The minority report : a criticism (a summary of which appeared in the "Times" of 19th June 1910)

Vulliamy, A. F. (Arthur Frederick)

London, P.S. King, 1910.

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THE
MINORITY REPORT

A CRITICISM

(*A Summary of which appeared in the "Times" of 19th June* 1910)

SIXPENCE NET.

LONDON.
P. S. KING & SON
ORCHARD HOUSE, WESTMINSTER
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From the
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PREFACE.

THE following criticism was written some months ago, but its publication has been unavoidably postponed. Certain of the points contained in it are now matters of common knowledge, but the article is published as originally written. A summary appeared in the *Times* of 19th June 1910.

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THE MINORITY REPORT:

A CRITICISM.

INTRODUCTORY.

IT is difficult for the practical Poor Law administrator to criticise a document which regards the whole question from a standpoint so different from his own. What appear to him to be points for criticism would probably appear to the authors of the Minority Report and their friends to be its principal merits. His ideals for the future and his views as to the solution of the problem of poverty are so widely divergent from theirs that it is next to impossible for him to meet them upon common ground or to consider their Report as a Poor Law Report at all. The aim of those who have studied the question in the past has always been to combine assured maintenance for all who are destitute with a maximum of independence, and the goal to which they have looked has been that ultimately the people should "live by their labour." The proposals of the Minority, on the other hand, contemplate with equanimity conditions under which the bulk of the population would be condemned to permanent dependence. They entirely ignore the whole question of pauperisation by the Poor Law, of which we have had, and still have, such bitter experience in this country—a question which appears to most Poor Law administrators to be of vital importance. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that they profess to be able to cure pauperism by making every one a pauper. It

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is plain that the authors of the Report have had no experience of pauperism in the concrete or of practical administration.

The following imperfect analysis will try to show first that the Report is a Socialist document advocating, with but little disguise, "universal provision" by the State of the necessaries of life. It will naturally gain the support of Socialists—indeed the Socialist organisations are working for it tooth and nail throughout the country—but it will be regarded with suspicion by those who still regard self provision as the true basis of social welfare. The actual proposals of the Minority will next be examined, and their claim to "scientific precision," and it will be shown how little warrant there is for any such claim. The illusory nature of the safeguards proposed, the probable effect of the delegation of relief administration to bodies elected for other purposes, the manipulation of the labour market with dictatorial power conferred upon superintendents of labour exchanges, the artificial exclusion of certain classes of people from the labour market altogether, the ear-marking of huge sums for the "regularisation" of labour, the possibility of "training" and "honourably maintaining" enormous numbers of adults in public training establishments and of inspiring them wholesale with *morale*—all these questions will be dealt with in turn and critically examined. Certain inaccuracies in matters of fact and internal inconsistencies will also be indicated as bearing upon the credit of the Report.

Finally, something will be said as to the attitude of the Minority upon a question which will appear to many to be the most important question of all, namely, the question of character or, to use their own expression, of the "moral factor" in the problem of pauperism. It may be said at once that the general impression left upon the mind by the Report is that it is a gospel of materialism which is certain to defeat its own objects, because character, as the antithesis of pauperism, is essential to material well-being.

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The Authorship of the Report and its Sponsors.

The authors of the Minority Report are not disposed to let the grass grow under their feet, and are prosecuting a "crusade against destitution," with the Report as their war-cry. The movement is godfathered by the distinguished names of Sir John Gorst, Mr Bernard Shaw, Mr H. G. Wells, and Mr Sidney Webb. Mr Sidney Webb indeed is something more than a godfather. He is joint-author of the Report, of which he speaks frankly as "our Report." Lord George Hamilton, the Chairman of the Royal Commission, has recently pointed out that Mr and Mrs Sidney Webb have claimed the copyright of this public document, which they could not have done if the other signatories had contributed even a line to its pages. The position is novel. Never before, so far as we know, has the Report of a Royal Commission being written in great part by one who has neither been appointed to the Commission, nor has been present at its meetings nor heard the evidence. A question arises whether this will be taken as a precedent in the appointment of future Royal Commissioners, and whether such appointments will be considered to be dual appointments. The preliminary manifesto of the "crusade" appears in the June (1909) number of the Rev. R. J. Campbell's paper, *The Christian Commonwealth.* Mr H. G. Wells gives it his benediction. "The Minority Report," he says, "expresses that deliberately constructive Socialism which I have always advocated." The views of its other sponsors are equally enthusiastic. Mr Bernard Shaw hails it as the greatest evolutionary discovery since that of Darwin, and it is only reasonable to assume that this approval from leading Socialist authorities shows that its recommendations are Socialistic in their tendency.

Its Programme.

The programme of the manifesto is a sweeping one. The Poor Law is to be "abolished," that is to say, it

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is to disappear as a separate branch of administration. Boards of Guardians are to be swept away and their duties handed over to the various Committees of the County and Borough Councils. At the same time all the safeguards which the experience of three hundred years has led us to adopt are to be put on one side. The position of the pauper is no longer to be less attractive than that of the independent labourer. Public relief is no longer to be confined to the destitute, but is to be extended to every one who is even likely to become destitute. Upon this basis children are to be maintained, when necessary, as well as educated by the Education Committees; the sick and impotent are to be maintained by the Public Health Committees; the aged by the Pension Committees, and so forth. For the able-bodied a new national authority is to be created under a Minister for Labour, who will organise the labour market in such a way that the "opportunity of employment shall not be lacking to any able-bodied man," and "honourably maintain" those who fail to get employment, in or near "public training" establishments. The Committees will provide "whatever treatment may seem most appropriate in each case," and the only check upon their action will be the "Registrar," whose duty it will be to register public relief, to sanction grants of home aliment, and recover relief from those able to pay "upon such terms as Parliament may decide."

