M. J. D. ROBERTS

RESHAPING THE GIFT RELATIONSHIP

THE LONDON MENDICITY SOCIETY AND
THE SUPPRESSION OF BEGGING IN ENGLAND 1818–1869*

SUMMARY: As English urban society overhauled its systems of policing, poor relief and labour discipline in the early nineteenth century, one form of interaction between classes to become problematical was the act of giving to beggars. While economic ideology endorsed a more calculating approach to the relief of distress, social and religious ideology preached the necessity of expanded personal concern for the distressed. Among the commercial and professional middle classes a variety of volunteer activists attempted a solution to this dilemma by professionalizing relations between giver and receiver, thus anticipating the methods of later Victorian "charity organization" by a full half-century.

Introduction

It is difficult in most parts of the developed world to find evidence that beggars and begging rank high in the public mind's consolidated list of significant social problems. From one direction modern urban police forces work against any expectation among potential beggars that direct requests for assistance are a legitimate public activity. From another direction the existence of government-regulated welfare bureaucracies undermines the disposition of those approached to give requests serious attention. Yet direct giving by the well-off to the deprived or distressed is a customary feature of unbureaucratized cultures the world over. In some situations custom solidifies into ritualized and virtually unrefusable form. In others it erodes in a reverse direction and the very act of begging becomes a source of unease, generating emotions of embarrassment, annoyance, fear or even anger in those solicited.[1] English urban society in the early and mid-

[1] The key discussion of "gift relationships" as cultural universals is Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*, transl. I. Cunnison (Oxford, 1954). For a useful guide to recent work on begging in modern third-world cultures, see John Iliffe, *The African Poor: A History* (Cambridge, 1987), esp. pp. 17–20, 43–47, 190–192, 248–249. (My thanks to Jill Roe for this reference, and to Deryck Schreuder for first pointing out the relevance of the third-world

nineteenth century gives overflowing evidence of an evolution in this re-
verse direction and my aim here is to trace the course of some of the more
energetic volunteer attempts made to discipline and redirect the charitable
impulses of donors during the period of first-stage industrialization, com-
mercial expansion and urban growth.[2] My chief evidence of volunteer
efforts to change public attitude is drawn from the recorded activities of the
Society for the Suppression of Mendicity, established in London in 1818,
but evidence is also drawn from the work of associations attracted to the
problem in years both before and after its date of foundation, as well as
from critics of all attempts to tighten the criteria of charitable
"deservingness".

Begging as an early nineteenth-century social problem

When did the reaction against urban begging begin? Mid- and late-Victor-
ian commentators, secure in the belief that they already lived in a much
improved world, conventionally located the "bad old days" in the period
which followed the end of the French Wars. Progress was then measured
from that base line and efforts to control the situation could be explained in
terms of a natural revulsion against intolerable excess:

> At the close of the great European war the evil [of mendicancy] had reached its
> height; ostentatiously loathsome objects paraded the great thoroughfares; pro-
> fessional beggars, by a police of their own, quartered the town amongst them,
> and stories were currently told of the nightly carouses and orgies which were
> defrayed by the proceeds of their frauds on the credulous public.[3]

The certainty about precise turning points was no doubt a comforting and
convenient fantasy but such commentators nonetheless had a substantial
documentary foundation for their assertions. This was the testimony given
before the House of Commons select committee on mendicity in the me-

perspective to the topic tackled here.) For anthropologically-aware attempts to apply the
concept of the gift relationship to nineteenth-century English material, see Bob Busha-
way, *By Rite: Custom, Ceremony and Community in England 1700–1880* (London,
1982), chs 1, 2, 7; Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London* (Oxford, 1971), pp. 251–261,
and Robert Storch, "Introduction" to *Popular Culture and Custom in Nineteenth-
Century England* (London, 1982), also chs 4 and 6.
[2] Attitudes towards vagrancy and begging in rural communities, not touched on here,
may be traced in D. J. V. Jones, *Crime, Protest, Community and Police in 19th-Century
Britain* (London, 1982), esp. ch. 7, and in Bushaway, *By Rite*.
[3] [R. H. Cheney?], "The charities and poor of London", *Quarterly Review*, LXXXXVII
(1855), pp. 407–450 at p. 423. See also Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London
Poor*, 4 vols (London, 1861–1862), 4, p. 398, and C. J. Ribton-Turner, *A History of
Vagrants and Vagrancy and Beggars and Begging* (London, 1887), pp. 216–217.

tropolis during 1815 and 1816. This committee, set up in June1815 against a background of economic dislocation and periodically riotous popular unrest, had been charged with the task of investigating the extent of destitution and begging among the London poor, and of suggesting remedies.[4] The committee had called evidence from a variety of witnesses: clergy, magistrates, police and poor law officials, private philanthropists and employers of labour all put in an appearance. That evidence reinforced at very least the broad impression already widespread in the minds of "the official classes" – that these were years of exceptionally visible distress among major sections of the metropolitan labouring population. Later research has supplemented the committee's findings to establish a range of reasons for this: military demobilization and its effects upon demand for labour, goods and services; the metropolis as a magnet for migratory labour in an era of rural labour glut and growing official enthusiasm for a free labour market; the structure of the metropolitan economy itself with its abnormally high reliance on seasonal and casual labour; the increasing vulnerability of segments even of its skilled workforce to low-wage foreign and provincial competition.[5] The effects of all these trends on the condition of the labouring population proved difficult to quantify, then and later, but there were several conclusions which the committee felt the evidence would bear. There were, the committee thought on "probable conjecture", "considerably more" beggars in post-war London than the 15,000 estimated to have roamed the streets during the worst period of wartime distress in the years 1796 to 1802. Among these some, at least, were professionals practising "gross and monstrous frauds" with such success that their example threatened to undermine labour discipline, "much more [being] gained by importunate solicitations in the street for charity than is earned by the sober and most industrious artificers and labourers, by their utmost application to the work in which they are employed". The fact that so many children were engaged in the trade suggested that adults were busily transmitting the skills and values of a begging, probably criminal, culture to an expanded intake of new recruits. And the whole problem had been made worse by the uncoordinated and casual approach of metropolitan authorities in recent times past who had preferred either to turn a blind eye to the fact that public begging was an offence under the 1744 Vagrant Act, or else to "solve" the problem by passing convicted vagrants back to their parish of settlement by defective methods after inadequate punishment.[6]

[4] *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 1st series, vol. XXXI, cols. 686–689.
[5] I. Prothero, *Artisans and Politics in Early 19th-Century London* (London, 1979), pp. 64–67; see also M. D. George, *London Life in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1966 edn.), pp. 154–157, and L. D. Schwarz, "The Standard of Living in the Long Run: London, 1700–1860", *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, XXXVIII (1985), pp. 24–41.
[6] Select Committee on Mendicity in the Metropolis: Final Report, *Parliamentary Papers* [hereafter, *PP*], 1816 (396), V, pp. 393, 395, 401.

These, then, were the sort of findings on which later commentators based their judgments of an era of begging swollen beyond control and threatening to spread generally in the working population. Yet, behind this apparently uncomplicated facade there lurked uncertainty, ambivalence and confusion about assumptions which a closer reading might have brought into view. It is clear, for example, from the evidence published (and even clearer from evidence taken by the committee but left unpublished) that a significant number of well-informed witnesses were in disagreement with the committee's final "probable conjecture" that the number of beggars had grown in modern times. The Bow-street magistrate, Sir Nathaniel Conant, in particular, had made a firm declaration on thirty years' experience that there were now fewer beggars even though the metropolis had grown and its economic life had been put under increased strain. He thought this remarkable, as did Francis Place who was also convinced that beggars in 1815 were less "atrocious" in their deceptions and general intrusiveness than they had been at the start of the French wars.[7]

Even more perplexing from a later perspective is the strain which the committee shows in formulating its attitude to the social desirability of individually bargained "gift relationships". Deception and harassment were deplorable, it was true. And, in a train of thought compatible with later Victorian assumptions, reaction to the situation had to involve collection of information "to enable a discrimination [to be made] between the importunate and clamorous Beggars, and the unhappy and suffering Mendicants whose wretchedness is owing to misfortune [. . .]". But what was to be made of a following phrase extending encouragement to those whose "wretchedness" stemmed from a "degree of imprudence which [. . .] should not be allowed to operate entirely against compassion"? And how to evaluate the paternalist indulgence of the committee's final summing up that, at a pinch, relief of "the really distressed Poor" was "an object that must be considered of still higher importance than getting rid of the intolerable nuisance of Vagrancy"?[8]

It is true that this committee, like the rest of its many companion committees of the post-war period, was a highly political animal setting out to find evidence to support a preconceived conclusion. We would therefore expect it to be partisan in selection of evidence and so it was. One witness at least (Francis Place again) left an account of how his evidence before the committee was found "irrelevant" by its chairman and dominant personality, George Rose. (Place's lecture on the principles of a free labour

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[7] *PP*, 1814–15 (473), III, 267; Place Papers, British Library [hereafter, BL] Add MSS 27825, folios 255–259, 35145, folios 71–78, 35152, folio 142. See George, *London Life in the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 211–312, 370, for endorsement of these "optimist" views.
[8] Select Committee on Mendicity: Final Report, pp. 402–403.

market and its social results was not a message the first-generation Tory gentleman, Rose, wished to hear.)[9]

The underlying problem which the committee faced, however, was not so much one of achieving open-mindedness as of reconciling changing attitudes – changing definitions of what constituted "true charity" in a large-scale, commercially oriented community. If beggars were perceived as a growing problem an explanation lay quite as much in the minds of those asked for relief as in the behaviour of those making the request.

