

**PRUSSIA AND THE POOR; OR,
OBSERVATIONS UPON THE
SYSTEMATIZED RELIEF OF THE POOR AT
ELBERFELD, IN CONTRAST WITH THAT OF
ENGLAND. FOUNDED UPON A VISIT AND
PERSONAL INQUIRY**

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Prussia and the Poor; Or, Observations upon the Systematized Relief of the Poor at Elberfeld, in Contrast with That of England. Founded upon a Visit and Personal Inquiry by Richard Hibbs

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RICHARD HIBBS

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E L B E R F E L D,

IN CONTRAST WITH THAT OF ENGLAND.

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WITH

A N A P P E N D I X,

CONTAINING :—

I. The "International;" II. Register of "Deaths from Starvation" in London from 1862 to 1865; III. The Alderman, the Street Preacher, and the Poor; IV. Correspondence, &c.; V. Sermons.

BY THE

REV. RICHARD HIBBS, M.A.,

SOMETIME SCHOLAR OF ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

"Break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor."—DANIEL iv. 27.

"Righteousness exalteth a nation;
But sin is a reproach to any people."—PROV. xiv. 34.

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S. F.

PREFATORY REMARKS.

THE writer of the following pages has been led, from time to time, through the ever changing phases of social politics, to defer their publication. On returning to England, in 1873, from his visit to Elberfeld—whither, when residing on the Continent, he had gone for the express purpose of inquiring into the system there adopted for the relief of the poor,—he happily found the labouring classes in England much better remunerated for their toil than when he went abroad in 1867; and, by consequence, not so much in need of parochial assistance. But, besides the fact that wages are again receding, in some parts, to their former inadequate scale, specially in some agricultural districts, for example, in Wiltshire and other counties, there is once again arising in the country, judging from the reported utterances of such speakers on social politics as Lords Lytton and Kimberley, the opinion that out-door relief must be given up, and the House Test rigorously enforced. Hence, then, the need that exists once again that poor-relief systems be reviewed, and matters pertaining to them fully ventilated.

But the author has also private, or rather personal, reasons for the printing of these pages, as well as public ones. This will be made apparent in the Appendix, which contains a correspondence recently passed between a certain Continental Society in connexion with the Church of England and himself. From this it will be seen that the writer has been compelled *volens volens*, would he have any regard for his good name, to come forward and challenge his foes to shew cause why they should represent him as unworthy

to occupy, even temporarily, the pulpit of any of the British Chaplaincies abroad. They have done this on the ground of his professing sentiments, as they suppose, distasteful to many. They aim at stigmatising the author as a "political preacher." It is manifest that they base their objections on the charges which appeared first in the *Saturday Review*, in which the preacher—with so much charity on the part of the reviewer—is stigmatised as a 'Clerical Firebrand;' but more especially on the charges brought against him some years ago by a Knighted Alderman, in the Marlborough Street Police Court. This Knight (of the Thistle, we will presume) seemed to regard the then Street Preacher as personally opposed to him, Sir Robert. On his banneret, it may be surmised, is conspicuously inscribed the defiant motto—"Nemo me impunè læcessit!" Now, had he adhered to the truth in his Jeremiad before the puisne Rhadamanthus, an account of which was published the next morning in *The Times*, the preacher would have accepted it with all readiness, and without so much as a wish to reply, as he did the previous attack of the *Saturday Review*, despite its acrimony. But Sir Robert stated what was not true; and accordingly efforts were immediately made by the calumniated offender to rebut the charge. The magistrate, however, would not allow him to defend himself, or to call witnesses, but gratuitously insulted him, and drove him from the judgment-seat. But what has been the result of all this to the preacher all these years since? From the correspondence referred to it will be seen that nowhere on the Continent, including both Hesperias, was he permitted, for a period extending between six and seven years, through the persecuting malevolence of those who hate the friends of the poor, to exercise his sacred calling in peace. Everywhere, and at all times, he found himself spoken against and suspected of everything that was unlovely and of ill report. Even friends who asked his assistance in their pulpits were tampered with, and brought over in some instances to the side of his opponents and calumniators. As the Society referred to above has stated, he was regarded as a "public character," and that in the worst sense of the words. It

will be seen, too, from this correspondence, that the author is still considered to hold sentiments unworthy of the clerical profession. These things being so, it is high time that he should defend himself against misrepresentations so injurious to himself and his work as a preacher of the Gospel. He cannot "let bygones be bygones," because of their *continued pernicious results*; and, therefore, because others will not suffer them to be bygones. His foes have only been too successful for him to remain silent one moment longer. He had hoped that they would in time lay aside their hostility, and suffer him to prosecute the duties of his sacred calling, whether at home or abroad, in peace and quietness. The truth is, the *Saturday Review* and the belligerent City Knight did their work too effectually for the humble name of the object of their malignant opposition to be allowed to sink into oblivion.

From the above remarks it will be seen that the author can produce strong reasons for allowing *now* to appear his letter to Sir Robert C——, the MS. of which, as will be seen from the date, has lain in his desk more than the period recommended by the Roman satirist to writers in general, whom he deports from rushing into print. He had intended to impose the duty of publishing this *brochure* on his executors. But circumstances, both of a public and private nature, constrain him to bring forth at once to a discerning public "things both new and old."