Its Promises.

The Minority promise great results from their scheme. Overlapping is to be stopped, destitution prevented in its earlier stages and eventually abolished altogether. "We may be unduly hopeful," they say, "but after the most careful consideration and a great deal of consultation with practical administrators on all sides of the question, we make bold to say that it can be done. We can abolish destitution."

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It would be interesting to learn the names and qualifications of those "practical administrators" who would endorse this statement. The Association of Poor Law Unions, which is the leading body of practical expert opinion upon the subject, has already expressed an opinion adverse to the Report. At the last Central Poor Law Conference, according to the most friendly estimate, only thirty hands were held up in its favour, though some five hundred Delegates were present.

This is not the first time in history that we have been promised the abolition of poverty through the Poor Law. Doubtless the authors of the Act of Elizabeth thought that they had solved the problem when they provided for the "relief of the impotent and the setting of the able-bodied on work." Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries many of the most eminent thinkers, amongst whom John Locke was the most conspicuous, devised scheme after scheme for this very purpose. Sir F. Eden, writing at the close of the eighteenth century, says, "It may be of some consolation to the many patriotic but unsuccessful philanthropists, who since his time have attempted the arduous work of repairing this portion of the legislative fabric, that even so great a man as Mr Locke attempted it to but little purpose." Yet once more we have a panacea proposed to us—a short cut out of all our difficulties, and past experience suggests that we should examine it both critically and closely. The manifesto of the crusaders is rather a call to arms than a serious argument, and in order to understand the position clearly we must turn to the Minority Report itself.

Its Claim to "Scientific Precision."

There is a general impression that it contains a very clearly and fully thought-out scheme of reform. The Commissioners themselves seem to be of that opinion, for they speak of the "detailed and finished

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scheme which they have presented" (p. 1179).* Canon Barnett in a recent number of the *Fortnightly Review* commends the Report for its "scientific precision." I think that this opinion is erroneous, and in that opinion I am borne out by the able writer of Messrs Knight's admirable synopsis of the Reports, who says: "An administrator of the present system will naturally desire to understand first, how the new machinery would work in the details of administration. But the Report does not discuss these details except in meagre fashion. It is more concerned with establishing the general principles upon which its scheme of reform depends." Yet in Poor Law matters details are of the essence of the problem, and even in Part I., where the Commissioners are especially satisfied with the "finish" of their scheme, it will not, I think, be difficult to show that some of the most important questions are left unanswered. For example the several Committees to whom the relief of poverty is to be entrusted will "provide under suitable conditions, safeguards to be embodied in statutes and regulation Orders, for the several classes of persons committed to their charge whatever treatment they may deem most appropriate to their condition." But we have in the Report no clear statement of what these conditions and safeguards are to be; all we know is that they are to be laid down at some future period. We know indeed that the Committees are not to be bound by any of the automatic tests of 1834, and we are given to understand that there are still some conditions and safeguards to be "embodied in regulations and statutes." Surely we ought to know what these are to be.

The Registrar.

In the next place the position of the Registrar is far from clear. We naturally ask ourselves whether his control, which is the sole check upon the powers

* The references throughout are to the original official volume containing both the Reports of the Commission, [CD. 4499].

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of the Committees, is likely to be an effective substitute for the older automatic checks which are now to be discarded, and we cannot see that this is likely to be the case.

First, it is noticeable that his power in the matter of "home aliment" is only to be a power of revision. The original decision is arrived at by the local executives which the Minority are pleased to call the "many-headed" body. It would appear likely that the original decision will prevail in the vast majority of cases, and that the sanction of the Registrar will, except in extreme cases, be little more than a formality. This view is borne out by the fact that the Registrar will have "nothing to do with the treatment of the case" (p. 1111), but the most important practical question in the treatment of a case is usually whether indoor or outdoor relief is to be offered. On the other hand he will plainly have discretion as to the amount of outdoor relief which is to be granted. When two or three of the new authorities have recommended overlapping out-relief for the same family, he will have the power to see that it is "neither too much nor too little." But his general function will apparently be not so much to determine whether out-relief is to be granted, but as to its amount. The practical granting of out-relief will therefore apparently still remain with the "many-headed" body. But even if that is not so, it is evidently the intention of the Minority that out-relief should be granted in all cases where it is reasonably possible, and to many which are now outside the scope of the Poor Law altogether. Those who believe that the Minority wish to restrict out-relief by the intervention of the Registrar, will find themselves disappointed.

The second principal function of the Registrar is to be the recovery of relief from "those able to pay." Here again the ability to pay is to be determined by future legislation, based presumably upon some such consideration as a "poverty line," the course recently roughly adopted by the London County Council with

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regard to the feeding of school children. It is hardly necessary to point out the extreme practical difficulty of any such enactment. The "poverty line" is an abstraction about which it is next to impossible to generalise. If it is to be based upon earnings, not an agricultural labourer in the country would be assessable by the Registrar. All could claim exemption. We can easily imagine the debates in the House of Commons when such a subject was discussed. The Minority point, apparently in support of their proposals, to the fact that already a certain amount is recovered from recipients of Poor Law relief. When we examine the figures we find that it amounts to under half a million out of some 15 millions expenditure, or 3 per cent. One-half of this is paid in respect of lunacy cases, when the relations are frequently in good positions, and almost the whole of it is voluntarily offered and paid. The amount is usually roughly assessed between Boards of Guardians and applicants for relief or their relations, and is recovered by moral suasion and appeals to self-respect and personal responsibility. An infinitesimal fraction is recovered by legal process. As a rule, when applicants refuse to repay, the onus of proving means is too hard a task for Guardians, and the matter is allowed to drop. The argument for giving relief on the basis of recovery is a favourite one at the present time, and as it is practically the principal limitation upon the relief proposals of the Minority, it is necessary to examine it narrowly, and to consider whether it is likely to be an effective check upon pauperism. We have had some recent experience in the matter. The argument is most commonly used with regard to the feeding of school children. First feed the child, it is said, and then recover from the parent. Not long ago the Local Government Board issued an Order enabling Guardians to feed school children on that basis. The Order was largely acted upon in Bradford, and of £1,300 spent in meals only £3 was recovered. The London County Council are experiencing the same difficulty, and have only recovered £26 out of

