict orders that only one ration is to be given for any number of tickets presented by the same vagrant, and that he is not to be relieved oftener than once in three months, and that residents in the neighbourhood are not to be relieved under any circumstances; but the bread is all paid for at the rate of 2*d.* per lb., or 8*d.* per quartern loaf, which is very profitable to the sellers—especially where their customers are not in a position to take exception to the quality. It is almost too much to expect that they should be very careful in carrying out instructions which limit such a profitable sale, and the temptation

to give a tramp three rations in exchange for six tickets, and then get paid for the six, is greater than it is right to put in the way of any small tradesman. Moreover, it is not everyone who has the faculty of recognizing again at any time within three months all the tramps whom he had seen for a few seconds whilst giving them a piece of bread.

Recognizing the excellence of the principles on which the Dorset system is founded, if there is another which, whilst founded on the same principles, carries them out in such a way, and combines them with such other regulations, as will safeguard its benevolent provisions, and give immunity from their possible abuse, this will surely be a great improvement—a far safer plan to recommend for general adoption. In the Berkshire system, an account of which has been given above, I believe that the desideratum is to be found ; it stands at the top of the tree, and the other branches are a good long way below it. Quite at the bottom, a source of weakness to the whole, is the do-nothing system of utter slackness, where vagrants are allowed to beg and cadge, to come and go, in such numbers as they please, and no notice taken of them ; where easy-going, soft-hearted people are not told of the harm they do by giving to every tramp who begs, and where the few apprehended are sentenced, for the same offence, sometimes simply to get out of *that* neighbourhood, sometimes, if the Bench is bothered, to a month. I should not like to mention the names of any counties where this is the state of things, but I fear there are many. Then, as the next branch, perhaps just a foot or two above the others, perhaps almost as low down, comes the system of severity alone. By this means the vagrants are either driven away, hardened by treatment which shows no care for what becomes of them if only they will go, and with a sullen determination to be always idle ; or it may happen that the sympathy of the public is enlisted on their side, so that they reap an abundant harvest, and come in greater numbers the

more harshly they are treated. Either result is quite unsatisfactory.

Far higher up the tree, a strong branch at its base, but requiring a favoured position and soft breezes for its best development, twisted, grown feeble, or broken sheer off at a little distance from the stem, because winds have been rough and circumstances a little unpropitious, comes the Dorset system. Then at the top, far above these other branches, and capable of having all that is best from them grafted into it, comes the Berkshire system.

But to drop this figure and take up another for a moment, I think it is no unfair comparison to say that the Dorset system resembles in its action that much abused person the indiscriminate alms-giver, who gives what he has to give, whether bread or sixpences, without any proof at all that the applicant is trying to do something for himself, and whose so-called charity is constantly abused, causing the very evil which he thinks so indolently to cure. Contrasted with this, the Berkshire system fills the part of one who, before he will give anything, takes the trouble to ascertain that the applicant has given a true account of himself, and is at all events not a professional idler; who in this way finds that the number who are fit for and will accept his help are comparatively few, but who can at all events feel sure that what he gives has done good, not harm.

The plan of bread-stations is good for more reasons than one. We do not like to think that any man should be in want of sufficient nourishment within our boundaries; therefore let us give him food. We want to put an end to the trade of the professional beggar – to make it obvious that he cannot be without enough to eat, and so to stop off public sympathy and spoil his market; therefore let us give him food. To give it in such a way that artful members of the fraternity can get excess of it, only to waste and turn to harm, is to foster the very evil we wish to eradicate; therefore the

administration of the relief is placed in the hands of the police, who have no interest in giving much or little, and this abuse is obviated.

To let men slouch through our counties as they will, supplied with meals at comfortable intervals, and in no way urged to do a fair day's walk, is harmful both to them and us ; therefore we combine a system of way-tickets with the food relief, making a good journey according to his strength the condition of assistance to each. By this means, as well as by the stopping of alms, a push is given in the direction of steady marching to a destination, and some who perhaps had little choice in the matter when they first left settled work are helped in bracing themselves up to return to it.

