

BIBLIOTHECA SACRA

ARTICLE I.

THE TRUE ORIGIN OF MODERN METHODS OF SCIENTIFIC CHARITY.¹

BY REVEREND JOSEPH H. CROOKER, D.D.,
OBERLIN, OHIO.

IN the Tenth Annual Report (1873, p. 123) of the Board of State Charities of Massachusetts, the then Secretary, Hon. Edward L. Pierce (the biographer of Charles Sumner), described the Elberfeld (Germany) System of Poor Relief, organized there in 1853, by a prominent banker, Daniel von der Heydt. In 1869, under the leadership of Octavia Hill, the main principles of this system were applied to English conditions in the formation of the Charity Organization Society of London. These principles were first incorporated in our country by the Buffalo Charity Organization Society (1877), and then by the Boston Associated Charities in December, 1878. In all these cases the essential principles are the same, but the English and the American differ in details from the Elberfeld:

¹ A longer and different account of these studies was published in Edward Everett Hale's magazine—*Lend a Hand Monthly*, for Jan. and Feb. 1889. A few years ago, a short description of the Hamburg System was issued by the Board of Charities of a Western state: written by one of our most eminent philanthropic workers, who derived all his information (as he admitted) from Dr. Crooker's pages, but gave him no credit for these investigations.—**EDITOR.**

the latter is a municipal system where the work is done by men; the others are volunteer organizations largely in the hands of women.

The Elberfeld System became famous as the first movement in the line of Scientific Charity. It is so represented by prominent writers to-day. This statement is made in Bliss's *Encyclopedia of Social Reform* (1908), in two articles, under the authority of Dr. Edward T. Devine. In the standard work on this subject, "*Modern Methods of Charity*" (1904), by Professor Charles R. Henderson, the Elberfeld System is fully described and honor is given to it as the pioneer in this field of philanthropy.

But this popular impression is a mistake. The credit is due to another German city. The true history of the origin of scientific charity is far different: it is longer, more elaborate, more interesting.

In 1882, I conducted a large class in Social Science in connection with my church work in Madison, Wisconsin. It was probably one of the first ventures in this line in the country. It was attended by state officials, by students and professors of the University, and the subjects discussed were: crime and criminal law reform; criminals and prison reform, insanity and asylums; hospitals, sanitation, and preventive medicine; defectives and juvenile delinquents; pauperism, the care of the poor, and poor-law reform.

When searching the shelves of the great Historical Library for material for these lectures, I came across a set of books: "*The Pamphleteer*" (London), which contained many rare and valuable documents. One of these, of some thirty pages, was entitled: "*Account of the Management of the Poor in Hamburg between the years 1788 and 1794. By Baron Von Voght. London: 1796.*" A glance at once created, not only

interest, but astonishment. Here was described a method of charity more comprehensive than that at Elberfeld and some sixty-five years earlier than the work of Daniel von der Heydt!

In the formation of this institution, Professor Büsch, the founder of the first Savings Bank, furnished the initiative enthusiasm, while a leading Hamburg merchant, Casper Von Voght (1752-1839), furnished the organizing genius and administrative ability. The principles upon which they worked were these:—

1. To create a central bureau to supervise all work done for the poor, and to bring all charitable agencies under one management, in order to prevent "overlapping," and also to put a stop to indiscriminate almsgiving.

2. To subdivide the city (population in 1785 was 110,000) into small districts, of which there were sixty, in each of which three competent citizens should personally investigate the condition of all paupers and semi-paupers, in a small neighborhood, that the exact needs of all might be known, that the deserving might be discovered and the undeserving rebuked, and that no more relief should be given than what was absolutely necessary; and given in such a way as to foster self-respect and self-help.

3. To remove the causes of distress and pauperism by compelling the able-bodied to work, by making the homes of the poor more healthy, by providing work for the unemployed, and by giving the children of the destitute an industrial training, that they might grow up self-dependent citizens.

The essential factor in this system was the unpaid, friendly district visitor, who looked after the poor in a particular neighborhood. He was required to keep himself thoroughly informed respecting the condition of the poor under his care,

of whom he must keep a complete list. He was obliged to work according to certain printed instructions, which, among other things, directed him to determine the sanitary condition of the dwellings occupied by the poor; the amount of rent charged and the sum due; the number, age, sex, physical condition, education, and employment of the children; the character of the clothing and household utensils of the family; the sources of support; the relatives and their ability to render assistance; the moral character and former habits of the parents; and, in fact, everything that enters into the personal history and description of such individuals.