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£34,000. This power of recovery, then, would apparently be of little effect, except in the cases of those who are comparatively affluent. The bulk of the labouring population, whose means are fluctuating and difficult to gauge, but who now contrive to support themselves and their families, and often even to put something by in a sick club, would be exempt, and it is evidently the intention of the Minority that they should be so. But they are the real difficulty, the real problem. It would perhaps be unfair to say that this aspect of the question of assessment and recovery has not been considered by the Minority. It is evidently part of their deliberate policy that the bulk of the poorer population should be entitled to relief without any question of recovery. In fact, they say in one place, that of course it is impossible to recover from people unless the community places them in the position to pay. Generally speaking, it cannot be said that the Minority scheme is "scientifically precise." It leaves many questions of principle to be settled by future legislation. It discusses details in the most "meagre fashion." It proposes things which have been practically proved to be impossible.

The Abolition of the Poor Law and the Proposal to Transfer the Responsibility of Giving Relief to various Administrative Departments other than the Poor Law so-called.

The Minority would repeal all Poor Law legislation or Orders subsequent to the Act of Elizabeth, retaining the Act of Elizabeth in order to preserve "the right to relief" (p. 1030). The Act of Elizabeth would then be carried out by the several administrative departments specified: the Poor Law would be "abolished" as a separate branch of administration, but would reappear in education, sanitation, and industry. The Majority criticise this proposal on the ground that it would lead to much overlapping, and that the new authorities being elected for another purpose would consider the ques-

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tion rather from the point of view of their special functions than from a Poor Law point of view. The administration of public relief is, they consider, a matter of so much complexity, its maladministration in the past has led to such grave evils, that it is necessary that it should be administered by experts specially appointed and qualified for the purpose, otherwise no limits can be set to the spread of pauperism and dependence. The Majority would appear to have some warrant for their criticism in the experience that we have already had of the delegation of relief duties to bodies outside the Poor Law. Since the relief of the able-bodied was handed over by Mr Chamberlain's Circular, and later by the Unemployed Workmen's Act, to bodies other than the Guardians, not only has overlapping increased enormously, but the number of the unemployed has also shown a constant tendency to increase. I mean, of course, by the unemployed those who apply as such to public bodies, and not the unemployed percentages of trades unions, for the proportion of trades unionists amongst such applicants is infinitesimal. Similarly with regard to the feeding of necessitous school children. The London County Council have only recently placed it upon the rates, yet within a few months the number of children fed has more than doubled itself and is still increasing. The Minority themselves point out that it has led to a large amount of overlapping, as in many cases the children are fed by the Education Authority whilst their parents receive out-relief from the Guardians. There can be no doubt —indeed the Minority do not attempt to conceal it— that if these various Committees are to administer the Act of Elizabeth upon the lines indicated and with the new duty to "search out destitution," there will be a vast increase both in expenditure and in pauperism, if, indeed, the word is still to be allowed to have any meaning.

A recapitulation of the duties that will fall upon these Committees if the Minority Report becomes law will serve to show the extent of the respon-

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sibilities that will be incurred by the community in regard to the several classes dealt with. In all cases, be it remembered, destitution is to be sought out, and there is to be no waiting for an application for relief, and every case is to receive whatever treatment the Committee dealing with it "may consider most appropriate." The children will be dealt with upon these lines by the Education Committees. Under a special heading, new to the Poor Law, "birth and infancy" will be dealt with by the Public Health Authority, and nursing mothers will receive nourishment both before and after confinement and nourishment for their babies. The sick and impotent will also be maintained by the Public Health Authority, whose duty it will be to search out "incipient" sickness. The feeble-minded will be handed over to a Lunacy Authority, whose business it will be to search out incipient feeble-mindedness—a rather alarming prospect. The aged are to be looked after by the Pension Committee; the age is to be reduced to "sixty-five or even sixty," by which provision the cost will be doubled or even quadrupled at a stroke. For those disabled under the pension age, whatever it may be, "local pensions" will be provided by the Public Health Authority. A network of new institutions, such as public day industrial schools, hospitals, and sanatoria, &c., is also suggested or will be the necessary corollary. The Minority admit the probable increase in expense, but regard it with equanimity. The cost of public assistance, they say, is not keeping pace with the wealth of the country, as if forsooth! that were a matter for regret; perhaps the future question will be whether the wealth of the country is keeping pace with the cost of public assistance. But, after all, to many the real question is not the cost but the increase of dependence.

The Able-bodied.

Their proposals in regard to the able-bodied provide for a Minister for Labour, who is to "organise

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industry" and provide work for as many as possible, and to honourably maintain the remainder. The principal instrument which is to be used in the organisation of industry is the labour exchange, from which all employers of casual labour are to be compelled to hire their labour, though labourers will not be compelled to register unless they become in some way chargeable to the public authority. It will be the duty of the superintendent of the labour exchange to "dovetail" casual work—that is to say, that instead of giving two days' work apiece to A, B, and C, he will give six days' work to one of them at his discretion; at least there is nothing to show how he is to decide between them, and a wide door is opened to favouritism. The other two will be ousted altogether from the labour market, and will have to be maintained. They become "the surplus of labour." "We cannot," say the Minority, "avoid the conclusion that there is this surplus of labour."