All inquiries into collective states of mind must of necessity be speculative to a degree but there does seem to be a strong case for arguing that the respectable classes of later Hanoverian towns and cities were coming to believe that they were vulnerable to being "put upon". This in turn can be interpreted as an unremarked side-effect of the well documented increase in sensitivity to the sight of suffering among bourgeois ranks over the period of accelerated commercial and urban growth, of intensified intellectual and political ferment, which began in the mid-eighteenth century.[10] "Thin-skinned" newcomers to the privileged circle of later-century public life were increasingly distressed by the material suffering and moral estrangement of social ranks which they identified as a prominent feature of their times. Many developed a sharpened sense of personal obligation to relieve "misfortune". The result was a remarkable flowering of volunteer charitable associations from the 1780s forward.[11] Religious evangelicals often led the way but the impulse spread widely across the middling and into the upper ranks of society. With the impulse to relieve, however, went a desire not to "demoralize", an anxiety not to waste resources, a concern to monitor effects. It seems safe enough to suggest that the incentive to balance prudent calculation of result against sentimental impulse was a cultural characteristic of longstanding operation.[12] Even so, events of the

[9] Richard Tompson, *The Charity Commission and the Age of Reform* (London, 1979), pp. 85–89; Brian Harrison, *Peaceable Kingdom: Stability and Change in Modern Britain* (Oxford, 1982), pp.263–267. For Place's account of the Mendicity Committee of 1815–16, see BL Add MS 35145, folios 71–78. George Rose's political career and social attitudes are summarized in R. G. Thorne (ed.) *History of Parliament: The Commons 1790–1820*, 5 vols (London, 1986), 5, p. 52.

[10] See, e.g., Harold Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society 1780–1880* (London, 1969), p. 280; Robert Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society 1700–1850* (Cambridge, 1973), ch. 7; Randall McGowen, "A Powerful Sympathy: Terror, the Prison, and Humanitarian Reform in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain", *Journal of British Studies*, XXV (1986), pp. 312–334; J. Turner, *Reckoning with the Beast* (London, 1980), chs 1–2.

[11] T. W. Laqueur, *Religion and Respectability: Sunday Schools and Working-Class Culture 1780–1850* (London, 1976), p. 2 (table 1).

[12] See, e.g., Joanna Innes, "Prisons for the Poor: English Bridewells, 1555–1800", in Francis Snyder and Douglas Hay (eds), *Labour, Law and Crime: An Historical Perspective* (London, 1987), pp. 42–122, esp. p. 102.

later Hanoverian period did much to strengthen the desire to achieve it. Big cities and migratory populations undermined the assumptions of personal knowledge of character and condition on which older forms of charitable giving had ideally relied. Malthusian doctrines of inevitable suffering resulting from imprudent use of finite resources encouraged calculation of likely consequences. The years of political insecurity, military crisis and recurrent economic dislocation gave incentive to develop plans of permanent socialization for the labouring classes in preference to short-term expedients of buying off "importunity".

It had been the experience of wartime dislocation in particular which helped to germinate the first significant crop of volunteer associational responses to public begging in London and elsewhere. Matthew Martin, for example, the key witness before the 1815 parliamentary committee, had begun his investigations into metropolitan mendicity in early 1796 as a response to the war's first food price crisis. His goal had been to relieve distress and to map out its "true extent" but also to collect reliable information on the "causes" and wider context which drove individuals to beg. This project proved promising enough to attract a subsidy from the leading philanthropic organization of the war years, Thomas Bernard's Society for Bettering the Condition of the Poor. Bernard in turn helped Martin to obtain further support from the Home Office. (The Home Office maintained its interest in Martin's work for most of the war.)[13]

Another volunteer experiment which had taken longer to mature, but with ultimately more practical result, was the attempt of the Quaker, William Allen, to combine the giving of relief with a system of "domiciliary visitation" of those claiming to be distressed. Allen hoped through this procedure both to protect givers against impostors and to monitor the results (material and moral) of charitable giving. He had tried and failed to convince his companions in the Spitalfields Soup Charity of the practicability of the system during the second great wave of metropolitan wartime distress in 1799–1801; but his own belief in its benefits survived this setback and he finally got his prototype volunteer inspection system adopted across wide areas of the capital during the third and last wave of wartime distress in 1812–1813.[14]

Meanwhile, London had already been outpaced by the provinces. It was in Bath that the first society explicitly proclaiming its purpose as "the suppression of vagrants, street-beggars, and impostors" had been formed in 1805. (Matthew Martin was one of its early supporters.) Conditions for a

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[13] *Society for Bettering the Condition and Increasing the Comforts of the Poor: Reports*, I (London, 1798), pp. 166–176; and *PP* 1814–15 (473), III, p. 320.
[14] *The Philanthropist*, II (1812), pp. 173–196; *The Life of William Allen*, 3 vols (1846), 1, pp. 36, 143–146, 183.

backlash against beggars in Bath proved quick-maturing for a variety of reasons. As in other parts of the country wartime dislocation and high food prices had brought distress to Bath's "settled poor". Bath's geographical position on a well-travelled route of seasonal labour migration also raised tensions. Above all, it was Bath's unusually high proportion of potential givers – its steady stream of short-term resort visitors from the affluent and leisured classes – which produced a situation ripe for exploitation and, in turn, attempted regulation. This regulation was devised with some care. The Bath Society was run in close cooperation with local magistrates and poor law officers; it paid a "beadle" to patrol the streets to warn off vagrants, kept a register of bona fide travellers, urged its supporters to give the society's relief tickets rather than money to beggars, and ran a system of personal home visits to applicants for relief designed to "trace distresses to their source". Within a few years it was able to report a significant decline in Bath's begging problem. Its "experience" over the period also allowed it to "assure the public [. . .] that the distress which demands charitable aid is rarely to be found among Street-Beggars: that alms given in the street, without investigation, are bounties on idleness and fraud; and that every shilling so received is a robbery from real distress".[15] The message seemed increasingly to be one whose time had come. By 1815 the society was able to report on the founding of similar associations in Oxford, Edinburgh and Colchester, and it looked forward to Martin spreading the word through his evidence given to the parliamentary select committee already mentioned.[16]

Yet, once again, caution is needed to interpret the aims and activities of all these associations – as much as it was needed to interpret the stance of the 1815 parliamentary investigators. By hindsight the policing and disciplinary aspects of all these experiments tend to leap from the page. The relief-giving motives of the participants, however, ought not to be lost from the record. Matthew Martin, for one, described his 1796 investigations of beggars as an attempt to gather evidence in support of his "supposition [. . .] that the general obloquy passed upon this despised though numerous class of society, was in many instances unjust". Bernard backed him up, interpreting his findings as a severe indictment of the insensitivity of metropolitan poor law officials to cases of legitimate need. Allen was more censorious, willing to identify the majority of beggars as "a sort of delinquents". Yet he went on to express anxiety that justice be done to that "considerable proportion who are real objects of distress". (He also came out as a firm anti-alarmist in the debate about the spread of begging in

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[15] *Bath Society for the Suppression of Vagrants: Report for 1809* (1810), pp. 3–5; *Report for 1812* (1813), pp. 14–15. See also *Bettering Society: Reports*, I, p. 175, and for general social background, R. S. Neale, *Bath 1680–1850: A Social History* (London, 1981), p. 85.
[16] *Bath Society: Report for 1815* (1816), p. 6. There is a report on the work of the Edinburgh Society in *Philanthropist*, V (1815), pp. 80–82.

1815.) And out in provincial England the Bath Society, on the evidence of its patterns of expenditure and activity over the first decade of its work, became an organization swinging almost against its collective sense of better judgment from a policing to a welfare-providing role.[17] In general terms it is clear enough that an ideology of "deservingness" – of discrimination in giving – is gaining ground among early nineteenth-century "leaders of opinion". This did not yet necessarily mean that these people had turned against beggars as a class. That situation was to be changed by the foundation of the Society for the Suppression of Mendicity in London in early 1818.

Begging condemned: the London Mendicity Society and its supporters

The official life of the London Mendicity Society began on 5 January 1818 when a small group of business and professional men met to consider what might be done to counteract the "alarming prevalence of Mendicity in the Metropolis". The meeting had been called through advertisement placed by one W. H. Bodkin, of whom more in due course. After canvassing the possibility of attracting more influential names than theirs to the cause – Wilberforce, Burdett, Brougham and George Rose were among the names mentioned – those present resolved to call a public meeting. The meeting was held a few days later at the Crown and Anchor Tavern in the Strand. There the society was formed and its objects set out. These were to include action to "mitigate the sufferings of a numerous class of our Fellow Creatures" as well as "an active interference to lessen the evil" of mendicity. The recital of motives made in the first report of the society, however, reveals a view of priorities firmly skewed to achieve the latter object. Destitute seamen; the concern aroused by the recent report on metropolitan mendicity; the growth of public awareness of the problem of juvenile crime; recent revelations of the inadequacy and expense of the systems of policing and poor-law administration in the metropolitan area – these were the listed explanations for action.[18]

A survey of the first group of volunteers actively attracted to the work of the new society gives further clues to likely priorities. Like many volunteer

[17] Martin's views may be found in *PP* 1814–15 (473), III, p. 320; Bernard's in *Bettering Society: Reports*, I, pp. 168–173; Allen's in *Philanthropist*, V (London, 1815), p. 323. For the Bath Society, see note 15 above. Similar sensitivities in a metropolitan context may be detected in *Benevolent or Strangers' Friend Society: Report for 1819* (London, 1820), p. 5. See also David Owen, *English Philanthropy 1660–1960* (Cambridge, MA, 1964), pp. 109–111.
[18] Society for the Suppression of Mendicity: Minute Book, BL Add MS 50136, folios 1–4, 46.

associations the Mendicity Society was eager to present itself as the logical next step in a cause long contemplated but as yet imperfectly realized. It was therefore eager to gain endorsement from men of known reputation in the field and in fact managed to enrol a fairly comprehensive range of father-figures in its list of office-bearers. Matthew Martin, William Allen, Patrick Colquhoun the well-known police magistrate, and the Revd Dr Francis Randolph, a one-time committee-man of the Bath Mendicity Society, all accepted nomination to office in one form or another. Thomas Bernard, in the final few months of his life, pledged over a significant part of the proceeds of his own philanthropic empire to the new cause.[19]

But these were not the driving force behind the new society nor, on the scraps of evidence available, did they show any strong wish to be so.[20] The active promoters were men of a new generation. In terms of public standing and background they fall into two groups. Both groups had their particular view of the task to contribute.