The information thus collected respecting each case, the district visitor put into a written report, which, after making a copy for his own use in the future, he sent to that one of the ten superintendents in whose precinct he labored and to whom he was directly responsible. And to this report he appended his own recommendations respecting the relief or work needed, the clothes to be allowed, and the school tickets that were necessary.

With this report of the district visitor before him, the superintendent of the precinct decided what allowance should be granted or what other course should be taken; for it was even then understood that the person who determines the relief given must not be the person who comes into immediate association with the poor, though in cases of emergency any member of the one hundred and eighty district visitors of the city might give assistance, but only for the time being. The decision of his superior, which was likely to be in the line of his own suggestions, the district visitor carried into operation and reported the result.

But these superintendents at the head of the work in each precinct were obliged in their decisions to follow certain es-

established principles, and prominent among them Von Voght places these: 1. "To prevent any man from receiving a shilling which he was able to earn for himself." 2. "To reduce the support given lower than what any industrious man or woman in such circumstances could earn; for, if the manner in which relief is given is not a spur to industry, it becomes undoubtedly a premium to sloth and profligacy." These are rules of action which are not likely to be improved.

The only way to prevent pauperism is to make a life of idleness less desirable than a life of industry. This fundamental principle was everywhere kept in view: Help every man to help himself; make relief depend upon willingness to work, if able; and in this way preserve the self-respect of the poor, and uproot the causes of pauperism. Very little money was given to any, except for work done; and under no circumstances was a shilling to be given to the intemperate,—a surprisingly wise precaution to have been taken at that time.

Especial attention was given to the children, for it was held that among them the chief work for the prevention of pauperism must be done. To use the words of Von Voght, "The most effectual means of preventing misery is the better education of the children." In every district, a warm room was prepared and furnished with bread and milk, "where such parents as go out to work may deposit their children during the day, and thus prevent any obstacle to their own industry or that of their elder children." Here were day nurseries a hundred and thirty years ago! Reliance, however, was placed chiefly upon the free schools, which were provided upon a large scale for children between the ages of six and sixteen. Every poor family was compelled to send all children between these ages to such a school, where they labored two thirds of the time and studied the elementary branches one third of the

time. Thus, even as long ago as 1788, resort was made to industrial training as the great preventive of pauperism. And we are told that in these schools special care was taken to develop the judgment as well as the memory of the child; the eyes and fingers as well as the brain.

As has already been stated, all the charitable agencies of the city, private and public, secular and ecclesiastical, were brought into connection with the Executive Board of the institution or under its control, in order that there might be no "overlapping" or, to use their own words, that no person should receive "two supports."

The wisdom of charity was well described by Baron Von Voght in these words:—

"We determined, and this is the second hinge upon which the institution [Armenanstalt] turns, that to no family any relief should be given for a child past six years; but that the child, being sent to school, should receive, not only the payment for his work [in connection with his studies], but also an allowance in the compound ratio of his attendance at school, his behavior, and his application to work. . . . And children became accustomed to look from their infancy upon the means of subsistence as the recompense of labor, or at least of exertion."

And to meet the needs of those who could not attend on week days, Sunday schools were established with somewhat different methods of instruction.

These general principles were put into operation through the following means and methods:—

1. Circulars were widely distributed to educate the public, describing the system and appealing for coöperation: All almsgiving at the door or on the street was forbidden under heavy penalty; notice was given that work would be provided for those out of employment and all needy persons would be immediately helped; requests were made that all cases of distress or imposture be at once reported.

2. Free lodging houses for transients were provided, but kept under strict rules: the able-bodied compelled to work for shelter and food, the wise "work-test."

3. A yarn spinnery was opened to teach the incompetent a trade and to encourage thrift.

4. A provident loan fund was established to help the poor to build better houses, easy payments being provided.

5. A free hospital was built for incurable paupers.

6. A band of nurses was organized to care for the sick poor in their own homes, and arrangements were made to furnish medicines at cost prices in special cases.

7. The sanitary inspection of all houses was made regularly and obedience to the directions given was made compulsory.

8. Infant schools were opened for the care and instruction of very young children: similar in purpose to our free Kindergartens, though different in methods.

9. Every thing given to the poor was considered a loan, and all clothing, bedding and tools were marked with the stamp of the institution, so that they could not be sold or pawned, while they could be taken away, if the recipients proved unworthy.

10. The support of this Hamburg System came from: Public Taxes; Half of the Collections in the Church poor-boxes; Donations from private persons; Contributions made in families: "That all, but especially children, may be given an opportunity to indulge their pity and render service to those in need, educating the young in benevolence"!