Surplus Labour.

This argument of "surplus labour" was used with constant iteration against the reformers of 1834. If we turn to the Majority Report (Part III., sections 442-445) we shall find how it was met by them, and how their arguments were justified by the eventual absorption of this supposed "surplus" in the labour market. The conditions are very similar at the present moment. Then we had a mass of "unemployed" centring round the parish pay-tables and claiming parish work and parish allowances. Now, we have similar apparently "stagnant pools" of labour besieging the doors of Distress Committees and Borough Council offices. We have in addition huge centralised charities providing relief work and free meals, which make the problem even more acute. Then, as now, we had an alleged surplus of labour which did not disappear till outdoor relief to the able-bodied was cut off and wages were no longer supplemented.

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Artificial Exclusion from the Labour Market.

But, assuming for the moment that this surplus of labour is a fact, we have to consider how the Minority propose to deal with it. First, they would endeavour to reduce it by the exclusion of certain classes of labour from the labour market. Women with young children would be provided with adequate outdoor relief on condition that they did no work. The school age would be raised to fifteen, and young people up to eighteen would be only allowed to work thirty hours a week. We can hardly contemplate with equanimity the number of inspectors that would be required to enforce such a policy. We may doubt, judging from the Scotch experiment of giving "adequate relief" to widows in order to keep them out of the labour market,* and indeed from much experience in out-relief administration, whether it is desirable to keep women in total idleness. We may doubt whether it would be possible or even desirable, by a cast-iron law, to exclude a young man with ambitions from his workshop, where he may be receiving a much more valuable education than he can get in Polytechnics, and where he is earning something for the support of himself and family, and his work is "sweetened by the prospect of reward." But, supposing that all these proposals† were carried out, there would still, say the Minority, be a surplus of labour to be dealt with, and, to use their own expression, "honourably maintained" by the Ministry for Labour. This maintenance would take several forms. The first would be that of adequate "home

* "A considerable number of these widows fell into bad habits, became drunken, and otherwise unsatisfactory, and had to be struck off the roll. . . . So many of the women are devoid of domestic and other interests that work for wages is a positive safeguard. How they are to be taught to care wisely for their homes and their children, and to spend their relief to the best advantage, is a problem which this scheme has not solved."—Majority Report, Part IV., chap. 6, 275.

† We may observe that all these proposals are based upon the often exposed "lump of labour" fallacy.

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aliment," on condition of daily attendance at a training establishment. In the second, the head of the family would enter the training establishment and his family would be maintained outside. The third would be the purely residential colony, reserved chiefly for single men. The fourth, the detention colony for the lowest class of labour with "morbid" proclivities. But a large number of men who are now in the labour market, but partially disabled, would be sifted out altogether, and handed over to the Public Health Authority. If unable to do full work, they would not be allowed to do any. We have already seen that by the "dovetailing" process a large number of men would be ousted altogether from the labour market, and it remains to be seen how these are to be dealt with in detail. The Minority tell us (p. 1152) that in Liverpool out of 15,000 men at the docks, 5,000 are "surplus labour," and so would have to be excluded from the labour market. If in a single industry in a single town it becomes necessary to maintain 5,000 men in training establishments, we can easily see that the problem before us for the whole country is no light one.

The Organisation of the Labour Market.

In their proposals for the "organisation of the labour market," the Minority would, in fact, stretch it, bound hand and foot, upon a bed of Procrustes. The working man would be obliged to accept any job that is offered to him by the labour exchange, regardless of time and place, under the risk, if he refused, of being sent to a penal colony. He might be sent off by administrative order to any part of Great Britain (p. 1208), like the young man in Richter's "Pictures of the Socialistic Future." He would be cut off from all chances of a temporary job, which might be just what he wanted to tide him over a difficulty. If he was a railway, tram, or omnibus employé, his hours of labour would be limited, and he could

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no longer earn money by working overtime. The employer of labour would be debarred from giving a man a job except through the labour exchange. The whole labour market would be delivered over in fetters to a number of salaried officials.

Training.

We have next to see what is meant by "training." The Minority only tell us that "the technique of this subject is as yet in the making" (p. 1071). They can only offer suggestions, and these suggestions are that mental arithmetic, mechanical drawing, and drawing to scale, gardening, cooking, washing, might be tried. The men are to be medically examined and tested: and there are to be physical exercises and organised recreation (p. 1204). We may pause for the moment to think of the position of Local Authorities such as those in Liverpool whose business it would be to set 5,000 dock labourers forcibly deprived of all work to mental arithmetic and the rest. But as this theory of "training" is for the moment so generally adopted, and as so much depends upon it, it is necessary that we should examine it very closely. The "technique," say the Minority, is not yet developed. The only experience we have had so far in England has been that of Hollesley Bay, of the results of which the Majority say it is too soon to judge. Many of those who have had experience of Hollesley Bay have grave doubts of the ultimate result of the "training" received there. There were some witnesses before the Commission who feared that the men there were apt to become "institutionalised." Mr Lansbury himself in a recent article in the *Commonwealth* uses the expressive phrase "wet-nursing" in connection with it, and there is in fact evidence that men there are being "wet-nursed," but not that they are being "wet-nursed" back into the labour market. There is also evidence that the men "do not take the training sufficiently seriously" (p. 1121). The Minority poke fun at the attempt made

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in certain London Workhouses to supply a "mental instructor" for the able-bodied inmates. The men either "went to sleep or interrupted" (p. 1065). Possibly the trainer of the future may share the same fate as the mental instructor of the past, though he would have the new power of consigning those who showed distaste for mental arithmetic to a "penal colony." Abroad, training colonies have been in existence for many years and the "technique" should have been worked out by this time. But the general consensus of opinion is that their training and reformatory influence has been but slight, and that they have become "colonies of social wreckage rather than colonies of unemployed" (Board of Trade Reports, 1893, 1904).

