



THE "SORTING" OF PAUPERS.

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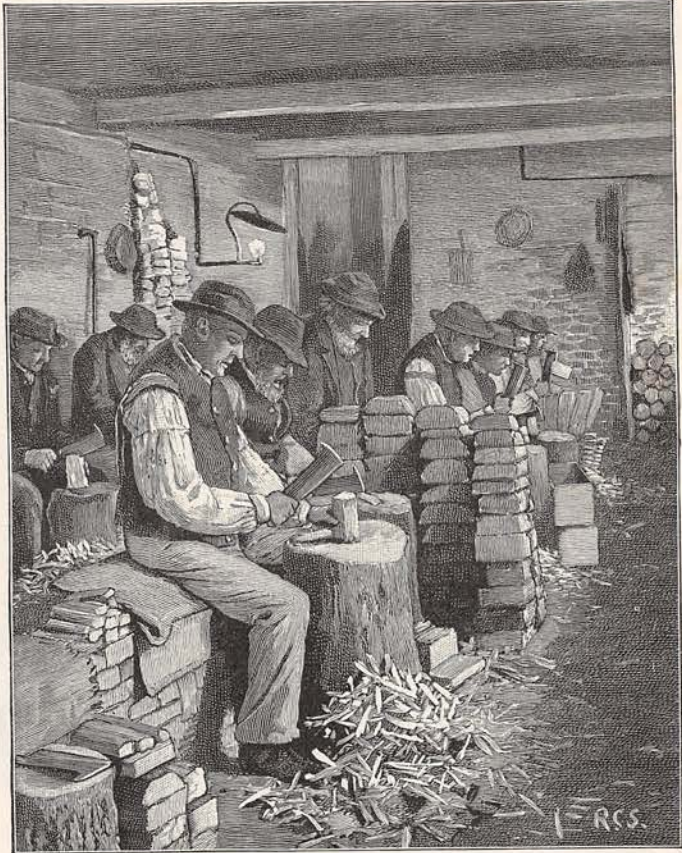
IN the eyes of the law, in Draco's day, all men were either black or white, criminals too vile to live, or paragons of righteous dealing. It was not until comparatively modern days, that legislators awoke to the fact that there is such a thing as moral greyness; that, for example, the hungry man who steals a loaf of bread is not quite on a par with him who commits a murder. Criminals, however, have little now to complain of; it is only paupers, in this our day, who are all clubbed together, all judged black alike. In English workhouses, honorary distinctions are things unknown; there young girls and old women, loafers and dotards, men who won't work and men who can't, they who have drifted from prison to prison, and they who have fought hard to keep the wolf from the door, all stand on the same level, lead the same life, eat the same food, and, as far as the limits of possibility, are subjected to the same treatment. Our poor-law system recognizes no *circumstances atténuantes* when poverty is the crime; it simply metes out even-handed justice all round.

In a Midland county there is a certain workhouse of which its managers are inordinately proud; and with reason, too, for in its way it is a perfect model. The house itself is thoroughly well built; the rooms are large and lofty; and all the arrangements with regard to heating and ventilation are upon the most approved principle. From an æsthetic point of view the place is certainly hideous, with that square, barnlike ugliness which is so terribly oppressive; but then beauty of structure can hardly yet be regarded as a *sine quâ non* for a workhouse. Inside and out it gleams with cleanliness. The windows—there are rows and rows of them all just alike—are simply appalling in their brilliancy; and so are the long white walls which seem to catch each ray of sunlight as it falls and give to it an almost cruel intensity. The gowns and caps of the women are without spot or blemish, and on all sides are neatness and order. Everything goes as if it were upon wheels; "there's a bell for this and a bell for that"; and all the meals are served to the minute. Each pauper there is well housed, well tended, and moderately well fed; what can he wish for more? Casual visitors are puzzled to account for the air of profound depression that pervades the place; and for the helpless, hopeless despondency which is written on every face they meet. The children, as they trudge along, walk sedately by twos and twos, as if they knew by instinct, that running and laughing and suchlike sports were never intended for little paupers. Even the babies wear an expression of preternatural gravity; whilst, as for the faces of the women. . . . Is there anything on earth more pathetic than the faces of pauper women, as they sit together in an afternoon, in those bare white rooms of theirs, just waiting for time to pass? Gentle-spoken, kindly beings some of them; others the veriest old hags a doss-house ever harboured; yet all equally wretched, all people who have nothing to do in the world, whom nobody wants. Amongst the men, the misery is more active if not more intense. An old

farmer, whom bad harvests have ruined, shrinks away with sullen indignation from the ex-jail bird who works by his side. The ne'er-do-well who, in his time, has spent thousands, scoffs and gibes at the workman, who could always have counted his earnings on his fingers. The only bond of union amongst the lot is their utter hopelessness; the knowledge that sticks will always be there to be chopped, and that they will have to chop them—at least until that day comes when they will be left, each one in his turn, to gaze at that long dazzling white dormitory wall, waiting for the end.