This pamphlet may well be called the original Gospel of Scientific Charity. It describes almost every principle and agency now in use by Charity Organizations. Nothing better than these words by Von Voght was ever written:—

"Pity prompts to relieve obvious distresses and the sharpness of want urges men to its antidote, labor. In repairing, however, those evils which society did not or could not prevent, it ought to be careful not to counteract the wise purposes of nature, but give the poor a fair chance to work for themselves. The present distress must be relieved, the sick and the aged cared for; but the children must be instructed, and labor, not alms, offered to those who have some ability to work, however small that ability may be."

How very modern this sounds, although written so long ago: the fundamental principle of preventive philanthropy.

The results showed a surprising success: beggary came to an end; much misery relieved and more prevented; impostors punished and the deserving poor comforted; many taught trades and made self-dependent; children educated and trained in self-respect; vices lessened, crimes prevented, sickness relieved and prevented, thus increasing the health of the community, and "health is," as Von Voght wrote, "the poor man's capital." The number of paupers was lessened fifty per cent, the condition of the poor was greatly improved; the number of child-paupers reduced in a few years from over two thousand to less than four hundred. The amount of money spent, to give this better care, was much less than the sum which had previously been largely wasted. And better than all else, the noble and valuable social and humane results: a large company of superior citizens trained in sympathy and service, and the less fortunate people made to feel the kindness of their neighbors: illustrating the principle, "Not alms but a friend," stated fifty years before by Defoe in "Almsgiving no Charity."

The careful study of Baron Von Voght's pamphlet created intense interest and suggested various questions: Was this the origin of the modern methods of poor-relief? What influence did this Hamburg Institution have upon charitable

methods? Who was Casper Von Voght and what was his career?

A wide reading of the writings in this department, considerable correspondence, and advertisements in German papers asking for information, brought to light many interesting facts (to be given later), but no adequate description of the man or the institution that he founded.

Later, Professor Rasmus B. Anderson, a parishioner, who was then our minister to Denmark, brought me into correspondence with Dr. Carl Petersen, a distinguished citizen of Hamburg, who kindly gave me much valuable information by his letters (1888), and he also sent me several documents, the most important being: "Die Entwicklung des öffentlichen Armenswesens in Hamburg (Hamburg, 1883)," by Dr. Von Melle.

These "sources" (with others suggested by them) enabled me to demonstrate, what I had suspected, that the Hamburg Institution was the product of a long philanthropic experience, and that it was the first expression, in full and complete form, of the transition from medieval to modern methods of charity. This transition represented a radical change in the public mind respecting poverty and property, beggary and almsgiving; and also changes in the policies followed in caring for those in want and distress.

From one point of view, the object of scientific charity is to make it possible for us to go to bed at night feeling sure that every person in our community is provided with food and shelter. But from a higher point of view, it is to impart life itself, that the poor may reach that manhood which makes want impossible. And it will not be uninteresting to glance briefly at the differences between ancient and modern methods of charity.

1. As a rule, in ancient times, the motive of almsgiving was a desire for personal advantage; to gain merit rather than to help others. Doubtless there has always been much giving from a nobler motive than this; and yet, both in the Orient and under medieval Christianity, the mere merit of almsgiving was given great prominence and almost exclusive attention. But we to-day occupy another point of view, and act from a far different motive. Our action is prompted by pity and sympathy rather than by interest in our own welfare. Charity to us is not a means for securing merit, but a method of uplift and helpfulness. What we have in view is not a selfish salvation, but a beneficent service. We use our gift, not to raise ourselves, but to lift up our brother.

2. What we find everywhere to have been the custom in former times was indiscriminate almsgiving. As long as poverty was commended as a divine estate and beggary was honored as a primary virtue, no one would ask about the results and no one would hesitate because the applicants were unworthy. While charity was so regarded, every applicant would be served without any questions being asked. No matter how worthless, the beggar was fed; no matter how idle, the vagrant was harbored. But, happily, these views of life have passed away; property has received recognition as one of the beneficent factors of civilization, while beggary has ceased to be regarded as a virtue. Instead of the glorification of poverty, public opinion in these days emphasizes the glory and importance of self-help and independence. We now bring research and reflection to bear upon this problem. We realize that unwise charity not only perpetuates, but produces misery. A modern sentiment has arisen, more intelligent and more humane than the unthinking sympathy of the past, which demands that we work with careful supervision and thoughtful

provision, in order that what we bestow shall be so given that it will encourage virtue rather than vice, and put a premium upon exertion rather than on idleness. In these days we insist that the open eye shall accompany and direct the open hand; that the heart shall work obedient to the head; and that our helpfulness shall issue in self-help.