Hollesley Bay.

As the Report contemplates the establishment of colonies of the Hollesley Bay type "near every large town," it is of some importance to consider what are the results that have been achieved by that colony during the four or five years of its existence. It is necessary first to say that it is managed by a very able staff who are enthusiastically devoted to this work, and that nothing is left undone that appears likely to improve the "technique" of dealing with the unemployed. But so far it has been disappointing in several ways. It is admitted on all sides that it has failed in its original object of "tiding over" periods of unemployment, and it is on its training side that most is now hoped of it. But so far there has not been much to show in this respect. It is claimed for it that it has "trained" a few men for emigration, but there is nothing to show that these men made better emigrants than those who were emigrated direct by the Central Body, the great majority of whom did exceedingly well. A small number of men have been migrated to different parts of the country; some have returned, but some remain. Those who have succeeded may or may not owe their success to the training received

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there. Altogether the results are at least not very tangible, whilst the expense has been very heavy. There are, however, one or two considerations which have not, I think, received enough attention. The fact is that the atmosphere of a training colony is, in the very nature of things, an extremely artificial one. The men, all of whom are married, are cut off from their wives and families, and have for sixteen weeks no responsibility in regard to them. They work under skilled superintendence by time-table so many hours a week, and receive sixpence a week pocket money, which is frequently irregularly supplemented by small sums sent by their wives from the money received for their maintenance. Most of the men live in the main College building, which is a sort of barrack; a small number known as "settlers," who are specially selected for emigration, migration, or life on a small holding, live with their families in cottages on the estate. These cottages are quite unlike ordinary labourers' cottages, and can only be described as of the "garden city" style of architecture. They are picturesque, but the accommodation is not always very suitable. Adjoining them are outhouses which, in order to give the "settlers" a foretaste of life in the backwoods, are of rude "Canadian" construction. There are organised games and recreations, but as they have not yet been made compulsory, many of the men on the wrong side of forty do not feel moved to take part in them. In the evenings there are lectures, which are compulsory for some of the men, chiefly upon subjects connected with farm or garden, but varied occasionally by matters of general interest. For example the distinguished authors of the Minority Report gave them not long ago a lecture upon the "Problem of the Unemployed," and another upon the "Sweating System." The men are also encouraged to write essays, chiefly upon agricultural subjects, and often write them very well. The Londoner is very quick-witted in such matters. There is no doubt, moreover, that many of the men work well when their

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task is set them under the supervision of the able farm manager. Their behaviour is usually unexceptionable, and the reports from week to week are that everything is going well. But the question still remains whether this is the sort of training which makes men, or whether the "institutional" atmosphere of the colony is not inimical to such results. We have little to go upon so far. Only a small percentage of men have been re-established in the labour market. The Minority put it at 10 per cent. (p. 1122). There is nothing to show that even this has been the result of their stay at Hollesley Bay, and we have to set against it the fact that except for their periodical "outings" they have for sixteen weeks been secluded from opportunities of looking for work. The only other evidence we have as to the results of training colonies comes from abroad, and the only colonies that appear to have met with much success there have been the semi-penal colonies. "Recidivism" is a well-known feature of the foreign colonies and the "Kolonie bummler" a familiar figure in Germany. It is significant that already there has been a disposition on the part of a good many men who have had their sixteen weeks or more at Hollesley Bay to try to get back there.

Non-Residential Colonies.

Of course the Minority contemplate also another type of colony, the non-residential colony, which is to be a sort of industrial school for the man out of work—but the question of the efficacy of the training is the same everywhere. The theory of this training, which is the keystone of the constructive policy of the Minority in regard to the able-bodied, is that adults can be trained both physically and morally to a new life. But the nature of grown-up men and women is not so easily changed. Those who have experienced the difficulty in a single case, it may be that of a relative or friend, will find it hard to

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believe that chance comers can be inspired wholesale with *morale* in public training establishments. Yet otherwise the whole policy falls to the ground.

Errors of Fact.

The Report is strongest on its denunciatory side. Yet even here it is by no means infallible. Errors of fact have already been pointed out. For example, it cites the Atcham Union as one in which the children are still educated and maintained in the Workhouse (p. 963). At the recent Central Poor Law Conference the Atcham representatives pointed out that they had been sent out to the public elementary schools many years ago. The incident is interesting for a special reason, Atcham is one of the small number of "strictly" administered Unions which are especially obnoxious to the Minority, who never lose a chance of having a "dig" at them when they think that they see the opportunity. In this case, at least, their "dig" has been a failure. So too with their assertions as to the excessive infantile mortality in Workhouses. The facts are at least disputed. The Minority themselves admit the "shortcomings of the statistical data" (p. 782) upon which they base at least three pages of denunciation in the Report. But of course such loose statements are useful with popular audiences. On the other hand the Local Government Board has issued a Memorandum upon the subject, which puts a different colour upon the figures, and the Chairman of a large and important London Union has recently shown us that they are quite inapplicable to his Union. Generally speaking, the declamatory statements of the Minority appear likely to defeat themselves by their very extravagance. For example, they are saying publicly, that "the whole of the £15,000,000 now spent under the Poor Law is absolutely wasted and thrown away." A perusal of the valuable Blue-book* just issued by the Local Government Board is a

* Public Health and Social Conditions, [CD. 4671].