Among the men of existing public reputation the most prominent names on the first board of management are undoubtedly those of radical MP, Joseph Hume, and of the retired stockbroker, David Ricardo. To them may be added the names of the plutocrat Whig MPs Charles Barclay, John Abel Smith, and William Williams (a brewer and two bankers respectively). From the ranks of the many founding vice-presidents we may retrieve the name of the one who engaged most actively in the affairs of the society – the liberal Tory MP William Sturges Bourne. So far as we can reconstruct their motives, these public figures seem to have supported the new society as a means of furthering their existing interest in schemes to promote economic and moral self-discipline among the labouring classes. The fact that several of them were supporters of a recently frustrated campaign to overhaul (and ultimately abolish) the poor laws also helps to explain the attraction of a scheme based on voluntary experiment.[21] Williams and Sturges Bourne apart, these initial enthusiasts seem to have retired from active, day-to-day interest in the society after the early, organizing phase of its growth. Yet in that time they gave the imprint of their authority to the cause. They also helped to bolster a view of the society's place and purpose in public life which gave it much of its continuing ideological identity. That is, they helped to associate the society in its members' and in the public mind with the values of "political economy", the free play of market forces, un-

[19] *Ibid.*, folios 9–10, 14–15, 44. In addition, Matthew Martin managed to induce the private sponsors of his pre-1815 mendicity investigation to accept nomination as Vice-Presidents of the new society almost *en bloc*: *PP* 1814–15 (473), III, p. 319.

[20] Allen, *Life*, I, pp. 338–339, 342; and see generally the society's minute book entries for 1818.

[21] J. R. Poynter, *Society and Pauperism: English Ideas on Poor Relief, 1795–1834* (London, 1969), pp. 244–248, 289–294.

relenting attack on waste and corruption in the provision of both private
charity and relief given under the poor law, and a generally secular radical
approach to social improvement.[22]

We are still, however, a step away from identifying the most energetic
and continuously committed core of activists in the new cause. To find these
we must move down the scale of public visibility to enter the more local
world of metropolitan voluntarism and parish vestry experience. Here we
are hard pressed to identify a uniform set of motives and attitudes but we
may note that post-war social ferment had already brought a number of
them to some prominence as volunteers in the causes of popular education,
juvenile crime control, prison reform and related "remedial charities" so
we can verify that the list of stimuli to action cited by the society on
foundation reflected a considered and maturing anxiety about social dis-
cipline among its most eager and persevering organizers.[23] In addition, it
seems plausible to suggest that the dominant tone of commitment here is
one conditioned by the mingled ambitions and insecurities of a "rising
generation" of young professionals, would-be professionals and business-
men – men with some confidence in their abilities and expertise but men
with public reputations still substantially to make.[24] The most prominent
and, in career terms, most precariously poised of any in this group was a
twenty-seven-year-old Islington-born "auctioneer and house agent" with
some experience as overseer of the poor in the parish of St. James's,
Clerkenwell. His name was William Henry Bodkin. Later in life, after he
had become a barrister, a Peelite MP, an assistant judge, a knight of the
realm and Deputy Lieutenant of Middlesex, he described himself as "of a
long-established County Galway family", but in 1818 he was still very much

[22] Ricardo and Smith were in fact to become foundation members of the Political
Economy Club set up in 1821 with the aim (according to the rules drafted by James Mill)
of promoting "the diffusion [. . .] of just principles of Political Economy": *Political
Economy Club Centenary Volume* (London, 1921), pp. 1–4, and cf. pp. 210, 213. Sturges
Bourne is best known as sponsor of two Acts of 1818 and 1819 to overhaul the machinery
of the poor law, and also as a commissioner of the 1832 Royal Commission on the Poor
Laws. For recent appraisal of his distinctive intellectual stance, see Peter Mandler,
"Tories and Paupers: Christian Political Economy and the Making of the New Poor
Law", *Historical Journal*, XXXIII (1990), pp. 91–93, 98–100.
[23] Of the 36 board members of the Society in 1818, e.g., four appear on the committee of
the British and Foreign School Society in 1814, and four on the Juvenile Delinquency
Committee (forerunner of the Prison Discipline Society) in 1816. For evidence of links
with the Savings Bank movement, see *Political Economy Club Centenary Volume*, pp.
210–211.
[24] For the later careers of two of the more successful, see *The Times*, 9 April 1880, p. 7
(Henry Pownall, attorney, Evangelical activist and eventual long-serving chairman of
the Middlesex bench of magistrates); *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1863, II, pp. 656–659
(William Tooke, solicitor, promoter of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowl-
edge, Treasurer of London University and brother of Thomas Tooke, the co-founder
with Ricardo of the Political Economy Club).

on the alert for a career path out of the socially indeterminate and economically unstable situation in which he found himself. The Mendicity Society was one of at least two volunteer associations which he helped to float (as *The Times* later unkindly insinuated was the appropriate metaphor), and his assiduity in mastering the more practical aspects of the society's business certainly brought benefits in its train. In 1818 he volunteered as honorary secretary to the society; by 1821 he was "assistant manager" of its central inquiry and relief office at a salary of £300 per annum, and a publicist on the reform of the poor law; by 1826 he had used his experience gained, and gentlemanly contacts made, to launch himself as a barrister; by 1830 he had prospered well enough to be able to resign his secretaryship to take up at last the residual role of Visitor and honorary solicitor.[25]

With driving young enthusiasts such as Bodkin controlling operations the Mendicity Society was from its start, a rather less paternalist, rather more "modernizing" variety of volunteer association than its forerunners in the field. It is not without significance that contemporary causes which later engaged the interest of its early promoters included those of criminal law reform, anti-slavery and secular education.[26] It is also significant that, in comparison with the leading "moral reform" societies until that point, the Mendicity Society was the most undisguisedly secular in its orientation. This was no explicit act of policy: the society clearly hoped to harness the London parish clergy to the task as so many societies had done and were again to do. But it did not rely on this support. (Its first operational structure, for example, used the eight metropolitan police districts rather than parish boundaries for its guide.)[27] In addition, there were some underplayed but nonetheless discernible early problems in recruiting the energies of the full range of the society's most likely allies in the religious world of the metropolitan laity. There were, it is true, evangelicals representative both

[25] F. Boase, *Modern English Biography*, 6 vols (London, 1892–1921), 1, p. 323; Select Committee on the Vagrant Laws, *PP*, 1821 (543), IV, p. 135; *The Times*, 17 July 1824, pp. 2–3; lists of office-holders in *Mendicity Society: Reports*, 1822–1830. For discussion of "moral entrepreneurs" of "marginal" social position and their search for employment commensurate with their administrative and intellectual aspirations/capacities, see, *inter alia*, John Bourne, *Patronage and Society in 19th-Century England* (London, 1986), pp. 88–89; A. P. Donajgrodzki, *Social Control in Nineteenth Century Britain* (London, 1977), pp. 54–56. Bodkin hardly measures up to the "giants" of the category (Colquhoun, Chadwick, etc.) as a publicist but his administrative skills and sustained interest in social policy issues qualify him for at least modest recognition in their company.

[26] Of the 36 board members of the society in 1818, e.g., four appear as committee members of the Prison Discipline Society in 1821, and four as foundation committee members of the Anti-Slavery Society in 1823. For the later (mid-1820s) connection with the Society for the Diffusion of the Useful Knowledge see note 24 above.

[27] Mendicity Society: Minute Book, folios 8, 18–19. There were four clergy on the first board but none by 1822 and only a handful thereafter if one sets aside the selection of bishops listed as vice-presidents.

of Church and Dissent active on the first board of the society, and evangel-
icals gave financial support from the earliest stages. But the most presti-
gious and well-connected evangelicals seem to have resisted recruitment to
leadership positions for some time. (The first Clapham Evangelical to
arrive on the board was C. J. Shore [second Baron Teignmouth] in 1820
after which date the evangelical presence in the society entrenched itself.)
Why the initial hesitation?[28] It seems likely that some evangelicals were
troubled by the more rigorous definition of charity implicit in the new
society's objects. Even more likely, it was recent experience of Radical
religious heterodoxy which encouraged caution. (The British and Foreign
School Society in which William Allen, Joseph Hume and a number of
other board members were heavily involved had only recently passed
through a bitter series of feuds about the place of religious instruction in the
schooling of the London poor.[29] Whatever the reason for the situation,
London developments stood in notable contrast to contemporary experi-
ments in Glasgow where, in precisely these years, the Revd Thomas Chal-
mers was making a national reputation for himself by refurbishing the
clergy-supervised parish as the effective unit of combined charitable relief
and social "police".[30]

   If this was the world of the first supporters of the new society, what of the
wider membership? One point seems clear: differences of opinion within
the leadership had little impact on wider recruiting prospects. The society in
its first years managed very quickly to consolidate its identity as an organ-
ization plugging a recognizable gap in the existing range of metropolitan
"charitable" activities. It continued successful by all the conventional mea-
sures of support over the following thirty years.

