

1898.
NEW ZEALAND.

HOSPITALS AND CHARITABLE INSTITUTIONS OF THE COLONY

(REPORT ON THE), BY THE INSPECTOR OF HOSPITALS.

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

The INSPECTOR of HOSPITALS and CHARITABLE INSTITUTIONS to the Hon. the MINISTER of EDUCATION.

SIR,—

In studying year after year the working of our hospital and charitable-aid system I am more and more struck with two things: First, the tendency in every charitable movement to look to the initiative of the State; and, second, the consequent ostracism of charity. I desire to draw attention to the genesis and effects of that extraordinary development among us of the sentiment of benevolence so impulsive in its character, and so strongly vicarious in its methods, and which I consider to be one of the greatest characteristics and one of the chiefest dangers of our colonial communities. In searching for causes we must often go far afield. In tracing down the stream of tendency the chief thing is to make sure that you have got into the main current. There is no doubt that the main current of this impulsive humanitarianism, so markedly vicarious, of our people has its main source in the Christian doctrine of the brotherhood of man that, like sunrise on the sea, marked the inauguration of our era.

Up to the great reaction of the sixteenth century the king's justice, supplemented by Christian charity, covered the functions of law and (optional) morality. That part of conduct which society has to make compulsory if it would secure its own existence is law. Now, among us, the wonderful thing is, that we seem to have despaired of charity and duty, and perhaps our most marked tendency is to place under legal compulsion as large an area of human conduct as possible. Up to almost our own time the movement of progress was in the contrary direction. The goal was to confine the State's action so far as possible to the security of person and property, and the measure of Britain's superiority over other nations was held to lie in the extent to which the activity of her citizens could with safety be left free from compulsion. How has it come about that our idea of freedom has been so transformed? The Protestant reaction was against the supremacy of the Church and the king. Private judgment in matters of faith and private enterprise in action were the new ideals of freedom. The whole movement which culminated in England just before the birth of her younger colonies meant the reinstatement of the individual, and the curtailment of community. Once it was admitted that in matters of faith every man was free, it became manifest that this freedom carried with it the right and duty of every free agent to provide also for himself and his family. If, however, the worker so takes his destiny upon himself here as well as hereafter it must be at his own peril. Success may, indeed, crown his efforts—he may become a millionaire; but then, on the other hand, what if he fail? Oh, that is another matter. Then, indeed, he must be handed over to the minimum compulsory charity whose symbol is Bumble. Surely this can never be what our fathers meant by freedom. This means for most of us simply freedom to starve. Just so, but you would have it; and that is the alternative offered by justice from the basis of your own claim for the right of the individual to think what he likes and do what he likes. Hume, Adam Smith, and Mill were the prophets of this individualistic dispensation. Under it private judgment, emancipated from the restraint of authority, rushed headlong into sectarianism, and while the sects were quarrelling the capitalist ran away with the profits of the whole period of England's industrial supremacy, and the masses of her people lapsed. Lassalle, like a new Peter the Hermit, had proclaimed a new crusade to recover the Promised Land, for had not the Chartists made it clear that there was no road thither through individualism. Civilisation had got into a *cul-de-sac*, like the Nile, the river of civilisation, where it is imprisoned and its current lost in the Central African morasses. Wordsworth said of this time, "England, thou art become a fen of stagnant waters." The outlet for which England was tentatively groping she found through the colonies. The colonial system of Wakefield contained germinal ideas secreted from the blood of an individualistic civilisation, which were destined to inoculate the whole maternal