

THE POOR LAW IN LIVERPOOL

1681-1834

By W. Lyon Blease, LL.M.

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THE Minutes of the Liverpool Vestry are contained in a number of folios, which are preserved in the parish offices on Brownlow Hill. These volumes are the principal source from which the history of the Poor Law in Liverpool is to be derived. Other information can be obtained from the records of various public bodies, chiefly those of the Liverpool Corporation, from contemporary pamphlets, and from the local newspapers. A few details can be found in the numerous local histories. But the minutes themselves provide practically all the material for the period lying between 1681 and the beginning of the nineteenth century. For a great part of that time even the official records contain very few entries of importance, and it is not until about 1740 that they furnish the student with any full information of the working of the parochial system. There are no entries earlier than 1682. It is certain that earlier records once existed, but they have been either lost or destroyed, and the first official entry is the account of Richard Diggles, Chapelwarden, and John Lamond, Sidesman, showing their receipts and expenditure on account of the parochial chapel from April 1681 to April 1682. From the form of the first few entries it is clear that they were made in accordance with a regular practice, and there can be little doubt that Minutes were kept

from the day when the relief of their own poor was first entrusted to the inhabitants of Liverpool. The town was not made a separate parish until 1699, when it was severed from the parish of Walton. But the Poor Law unit was no doubt created by the Statute 13 & 14 Charles II., c. 13, which provided¹ that in certain counties in the North of England, including Lancashire, the townships and villages should have overseers of their own, distinct from those of the large and sparsely populated parishes in which they were situated. It has been suggested that the churchwarden and sidesman of the chapel of St. Nicholas were originally appointed by the freemen of the borough, to whom the chapel belonged. But at some date before 1681 the choice of these offices must have been vested in the inhabitants in vestry assembled, and the Minutes record in unbroken succession the names of the churchwardens and sidesmen throughout the period with which this paper is concerned.

The history of the Poor Law organisation is divided naturally into four periods. The first is the period of universal outdoor relief, and ends with the construction of the first workhouse in 1733. The second is the period during which the complex system of government by a salaried staff under the superintendence of a standing committee attained its full development. This period ended, roughly speaking, with the building of the second workhouse in 1769. The third period is that in which the parish secured full control over such public business, other than poor relief, as was neglected by the corporation. This ends with the inglorious career of John Dennison and the consequent collapse of the whole parochial system in 1820. The last period is the period of government by Select Vestry.

¹ By sections 21 and 22.

THE FIRST PERIOD

The information which we possess of the working of the system at the end of the seventeenth century is extremely scanty. From 1681 to 1707 the Minutes contain nothing but statements of the amounts of the various levys, or rates, the names of officers, and copies of the annual accounts. There are a few indentures of apprenticeship, and one or two curious references to collections for the relief of prisoners of war. After 1707 there are occasional orders on matters connected with the church. But it is not until 1729 that any entry is to be found which concerns the general affairs of the parish. The Vestry met in the chapel of Our Lady and St. Nicholas on Easter Tuesday in each year. There is nothing to show whether these early meetings were attended by a large number of inhabitants or not. The Minutes of a Special Vestry of the 4th June 1700 are signed by the Mayor and fourteen others. Another Special Vestry of the 13th February 1716 was attended by "Mr. Richmond, Rector of this parish, the Churchwardens, the Worshipful Mr. Mayor, Mr. Squire, and several of the Aldermen, with a great number of Parishioners." There are no signs of any transition stage, and it is most probable that the Vestry was always open to all the ratepayers. The functions at this early date were apparently confined to the allowance of the accounts, the election of the officers, and the determination of the amount of the levy for the year.

There was little need for any more detailed attention to the business of poor relief. The town was small, and one church was sufficient for the spiritual needs of the inhabitants. In such a place the character and condition of the recipients of relief

would be known to many of those present at the Vestry, and it would not be a difficult matter to decide how much money would be required, and upon which of the citizens should be imposed the duty of collecting and expending it. But the town was just entering upon a stage of rapid development, and the simple organisation speedily became more complex. The last forty years of the seventeenth century saw great changes in Liverpool. Trade was being carried on not only with coast towns, the Isle of Man, and Ireland, but also with foreign countries. The merchants and seamen of Liverpool were competing with Hull in the Baltic, and with London and Bristol in the Plantations. The growth of the industries of East Lancashire meant increased business for Liverpool. The tobacco and sugar trades were firmly established in the town, and drew regular supplies from the West Indies. New streets were being built, and the houses spread out over the waste land to the south and east. The population at the end of the century was no more than 5000, but it had doubled since the time of the Civil War. It was in the midst of this increasing population, dependent for its livelihood upon agriculture and the sea, that the churchwardens and overseers had to perform their duties.