This is a model workhouse, one of the best of its kind, yet even here all who cross its threshold, no matter whether old or young, no matter what their virtues or what their faults, are only paupers, just a class apart. This system has its advantages, no doubt, but it is hardly in accordance with the spirit of this philanthropic century of ours; and, as economists and humanitarians are at one in condemning it, and in pointing to hereditary pauperism as the outcome of its working, the time is at hand when it must yield place to some other arrangement. A method will have to be devised of discriminating between those whose poverty is the result of their own laziness or extravagance, and those whose misfortunes are due to no faults of their own; between the irredeemable, and the boys and girls who are still young enough to be turned into useful citizens.

It will not be the first time that an attempt has been made in England to "sort" paupers. Some of our ancestors were miles in advance of us in their views as to the treatment of the poor; and, oddly enough, whilst legislation with regard to criminals has, during the last three centuries, tended towards a more and more careful apportioning of punishment to merit, with regard to paupers, it has moved in a diametrically opposite direction. As early as 1388 a statute was passed in which a sharp distinction is drawn between "the impotent and the valiant beggars." The rich are exhorted to give alms to the former, but to hand the latter over for "whipping and branding." In 1549, it was specially enacted that the sick and aged should be tenderly dealt with; and four years later, Sir Richard Dobs, the then Lord Mayor, Bishop Ridley, and a committee of notable citizens, drew up a most elaborate document setting forth the various "degrees of the poore." The object of their classification was to insure each pauper's receiving the precise treatment he merited. Not content with dividing the poor into three classes, "Poore by impotencie, Poore by casualtie, and thriftless Poore," this committee subdivided each class into three sections. Thus "the fatherlesse poore man's child, the aged blind and lame, and the diseased person by leprosie," are all poore by impotencie; "the wounded soldier, the decayed householder, and the visited by greivous disease," are poore by casualtie; whilst "the rioter that consumeth all,



A WOOD-CHOPPING ROOM.

the vagabond that will abide in no place, and the idle person," all come under the heading of the "thrifless poore."

These sixteenth century poor-law reformers had faith evidently in the sorting process; and, as soon as they had enunciated their theories, they set to work to reduce



TYPES WORKING SIDE BY SIDE.

them to practice. They bought the Grey Friars Monastery, and fitted it up as a school for the "fatherlesse poore man's child." They turned St. Thomas's Hospital into a home for the blind, the lame, and the diseased; and they arranged that each parish should provide, at the expense of the community, convenient cottages for the aged destitute to live in. Nor did the committee restrict their help to "the poore by impotencie;" its members did what they could too for "the poore by casualltie." A quaint little letter is still extant written by Bishop Ridley to *Master Cecil*, to induce him to use his influence with the King and Council, that the royal palace of Bridewell might be given as a home for those who were willing to work, but could find no work to do. The Bishop also suggests that the land attached to the palace should be made into what we should now call a labour colony. From first to last in the account of the proceeding of this committee, there is, however, no mention of anything being done to help "the thrifless poore;" for them, evidently, "whippinge and brandinge" was held to be the right treatment. With all their anomalies, their absurdities, and their extravagance, there is many a useful lesson, on the subject of dealing with paupers, to be learnt by studying the records of our old civic charities.

Several continental cities have, during the last few years, made fairly successful experiments in the art of sorting paupers; and some of them have already, in full working order, systems by which the help he or she deserves is, roughly speaking, secured for each destitute member of their population. It is the custom in these places to refuse to regard as paupers, in the English meaning of the term, the very old, the very young, cripples, or invalids. All these are placed in a class to themselves, and are never brought in contact, directly or indirectly, with regular paupers. They are the unfortunate for whom their more lucky fellow-citizens are bound to provide; and, in justice to these latter, it must be stated that, as a rule, they do provide for them most ungrudgingly. The children are boarded out, or sent to orphanages, whilst special arrangements are made for the aged poor and the weak. This is notably the case in Austria, where at sixty-five—or at sixty if in feeble health—every man has the right to claim admittance, not as with us to a workhouse, but to a comfortable home, where he is supplied with food, clothing, and all the necessaries of life, or is given a small pension wherewith to provide them for himself. In illness he is nursed skilfully and tenderly; in health he is well cared for and treated with kindly consideration; for every effort is made to render life pleasant in these homes set apart for the aged. No

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"ASSOCIATES."

pauper, however, is allowed to cross their threshold, for there a pauper is an able-bodied man—or woman—and such an one, although he may be helped, providing he be willing to help himself, must certainly not be coddled.