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sufficient answer to this, or a reference to the separate Memorandum of Dr Downes will show what enormous progress has been made.

The Attitude of the Report towards Guardians.

The Report, like that of the Majority, proposes to abolish Boards of Guardians, but not at all because of "any inferiority of calibre" (p. 737) or "any personal shortcomings" (p. 787). On the contrary, "grave injustice has been done to them" by the Majority (p. 1003), although they have given "devoted public service gratuitously rendered" (p. 1007). The Minority wish especially to dissociate themselves from such a statement (by the Majority) as the following:—"The work is tending to fall into the hands of persons who, caring more for their own interests than those of the community, direct their administration more to the attainment of their own popularity than to the solution of the real problem of pauperism" (p. 1003). Such flattering assurances might almost induce Guardians to acquiesce in their own extinction, but, unfortunately, the force of them is considerably modified by other and jarring sentiments in the same Report which lead us to doubt whether they are altogether sincere. For example, a little earlier they speak of the Guardians as "jealous of the officers and their powers, and keenly alive to the electoral advantages of being able to oblige individuals, and to obtain a reputation for sympathy with the poor in whole neighbourhoods" (p. 760), and a little later of their "short-sighted good nature, the desire for electoral popularity, the irresistible tendency of a ward representative to be looked on by his supporters as a patron saint" (p. 761), expressions even stronger than those of the Majority at which the Minority are so shocked. Elsewhere they charge the Guardians with various sins of commission or omission which are hardly consistent with superior "calibre," intelligence, or even humanity. "They settle down to slipshod inquiry and the soothing

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dole" (p. 746). "They take no steps to require the most elementary sanitary conditions even, we grieve to say, where children are being reared" (p. 750). They tolerate "mephitic atmospheres" in nurseries. The Local Government Board "despairs" of being able to induce them to remove children from the Workhouse (p. 802). "They cannot be got to think of anything but board and lodging" (p. 813). "They have not troubled to look after the children they were maintaining" (p. 831). "The average Guardian is more impressed by these trifles than by solid work" (p. 817). They have been guilty of inhuman or irrational practices (p. 820), and so forth in many other places. Guardians will probably take these buffets and rewards with equal thanks. It is very improbable that they will be cajoled into support of the Minority proposals.

Inconsistencies.

Inconsistency has no terrors for the Minority in speaking to their brief. Inquiry is "slipshod" on p. 746, on p. 833 and elsewhere it is "inquisitorial." In one place Borough Councils are condemned for taking on men "at haphazard" (p. 1162), in another the Unemployed Workmen's Act has failed partly owing to the "inquisitorial inquiries" (p. 1129). Coming to their own proposals, the Registrar is to have a staff of officers for "systematic" inquiry. We may ask whether "systematic" inquiry is to be "inquisitorial." They are scornful of the Majority for proposing such changes in terminology as "continuous treatment" for the "good old-fashioned term 'detention.'" Yet they themselves desire to substitute the word "home aliment" for the "good old-fashioned term" outdoor relief. Similarly, for purposes of declamation, the "cellular" casual wards in Poplar became "solitary pens" (p. 1082), and we can hardly believe it when we read that in the new receiving houses "a certain amount of cellular accommodation will be essential" (p. 1213). When they have to

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defend their training establishments against the objection that they will be too deterrent, their answer is that "a man has always the alternative of earning his living outside" (p. 1206). But that is precisely the argument that has always been used with regard to the offer of the Workhouse of which they will hear nothing. "Solitary pens," "mammoth Workhouses," and the like are phrases typical of the wealth of rhetoric in the Report which contribute not a little to its literary effectiveness.

We may notice in passing the naïve surprise of Mr Lansbury (with the others) that "a great number of able-bodied men in health are receiving outdoor relief without any task of work" (p. 1093), although in Mr Lansbury's own Union from 172 to 534 men were so relieved weekly in 1906 (p. 209).

It is interesting to find that the Minority agree that the cause of failure hitherto of labour exchanges has been that they have been associated with Distress Committees and relief works (p. 1124). They quote with approval the words of the late Sir C. Trevelyan as to the evil of "mixing labour with relief" (p. 1097). But this does not prevent them from proposing a scheme by which the labour exchanges and the "maintenance" proposals will be under the same authority working alongside of one another.

Window Dressing.

There is a good deal in the Report which we may look on as a kind of "window dressing" intended to reassure the more timid. The Registrar is to be provided with case-papers "of the most approved pattern." References to "self-respect, personal responsibility, and the integrity of family life," are scattered about as it were with a pepper pot. For example, the Local Authority is to "stimulate parental responsibility, self-control, and self-help" (pp. 794-5), and how? By the provision of free milk at the municipal depot where the "baby is to be brought to be weighed,

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the mother's interest not allowed to slacken, praise and approval are to be given when the baby continues well, blame and warning if it sickens." By these means "self-respect, power of will, and personal responsibility," are to be evoked. Similarly in another place the same qualities are to be manufactured by the proposed training establishments. We may differ in our views as to what the result will be in this respect, but we shall all agree that the Socialist writers have in the past given but little prominence to these qualities and conditions. Indeed Socialists of a certain school are altogether inimical at heart to the "integrity of family life." We are entitled, therefore, to look with some suspicion upon this new-born solicitude, especially when it comes from the Fabians, who are generally reputed to be the Jesuits of their creed. The following definition of the "whole duty" of a Fabian is from the pen of a prominent Fabian in the early days of that Society:—"There should be only one absorbing principle in a Fabian's life—the attainment of Social Democracy, and all means and methods to attain that end are laudable. Study to be as morally immoral as possible. To be a true, earnest, upright Fabian a man should be as free from principle and morality as a parson."—*Workman's Times*, 13th February 1893. *Ridentem dicere verum quid vetat?*

Is it a Socialist Report?