The organisation in these early years was very simple. In 1682 the Annual Vestry elected one chapelwarden, one sidesman, and two overseers. There is no mention of any other officers. But the accounts of the overseers sometimes refer to a certain Sergeant Roe, who occasionally paid in small sums on account of men swearing or being drunk, and it is possible that he was the constable of the parish. The Minutes were apparently kept by some attorney, to whom the churchwarden paid the sum of 2s. a year for the work. In the year 1700 a change was made in the number of

the officials. An Act of 1699 made Liverpool a separate parish, and provided for the building of the new church of St. Peter. The Vestry accordingly, in subsequent years, elected two churchwardens and two sidesmen. The number of the overseers was frequently changed, and the parishioners made many experiments in this direction before their constitution was finally settled.

The accounts of the overseers are the only sources of information which we possess of the system of relief in this early period, and the last of these which appears in the Minute Book is dated 1705. The funds at the disposal of the overseers were derived chiefly from the Poor's Levy. This was at first ordered as a fixed sum, and it was apparently left to the discretion of the overseers to settle the amount which each owner of land or houses was to pay. After 1724 it was always ordered in the form of a rate. To the produce of this levy were added other sums, which were obtained in a great variety of ways from charitable donations, rents and interest on legacies, and fines levied by the Justices or other officials. There were occasional gifts from charitable persons. £3 were paid by the Corporation every year as interest on a bequest of Mr. Chorley. A small rent was received for two houses in Forrest Street, Chester, which had been devised for the benefit of the Liverpool poor by Mr. Bird. Certain fees were obtained from hawkers. Whether these payments were received directly or indirectly is not clear, but the most natural supposition is that a license was granted by the officers of the Corporation, and the fee, or part of it, was paid by them to the overseers. £2, 10s. was the regular fine for the burial of a corpse in linen. Profane swearing was punished by a penalty varying from 1s. to 5s. These fines could be

imposed by a justice on his own motion, and were paid over by him to the overseers. These entries are not very frequent, and it is not unlikely that the justices of Liverpool, as in other places, sometimes omitted to account for all the sums which they received. Very numerous are the entries of sums paid in respect of "seizures"—"To a seizure of beef," "to bad meat taken from a butcher," "a small firkin of butter seized on by ye Custom House officers." None of these seizures can have been made by the overseers themselves. The solitary case of the firkin of butter was doubtless the result of an attempt to evade some customs regulation. The seizures of bad beef, butter, and sheep were probably made by the officers of the markets, which were the property of the freemen of the borough. There are a few references to seizures of shoes and leather, and the only possible explanation of these is that the articles were offered for sale by persons who were not freemen, and had in consequence no right to sell in the open market.

The expenses of the overseers present less difficulty. The system of relief in such a place as Liverpool was not very complicated. There was no workhouse, and the relief consequently took the form of the distribution of money. Each Poor Law unit was bound to maintain its own poor, and, in reading the accounts, it is easy to distinguish between the regular payments to residents and the casual gifts to passengers. The great bulk of the regular payments was made to adults, mostly women, who received either 6d. or 1s. a week. Children were sent to board at the houses of women who lived in the town, and the overseers paid fixed sums, generally 12s. or 13s. a quarter, for their diet, and also provided them with clothes and shoes. The extraordinary payments were such as might be expected in a thriving

seaport which traded with all parts of Western Europe, and was situated on the chief highway between England and Ireland. Spaniards, Dutchmen, and Frenchmen obtained relief at various times. There are constant references to Irish passengers, and the great war brought a large number of such entries as "To a soldier's child," "To carriage to ye Burial of some dead, and to ye Hospital some sick Soldiers," or "To Soldiers' Wives." These casual donations naturally varied from year to year. The regular paupers seem to have been very few. £40 sufficed for all the needs of the town in 1681, and the accounts contain the names of about twenty adults in receipt of weekly doles—not a very large proportion of a population of more than 3000. There are no signs of that indiscriminate distribution of money which drove Parliament in 1691 to enact that registers should be kept showing the names of the paupers and the amount of the relief. The only effect of this Act which can be traced in the accounts is that the names no longer appear in the accounts themselves, and a lump sum is entered as paid "per week by payments as appears in ye Rolls." It appears from the accounts of 1701 that these payments were made in the church. Some attempt was made to teach the children, and there are occasional notes of payments for their "schooling." A few indentures of apprenticeship are preserved in the Minute Book, and the accounts show the sums, generally 25s., which were paid to the employers as premiums.