Any influence in this direction which can be brought to bear upon the men, however slight its results may at first appear to be, is of great value, because it is by gradually drawing the great army of tramps and idlers back into the other army, still greater happily, of honest workers, that the true solution of this terrible vagrant question must ultimately be found. This may seem an almost hopeless achievement to look for now, but the things they are most bidden to despair of may come at last to those who decline to regard them as impossible. The result, if ever it can be attained, is worth much patient striving for ; undaunted perseverance is at all events the bravest policy, and no chance must be lost of advancing even half a step towards our end.

In the two counties where the Berkshire system is now at work, the ration given at the stations, sometimes spoken of as "a mid-day meal," is always bread alone—half a pound of bread. Now, one principal object of the system is to enable us to assure charitable persons that the vagrants have quite sufficient food, and that there is therefore no need to give to them ; and the question is, not so much what food is really sufficient for the vagrant to do his journeys on, as what food the public will think sufficient. On these grounds, as well as on others, I should like to see something more given. I

do not believe the public will consider half a pound of bread in addition to the workhouse rations to be enough. The workhouse allowance by itself is very insufficient; if any gentleman will make the experiment he will find this out. I tried it for a couple of days, and found it a little harder not to give something to the vagrants afterwards. There are several kinds of puddings made from oatmeal, Indian meal, flour, suet, &c., which cost no more than bread, weight for weight, whilst they are more palatable and sustaining, will keep good for several days, and can be eaten either hot or cold: some such substitute for the dry bread might be adopted, but if there is any serious objection to this, then let it at all events be a pound of bread, not half a pound.

Not only on public and economical grounds is it desirable to adopt some such system of dealing with vagrants as is now advocated, but also on grounds which may, in a sense, be called selfish, since they are for the saving of our own personal discomfort.

To meet one of the lowest and most miserable class of vagrants on our roads is unfortunately common enough to have weakened the shock which it would otherwise give, yet it is a thing to which I think no one can get so far accustomed as to be able to forget it in a moment.

Look at the man! His wretched garments held together with tags and scraps of string, his limbs showing through the rents, scarcely a whole foot of covering upon him anywhere; the frayed-out shreds of leather called his boots working up and down at every step against sores that the eye *will* light upon; weak-eyed, hollow-cheeked, unshaven, abject; too hopeless even to beg; without one thought of self-respect remaining; the very depth of misery; awful to look upon. We know that in nine cases out of ten the man's own folly or misdeeds have brought him to this state; we know that many, out of sheer idleness, have deliberately chosen so to live rather than turn to steady work in

the days when this was possible for them ; and yet, even bearing this in mind, one who can pass by such a sight and not himself be miserable at the thought of it for many moments afterwards—perhaps for many hours—must have set his heart harder than it is good for the heart of any man to be.

To give them money is but to encourage them and others to continue in this same miserable life ; to help them personally in any other way—truth being quite gone out of their lips, and the desire of steady work a distant memory—is seldom possible ; it will therefore be most welcome to many people to know that a good supply of food is at all events provided for them on their road from nowhere to—the other end of nowhere.

I fear that I have given but little information as to the results hitherto obtained by the Berkshire system ; it is most difficult to do so. I can but give a few figures for the past year or two, which must be taken for what they are worth. Comparing the number of vagrants relieved in the casual wards in 1878 and 1881, I find these results :—

Berkshire	7	per cent.	Decrease.
South Wales District	1 $\frac{1}{4}$	„	Increase.
Hants	13	„	„
Dorsetshire	20	„	„
Herefordshire	28	„	„
Leicestershire	31	„	„
Stafford, Salop, and Cheshire } District	31	„	„
Northumberland	38	„	„
North-Eastern District	51	„	„
Essex	64	„	„

Vagrants relieved in all Wilts Unions show decrease of 561 for the quarter ending March 31, 1882, when the system was in force, as compared with the same quarter of 1881, previous to its adoption, and this notwithstanding that two of the town unions declined to co-operate in the system, have no casual wards, and a considerable increase of vagrants.