It is curious to observe the anxiety that exists in many unexpected quarters to minimise the Socialist proclivities of the Report. For example, in a little book recently issued and entitled "By What Authority?" a book which is the joint work of three learned professors, we find that "Socialism is not the issue," "there is a marked absence of the formulæ and industrial aspirations of current Socialism" (p. 10). Undoubtedly it has not been the cue of the Minority to put forward the "Socialist aspirations" too baldly, but one would at least have expected that

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some suspicions might have been aroused in the minds of these ingenuous professors by the general proposals of the Minority, and especially those in regard to the organisation of labour and by the frequent occurrence of well-known Socialist phrases, such as "the way in which we have chosen to organise industry" (pp. 1095, 1131), "an incident of the competitive system" (p. 1132), the "economic circumstances we have chosen to create" (p. 1079). The question, however, has now been set definitely at rest by the enthusiastic reception of the Report by all leading Socialists, and especially by Mr H. G. Wells.

Labour Exchanges as a Test of Unemployment.

The Minority appear to accept the labour exchange as a test of unemployment—that is to say, if there is no job offering to a man at the labour exchange, it is to be assumed that he cannot get work. This, of course, involves the assumption that all the jobs offering can be registered at the labour exchange, a thing which is inconceivable. Many thousands of labourers now tide over their times of unemployment for themselves by street selling and other quite legitimate ways of earning a living. Thousands of men, who have reached honourable and even distinguished positions, have had in their day to resort to all sorts of shifts and devices to tide themselves over difficulties—shifts and devices which could figure in no labour exchange, however complete. We have heard of writers, who have afterwards become great, who have had to sweep a crossing. We have heard of "captains of industry" who have had similar experience of one kind or another, yet they have "worried through" by grit and self-reliance. Yet these, one and all, could under the Minority proposals claim at the first check in their career to be maintained in a training establishment, because there might be nothing offering for them at the labour exchange. The Minority point out to us with regard

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to insurance against unemployment that "the power to draw out-of-work pay may, by its subtle play upon motive, tend insidiously to slacken the effort to obtain another job" (p. 1143); and, again, that the labourers before 1834, "secure of subsistence, lowered the quality and quantity of their effort" (p. 1038). What, then, would be the result of "honourable" maintenance and "secure subsistence" in a training establishment with mental arithmetic, organised recreation, physical drill, and the rest? What would have been the fate of many men who have succeeded after a life of struggle, if at some critical moment in their lives they had been relegated to a training establishment, whilst their wives and families received "adequate home aliment"?

Regularisation.

Towards the end of the Report we find an elaborate scheme for the "regularisation" of labour. Under this the Government is to "ear-mark" at least four millions a year of expenditure upon the public service, for work which is to be undertaken out of loan on a ten years' programme at unequal annual rates to the extent of ten or even fifteen millions in a single year whenever the "Index Number" of unemployment has reached "Warning Point" (p. 1196). The money is then to be spent in guns, battleships, barracks, post offices, schools, printing historical manuscripts, and renewing worn-out furniture. Simultaneously public bodies are to be urged to undertake their ordinary municipal work. It may be feared that the "Index Number," which will be determined by the number of applications for work to the labour exchange of the future, will tend under these conditions to remain permanently at "Warning Point," and there is after all some limit to the number of guns, battleships, &c., which are required, and some limit to the ordinary municipal undertakings of Borough Councils. Many will be of opinion that already there has been far too much pressure put upon them to manufacture

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work. There are those who will enter a protest against these further proposals for the manipulation of the labour market. Sir George Nicholls said many years ago, "No one now doubts the pernicious effect of artificial employment, or is blind to the consequences of tampering with the labour market, whether by the parish or in any other way," and that until lately has been the view of most responsible statesmen. We first turned our back upon that policy in 1886 when Mr Chamberlain issued his "momentous" Circular, and we have since embodied the principle of that Circular in the Unemployed Workmen's Act. Like all previous attempts at manipulation, both the Circular and the Act have been shown to be failures, yet their failure is now made a reason for further efforts in the same direction.

The Minority and the Moral Factor.

The attitude of the Minority in regard to the question of character is a difficult one to understand. They complain in their manifesto of critics who say that they ignore the "moral factor" of the problem of pauperism. The moral factor they say is to them "the whole of the problem." But this is difficult to reconcile with their views in several parts of the Report. For example, in speaking of unemployment they say, "We have deliberately subordinated the question of character because it does not seem to us to be of significance with regard to the existence or amount of unemployment" (p. 1172). But they contradict themselves almost in the next sentence, because they admit that efficiency of labour, which is another word for character, "is one of the factors of productivity, and the greater the national product the larger the number of persons it will maintain." The amount of unemployment, they say, depends upon "briskness of trade," but it is impossible to conceive of trade being brisk in any country where the workers are inefficient or wanting in *morale*.

