

ture on outdoor charitable relief rather than at expenditure on hospitals. Generally speaking, as I have said before, our hospitals are well and economically managed; and I think it would be a bad economy to try any reform that might tend to impair their efficiency. But I wish I could say the same of charitable aid, especially the way in which outdoor relief is given. Unfortunately I have not the pen of my predecessor, with which, year in and year out, in vigorous and picturesque language he denounced the system which is gradually weakening the moral fibre of the people of these Islands. Outdoor relief is to be had for the asking, in many instances after a brief and often perfunctory inquiry. Often no inquiry is made. There are some who doubtless would make a boast of this, but they hardly realise what indiscriminate outdoor relief means to the nation at large. My predecessor strongly and repeatedly advocated that to stem this ever-increasing expense to the country no money should be paid out of the Consolidated Fund "towards the permanent degradation of the people." Look at the facts: In 1898 the Old-age Pensions Act became law. It was then considered that with the giving of pensions there would be a corresponding decrease in the amount expended in charitable aid. The following will show how little that hope has been justified, and how the poor-law expenditure has increased despite the wave of prosperity that has extended over the Dominion during the last ten years. And are we not beginning to feel the moral effect of this indiscriminate charity? Can it be truly said that we have the splendid enterprise and self-reliance that characterized the early settlers on these shores? Far from it: we see the lack of self-reliance in the constant stream of deputations to the Government for assistance in the way of subsidy for all sorts and conditions of things. One of the cardinal principles of poor-law relief is to insure that the recipient of charitable aid is not placed in a better position as regards the comforts and general condition of life than his self-reliant neighbour, who is struggling to keep off the rates. Can any one say that the condition of many of the recipients of poor-relief is not much better than that of those on the verge of pauperism, but who have so far maintained their self-reliance? Are not many of the inmates in our old peoples' homes living under better conditions as regards the comforts of life than they have ever before experienced? The duty of the State is to see that no one starves, but there is a wide difference between this and a system that allows some charitable-aid recipients to buy chocolates and other luxuries denied the family of the struggling working-man. The deserving poor should receive their extra comforts from organized private philanthropy, which fortunately has established many excellent institutions in these Islands, and there is abundant evidence that it only needs organization to bring those private charities together on the lines of the Charity Organization Society of the United Kingdom, so that public and private charity can go hand in hand in restricting the insatiable demands of an undeserving poor, and in providing all that can reasonably be provided for those who have fallen on to evil times through no fault of their own.

If some such scheme could be arranged we might continue to grant a certain amount of outdoor relief before resorting to—what we must ultimately adopt—a workhouse system. For the able-bodied pauper, however, a workhouse test seems absolutely essential. I am naturally reluctant at this stage to make any definite recommendation, but would rather wait until I had further inquired into the problem—a problem that cannot be settled on eighteen months' experience. Doubtless many of you have valuable suggestions to offer on the subject, but I would very much like to hear the opinions of this Conference on the Elberfeld system, a modification of which appears to me to be particularly adaptable to this country. The system seems to have worked well in some parts of Germany, and, provided we can get the right men to come forward to our assistance, I can see no reason why—in fact, I have yet to learn that what can be done by a patriotic German cannot be better done by a public-spirited and patriotic Briton.

I am well aware that many of your Boards recognise the evils of the present system, and the dangers into which we are drifting. In the Conference of Charitable Aid Boards held here in 1904 there was not a recommendation that would not appeal to a sensible man, and chief of these was that the Boards should be relieved of the responsibility of the children in the industrial schools, and that such should be handed over to the State. Personally, I would extend such advantages to all children sooner than that they should be placed under Charitable Aid Boards, and so in a measure start life handicapped. We all know that pauperism is contagious, and that the sooner a child is removed from its fell influences the better citizen he is likely to turn out. In fact, in the words of M. Thiry, Professor of Criminal Law in the University of Liège, "If you would succeed in diminishing vagrancy and begging, as well as crime, give more attention to the children." Nor can the Government be accused of having been wanting in this respect. The Infant Life Protection and other Acts were framed on the principle that it is only right and fair to give the children a good start in life, and to try and relieve them as soon as possible from the evils of a bad environment.

The charitable-aid question is the greatest of all problems before you, and we should allow no false feelings or sickly sentimentalism to draw us into depths—financial and moral—from which there will be great difficulty in emerging. Now is the time to act: the chance is now with you. You have come here conscious of your power to make or mar this Bill, and very possibly you can do so, but if you are the men I take you to be, you will divest yourselves of the cloaks of parochialism and the politics of party, and, at any rate, cause a Bill to be framed that will not only redound to your credit, but will make for the betterment of the sick and needy, whilst preserving the moral fibre of the people of these Islands.

On the motion of Mr. PAYLING, it was resolved to admit the Press to the deliberations of the Conference.

The CHAIRMAN intimated that each Board or institution should have one vote irrespective of the number of delegates representing Boards or institutions. The votes would be very carefully recorded, so that the significance of each vote might be readily assessed by the Minister.