In adding his own private Register of Deaths from Starvation, which occurred in London alone during less than a moiety of the last decade of years, as attested by Coroners' Inquests, he feels that no apology is needed. Theories are fallacious; facts are indubitable and indisputable. Let the advocates of Bastilles for the deserving poor defend, if they can, their system in face of such appalling records. Further, let the Temperance nostrum-mongers of every shade hold their peace. Not a single case of death from destitution in these registrations was attributed either by the Coroner or Jury to drunkenness. We should not advert to these *good* people --for undoubtedly drunkenness is a crying evil in the land, and Temperance Societies do well to decry it—were it not that they

too often attribute to it as a cause results which are in no wise produced by it ; and, at the same time, shew themselves too often "partial in the law." As to the former, the old story touching the sapient Wiltshire jury applies here. An inquest was held on the body of a man found dead on Salisbury Plain. The Coroner, on discovering indications that the poor man had perished by his own hand, suggested the verdict of "*Felo da se*," which the learned foreman interpreted—being guided, it may be presumed, more by the sound than the sense—"Fell into the sea." Difficulties were urged by one at least of the twelve, on the ground of there being no sea near Stonehenge ; but these were speedily set aside by the foreman, with the remark that "the Coroner knows best." The suicide, therefore, according to the verdict, "fell into the sea" on Salisbury Plain ! Now, the parallel in the present day is just this : People perish through want of food and the necessaries of life—fuel among the rest, in our inclement part of the Temperate Zone—and the single cut and dried verdict of the temperance tribe is, "Death from drunkenness." As to the one-sidedness of this quackery, we would say :—If beer-drinking must be stopped, club-house potations should be inquired into. The boast of England is that all men are equal in the eye of the law. Yes, rich and poor here must be tarred with the same brush. We trust that the Rev. Basil Wiberforce had an eye to some thing more than beer-drinking when, according to his speech, as reported in the *Gloucester Chronicle*, date April 10, 1875, he thus expressed himself :—"I venture to say from my experience of this sin of drunkenness, that it has ruined more young men starting in life, it has robbed of their honour more pure women, it has brought down more grey hairs with bitter sorrow to the grave, it has emptied more churches and chapels, and, I say, it has damned more souls than all the sins of the Ten Commandments rolled into one." So, then, our new school of Moral Philosophy has discovered an important *omission* in the Decalogue. Moses is weighed in their newly-invented scales, and found wanting. Murder, adultery, fraud—these are as the small dust of the balance. Our Divorce Court, and all other

Courts of Justice, must of course be pronounced impertinent, and bidden forthwith to close their doors. Deeds of violence, adultery, chicanery (what a blessed gospel for public companies!) are mere *peccadillos*. Nay, it is taught that these sins only enter into the man together with the alcohol. Hence that favourite phrase, "demon drink," of the new gossellers. Wisdom once proclaimed upon the house tops, "*not* that which entereth into a man defileth the man." These public instructors, on the other hand, hold and teach that "the heart of man, out of which proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, &c., &c.," only becomes evil when inspired by liquor. Philip sober is a saint!

Should the movement among the agricultural labourers extend to all the counties, so that the wages of the sons of the soil become fairly proportionate to their reasonable wants, the "House Test" will become in a manner obsolete, as it regards this portion of the labouring population, from the paucity of applications for relief. This *desideratum* is, doubtless, that which animates those who support this movement. All honour to them, therefore; and, despite the fact that certain Episcopal charges seem to betray some hesitation on the part of those delivering them, as to the duty of the Clergy sanctioning these efforts among the rural poor for securing *self-relief*, all charitably disposed persons cannot but hail with the highest satisfaction the prospect of seeing those by whose toil "the staff of life" is maintained, relieved from the dread of the Union, with its prison life, and all its horrors for old age and honesty. The writer, for one, rejoices at this self-emancipation of the rural population; and heartily bids "God speed" to all who have been raised up in the good providence of God to assist their poor brethren in working out this Exodus from the oppressive grasp of the Mammon-Pharaoh.

Other Church-rulers are deploring the spirit of the age as betraying no fixed principles and shewing that something is yet lacking "in the state of Denmark." Let us boldly tell them that that indefinable 'something' is charity—charity for those "who have none to help." When true Christianity shall prevail,

'Bastilles' will be a thing of the past. "The end of the commandment is charity.'

It is this loving spirit which has influenced the people of Elberfeld. Hence they enjoy the two-fold happiness of knowing that they have performed a Christian duty, and also that of seeing not only that the unfortunate and the afflicted are sympathised with and relieved, but also raised from their degradation and misery and then enabled to help others, thus passing from the class of the relieved to the relieving one. Their plan is not to pauperise permanently, but to elevate. To accomplish this, all persons who have the requisite time at their disposal assist in the distribution of the money raised for the relief of the poor. They do not make "a job" of distress. Poor-law Presidents and Commissioners with them must do their work for the love of it, not that they and their families may ride in their carriages supported by money which should relieve the destitute. This is Prussia's method of assisting the poor. May England, for once, confess that she has been misled by her self-styled Political Economists, and learn, though late, "the more excellent way." For England's God it is that bids her "go and do likewise."

What efforts have been made of late years for the *evangelisation* of the million! But where are the results? As to the National Church, she has long since been constrained to confess that she has lost the working population. Ah, is there not a cause? Time was when the poor, wasted with sickness and starving through being thrown out of employment found sympathy with their "spiritual pastors and masters." But the new Poor-law Amendment Act introduced another state of things; and from that unhappy moment the poor have not ceased year by year to be more and more alienated from the Church of their fathers. Churches may be built, aye, and expressly for them, but they decline the proffered boon; and if they are Sunday worshippers at all, they are to be found at the Conventicle. Even the American Evangelists *met with indifference* from the producing classes. These latter *have discovered that 'faith' as in St. James's day can still be dia*