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[28] William Wilberforce, while privately pronouncing his "ardent concurrence in the
objects of the Society", declined any formal association with its work in 1818: Minute
Book, folio 20. He did, however, turn out in force with other Evangelicals to shore up its
reputation at a critical moment in 1824: see note 77 below. See also *Life of William Allen*,
1, pp. 338–339.
[29] *Ibid.*, 1, p. 267; Henry B. Binns, *A Century of Education: The Centenary History of the
British and Foreign School Society* (London, 1908), pp. 94–95; and Alice Prochaska,
"The Practice of Radicalism: Educational Reform in Westminster" in John Stevenson
(ed.), *London in the Age of Reform* (Oxford, 1977), pp. 102–116, esp. p. 112.
[30] Stewart J. Brown, *Thomas Chalmers and the Godly Commonwealth in Scotland*
(Oxford, 1982), pp. 116–144, esp. p. 132. See also Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement:
The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought 1785–1865* (Oxford,
1988), p. 56. The Chalmers "blueprint" was in fact tried out by various groups in London
during the 1820s, but chiefly as an instrument of religious evangelization, and with
generally discouraging results: Donald M. Lewis, *Lighten Their Darkness: The Evangeli-
cal Mission to Working-Class London, 1828–1860* (Westport, CT, 1986), pp. 36–42.
Chalmers himself admitted that, as long as the English Poor Law drew its funding from a
compulsory rate (rather than a voluntary one, as in Scotland), his system could not easily
be transplanted to England: Poynter, *Society and Pauperism*, pp. 234–237.

Early appeal was greatly helped by the onset of a period of increased social tension in 1819 which, in London, was prolonged, first by a severe winter in 1819–1820 and then by the excitements of the Queen Caroline affair. Under these conditions the incentive to give rose, but so did the incentive to target relief effectively and to monitor results. The society's relatively steady income of *c.* £3,000 a year over its first decade suggests that it located a stable range of supporters fairly readily. This income was derived from a core of approximately 1,500 regular subscribers and a more fluctuating number of casual donors.[31] Those contributing covered a good range of both City and West End society. The society was never at a loss for the support of the titled. (It had been, most likely, Joseph Hume's persuasion which had induced his friend, the Duke of York, to volunteer as the society's first patron. The dynastic connection thus begun proved a useful one, gaining for the society the patronage, on York's death, of his brother Clarence (later William IV) and then, in 1837, of their niece, Queen Victoria.[32]) Among the untitled a sampling of the subscription lists suggests that the society exerted its attraction over an assorted self-selection of bankers, businessmen and professionals from the upper and middle ranks of the metropolitan bourgeoisie. Retired naval and military officers are perhaps over-represented. Clergy and, perhaps, women seem under-represented.[33] In terms of overall appeal the society remained content with the type of support attracted in its first years. The occasional "special appeal" excepted, it made no determined effort to expand either the number of its supporters or their social range over following decades.

One further question remains: What were these supporters hoping to achieve through the society? Answers to such questions can never be conclusive.[34] There are strong hints, all the same, that members, and even

[31] Financial and membership information compiled from *Mendicity Society: Annual Reports* [hereafter, *Reports*]. The figures cited compare respectably enough with income and membership levels of other contemporary charities cited in F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in 19th-Century England* (Oxford, 1980), pp. 231–245, and with the average £5,000 per annum subscription income of the rather more relief-oriented Manufacturing Poor Association set up (1812–1815) to deal with a previous period of metropolitan (and provincial) distress: *Association for the Relief of the Manufacturing Poor: Reports*, I (1813), p. 36, and II (1815), p. 36.
[32] Mendicity Society: Minute Book, folio 35. See also C. J. Shore [2nd Baron Teignmouth], *Reminiscences of Many Years*, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1878), 2, p. 187.
[33] Women formed *c.* 20% of subscribers in 1818 and *c.* 25% in 1830. Cf. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, pp. 231, 245 though the data presented there still leaves open the issue of what types of volunteer organizations are legitimately comparable with the Mendicity Society. The later Charity Organisation Society, e.g., had a very similar proportion of female subscribers, whereas the Bath Society, previously mentioned, had a clear majority of female subscribers.
[34] For further discussion see Harrison, *Peaceable Kingdom*, pp. 224–240, and Owen, *English Philanthropy*, ch. 6.

more so casual contributors, viewed the objects of the society in rather different balance from the one preached as desirable by the executive elite. The society's objects, it is true, changed over time in response to changes in police and poor law practice (see the following section). This may have taken time to make its mark on uninformed contributors. Yet the pattern of support for the society still suggests that supporters valued the relief-giving function of the society consistently more highly than the policy-makers of the society would have preferred.[35] This does not mean that supporters were indifferent, or hostile, to the labour-disciplining objects of the society's work, just that they were most likely to have their sense of obligation activated at times when "distress" was most socially visible (i.e. in the street or as publicized by the press).

It was sudden awareness of destitution which opened purses as much for the Mendicity Society as for other less discriminating charities. The classic situation activating concern was a cold or wet season with its effects on the outdoor labour market, but concern about the general level of political or social tension might also work the trick and, interestingly, concern about the transitional impact of sudden adjustments in social policy on habituated clients as well. This happened in 1819 with the curtailment of the poor law rights of Irish labourers in England, in the mid-1830s with the winding down of outdoor relief under the New Poor Law, and again in the 1840s with further attempts to tighten poor law eligibility for casual relief.[36] The point may be illustrated in part by outlining the contours of the society's sub-scription income over the first – the most prosperous – three decades of activity. From the plateau of solid support which persists throughout the period rise several peaks of exceptional "prosperity". The first occurs in 1830 when income more than doubles to £8,000 at a time of combined social unrest, economic dislocation and seasonal severity; the second in the "bleak age" of the later 1830s and early 1840s (£3,000 rising to £6,000 between 1834 and 1838); a final, somewhat flatter peak takes place in 1847 (£5,300, up £1,000 over 1846) when Irish famine refugees swell the ranks of the local unemployed. It was in this last year that the society felt it necessary to warn members that not all Irish beggars were victims of famine. The cases of imposture uncovered "show how dangerous it is to give without inquiry, even on occasions like that of the present visitation in Ireland, which seems almost to render inquiry superfluous".[37] The "no relief with-

[35] See, e.g., *Reports*, No. 8 (1826), p. 25; No. 12 (1830), pp. 22–23; No. 13 (1831), p. 16. Cf. No. 33 (1851), p. 12. See also C. S. Yeo, "Introduction" to H. Bosanquet, *Social Work in London 1869–1912* (Brighton, 1973), p. x, for impressions of a similar divergence of priorities in the late Victorian Charity Organisation Society.
[36] For the "cold weather" rule, see *Reports*, No. 21 (1839), p. 11; No. 28 (1846), p. 12. For the impact of the New Poor Law, see No. 17 (1835), pp. 12–16; No. 18 (1836), pp. 12–13.

out inquiry" principle had, of course, been the society's guiding rule of practice from the time it took up its task in 1818.

Begging suppressed: the London Mendicity Society in action

How had the society carried out its task thus far? The first point on which we need to remind ourselves is that the Mendicity Society never saw its work as an attempt to suppress giving. Quite the reverse:

> [The goal was] not [. . .] to impose limits upon Public Benevolence, but rather to prevent falsehood and imposture in the Poor, from abusing the generosity of the Rich, and thereby weakening that good feeling, which it is so important to maintain amongst all Classes of Society.[38]

Further than this: "Public Benevolence", when practised, ought to be interpretable as an expression of *personal* concern – to be a "consolation" to the poor, a "gratification" to the rich, and a "beneficial influence" on the minds of both. In other words, transfer of resources between classes was to act as a social cement, confirming the sense of social obligation in both giver and receiver.[39]

The society's founders thus put a high value on volunteer initiative. In a very pressing sense, they saw an expansion of charitable activity as a way out of the impasse of high involuntary investment and small social return which they believed had become the predicament of the poor law. (They also had their doubts about the older, endowed, urban charities.[40]) What they proposed, of course, was a form of charity which was disciplined to correct this situation, not to replicate it.

Here they were helped to some degree by knowledge of previous volunteer experiments (see the first section). However, no previous volunteer group had ever shown signs of developing the ambition needed to con-

[37] *Ibid.*, No. 29 (1847), p. 16. Cf. Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, pp. 108–114. Not just the Irish were suspect: for similar warnings against "imposture" among Crimean War veterans, *Reports*, No. 38 (1856), p. 14. See also Lionel Rose "*Rogues and Vagabonds*": *Vagrant Underworld in Britain 1815–1985* (London, 1988), pp. 23–25.
[38] *Reports*, No. 4 (1822), p. 26; and see Mendicity Society: Minute Book, folios 47, 104.
[39] *Reports*, No. 5 (1823), p. 25. For elucidation of the "status maintaining function" of the gift, and explanation of the reasons why this is customarily assumed to require a direct "relationship between persons" in order to retain effectiveness, see Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, pp. 251–252, including the anthropological references cited there. There is also useful discussion of early 19th-century alarm about the social implications of "lost contact" in Donajgrodzki, *Social Control*, pp. 21–24.
[40] Mendicity Society: Minute Book, folio 17; *Reports*, No. 1 (1819), p. 13.

template the uniform enforcement of a "no relief without inquiry" rule across a community the size of metropolitan London. (The 1815–1816 select committee had considered the matter and timidly suggested that the goal, if thought worth attempting, would need state subsidy to succeed.[41]) The early leaders of the Mendicity Society, by contrast, were prepared to chance their hand.

The key to success, they agreed, was a centralized system of examining claims for assistance. This would be operated by gentleman volunteers who would decide from information given by the applicant and cross-checked from independent sources (parish authorities included), whether relief was deserved. Business would be generated by two, complementary methods: by members and public supporters of the society giving tickets of entitlement to beggars rather than money, and by the society's constables patrolling the streets to detain beggars for inquiry. Then, when inquiry had been completed, the processed client would be granted relief, or cleared for receipt of private assistance, or advised of entitlements available through parish authorities or specialist charities, or else taken before a magistrate to be dealt with as a vagrant.[42] This plan, it was hoped, would quickly demonstrate its effectiveness as a means of discriminating between deserving and undeserving, thus gaining official and public goodwill and opening up "the possibility of entirely eradicating Street Beggars in the relatively near future".[43]

The plan, however, when put into effect did not prove quite the straightforward blueprint for practice that the drafters had anticipated. The reasons for this were varied. The most obvious pressures for adjustment were, by hindsight, pressures generated by developments in public administration, and therefore beyond the society's direct control. But the first aspect of the society's plan to need adjustment was an internal matter.