3. Our forefathers had no thought of anything but temporary relief. If a man was hungry, to feed him for the day was their motto and practice. They responded to the cry of distress, but they did not investigate the causes of that distress; they hastened to relieve the needy, but they did not take any steps to prevent the recurrence of misfortunes. But a wiser charity has arisen. The apostles of modern charity do something more than distribute alms. They strive to lay bare the causes of distress, and uproot the sources of pauperism. To-day, our emphasis centers on preventive rather than on merely palliative measures. We hold that the only effectual charity is that which places the needy in positions of independence. Our object is not simply to relieve suffering, but to produce manly, prosperous, self-dependent men and women. Our order of procedure in the care of the poor is: first, temporary aid; second, thorough investigation; third, the use of such means as will lift the needy permanently out of want. How these principles came first to be applied by Von Voght, we shall now see.

Thus we come to the immediate antecedents that led to the organization of the Hamburg Institution, which first embodied and popularized these principles. About the close of the first decade of the eighteenth century, a very severe plague raged in Hamburg, the wealthiest of the four Free Cities and the intellectual center at that time of northern Germany. To overcome this evil, a Sanitary Association was formed; and

the very first lesson which its members learned was the need of a radical reform in the methods for the care of the poor.

The deepening sense of the necessity for a reorganization of the system of public charities, created by the experience of the Sanitary Association, soon convinced its leaders that this work ought to be carried forward by secular agencies, and a step forward was taken by certain public-spirited citizens under the lead of Syndic Sillem, who in 1711 created an institution for poor-relief (*Armenanstalt*). This was a department of the Sanitary Association, composed of Burgomasters, each of whom was assigned to one of the numerous districts into which the city was divided for the better care of the poor; and it was made the duty of each member of the institution to inspect the condition of all destitute persons in his district. Here was the origin of that important policy known as the personal supervision of the poor.

The central principle of this policy is that superior men should strive, by friendly and efficient helpfulness, to cure, rather than merely to palliate, the evils of poverty and pauperism. The essential element of scientific charity is that immediate attention be given at the critical moment, and that the care be both wise and friendly. But the machinery devised at that time to carry out this policy was too imperfect to accomplish any great reform. However, two important steps had been taken toward a solution of the great problem. It was seen that poor-relief must be administered by some centralized secular organization, and the policy of personal supervision was put into operation, though very imperfectly.

Then came the maturer institution which has been described, the decisive steps for its formation (1787) being due to the coöperation of members of a Patriotic Society, which had been organized (in 1765) to promote social reforms, with prominent

officials of the city. It represented the lessons learned through the expanding experience of nearly a century, while in it were more fully expressed the ideals and methods of the modern humanitarian spirit, which Lessing, residing in Hamburg for some years, had done much to foster.

The influence of the Hamburg Institution spread far and wide. Circulars descriptive of it were distributed over western Europe. Twenty German cities very soon organized similar institutions, among them Munich, where Count Rumford was the leader, and his *Essays on the care of the poor* contain little more than a restatement of the Hamburg principles. The example of Hamburg was followed in different parts of Switzerland. In England, Malthus, writing in 1798 (two years after the publication of Von Voght's pamphlet), referred in his notable work, "On Population," to the Hamburg Institution as "the most successful of any yet established." The same year, John Mason Good published his book, "Dissertation on the Best Means of Maintaining and Employing the Poor," for which he received a prize of fifty guineas. It was widely read and much praised. He repeatedly quoted Von Voght and referred to him as "a very intelligent authority." About this time the *Gentleman's Magazine* (London) made several complimentary references to Von Voght. In 1817, a committee of prominent English merchants, scholars, and reformers secured the republication of Von Voght's pamphlet, which had a large circulation and exerted a strong influence in promoting a reform of the Poor Laws and a better care of the poor throughout Great Britain.

It was two years later (1819), that Chalmers began his great work for the care of the poor in St. John's Parish, Glasgow. I have found no references to Hamburg or Von Voght in his writings,—not even in his "Sufficiency of a Parochial

System," but the similarity of his ideas and methods to those put in operation at Hamburg makes it probable that here was the source of his inspiration. This seems all the more probable from these circumstances: A few years before, Von Voght had spent some weeks in Scotland and made many friends there, and it was only two years before that Von Voght's pamphlet had been reprinted and widely circulated.

