

**PUBLIC RELIEF OF
THE POOR; SIX
LECTURES**

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Public relief of the poor; Six lectures by Thomas Mackay

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THOMAS MACKAY

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BY THOMAS MACKAY

AUTHOR OF "THE ENGLISH POOR," ETC.



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PREFACE

THE following pages are the substance of six lectures delivered at the Church House, Westminster, at the invitation of the "Joint Lectures Committee," during the winter 1900-1901. Although much has been written about the relief of the poor, no work, as far as the author is aware, covers the precise ground traversed in this volume. The treatment of the subject is theoretical rather than practical. If the author is right in his conviction that pauperism and dependence among the poorer classes are largely artificial and unnecessary conditions, certain practical conclusions naturally follow, but there is really no difficulty in adopting the policy indicated. What is wanting to secure the great reformation which lies within reach, is a reasoned conviction of the possibility of dispauperisation. The object of these lectures was to present the arguments which seemed to establish this proposition, and to leave its

practical application to the common sense of those who are responsible for the administration of public relief.

A strong conviction of the justice of certain views naturally leads to a belief that a fair hearing will secure their general acceptance, and it is hoped that these pages may do something to overcome the indifference and prejudice of public opinion, which regards the whole question as incapable of amendment. In this sense, and in connection with this subject, a correct theory is the most practical thing in the world ; for if the possibility of dispauperisation be once established, the details of administration present very little difficulty. The details of a dispauperising administration have been set out in many handbooks, and have been shown to justify themselves by the results. To some minds the force of a general principle has more authority, and to them the following attempt to analyse the economic significance of pauperism and dependence is specially addressed.

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PUBLIC RELIEF OF THE POOR IN ENGLAND



INTRODUCTORY

BEFORE we can justly appreciate the importance of a good system of public relief, we must endeavour to understand how very limited an influence it has in promoting a healthy organisation of society. The necessity of relief is evidence of stunted growth or social disorder. Medical treatment, skilfully applied, may remove the causes of physical disease, but relief is only a treatment of symptoms: it never touches, except to aggravate them, the economic causes of poverty and destitution.

It is necessary, at the very outset, to insist on this subordinate importance of relief. Otherwise it is impossible to form a right judgment as to the true relation of social well-being to