There is something decidedly refreshing in the wholesome sternness of the continental authorities, who have adopted the so-called Elberfeld system, in their dealings with professional loafers. They will not tolerate them, will not in fact allow that they have any right whatever to exist; the consequence is that, in many towns, a "permanent pauper" is a thing unknown. If a man cannot work from physical weakness, he

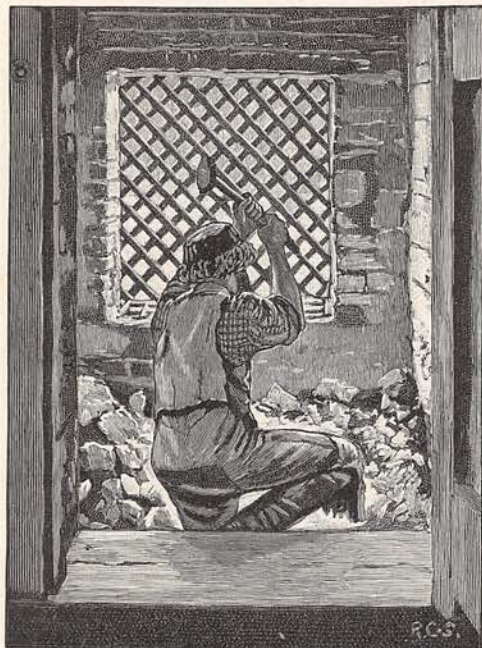
is sent to a hospital or a convalescent home; if he will not work, he is treated as a criminal. A pauper's willingness to do an honest day's work is the standard by which poor-law officials measure his worth. In Vienna paupers—viz., the able-bodied destitute—are divided into three distinct classes, each class having assigned to it a separate abode. A man, if suddenly reduced to want, may, whilst he seeks for work, go to a refuge which corresponds roughly to our casual ward. In these refuges, however, all the arrangements are made with a view to helping the man who goes there to find employment; whilst in our casual wards, they seem to have been devised for the special purpose of preventing his doing so. In Vienna, his breakfast is given to him at five o'clock in the morning,



OLD WOMEN "RUSTING OUT."

and there is always an official at hand to hurry him out to look for work, and to tell him where he is most likely to find it. In London he must pass the best hours of the day in the casual ward breaking stones, chopping wood, or in some other way working out the cost of what has been given to him. The result of this arrangement is that, when at last he is released, it is too late; every post he would have had a chance of obtaining has been filled up hours before. This is the way we manufacture permanent paupers. In Vienna things are managed on a different system. If a man there fails to find work in his first day's search, he may return to the refuge at night; he may even stay there several days in succession, always supposing the authorities are convinced he is doing his utmost to provide himself with employment. A sharp watch, however, is kept on his movements, and the moment he shows signs of a taste for loafing, the door of the refuge is closed on him for ever. If he still require help, he must go to the workhouse, where he must submit to a certain amount of discipline, and must work out the cost of the food and lodging with which he is supplied. An ordinarily industrious man, however, has no reason to

complain even in the workhouse. Providing he does his work, he is there infinitely better fed, better housed, and more humanely treated than he would be in most English unions. But no shirking of work is tolerated, and the first indication on his part of a desire to take life easily, or to prolong his visit unduly, meets with scant mercy. From the first he is given to understand, with unmistakable clearness, that although



STONE-BREAKER'S CELL.

Ten hundredweight of stones to be broken in a day and put through the lattice window. For this the casual gets twenty ounces of bread, an ounce and a half of cheese, two basins of gruel, and a straw bed.

The working classes in Austria have a code of ethics of their own with regard to paupers. A man may go to a casual ward without subjecting himself to any reproach whatsoever; he may stay in a workhouse even, and leave it without a stain upon his character; but, if he once be sent to a penal colony, he is regarded as a criminal, as the enemy of his kind. In England, unfortunately, public sentiment is less educated; and no one dreams of distinguishing "the thriftless poore," or even "the rioter that consumeth all," from "the fatherlesse poore man's son," or "the decayed householder." They are all paupers, and paupers only.

the town is prepared to give food and shelter to the weak and helpless, it expects the able-bodied to provide these things for themselves. Still, in the workhouse as in the refuges, men who are really trying to make a fresh start in life, always meet with encouragement and kindly aid. The authorities are in touch with the employers of labour, and take care to provide the paupers with opportunities of finding work.

All the world over, a certain proportion of the men who appeal to their fellows for help belong to the irredeemable class, the drunken, the vicious, the hopelessly lazy; and it is in dealing with these that the Austrian system is specially successful. As a rule, persons of this sort present themselves first at a refuge, where however their stay is very limited. They then pass on to a workhouse, where, if they are exceptionally lucky, they may succeed in disguising their real character for a week, or a fortnight perhaps at most. Proof of their worthlessness, or laziness—the two terms are regarded as synonymous—is always forthcoming before long, and then they are straightway packed off to a penal colony, where the length of their visit depends upon their conduct, not their wishes.