In one respect the system, as at present organized, seems to be capable of improvement, namely, that

there are no means by which any who have paid for their own food and lodging on a certain night, and who, having done this, begin their further journey penniless, can avail themselves of the bread station on the road to the workhouse at which they must sleep the following night. Of course such cases are not numerous, but I think they should be provided against, and I am in hopes that some means of meeting them can be devised. The Berkshire system, of course, does not profess to be perfect ; but I think it is good—better than any other yet tried, or possible under existing laws. There is also this strong point in favour of its adoption, namely, whilst there is the chance of its doing much good, I think it may be taken as certain that it can do no harm, which is more than can be said for either of the other plans. Wiltshire decided to adopt the system about a year ago, and has had it actually at work for several months, with the results above given ; Gloucestershire decided to adopt it at the last Quarter Sessions, and hopes now shortly to have the arrangements in working order ; and if some other counties in this district—adjacent to us and to each other—will take it up also (and I am told that there are good hopes of the plan being favourably considered in Hereford and Worcester), and all work together on the same plan, it will have a fairer trial than any system ever yet has had, and I believe there would be no cause for disappointment with the result which might be so obtained.

DISCUSSION.

Sir R. HARINGTON, after a pause, said he had hoped to gain some information as to the proportion of those persons who honestly travelled from one place to another, to the others who went through the country under the name of vagrants. It must by no means be assumed that the whole number of persons who had slept in the casual wards of the workhouses and at the common lodging-houses belonged to the mischievous class whom they wished to interfere with. He thought it must be generally agreed upon that a very large

proportion were persons who desired no more than to transfer themselves from one part of the country to another with a view to obtain work, and there should be some difference between the treatment of those people and those who were called professional tramps. That applied especially to the counties of Worcester and Hereford, for a large number of the persons who came into those counties in the year were those who came to look for work at hop-picking, and it must be borne in mind that there were circumstances which caused a greater number of such people to seek relief at the workhouse in some years than in others. That ought to be taken into consideration in comparing the rate of pauperism. There could be no doubt that it was most desirable that something like uniformity should be established by the different counties in the means adopted for the relief of tramps, and that, he took it, was the aim of the paper which they had heard read. It seemed to him, therefore, that the assistance of the various Courts of Quarter Sessions was required, and what he would strongly recommend was that the various Courts of Quarter Sessions should appoint some number of their members, say one or two, to confer together and endeavour, if they could, to arrive at some uniform system to recommend to their various Courts. The Berkshire system, as they had heard that day, certainly seemed to commend itself to their approbation, but still it was probable that when they came to consider it closely they might find room for improvement. He thought the most practical way of dealing with the question would be that which he suggested. Let them appoint some representative body to meet and see how far they could recommend to the counties a uniform system, in which the police could be employed, for there was no doubt that the police would be the last thing that would remain under the control of the magistrates, even if the County Boards Bill should be passed; therefore he threw out the suggestion in the hope that something of the sort might be adopted.

Mr. BARWICK BAKER said the Chief Constable for Gloucestershire (Admiral Christian) had taken a census of the tramps found in the county on the night of Tuesday, April 4th. The names of every one were carefully taken down, together with their account of themselves. The policemen who carried out the census also recorded how far they judged the tramps' accounts to be true. Of course this last statement was not evidence, but still the belief of a superintendent of police was very likely to be not far from right, and the police were not particularly inclined to favour the class of men with whom they dealt. There were found sleeping in the casual wards of workhouses, 171, and sleeping in common lodging-houses, 553. These men gave their descriptions—children, 64; drovers, 12; labourers, 141; married women, 61; orphans, 74; and so on. The strange thing which surprised Admiral Christian and also surprised himself (the speaker), was that the number of statements believed to be true out of the 553 was 424; and the number of men believed to belong to the tramp class was 129. This would make an important