The matter at issue was basically a question about the level of commitment and expertise obtainable from the gentleman volunteers who presided over the inquiry system. The original intention had been to devise standardized procedures in order to blend the gentlemanly qualities of benevolence and honourable fair mindedness with the professional and businesslike qualities of efficiency and consistency in decision-making, but a realization of the complexity and size of the burden taken up seems to have struck within the first year of operation.[44] A system of rostered service spread the burden but increased the likelihood of inconsistent or over-

[41] Select Committee on Mendicity: Final Report, p. 403.
[42] Mendicity Society: Minute Book, folio 17. Tickets were issued free to subscribers, at cost to others, and were exchangeable for a meal at the Society's office on condition that the presenter consented to answer a standard set of questions.
[43] *Ibid.*, folio 43.
[44] *Reports*, No. 2 (1820), p. 10.

generous decisions. The board of management was eventually driven, during 1821, to transfer most of the day-to-day business to a salaried full-time "assistant manager". (W. H. Bodkin). The result of this in turn was a growing suspicion in some quarters that the Mendicity Society had become a patronage machine for the distribution of spoils to pseudo-gentlemen of doubtful social origin, unacceptably entrepreneurial tendencies and overvalued (because self-certified) expertise. Matters settled down as Bodkin gradually moved out to pursue his law career in the later '20s.[45] The episode nevertheless serves as a reminder that professionalization of volunteer occupations created problems as well as solving them.

Much the same might be said about the professionalization of state services, this too being a live issue from the time the society began its work. The pressures placed on the society to adjust its methods of operation in response to changes in public administration took longer to surface but were no less decisive for that.

The most obvious example of these pressures at work may be found in the field of law-enforcement. The society, as we know, had begun operations in 1818 by deciding to take on its own constables. The justification for this had been that existing police agents in London were demonstrably uninterested in enforcing the begging provisions of the Vagrant Act. (After the reward attached was removed in 1824 their interest fell even further.)[46] The society at first saw its involvement in law enforcement as a stop-gap until public authorities could be roused to action but, as it gained experience, it became increasingly inclined to see itself as a pioneer provider of specialist services in an area of social regulation for which the criminal law might sometimes be too blunt an instrument.

In its first phase of police operations the society acted very much in the tradition of the volunteer prosecuting association – a valued stand-by of private citizens over the previous fifty years. The fact that it sought and was granted the endorsement of successive Home Secretaries (first Sidmouth, then Peel) for its work helps to confirm the deduction that its first impulse was to present itself as an auxiliary to hard-pressed authorities.[47] It certainly made its impression on the criminal statistics of the 1820s. (One third of all metropolitan police office committals for vagrancy – some 10,000 cases –

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[45] *The Times*, 17 July 1824, pp. 2–3. For a glimpse of the role of the Board of Management in the post-Bodkin era, see Select Committee on District Asylums (Metropolis), *PP*, 1846 (388), III, Qns. 1953–1956.

[46] Select Committee on Vagrant Laws, pp. 137, 145, 183; *Mendicity Society: Reports*, No. 7 (1825), p. 26.

[47] Minute Book, folios 20, 26; *Reports*, No. 4 (1822), p. 25. For the widespread acceptance of volunteer policing bodies in this period, see David Philips, "Associations for the prosecution of felons in England 1760–1860", in Douglas Hay and Francis Snyder (eds), *Policing and Prosecution in Britain 1750–1850* (Oxford, 1989), ch. 3.

were instituted by society officers between 1818 and 1830, and the convic-
tion rate of slightly more than fifty per cent compares favourably with the
rate obtained in the 1830s by Peel's New Police.)[48]

The formation of the Metropolitan Police in 1829 required the society to
rethink its role quite considerably. As it took stock it decided that it was not
unhappy to be rid of its policing task, given a guarantee that the work would
be kept up. Its constables in the 1820s had gained the society the sort of
reputation for over-zealous activity which, in the 1830s, was to be experi-
enced in turn by the New Police. Not all magistrates had sided with the
society, either, nor had it managed to convince legislators of the need to
make convictions easier to obtain.[49] Above all, the society needed to release
resources to cope with expanded demand in the casual relief branch of its
work, and it acknowledged that the New Police were likely to achieve a far
higher level of uniform law enforcement across the metropolitan area as a
whole than its six or eight constables could ever deliver. It therefore
discontinued its police operations in 1831. It did not withdraw, however,
without striking a formal bargain to entrench its position with the author-
ities. It had, for some years past, made its files available to magistrates who
asked for them, to allow them to check on the "character" of convicted
vagrants before passing sentence. Now it traded in its constables in return
for an undertaking from the Police Commissioners that all vagrants appre-
hended would be brought to the society's office for examination as to
character and possible past record before being charged.[50] This arrange-
ment continued in variant forms for several decades after. In addition, the
society began to re-recruit constables in 1834 when it became apparent that
the uniform of the Metropolitan Police merely warned beggars into a state
of passing inactivity. This was done with full police approval: in 1839
Commissioners Rowan and Mayne gave it as their "decided" view that the

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[48] Figures for the society's committals and convictions for metropolitan London (ex-
cluding the City of London) are taken from its *Reports*, No. 12 (1830), p. 20, and No. 17
(1835), p. iii. Approx. two out of every three metropolitan vagrant convictions in the
mid-1820s were for begging: *PP*, 1824 (357), XIX, pp. 215–338, esp. pp. 279–280. For
metropolitan vagrant statistics after 1830, see Ribton-Turner, *History of Vagrants*, pp.
673–674; Jones, *Crime, Protest, Community and Police*, p. 199.
[49] *Reports*, No. 8 (1826), p. 26. See also Stanley H. Palmer, *Police and Protest in England
and Ireland 1780–1850* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 303–315, and Phillip Thurmond Smith,
Policing Victorian London (Westport, CN, 1985), pp. 51–55. On the society's efforts to
influence the reform of the vagrant laws, see *PP*, 1821 (543), IV, p. 144; *Reports*, No. 3
(1821), p. 12; No. 4 (1822), p. 23; No. 8 (1826), p. 18. The recurrent problem here, apart
from deciding how high to set the standard of proof, was to define the offence itself.
Beggars were often quick to adjust their behaviour from direct request to implied
exchange for services (e.g., crossing-sweeping) or goods provided. For discussion of the
legal technicalities involved, see Rose, *Rogues and Vagabonds*, ch. 6.
[50] *Reports*, No. 13 (1831), pp. 21–29. Cf. No. 6 (1824), p. 15.

society had "co-operated beneficially with the metropolitan police in clearing the streets of beggars".[51] The society continued to contribute a significant proportion of vagrant prosecutions to the metropolitan police courts until at least mid-century, though its activity dropped away in the years following.[52]

The other field of activity in which state "modernization" required the Mendicity Society to adapt its plans was that of social security – poor relief. Here the society was to be a much more engaged party to developments from the start. That is, it was an active lobbyist in favour of reform as well as an accommodator of reform once enacted. Its general position that "the laws of the country" should be taken as they stood "so far as their enforcement is consistent with the best principles of political economy"[53] here left the society in a semi-permanent state of strain.

Early leaders of the society criticized the existing administration of the poor law from several directions: it lacked coordination, it "demoralized" the able-bodied poor by granting relief too indiscriminately and was driven by the financial burden thus created into evasion of responsibility for cases of genuine need (usually the young and the very old). In all these ways the poor law encouraged begging and fraud rather than curing it.[54] Much of the society's early work was, therefore, rather forlornly undertaken as a supplement to the poor law or else as an antidote to it. This involved the society in carrying out functions (vagrant passing to parish of settlement, for example) which poor-law authorities, though duty-bound to discharge, were notorious for doing incompetently. It also involved the society in acting as an information-clearing agency, and as a relief and advice bureau to those without poor law rights – or with rights they could not readily prove. In early years almost forty per cent of the society's clients had their problem "solved" by referring them to poor law authorities or, occasionally, to hospitals or asylums. These were chiefly the "impotent poor" (the sick, the mentally deranged, the young, the widowed, deserted or elderly). Other individuals reduced to beggary by unforeseen personal misfortune – not a large number of cases but the ones the society liked to highlight in its

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[51] *Ibid.*, No. 42 (1860), p. 18; No. 16 (1834), pp. 16–17; Select Committee on Metropolis Police Offices, *PP*, 1837–1838 (578), XV, Qn. 1082.

[52] In 1845 the society was responsible for rather more than a quarter of metropolitan vagrant apprehensions and had a better conviction rate than the police. By 1864 it brought in fewer than one sixth of the vagrants and its conviction rate had fallen below an improved police rate: Select Committee on District Asylums, Qn. 1975; *Reports*, No. 47 (1865), p. 11; Ribton-Turner, pp. 673–674. See also Clive Emsley, *Crime and Society in England 1750–1900* (London, 1987), pp. 148–150 and Bosanquet, *Social Work in London 1869–1912*, p. 5.

[53] *Reports*, No. 2 (1820), p. 22.

