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NEW ZEALAND.

HOSPITALS AND CHARITABLE INSTITUTIONS OF THE COLONY

(REPORT ON).

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

HOSPITAL AND CHARITABLE REPORT.

In my last year's report I dealt mainly with the charitable institutions of our colony, and especially with the abuses which are almost inseparable from the administration of outdoor relief. This year the fact that the whole question is to be brought under the consideration of Parliament, because of certain amendments demanded by various hospital districts, has led me to deal more fully with the general problem of our hospital system.

The central difficulty of this whole question is that it raises the vexed question of town *versus* country. On the one hand it is maintained that everywhere our social detritus drifts into the large towns—the unfortunate, the idle, and the vicious, from the natural instinct of their kind; and the sick poor because of the superior advantages of the larger hospitals. This fact, together with all its manifold implications, cannot be denied. All that can be done is to point out that probably the most serious rock ahead of our civilisation is precisely this fact—namely, that the whole tendency of our industrial organization is to make the towns too attractive as compared with the country; and the townsfolk must make up their minds to put up with, at any rate, some of the drawbacks. Further, the chief difficulty to be got over in the working of all our charitable institutions is the impossibility of getting the taxpayers of the large towns, where the most lavish charity is dispensed, to take the least trouble to prevent, or even try to hinder, the wholesale pauperisation that is going on. Nothing, I am persuaded, but the tax-gatherer at the door will make the towns organize themselves to stamp out the professional pauper—by separating, on full and discriminating inquiry, the sheep from the goats, the deserving from the undeserving poor. This is the key of the position which, if a determined assault were made on it now, before our towns have become too large, might be conquered once for all. But so long as the State gives money out of the Consolidated Fund, and allows the towns to tax the country, what hope is there that this problem will be seriously faced? A consideration which might fairly be urged on the other side is: that the country, and especially the pastoral districts, are heavily mulcted each year by the itinerant swagger whose home is in the towns, though it may be asked, how far is this evil due to the runholders' refusal to provide suitable accommodation for respectable married labourers?

The general question underlying this difficulty is the law of settlement, on the operations of which, and its difficulties, the experience of England and the United States ought to be a lesson to us.

In England the whole question has been so thoroughly threshed out that her experience is most authoritative. An admirable summary of English dealing with this matter is given in a recent volume on the English poor-law system by Dr. Aschrott, translated by H. P. Thomas, pp. 110. By the Act of Elizabeth, relief was made dependent on domicile, and therefore the law of settlement and removal became an essential part of the relief system, with the result that free migration of labour was tyrannically restricted, and the labourer was little better than a serf bound to the soil. The Act of Charles II., which prescribed (a) birth, (b) property as a householder, (c) residence, service, or apprenticeship for at least forty days as conditions of obtaining a settlement has slowly yet surely been modified by various enactments, till in 1876 three years uninterrupted residence entitled to a settlement. The Act of 1846 prohibited removal of numerous paupers, and imposed a duty of relieving them on their place of residence, irrespective of settlement, and thus destroyed the chief connection between relief and settlement. "Consequently, as the legislation which followed the Act of 1846 extended irremovability, relief at the place of residence became the rule, and at the place of settlement the exception. The question as to where the pauper was settled now began to take a subordinate place in the poor-law system. At present, the first question is, whether the particular person is liable to removal from the place in which he becomes destitute. It is only when this is answered in the affirmative that the second question arises. To what place is he to be removed? This latter point alone is affected by settlement. Irremovability extends to so many cases that the entire law of settlement no longer exercises an important influence on the relief system. In any further reforms it will have to be decided not whether the law of settlement