difference in their reckoning if, instead of having to deal with 30,000 or 40,000 or 50,000 tramps and vagrants, such a proportion as in Gloucestershire was found of poor men travelling at their own cost and with whom they had no more right or wish to interfere than with any of the members of the present meeting. They had a right to take notice of the 171 who lived on the public in workhouses, and of the 129 who lived by begging, but, judging by this county, there might be only 10,000 or 15,000 to deal with in all England. His friend Captain Congreve, the Chief Constable of Stafford, made somewhat the same estimate of those in the workhouses of his county, and he put down the whole of the professional tramps at 235 and the number of honest men at 360; so that even in Staffordshire, where the labouring classes were very well off and were very much inclined, he believed, to give away very largely, more than half the tramps were believed to be honest travellers. He was told on very good authority that it was believed an ordinary beggar made from 2*s.* to 2*s.* 6*d.* per day in Staffordshire. In Gloucestershire a considerable number had been taken up for begging, and a considerable number for other offences, chiefly drunkenness. Two had been taken up for burglary, 43 for stealing, 73 for drunkenness, 15 for assaults, &c. All those taken up for begging—with the exception of one man on whom was found a very large sum—were found, on an average, possessed of about 4½*d.* On those taken up for other offences an average sum of 5¾*d.* was found. The amount gained by the beggars in Gloucestershire might therefore be put at about double that sum—8*d.* or 10*d.* a day—which was, he believed, smaller than in many counties. He attributed this reduction to the fact that, fourteen years ago, the clergy had been asked to explain to their parishioners that all who applied to the workhouses received sufficient food, and the effect of this had been to greatly reduce the amount given by the poor to beggars.

Considerable further discussion then took place, at the conclusion of which—

The CHAIRMAN remarked that a difference of opinion had arisen merely through their looking on both sides of the question. The two objects they had in view were to prevent begging and to prevent vagrants avoiding one union to go to another. The Bill introduced by Mr. Pell would have the effect of almost entirely doing away with the name "vagrant." If they could prevent begging there could be no question that a very great deal would be done towards the suppression of vagrancy, and if two or more adjoining counties could be brought to work in unison on a good system that would remove the excuse for begging, and on the other hand if the magistrates would be uniform in their sentences, and if the vagrants were treated with a certain amount of labour, he thought they would do a great deal towards stopping what was, no doubt, a great curse in the country. The course adopted at Birmingham would have the effect of driving the vagrants from the workhouse, but if they did not go there they

would very likely be driven to beg or steal. That was what they wished to prevent.

Mr. BORRER, in reply, said—I think the reader of a Paper at a Poor Law Conference generally has the task of replying to a considerable number of unfavourable criticisms and objections, some of which are serious and difficult to meet ; I am, therefore, glad to have the much lighter task of noticing comments which, with a few exceptions, have implied approval of the system described ; and in doing this I need say the less since the Chairman has so ably drawn together the heads of discussion, and has pointed out that some of the apparent differences of opinion have arisen simply from a separate consideration of the several distinct objects which are embraced by the Berkshire system, and which, I believe, would be accomplished by it. Mr. Cross thinks nothing but fresh legislation will help us, and that whilst we go tinkering here and tinkering there we shall never do any good, uniformity being the only chance. I had hoped to make it clear by my Paper that the general adoption of the system there described was, in my view, the best way of advancing to something better than the tinkering plan. But whilst I believe, and have argued, that uniformity of action, throughout the whole country if possible, is immensely desirable, that would be a very poor reason for doing nothing until we can get it. No doubt any plan which does not suit the wishes of the men will simply divert the incidence of vagrancy, unless there is uniformity in different counties ; a result to which we can only advance gradually, and if we do not begin somewhere we shall never arrive at it. One county can do a little, two can do more, three or four can do a great deal ; and the example of three or four counties is likely to spread. Mr. Cross wants to know whether anyone in the room really has faith in the proposed system, and tells us beforehand that he will not believe anyone who professes this faith : I for one have the greatest faith in it, and believe that if it was generally adopted it would have an immensely beneficial effect. I can only hope that hard facts will one day oblige Mr. Cross also to be a little more believing. The Vice-Chairman of Birmingham, I think, is opposed to giving the mid-day food for nothing, fearing that the men will find it worth while to frequent the districts where this plan is adopted ; and another gentleman from the same union objects to showing sympathy by giving them plenty of food *and drink*, since they will then never do anything for themselves, and will increase. No doubt ; but I do not remember having proposed to give them any *drink*, and the effect of giving this food is to prevent the public from giving something much more likely to bring vagrants into a neighbourhood. If the gentleman will himself make trial of the vagrant diet, even with the addition of some bread in the middle of the day I do not think he will be inclined to tramp for the sake of getting it. To stop the public from giving alms is the strongest influence we can bring to bear towards making the men go and work for themselves