It cannot be proved that Frederic Ozanam, in founding the "Society of Saint Vincent de Paul" (1833), borrowed from Hamburg. But the following facts warrant the assumption that he probably did so: In 1808, Napoleon put Von Voght in charge of the charitable institutions of Paris, and descriptions of the Hamburg System were distributed throughout France; while in 1812, Von Voght himself organized the Charities of Marseilles in accordance with the Hamburg principles. Moreover, the man who furnished Ozanam the organizing genius for his great enterprise, Père Bailly, had been the editor of a paper in Paris when Von Voght was at the height of his influence in France. These facts and the similarity between the methods, in a general way, of the two movements, create a presumption in favor of such a dependence.

Previous to his selection by Napoleon, Von Voght had received high honors for his labors in behalf of the poor. In the year 1801, the Emperor, Francis II., called him to Vienna to reorganize the system of poor-relief of that city in accordance with the Hamburg Institution, of whose fame he had heard; and for his service at Vienna the Emperor made him a baron. In a short time he was called (1803) to Berlin on a similar mission.

One question remains unanswered: Did Elberfeld borrow from Hamburg? Several facts in the general situation make this dependence probable: The late date of the Elberfeld

organization (1853), the fame of the Hamburg Institution for many years over western Europe; the wide incorporation of the Hamburg principles throughout Germany during the first half of the nineteenth century. But complete proof of such a connection was difficult to secure.

However, it was finally found. Through the assistance of a parishioner, Professor William H. Rosenstengel, who had relatives of prominence living in Elberfeld, the town clerk was induced to search the city records to see what could be discovered respecting the origin of the movement in Elberfeld. That was in 1888. In a letter from the city clerk, Herr Ernst (dated Oct. 2, 1888), among many other interesting facts described, this definite statement was made: "In 1802, they [the charity workers of Elberfeld] had become acquainted with 'the instructive history of the Hamburg Institution of poor-relief.'" A Hamburg circular of instruction they made their own with a few unimportant changes.

This makes the dependence of Elberfeld upon Hamburg clear. The original borrowing was in 1802. In time, the system fell into decay, and what von der Heydt did in 1853, was simply to revive and somewhat enlarge the original organization, chiefly due to the influence of Hamburg. The influence of Elberfeld has been great, and honor should be given to that city for its noble work. But, if the truth of history is to be vindicated, this modern method of charity ought to be known as the "Hamburg System." And, if the charity organization societies of London, Boston, and other cities are daughters of Elberfeld, let us remember that Elberfeld herself is the daughter, and that these are the granddaughters of Hamburg.

It is remarkable and unfortunate that a man who accomplished so much for humanity and was so famous for years as

Baron Casper Von Voght, should now be so unknown even by specialists in his own department. Emminghaus, in "Poor Relief in Europe," made no mention of him or the Hamburg Institution. Two prominent Germans described the methods and sang the praises of Elberfeld at the International Congress of Charities in 1894; both, however, ignored Von Voght, apparently ignorant of his great work and fame, and unaware that he was the originator of the principles and policies, embodied in the "Elberfeld Method," two generations before von der Heydt revived the system, which had been borrowed from Hamburg. Even the learned Professor Henderson, in "Modern Methods of Charity," while dimly aware that Hamburg had early applied wise principles in the care of the poor, gave all the credit to Elberfeld, ignorant of the fact that it had borrowed from Von Voght, whose name he incidentally mentions (given incorrectly); but of his great services he seems to have had no knowledge!

The following paragraph, written by Von Voght, deserves careful attention:—

"If in a single instance indulgence is shown where, according to law, it ought not, then all is lost; abuse creeps in, and in a short time this weekly allowance becomes a pension that supersedes the necessity of working; then it becomes a matter of protection and the whole a system of corruption: worse a thousand times by being systematised than if no provision had been made, and if everything had been trusted to chance and to the exertion of private benevolence. These premiums held out to vice must of course increase the number of the idle and the profligate; and what must be the feelings of the honest, industrious workman, who, with the honest exertion of his strength, hardly earns the bare necessities of life, when next to his door Sloth sits in undeserved ease and reaps where it has not sown? It is literally true that, where no man can want, many will be idle; and that the natural course of things in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred would have forced the wretch to labor, and perhaps secure him comfort, if pity, like an unskillful physician, had not stepped in, and by a palliative remedy prevented the cure."

The experience of a hundred years has not taught us a lesson wiser than the truth here stated. The name of Von Voght ought certainly to be widely known and highly honored. He ought to stand in that far-shining group of immortals: John Howard and Philippe Pinel, Florence Nightingale and Dorothea Dix, Dr. Howe and Octavia Hill, Dr. Barnardo and Lord Shaftesbury. He did monumental deeds for humanity.