[54] *Ibid.*, No. 1 (1819), p. 13; No. 2 (1820), pp. 12–13; Minute Book, folio 17.

advertising – were sometimes placed with employers or given supervised loans to allow them to set up as small traders. In cases of large-scale yet temporary distress (a wet season, a dislocation of trade) the society was even prepared to sponsor work schemes (principally for young able-bodied males) in order to subsidize "self-reliance" and to nip in the bud any "temptation to beg".[55] It was not long, however, before the society realised that its methods for discriminating between stranded "genuine" work-seekers in the casual labour market and "impostors" would have to be refined. This was a problem which the 1815 Mendicity Committee had recognized and side-stepped. The Mendicity Society was made of sterner stuff. In 1821, noting that a regular fifty per cent of clients claimed to be "in want of employment", it moved to "routinize" its pre-relief inquiry procedures by imposing a three-hour "work test" on able-bodied applicants as a way of deterring those not "genuinely" seeking to support themselves. In ways such as this the society developed precedents for discriminating between applicants which were later to be taken over by the state.[56] At the same time its members played their part in the rallying of opinion which was eventually to lead to the Royal Commission of 1832 and the enactment of a New Poor Law in 1834.[57]

The New Poor Law when it came, however, was something of a mixed blessing for the society's work. In the short term, it is true, the society had steeled itself to act the role of volunteer shock-absorber, acting to mitigate, but eventually to reconcile the casual poor to the effects of curtailed outdoor relief rights. What it had not foreseen was the way in which this tightening of eligibility would help actually to entrench a scavenging "vagrant" culture among "comers and goers" – those casual workers on whom metropolitan employers drew for their reserves of seasonal labour.[58] The spread of the problem was, in the society's view, made worse by the proliferation of charities for the "houseless poor" which sprang up to cater

[55] *Ibid.*, folios 6, 8, 14,17; *Reports*, No. 1 (1819), pp. 14–15, 24–25; No. 2 (1820) pp. 10, 18, etc.

[56] *Ibid.*, No. 4 (1822), pp. 10–12. Cf. Anthony Brundage, *The Making of the New Poor Law* (London, 1978), pp. 12–14 (parish experiments with work tests, pre-1834); Jones, *Crime, Community, Protest and Police*, p. 190 (adoption of a work test for casual relief applicants by poor law unions, post-1834). See also *Reports*, No. 21 (1839), p. 17.

[57] Note especially the key role of Sturges Bourne, still a vice-president: Brundage, *Making of the New Poor Law*, pp. 20–21, 47–48. The Mendicity Society itself gave no evidence to the 1832 Royal Commission though associated societies in Durham and Newcastle did: Report of the Poor Law Commissioners, Appendix E (Vagrancy), *PP*, 1834 (44) XXXVIII, pp. 864, 880.

[58] R. Samuel, "Comers and Goers", in H. J. Dyos (ed.), *The Victorian City*, 2 vols (London, 1973), 1, pp. 123–160; Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, chs 2–4; and *Reports*, No. 18 (1836), p. 13.

[59] *Ibid.*, No. 24 (1842), pp. 14–15; No. 26 (1844), p. 12; No. 27 (1845), p. 11.

for this group and also by the equivocal attempts of the Poor Law Commis-
sioners during the 1840s to adjust the rules of eligibility for casual relief.[59]

Under these circumstances the society began to take a darker view of the
prospects for achieving its aims than it ever had before 1834. One can see
why. The 1834 Act, wide as it was, had not tackled all the problems of
concern to the society – the laws of settlement most notably – and the
implicit demands which it made on "the voluntary sector" in times of
slumps in the labour market seemed both more severe and more frequent
than formerly.[60] The society had been swept into the abyss twice before the
hungry forties: in 1819 and again in 1830 it had felt compelled to give relief
indiscriminately (i.e. without inquiry) to meet undeniable mass distress.
Between 1838 and 1848 a series of trade depressions plus the eventual ripple
effects of Irish Famine migration caused demand for emergency relief to
reach a level which the society became desperate to ease. Finally, in
January 1848, disaster struck: 20,000 Irish poor "besieged the doors" of the
relief office, the society was denounced by neighbours for attracting rather
than deterring vagrants, and typhus carried off seven members of the office
staff. A plea to the President of the Poor Law Board did at last bring official
action to "deter vagrancy" but only after the society had been forced to
suspend operations.[61] It took the society's leaders some years to regain their
nerve: it is arguable that they never entirely did so.

One aspect of the society's work now remains to be explored. The activities
so far described are bound to leave the impression that the pursuit of
"imposture" was invariably a form of class warfare. Begging in the street or
door to door was, after all, a class-defining activity in its own right. Yet it
was not the only begging tradition. The 1815 select committee had noted
the "growing problem" of begging letters and it took the Mendicity Society
little time after it began work to discover that specialization by beggars
demanded the specialized attention of suppressors. The society set up a
begging-letter department in 1820 and promptly found itself doing brisk
business. The work was expensive but so valued by subscribers that the
society was prepared to subsidize it.[62]

Begging letters clearly struck a raw nerve in late Georgian and early

[59] *Ibid.*, No. 24 (1842), pp. 14–15; No. 26 (1844), p. 12; No. 27 (1845), p. 11.

[60] *Ibid.*, No. 30 (1848), p. 15; Select Committee on District Asylums, Qns. 1991–1994,
2046. Cf. M. Rose, "Settlement, removal and the New Poor Law", in D. Fraser (ed.),
The New Poor Law in the 19th Century (London, 1976), pp. 25–44.

[61] For statistics of "meals given", see table in *Reports*, No. 50 (1868), p. 17. This records
a leap from 87,454 in 1837 to 155,348 in 1838 and a peak of 239,171 in 1847. After 1848
figures revert to pre-1838 levels. For the crisis of 1848 and its aftermath, see *ibid.*, No. 30
(1848), p. 15; No. 31 (1849), p. 14; No. 35 (1853), p. 14; and *PP*, 1847–48 (599), LIII, pp.
347–349 (the "Buller memorandum").

[62] *Ibid.*, No. 3 (1821), p. 15; No. 11 (1829), p. 24.

Victorian society. An explanation no doubt runs parallel to the attempted explanation of fear of deception sketched out in the first section except that, in this case, the fear is more often than not a fear of being deceived by unscrupulous or downwardly mobile members of the genteel classes themselves. One "objective" element in the situation, not to be overlooked, is the spread of cheap and reliable postal services, but the growth of concern is obviously based on wider grounds than ease and anonymity of delivery. As in the case of street beggars, it is possible to discern two conflicting emotions at work – annoyance at the "nuisance" and unease in the face of possibly "genuine suffering". On one side of the ledger, then, increased concern may be linked to a gradual strengthening of cultural demarcation lines between classes and the wish to "police" (or, if a marginal case, to evade) them. On the other – the guilt-inducing – side of the ledger, increased concern is best seen as an attempt to reconcile the demands of class solidarity with awareness of the economic realities of much middle-class existence and of its often searing cultural consequences for dependent individuals made vulnerable by bankruptcy, large families, or the premature and unpensioned death of a sole (male) breadwinner. The consequences for sons could be severe – witness Dickens and the blacking factory – though the consequences for wives and daughters were more widespread and culturally disturbing.[63] It is a well-established fact that the first half of the nineteenth century was a boom period for the establishment of charities for the preservation of gentility.[64] The Mendicity Society's interest may be identified as the reverse side of the same coin.

At any rate, this was one area of the society's activity in which its claim to special expertise actually strengthened over time. Early subscribers were reported to be delighted by the immunity which the society's investigations of claims made on them achieved. By the 1850s the Queen herself was making use of the society and, in 1857, doubled her annual donation in apparent gratitude for services rendered. The society also had increasing success in obtaining convictions against rings of begging-letter writers after mid-century and ran a warning list of fraudulent operators which antici-

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[63] For Dickens's susceptibility to begging-letter writers (and his vehement denunciation of them after being defrauded by one), see Rose, *Rogues and Vagabonds*, p. 34. For further evidence of their activities and of reaction to it, see, e.g., *Quarterly Review*, LXXXXVII (1855), pp. 424–425; and James Greenwood, *The Seven Curses of London* (first published 1869; Oxford, 1981), ch. 15. The broader theme of middle-class economic insecurity is explored by Bourne, *Patronage and Society*, pp. 89–97; and by Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780–1850* (London, 1987), chs 4 and 6.

[64] Frank Prochaska, *The Voluntary Impulse: Philanthropy in Modern Britain* (London, 1988), pp. 38–39. The Mendicity Society itself acted as a charity-distribution agency for this purpose, though on a strictly limited scale.

pates the Charity Organisation Society.[65] It is no doubt unkind to mention that another of its innovations – the introduction of a superannuation scheme for its office clerks in 1864 – was prompted by embarrassment at the discovery that its employees in their retirement were writing begging letters to subscribers in spite of the fact that their salaries had been set by "a somewhat liberal scale" to allow them to put aside prudently for their old age.[66]

Suppressors under scrutiny: reactions to Mendicity Society work

If our efforts to this point have been harnessed to the task of seeing the work of the Mendicity Society as its members and supporters saw it, a full evaluation demands that we find out something of reactions to this work as well. The reactions of three groups attract particular attention.

First the view from the angle of the client. It is, of course, only rarely that we come across a considered appraisal of the society's work from a beggar's point of view. Some beggars were by their nature literally inarticulate (the dumb, the physically or mentally incapacitated). Others whom we know formed a significant proportion of the begging population (in particular, children under the age of twelve), the society usually dismissed as not within its brief.[67] Yet some direct recollections of the view from the other side have survived. The most vivid is that of an 1840s artisan who claims that his encounter with the society turned him to Chartism.[68] The problem is that, the more articulate they are, the less likely they are to represent a "typical" response. (The artisan cited above, for example, not only gave

[65] *Reports*, No. 4 (1822), pp. 21–22; No. 34 (1852), p. 14; No. 39 (1857), p. 12; No. 42 (1860), p. 18; No. 47 (1865), p. 14.

[66] *Ibid.*, No. 46 (1864), p. 16.

[67] For the society's early enthusiasm for removing insane and diseased beggars to specialist institutions, see *Reports*, No. 7 (1825), p. 27, but note also the eventual grudging concession of immunity to blind beggars: No. 26 (1844), pp. 18–19. Policy towards begging by children was a problem the society never fully resolved, though it did establish direct links with specialist volunteer institutions for the reclamation of street children (notably Captain Brenton's Children's Friend Society) and it seems to have become increasingly willing to use the courts once the legal system was adjusted to recognize juveniles as a separate category: *Reports*, No. 3 (1821), p. 14, and No. 36 (1854), pp. 14–15. In the meantime it did its best to discipline any adult beneficiaries of children's begging proceeds. Further information on the extent of child begging is set out in Rose, *Rogues and Vagabonds*, ch. 5. For the overhaul of the court and prison system, see Ivy Pinchbeck and Margaret Hewitt, *Children in English Society*, 2 vols (London, 1969–1973), 2, ch. 16. Comparable patterns of response to beggars of both these types (the incapacitated and the under-aged) in a modernizing twentieth-century culture are set out in Iliffe, *African Poor*, pp. 190–192, 248–249.