So far as I have been able to learn from enquiry at cottages in my own neighbourhood on the roads most frequented by tramps, threats are seldom used now : the people tell me that the men used to threaten them, but now hardly ever do so ; whatever they get is given from sympathy. Mr. Anstice reminds us that we are bound to effect any saving we can of the ratepayers' money, and should therefore try to drive the vagrants into the lodging-houses, where they pay for themselves ; but you cannot do this without indirectly drawing from the pockets of the ratepayers a much larger sum than it costs to maintain the vagrants in the casual wards, since they must then get the money to pay for their lodgings by begging in the neighbourhood. Another gentleman from Birmingham thinks that the vagrants are kept away by the inspection of his particularly energetic policeman, and that cells, the labour test, and a close inspection are the only things to be relied upon. In reference to this supposition I have authority to mention the circumstances at Tarvin and Chester workhouses. Both are about the same distance from the town, both have separate cells, baths, and similar tasks of stonebreaking, and at both a police officer is in attendance each night, and inspects every vagrant. Chester is crowded every night, whilst Tarvin is half deserted. If cells and fear of the policeman keep them away from Tarvin, why not from Chester also? In noticing the suggestion of emigration as a remedy, I will only call to mind the words of a well known writer, who said that we must not confuse emigration with the transportation of rubbish. What right have we to take 10,000 wretched people and shoot them out into another country? Surely *none*. As to the discrimination between the honest work-seeker and the professional vagrant which Mr. Perry thinks we ought to attempt, I think I may claim that the Berkshire system does discriminate between these classes as far as we can at present go in that direction. The man who does not go straight and make good marches will get no help of food upon his road ; the straight-going travelling workman will. Moreover, in this system there is no interference whatever with work-seekers, or those who come for such purposes as harvesting and hop-picking ; unless they choose to put themselves under the system it does not even so far interfere with them as to give them any food. I trust I have now touched upon all such objections as have been raised to the proposed system, and will conclude by moving, "That the Berkshire System, being based upon sound principles, simple in its organization, and causing no additional expense to the ratepayers, is worthy of general adoption."

The motion with a "rider" by Sir R. Harington "That this Conference recommends the subject of Mr. Borrer's paper to the consideration of the Courts of Quarter Sessions of the West Midland Counties, and asks them to confer with one another with a view to adopting one uniform system of dealing with vagrants," was seconded by Mr. DORINGTON. He remarked that the Gloucestershire Court had taken action and appointed a committee, at the same time requesting

the Boards of Guardians in the county to nominate representatives to co-operate with this committee. The first meeting of the joint committee would take place on the following Thursday. He thought it most desirable that action should be carried further, and that by another Conference the system should be carried into other adjacent counties.

Both resolutions were carried and the Conference then adjourned.





