

On Working Schools
(1697)

Documents containing Locke's proposal are currently on order from Interlibrary loan. Until they become available the following passage from pages 424-426 of Maurice Cranston's *John Locke: A Biography* seems to give a sense of the proposal's character - certainly enough to see the contrast with his proposals for the education of young gentlemen.

The principal domestic issue before the Board of Trade during the sessions of 1697 was that of unemployment and pauperism. Each Commissioner was invited to submit a scheme for solving the problem. Locke's scheme² was rejected by the Board; but it is a remarkable document, and it throws a great deal of light on the workings of the writer's mind.

² P.R.O. Board of Trade Papers. [The have been request from ILS on microfilm.] There is an early draft in the Lovelace Collection (ibid., c. 30 f. 94).

At the outset he briskly diagnosed the causes of poverty and unemployment. They were, he said, neither 'scarcity of provisions or want of employment', but 'the relaxation of discipline and the corruption of manners, virtue and industry being as constant companions on the one side as vice and idleness on the other'. From this he deduced that the first step 'towards setting the poor on work ought to be a restraint of their debauchery by a strict execution of the laws against it, more particularly by the suppression of superfluous brandy shops and unnecessary alehouses'.

As the 'suppression of begging drones' by execution of existing laws might not be effective, Locke recommended a new law: 'that all men sound of limb and mind, above fourteen and under fifty, begging in maritime counties outside their own parish without a pass' should be arrested and sent 'to the next seaport town, there kept at hard labour till some of His Majesty's ships, coming in or near there, give an opportunity of putting them on board, where they shall serve three years, under strict discipline at soldier's pay. . .' Locke also proposed that men 'above fifty or maimed' likewise caught begging without a pass shall be sent 'to the next House of Correction there to be kept at hard labour for three years', and that 'whoever shall counterfeit a pass shall lose his ears for the first time that he is found guilty thereof, and the second time he shall be transported to the plantations'. For females, however, Locke favoured lighter punishments; girls over fourteen should go to the

House of Correction for three months, while those under fourteen should, like boys, be 'soundly whipped'.

Methods were suggested for 'taking away the pretence' that there was no work for the idle to do. First, guardians should have power to put the idle to work with private employers for less than the usual rate of pay, under threat of empressment. Secondly, pauper schools should be set up in every parish to enable both mothers and children to work productively. As an economical diet for the pauper children, Locke suggested that they should have their 'bellyful of bread daily . . . and to this may be also added, without any trouble, in cold weather, if it be thought needful, a little warm water-gruel; for the same fire that warms the room may be made use of to boil a pot of it'. By this means, 'computing all the earnings of a child from three to fourteen years of age, the nourishment and teaching of such a child during that whole time will cost the parish nothing', instead of the £50 or £60 such pauper children cost their parishes under existing poor law schemes.

Locke did not fail to add:

Another advantage also of bringing children thus to a working school is that by this means they may be obliged to come constantly to church every Sunday . . . whereby they may be brought into some sense of religion . . .

This appalling document, which appeared to Locke's Victorian Quaker biographer Fox Bourne as evidence of an 'excellent philanthropy'¹ did not commend itself to his contemporaries,² and it was not until the Poor Law Reforms of 1834 that anything like it was enacted by Parliament: the 'excellent philanthropy' Locke recommended was precisely that which Dickens so passionately castigated.

¹F.B., II, p. 391. [This book, which apparently includes the document itself, has been requested from ILS]

²After the rejection of his scheme, Locke informed Clarke on 25 February 1697/8. (Rand, p. 533):

'. . . I wrote some time since to Mr. Popple to give you a copy of my project about the better relief and employment of the poor, since our Board thought not fit to make use of it, that now the House [of Commons] was up on that consideration, that you might make use of it, [if] it should suggest to you anything that you might think useful in the case. It is a matter that requires every Englishman's best thoughts, for there is not any one thing that I know upon the right regulation whereof the prosperity of his country more depends. And whilst I have any breath left, I shall always be an Englishman . . .'

It is only fair to add at this point the testimony of Lady Masham on the subject of Locke's methods of charity:¹

He was naturally compassionate and exceedingly charitable to those in want. But his charity was always directed to encourage working, laborious, industrious people, and not to relieve idle beggars, to whom he never gave anything, or would suffer his friends to do so before him, saying such people as these were 'robbers of the poor': and asking those that went for to relieve them whether they knew none that they were sure were in want and deserved help? If so, how could they satisfy themselves to give anything they could spare to such as they knew not to be in need, but who probably deserved to be so? One article of his enquiry when any objects of charity were recommended to him used to be whether they were people that duly attended the public worship of God in any congregation whatever? And if they did not, but were such as spent their time on Sundays lazily at home, or worse employed in an alehouse, they were sure to be more sparingly relieved than others in the same circumstances. People who had been industrious, but were through age or infirmity passed labour, he was very bountiful to, and he used to blame that sparingness with which such were ordinarily relieved, as if it sufficed only that they should be kept from starving or extreme misery whereas they had, he said, a right to live comfortably in the world. Waste of anything he could not bear to see Nor would he (if he could help it) let anything be destroyed which could serve for the nourishment, maintenance, or allowable pleasure of any creature, though but the birds of the air. He yet thought very blameable that fondness for birds, dogs or other such creatures which makes some people feed them with such meat as their poor neighbours want and would be glad of.

¹ Amsterdam: Remonstrants' MSS. J. 57 a. 2 B.L. MSS. Locke, c. 16, f, 121.