[68] David Vincent (ed.), *Testaments of Radicalism: Memoirs of Working Class Politicians cians 1790–1885* (London, 1977), pp. 184–187.

involuntary confirmation of his social respectability by being unaware of the humiliations of the society's work-test and inquiry system in advance of the event, but betrayed clear signs of distaste for his "hardened, brutal looking" fellow clients: he joined the Chartists on the rebound to retrieve his violated sense of artisan self-respect.) To chart the course of "typical reactions" we are driven back to rely on impressions recorded by others, and mainly by the society itself.

Some patterns of reaction seem clear enough nonetheless. On the one hand the society stirred up much resentment among the labouring classes for its policework. The popular hostility which the Metropolitan Police endured in their first years of operation is well known. It is no surprise, therefore, to find the society attracting the same sort of response in the preceding decade of the 1820s: assaults on constables, spontaneous rescue of beggars taken into custody, accusations of petty, venal or criminal behaviour against constables, all occur and recur.[69] The telling point of comparison comes in the years after hostility to the New Police has subsided and been replaced by popular attitudes of guarded respect. For the society's constables this transition is slower and less complete. The cry of English liberties curtailed by spies and moral busybodies, in other words, takes longer to die when confronted by the self-appointed than by the State-appointed.[70]

On the other hand, the relief-giving side of the Society's work did gain acceptance of a qualified sort from at least a major portion of its potential clientele in spite of its routinized procedural humiliations. This acceptance as we have seen probably did not extend to the skilled section of the metropolitan workforce. Francis Place had long ago forced Matthew Martin to admit that "tradesmen" had a horror of begging and Mendicity Society officers were recording similar impressions of "mechanics" even in the depths of the 1840s.[71] Men with a trade were in any case more likely to have support networks among their trade companions than other working men. But among the more precariously placed it was not often possible to put such a high value on independence and self-respect – only to be as selective as circumstance allowed in taking up the charitable package deals on offer. Thus it was that the ticket system of referral was quickly summed up for what it was by "confirmed beggars", some of whom took not just to rejecting the ticket but abusing the giver at the same time; yet in times of

[69] *Reports*, No. 3 (1821), p. 10; "Castigator", *The Mendicity Society Unmasked* (1825), p. 50. Beggars also became adept at evasion techniques, thus provoking the society to lobby for redefinition of begging offences: see note 49 above.

[70] Select Committee on Metropolis Police Offices, Qns. 218–224, 941–943, 1011–1014. See also Greenwood, *Seven Curses of London*, p. 142.

[71] Place Papers, Add MS 27825, folio 259; *Reports*, No. 25 (1843), p. 12; Select Committee on District Asylums, Qn. 1992. See also John Benson, *The Working Class in Britain, 1850–1939* (London, 1989), p. 30.

casual but pressing need knowledge of how the tickets could be obtained was widespread and beggars sometimes traded tickets between themselves.[72] Similarly, and increasingly so in the post-1834 era, the society's meals, "work-tested" as they were, were still often thought worth combining with lodgings at night-refuges and valued in preference to the alternative option of applying at the workhouse. (The "casual Irish" had led the way but the casual English labourer followed.) Against this, the society's attempts to provide opportunities for "honest work" by enticing examined applicants into their paid make-work schemes (milling or stone-breaking for men, oakum-picking for women) led to clients "absconding" at rates sometimes touching eighty per cent.[73]

Overall, then, it seems improbable that the society made much of an impression as a sponsor of culture change among the charity-dependent classes. The society itself admitted after its first few years' experience that its early millennial vision of "entirely eradicating Street Beggars" was incapable of fulfilment. Recurrent outbreaks of begging in the late 1830s and mid- to late 1840s drove the point home.[74] Begging remained a tolerated option among all but the most "aristocratic" sections of the metropolitan labouring population throughout the most active years of the society's operation. It remained that way until the onset of mid-Victorian prosperity brought steadier work prospects and "improved habits" with it – at least for a time.[75]

If, however, the society largely failed to reshape the attitudes of potential clients, it could at least take some comfort from its impact on a second target group – the charity-giving classes. True, the battle against "open and careless charity" was never fully won, and the society never dared to take the step of suggesting (as the Metropolitan Police Commissioners once did) that there be an offence of street giving as well as of street begging.[76] All the same, the arguments which the society put forward to justify its work convinced "those whose opinions mattered" after relatively short debate.

This debate, it must be conceded, was not entirely bloodless. In its first years the society came under attack from an alliance of "old-fashioned paternalists" and populist libertarians which was also to have its say in contemporary debates over criminal law penalties, police and poor law

[72] *Reports*, No. 9 (1827), pp. 16–17; Vincent, *Testaments of Radicalism*, p. 184; Select Committee on District Asylums, Qns. 4035–4044.
[73] *Reports*, No. 4 (1822), pp. 11–13; No. 11 (1829), pp. 19–21; No. 17 (1835) pp.12–15; No. 27 (1845), p. 14; No. 29 (1847), pp. 11–13. See also Select Committee on District Asylums, Qns. 4038–4042.
[74] Mendicity Society: Minute Book, folio 43: *Reports*, No. 13 (1831), p. 29.
[75] *Reports*, No. 35 (1853), p. 16. Cf. Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty* (London, 1984), pp. 365–370; Benson, *Working Class*, pp. 27, 30.
[76] [W. R. Greg,] "Charity, Noxious and Beneficent", *Westminster Review*, LIX (1853), p. 70; Select Committee on Metropolis Police Offices, Qn. 912.

reform. The society was, after all, attempting to enforce aspects of the vagrant law with a rigour and consistency which had seldom been contemplated let alone attempted. Its concern to discipline charitable impulse was novel enough to invite misunderstanding or outright rejection as well. The practical consequences of challenging "traditional" assumptions affected the society's work in two main ways. First, it made some magistrates wary of seeming too eager to endorse the efforts of a "private" law enforcement agency. Second, and more dramatically, it made the society vulnerable to press-publicized allegations of oppression and fraud. The most damaging confrontation with the press took place in 1824 when the society's "honorary secretary" (Bodkin) felt compelled to sue *The Times* for libel after it had published and endorsed charges that the society was hoodwinking subscribers by spending fourteen shillings of their annual guinea on "management" rather than relief and that the secretary himself was drawing a salary sufficient to relieve 750 mendicants at the society's current rates.[77] After this matters settled. There was a final brief outburst of libertarian anger in the mid-1840s but by this time the society was already congratulating itself on achieving consensus endorsement for its work across the opinion-forming classes, and it had hard evidence to prove its point.[78] Such doubts as were expressed were now more likely to come from ideologues who suspected the society of not being active enough in the war against "those that will not work".[79] This leads us to consider the society's relations with a third key group – the group of critics who were ultimately to supplant it.

If asked to pinpoint a date at which the Mendicity Society started to lose momentum and direction, we would most likely come down close to the early months of 1848. The experience of administrative collapse suffered then certainly shook the self-confidence of its leaders. For several years following, the society felt compelled to nurse its all-too-finite resources by

[77] *The Times*, 17 Jan. 1824, pp. 2–3 (letter from "A Friend to the Poor", later alleged by the Lord Chief Justice to be a disgruntled former client of the society: *ibid.*, 12 March 1824, p. 4). See also, for report of court proceedings, 17 July 1824, pp. 2–3, and, for reports of emergency meetings held by the society to rebut allegations, 10 February, p. 2, and 5 March, p. 3. (Note here the key role played by Evangelical supporters, notably Wilberforce, in reassuring subscribers of the soundness of the society's goals and management, but cf. the following denunciation of the society's unChristian attitudes by "Castigator", *Mendicity Society Unmasked*, p. 23.)

[78] *Reports*, No. 18 (1836), pp. 16–17; No. 26 (1844), pp. 16–19. Unsolicited endorsements of the society's work may be found, *inter alia*, in Select Committee on Metropolis Police Offices, Qn. 1756, and in [Cheney?], *Quarterly Review*, LXXXXVII (1855), p. 426. Note, however, the hesitant yet lingering objections to a depersonalized police-oriented approach voiced by the Evangelical traditionalist, Sir Robert Inglis: *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 3rd series, vol. LXXI (1843), col. 412.