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Every efficient worker becomes a consumer as well as a producer, and swells the demand for commodities upon which briskness of trade depends. But further, the efficient and thrifty man has as often as not invested his money, not in beer and tobacco, but in the numerous investments available for working men, all of which are employed in reproductive enterprise, and give employment to labour. The savings of the working classes under this head are at the present moment about 400 millions. On the other hand, the consuming power of the less efficient worker is reduced to a minimum, or he becomes an actual burden upon industry, like the "parasitic" labourer before 1834 (p. 1037). The Minority admit, indeed, that distress from unemployment is greatly aggravated by faults of character. This we believe to be true both because the inefficient undisciplined man is not readily employed, and also because his unwise methods of expenditure do not contribute to the conditions which cause "briskness of trade." We should have expected, if for these reasons only, that they would have been anxious to maintain a high standard of character. But what is their conclusion? After a sneer at the ideal of the "capable and perfectly virtuous man who may possibly be able to go through a period of prolonged unemployment without physical or mental deterioration," they decide that the question of character is totally irrelevant, and because "the unemployed are like other men, full of faults" (p. 1175), they determine to ignore it altogether.

But that, of course, is only the question of character in regard to the particular issue of unemployment; there is the wider question of its relation to the whole problem of poverty. In regard to this everything depends upon what we mean by "character," what this "moral factor" really is, and what are the conditions essential to its existence. The Minority tell us in their manifesto that it is something which can only be enforced by the methods they propose; and, though they are not very explicit, they give us to understand that this is to be done by administrative action in individual

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cases when certain rules of conduct have been definitely violated. If a man is a drunkard, or if he is actively cruel to his wife and children, he will be discovered and "got at" through the various Committees, and will be "trained" or punished; and so, presumably, when many have been trained or punished the "moral factor" will once more assert itself. But until there has been some actual transgression of the moral law, some actual dereliction of duty, no action can be taken, and action can only be taken in individual cases. The "moral factor," as some of us conceive it, is of quite a different nature. It turns upon the effect that the expectation of public maintenance has, or is likely to have, upon whole sections of the poorer population in relation to pauperism and dependence. This is no question of active immorality. Pauperism is a negation—the loss of something, rather than a definite violation of any law. It is rather an economic phenomenon, the expression of the rule that human nature follows the line of least resistance, and, if encouraged to do so, becomes atrophied in body and soul. It is a question of *morale* rather than of morals. We have had and still have plenty of experience of it in this country. The Minority are quite aware of its existence. They speak in one place of the "demoralisation of the rural population by a hypertrophied Poor Law" before 1834. What they have now to prove, therefore, is that their present proposals—which are surely for a "hypertrophied" Poor Law, if ever there was one—will not have similar results.

Attitude of the Minority towards Charity.

Curiously enough, the Minority admit the demoralising effect of charity. In fact they view it with so much apprehension that they would abolish it altogether, except so far as institutional relief is concerned. "No encouragement whatever," they say, "should be given to any distribution of food, clothes, or money in the homes of the poor by voluntary charity" (p. 1022).

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They would thus throw everything that is now done by voluntary charity at the home upon the rates. It is strange that after all the evidence that they have received as to the evils of outdoor relief, both now and in the past, that they should give it this preference over charity. The truth may be that voluntary charity is incompatible with the Socialist ideals.

Conclusion.

The Minority then invite us to pass a sponge over the slate of Poor Law history from 1601 onwards; to discard all experience; to set at nought the teaching and conclusions of all responsible writers upon the Poor Law; and, more particularly, to reverse the "principles of 1834." And yet many eminent thinkers of wide experience have endorsed those principles. Mr Gladstone, shortly before his death, told us that the Poor Law of 1834 "rescued the English peasantry from the total loss of its independence" (Life, vol. i., p. 115), and Mr Gladstone had lived under both the old Poor Law and the new. The evidence before the present Commissioners shows that since the reform of 1834 rural able-bodied pauperism has almost disappeared, which is no small testimony in their favour. Dr Munsterberg, the eminent director of poor relief in Berlin, has told us in his evidence that in Germany they have adopted the principle of "less eligibility," which is at the root of the principles of 1834. Yet, in spite of all this, we are asked to embark upon a revolutionary scheme of "constructive Socialism," which is contrary to all experience, and, we might almost say, to all common-sense. Its authors have had no experience of Poor Law administration, but are the leaders of the most powerful Socialist movement in the country. Their arguments are so inconclusive, so irrelevant to a solution of the problem, and to difficulties which are common to all countries in which poor laws exist, that we cannot believe that they are intended as a serious contribution to the

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literature of the question. The Report, indeed, appears to be rather an attempt to trouble the waters for the coming Socialist fishing party. Its authors are indeed perfectly frank in some respects. The scheme is admittedly a *ballon d'essai*. To those who criticise their proposals in regard to unemployment as visionary, their reply is: "It is not a valid objection that a demonstrably perfect technique, either with regard to the prevalence of unemployment or the treatment of the unemployed, has never yet been worked out. No such technique can ever be more than foreshadowed until it is put into operation." Utopian? they say, well, we have only to put it in operation and see. "Could there have been anything more Utopian in 1860 than a picture of what to-day we take as a matter of course, the seven million children emerging every morning washed and brushed from five or six million homes in every part of the kingdom, traversing street and road and lonely woodland, going o'er moor and fell, to present themselves at a given hour at their 30,000 schools, where each of the seven million finds his or her own individual place, with books and blackboard and teacher provided?" (p. 1215). The analogy, despite its poetic force, is a misleading one. The problem of organising public education and of providing "books, blackboard, and teachers" is a very different one from that of "abolishing destitution," and recalling the Golden Age. Their proposals are for the control by a bureaucracy of those moral and economic forces which move the whole of human society, and nothing similar to them has ever been proposed or even dreamed of either in this or in any other country.

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POOR LAW REFORM.

VIA TERTIA.

THE CASE FOR THE GUARDIANS.

BY

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