

“Auckland, 11th May, 1892.

“SIR,—I regret to inform you that, in the course of my visitation of the children boarded-out by your Board, I found such a state of things in one of the houses I called at to-day that I dare not hesitate to state officially what I have already told you privately. Mr. Strathern, your visiting officer, accompanied me. At Mr. Stickley's house, Mount Eden, eight children are boarded. Four of these children are paid for by their mothers or friends. The other four are paid for by the Auckland Charitable Aid Board. The surroundings and interior of this house are squalid and dirty in the extreme. The wife, Mrs. Stickley, tried to excuse the confusion by saying that they were clearing-up and were caught at their worst; but it was evident that the normal condition of the place was filthy beyond measure. It was only by persisting in seeing everything for myself that I found my way into a side room, where two girls—Mabel and Alice Edgecumbe, aged respectfully ten and seven years—slept. The bed occupied by these children was unspeakably filthy. The bedding was very scanty, and so dirty as to be unfit for a dog-kennel. The mattresses were wet and rotting, and clearly had not been attended to in any way for a very long time. I called Mr. Strathern's attention to these facts, and asked why he had never reported these things. He said he had never seen this room, and did not know of its existence, and he agreed that never in all his life had he seen anything so bad; and, indeed, I can understand how a man by himself would hesitate before making such an examination as I found it necessary to make. After completing my investigation at Mr. Stickley's house, I resolved to see the two children, who were at school. I called out the two girls, whom I found fairly clean in their dress at first sight; but, on a closer examination, I found them very insufficiently clad for this cold weather, and the boots worn by the older one were completely useless. The soles were entirely gone, and the child would have been better bare-footed. The most distressing thing of all, however, was to hear these children, in reply to my questions about their bed, say, “We have a nice, clean, warm bed.” When I told them that I had just seen their bed, and tried to find out why they told me what was not true, they looked at me and were evidently too terrified to say a word more. All I could discover was that sometimes they were beaten by a big boy named “Cecil,” with a stick. The girls have a pinched look, and are very thin. I believe they are not sufficiently fed.—I have, &c., D. MACGREGOR.”

As I have already indicated, there seems to be arising all over the world a strong movement in favour of legally compelling society to deal more generously with the aged poor than is possible under the existing workhouse system. The experience of the English Poor-law administrators has demonstrated the necessity of putting an end to outdoor relief, or, at any rate, of limiting its evil effects by what is called the workhouse test. In many towns both in England and America outdoor relief has been entirely abolished, and with the most beneficial results—local charity organizations have sprung up and faced the difficulty in each case. Discrimination has superseded routine, and deserving applicants for relief have been treated more rationally and sympathetically than was possible under a system where shameless beggary and deception gave the best chance of success. This is the great reform in which all our efforts ought to be concentrated, for it is the only means of resuscitating the voluntary charity which our law has all but killed. I am sure that so long as the State finds half the money the existing abuses must continue. No subsidy, therefore, ought to be given for money spent in outdoor relief. Many of the Charitable Aid Boards who cried out against this proposal in the Bill of 1890 have since been taught by a hard experience how necessary it is: the Dunedin Trustees, whose then Chairman distinguished himself by his opposition to the Government proposals, have repented. I suggested to the Trustees at one of their meetings that they should send their Inspector to look up some of their cases in the country districts—with the result that in the *Otago Daily Times* of the 31st December, 1891, such a scandalous state of things was revealed as must have, I should think, satisfied every reflecting person that the system could no longer be tolerated.

In the hope of inducing the local bodies to throw the whole cost of outdoor relief on the rate-payers, and thus evoke the indispensable local supervision and discrimination by means of charity organization societies, while at the same time we revive the old system of voluntary charity, I have come to the conclusion that the State would do wisely in taking over from the local bodies the whole cost of properly caring for neglected children.

Recent legislation in Germany, Denmark, and other countries, and such old-age pension schemes as have been proposed by Mr. Chamberlain and others in England, indicate the rise of a strong public sentiment in favour of a more sympathetic and discriminating treatment of the aged poor. The idea is that the respectable poor ought not to be treated in the same way as thriftless spongers and broken-down drunkards, but rather as worn-out soldiers who have deserved well of their country. Our unjust system of distributing the proceeds of labour, it is argued, must compel society to face the duty of making such provision for deserving old age as shall not involve any sacrifice of self-respect in accepting it.

Of all the methods of effecting this desirable object that recently inaugurated in Denmark seems to me the safest. The object is to depauperise the aged and deserving poor. These people are no longer considered as paupers or treated as such. The law leaves the workhouse system untouched—it simply removes a carefully-selected class from its control, and constitutes them a class of State pensioners under strict conditions. The aid they need is to be theirs by right and not by charity, and its acceptance does not involve the forfeiture of their rights as citizens. Every applicant for admission to those privileges goes before a magistrate, who takes every precaution to prevent men and women who have idled away the best years of their lives from being accepted. No one is admitted as an old-age pensioner till he is sixty years of age. He must not have been sentenced for any transaction generally considered dishonourable. He must not have deprived himself of the means of living in favour of his children or others, or caused his poverty by a disorderly and extravagant mode of life, and for ten years preceding his application he must have had a fixed residence in the country, and during that period he must not have received charitable aid, nor have been