[79] E.g., Select Committee on District Asylums, Qns. 1964–1967 (Thomas Wakley). See also [Greg], *Westminster Review*, LIX (1853), pp. 62–88.

restricting its clients to mendicants who could prove six months' residence in London. This in effect turned the society into a charity discriminating on grounds of "settlement" – a criterion it had once deplored.[80] Subscribers were not pleased by the move either. As the crisis-racked leadership had helplessly foreseen, the curtailment of relief activity upset many support-ers: the society's subscription income slid by about one third in 1849 and continued on a slow downward path thereafter. A steady harvest of legacies partially offset this decline but also drew attention to the fact that the society was at risk of faltering in its ability to recruit a new generation of leaders. By the late 1850s risk was admitted to have become reality.[81]

Yet we would be deluding ourselves if we interpreted this contraction of support for the society as a contraction in support for the type of activity it promoted. In parts of provincial England, for example, the local urge to supplement the work of police and poor law guardians continued strong until late in the century. (This was most notably the case in rural areas.)[82] In London as well, the mid-Victorian decades saw, not an abandonment of the volunteer approach to the regulation of "social evils" but a redoubling of effort. The channels along which the new release of volunteer energies flowed did, all the same, reshape the contours of the volunteer world in a way which disadvantaged – even thwarted – the objectives of the Mendicity Society. In particular the new associations meant more likelihood of char-itable overlap, confusion and "waste". The fact that many of them derived their energies from the wellsprings of sectarian evangelical rivalry made them all the less amenable to coordination even though most of them claimed to combine relief work with personal investigation of each case.[83]

[80] *Reports*, No. 30 (1848), p. 14; No. 31 (1849), p. 12; No. 33 (1851), p. 12.
[81] *Ibid.,* No. 40 (1858), p. 12; No. 44 (1862), p. 14. By this time the society's leadership was made up of recruits from two generations, some (e.g., Pownall, Teignmouth) having served from the earliest period, others (e.g., Bosanquet, Westminster – for whom see note 83 below) having been recruited in the crisis-prone 1840s. After this decade active and eminent recruits were seldom come by, though the Tory Protestant politician C. B. Adderley, a recruit of the 1850s, played a key role in negotiations with the newly formed Charity Organisation Society after 1869.
[82] Charles Loch Mowat, *The Charity Organisation Society 1869–1913. Its Ideas and Work* (London, 1961), p. 7. Unlike many other metropolitan volunteer associations the Mendi-city Society had never systematically set out to put itself at the head of a national branch network. It did, in its first years, actively promote the formation of provincial societies in the hope of eventually creating a (never-defined) system of related associations but this network peaked in 1823 with *c.* 20 local societies in operation by which time London eagerness to encourage extension seems already to have faded: Mendicity Society: Minute Book, folio 17; *Reports*, No. 5 (1823), pp. 12, 14. The provincial societies with any staying power were, as a general rule, those founded and/or supported by local magistrates in towns or counties visited by vagrants and casual labourers in their seasonal migrations.
[83] Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, pp. 104–106. See also Katherine Heasman, *Evangelicals in Action* (London, 1962).

The most ambiguous development of all from the point of view of the Mendicity Society was the appearance of emergency relief organizations such as the Society for the Relief of Distress (1860) and the Lord Mayor's Mansion House Fund of 1866–1867. These were bodies which paid lip-service to the principle of discrimination in giving yet in practice intervened so often and so widely as to remove the incentive of the receiving classes to exercise prudent foresight.[84]

All these developments gave recurrent cause for concern to the Mendicity Society but they also created first-rate recruiting conditions for any organization skilled enough to harness the backlash which was likely to follow. By the second half of the 1860s it had become not so much a question of whether, as of when, concern having been aroused even further by a pattern of events not dissimilar from the blend which had prompted action by the founders of the Mendicity Society fifty years before. The economic and political uncertainties of the mid- to late 1860s, the "casu-alization" of major sections of the East End labour market, the displace-ment of labouring communities from redeveloped commercial areas all helped to produce trends in poor law and police vagrancy statistics which reinforced more immediate impressions (personal or press-sponsored) of a revitalized and ever more deceitful mendicant culture.[85] Among the com-mercial and professional classes where concern about "deformation of the gift" once again proved strongest, discomfort at the situation seems to have been stimulated by the uneasy belief that the problem was partly the result of their own abandonment of "class duty". The move to the suburbs, it was supposed, had left whole districts without reliable social leadership or civic resources.[86] In this context, the distribution of "guilt money" through indiscriminate, long-distance charity was understandable, but destined to entrench habits of dependence even more deeply. (As the only repre-sentatives of the gentlemanly culture left in the affected districts, it was the clergy even more than politicians or businessmen who this time round articulated the message of political economy. "The marvel of Christ's life is his repression of his powers of benevolence", as one of them put it in 1868.)[87]

This, then, was the context of the second great nineteenth-century on-slaught against begging and demoralizing forms of relief. Yet it was not within the power of the Mendicity Society to sell itself to a new generation as the answer to their need. The result was the founding in 1869 of a new

[84] *Reports*, No. 43 (1861), p. 13; No. 51 (1869), p. 12. See also Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, p. 246.
[85] *Ibid.*, pp. 241–245; Greenwood, *Seven Curses of London*, ch. 14; Jones, *Crime, Protest, Community and Police*, pp. 129–131.
[86] Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, pp. 247–251.
[87] Revd Brooke Lambert of Whitechapel, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 247.

society – the Society for Organising Charitable Relief and Repressing Mendicity. The prime aims of the Charity Organisation Society (COS) were not to give relief but to ensure that relief given (whether official or charitable) was given in full awareness of the facts, with the "undeserving" being turned over to the discipline of the state and the deserving being monitored to ensure a return to self-sufficiency, not further public dependence. These were aims closely resembling those first proposed by the Mendicity Society in 1818. The similarity was certainly sufficient to induce significant figures in the old society to defect.[88] It was the hope of the Charity Organisation Society that the old guard remaining would eventually agree to merge their business in (and donate their accumulated assets to) the new society. This did not happen. The determination of the old leaders to honour their obligation as trustees on behalf of past and present contributors to society funds was hard for COS leaders to bear: periodic anathemas were pronounced on the old society for its geographically restricted and over-centralized method of operation, its unwillingness to coordinate relief efforts with other bodies, above all for the fact that it "acted not for the public" (as the COS claimed to do) but "on almost mercantile principles [. . .] for its subscribers only".[89] It was an ironic set of charges and it spelled the end of the old society's period of public influence. The attitudes, values and methods of operation for which the society had once stood, however, were by then safe in the hands of its successors.[90]

Givers and receivers: the professionalization of a relationship

It was in 1886 that Cardinal Manning was moved to protest in the letter columns of *The Times:*

> We have been for years so tutored with warnings against alms and doles and private charities, that Mr Ruskin has said he never dares to give any thing in the

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[88] Mowat, *Charity Organisation Society*, pp. 15–26; *Reports*, No. 52 (1870), pp. 12–13. It is perhaps indicative of the generational "fault line" between the old and new societies that the Mendicity Society's president since 1847 (the Marquis of Westminster) died in 1869 and that his son played a key role in financing the COS: *ibid.*, p. 47. Similarly, Charles B. P. Bosanquet, the foundation secretary of the COS was the son of a cousin of Samuel Richard Bosanquet, treasurer of the Mendicity Society, 1843–1882: G. Lee, *The Story of the Bosanquets* (Canterbury, 1966).

[89] Sir Charles Trevelyan in *Charity Organisation Reporter*, I (1872), p. 70. See also pp. 96, 125; and C. B. P. Bosanquet, *London: Some Account of its Growth, Charitable Agencies, and Wants* (London, 1868), pp. 83–84.

[90] For the limited work still carried on by the Mendicity Society after 1869, see Rose, *Rogues and Vagabonds*, p. 95. The society retained a vestigial existence until 1959.

streets without looking on all sides to see whether there is a political economist coming [. . .].[91]

By this time the Charity Organisation Society was no doubt the ideological policeman Manning had in mind. It had certainly gained a high profile since its foundation almost twenty years before. But the purpose of this paper has been to establish that the restraining hand of political economy over charitable impulse had been systematically applied for a good half century before that, with experimental pilot schemes stretching back to an even more distant generation. Not only that: the London Mendicity Society and some of its provincial counterparts, firm in the belief that relief ought never to demoralize, had devised methods intended to discriminate between deserving and undeserving – to target and monitor relief – which were in principle applicable (and eventually taken up) by public authorities. Manning was to go on to insist that "The Good Samaritan did not delay to pour oil and wine into the wounds of the man half-dead until he had ascertained whether he was responsible for his own distress", but here he was in a minority among both public and volunteer opinion formers of his age.[92]

How are we to view the contribution of the anti-mendicity campaigners of the pre-COS era to this firming of attitude? It is possible, by discounting the gap between subjectively expressed intention and objectively measured effect to make some fairly trenchant judgments on this subject. Mendicity societies, it might be claimed, were the shock troops of class war in disciplining the metropolitan (even national) labour market of their era. Their inability to recognize the dilemmas faced by the casual poor in reaching that state of prudence and instant mobility which market ideology demanded of that class turned them into police and providers of palliatives when what was needed for effective culture change was job security and a living wage.[93] If the New Poor Law authorities were the main army, mendicity societies were the scouts and mobile skirmishers. If, on the other hand, one accepts the inevitability of the emerging class-ordered society and the necessary limits on knowledge of distress and resources for dealing with it, then a voluntary society with the mission of spreading resources as fairly as possible under the circumstances may be said to have performed a limited, perhaps self-deluding but flexible and practically useful role. (There is ample evidence throughout this period that some proportion of beggars *were* professionals in deception, however we evaluate their actions in terms of criminality.[94])

[91] Quoted in Robert Gray, *Cardinal Manning* (London, 1985), p. 301.
[92] Cf. Himmelfarb, *Idea of Poverty*, pp. 398–400; Owen, *English Philanthropy*, p. 136.
[93] Cf. C. S. Yeo, "Introduction" to Bosanquet, *Social Work in London*, p. x, though see also p. xii.
[94] Cf. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, p. 117, and, more generally, Harrison, *Peaceable Kingdom*, pp. 217–259, esp. pp. 234, 256–259.

Yet this is not quite the end of the matter for there is a double-sided explanation of function to be recognised here. As we have seen, mendicity societies acted not only to discipline the poor but also to meet the emotional needs of the giving classes. These classes, in order to preserve their own sense of self-respect, needed to find ways of discharging their culturally assumed responsibility of caring for cases of "genuine misfortune", however they defined that condition. From this angle the work of mendicity societies is to be interpreted as a middle-class device of cultural mediation – a way of reconciling "heart" with "mind" – a way of making contact without risking principle. Begging was, after all, an act of symbolic and traditional associations which resonated in the minds and emotions of sections of the bourgeoisie who, in general, had tenuous connection with the labouring poor either as employers or in any other structured way. This lack of contact seldom worries the citizens of modern urban, bureaucratized and professionalized societies. It worried citizens of metropolitan London for much of the nineteenth century. Torn between emotions of suspicion, annoyance, unease and pity, they sought a way out and found it in the volunteer professionalization of the gift relationship.