The accounts of the overseers cease abruptly in the year 1705. Those which are preserved show little change in the policy of weekly doles, maintenance of children, gifts to casual applicants, and the expenditure on burials, journeys, and other incidents of relief. There are no entries in the

Minutes themselves which give any indication of the course of development. Until 1712 they refer to nothing more important than gravestones, church clocks, repairs of the bailiffs' seat in the parochial chapel, and other matters connected with one or other of the two churches. The minutes of 1713 contain the first order dealing with poor relief. The system of outdoor relief had produced its natural and inevitable result, an increase of pauperism, and the overseers in many parishes in the country had found the indiscriminate distribution of doles less burdensome than the strict investigation of all the claims that were made upon them. The Act of 1691 had only partially checked this fatal practice, and in 1712 Parliament made a second attempt, and enacted that persons receiving relief should wear badges. The Vestry accordingly ordered that this Act should be observed. All poor persons who received weekly allowances were to wear badges with the letters "L.P." (signifying "Liverpool pauper"), or "not to be relieved." The overseers appear to have disregarded this direction, and in 1718 it was repeated, with the proviso that if they relieved anybody who did not wear the badge the amount was not to be allowed in their accounts.

For the next few years the Minutes are silent, but there is an ominous increase in the Poor's Levy. In 1681 it was £40. Ten years later it had increased to £100, and £35 was borrowed to supplement it. The next year it was £160; by 1719 it had risen to £520, and then it increased by leaps and bounds, until in 1722 it stood at £1000. What was happening during this last period is a matter of conjecture. There are no signs of malversation. The steady growth of population, the consequent difficulty of investigating the claims for relief, and the increasing demands of their own occupations upon the time of the overseers, may account for

some laxity. But the chief cause was also the cause of a similar increase in the Poor Rate in every parish in the country. The Act of 1691, which forbade the relief of persons other than those whose names were entered in the register kept for the purpose, had allowed a dangerous exception to this rule. In cases of sickness the overseers could grant relief on their own initiative, but in no other cases "but by authority under the hand of one justice of peace residing within such parish; or if none be there dwelling, in the parts, near or next adjoining, or by order of the justices in their respective quarter sessions."¹ The result of this provision was fatal to the whole scheme of relief by overseers. The tradesman or farmer, who had some opportunity of investigating the claims, might turn away anybody he pleased. But the disappointed applicant had only to go to a merchant or country gentleman, who knew nothing of his character or circumstances, to get an order for relief, which the overseer was bound to obey. Parliament, in 1722, was driven to pass another Act.² The justices were to order relief only when a reasonable cause was proved on oath, and after the overseers had been summoned to show cause why the relief should not be given. Another section lightened the burden which rested upon the shoulders of the overseers. In large parishes it was becoming impossible to examine all those who applied to the overseers or the Vestry, and the Act provided for the erection or hire of houses which were to be offered to the paupers instead of money. The names of all who refused to come into the houses were to be struck out of the register.

The Liverpool Vestry of 1723 ordered that the overseers should pursue the new Act of Parliament,

¹ 3 W. & M., cap. 11, sec. 11.

² 9 Geo. I., cap. 7.

and a Special Vestry on the 10th December considered the steps which they had taken. The Act allowed the overseers either to build houses or to hire them from other persons. It is obvious that a small parish, or a parish with little capital at its disposal, would find the second course the easier of the two, and this was adopted by Liverpool. Alderman Bryan Blundell built thirty-six houses on the south side of his Charity School, and the overseers asked the Vestry to approve of their contract for a tenancy. The agreement was confirmed by the ratepayers. It was ordered that 25s. a year should be paid for each house, making £45 a year in all. The overseers were directed to remove all poor persons whose rents they already paid into these houses. The contract to be made with Blundell was to be dated as from the following 25th March, and no rent was to be paid before that day, notwithstanding that some families should be in actual occupation at an earlier date. The overseers had some difficulty in getting the paupers into the houses, and a Special Vestry, held on 26th January 1725, ordered—

“That the overseers of the poor be supported in the Due Execution of their office, and that such poor persons as refuse to be Removed to the house or houses provided for them by the Overseers be put out of the Book or Books Roll or Register wherein they are entered, and not be entitled to any Rent or Reliefe pursuant to the Act of Parliamt. for that purpose.”

It is not clear how much benefit was derived from the substitution of indoor for outdoor relief. Two years after the houses were occupied the form of the order for the Poor's Levy was changed. The levy was no longer ordered as a lump sum, but the

Vestry itself determined the exact rate per pound at which it should be assessed. For many years the rate was differential. Lands, houses, and stock-in-trade were assessed separately. The rate on land was always higher than that on houses and buildings, and this distinction was maintained until 1783. There is nothing to show upon what principle the Vestry proceeded in making the rate in this way, or why they adopted a uniform rate in 1783. There appears to have been some difficulty in levying the rate upon stock-in-trade. The assessment upon such a variable capital value must always have been difficult. It was easy for a fraudulent tradesman to conceal part of his goods, and so lower his assessment. The rate was also open to the objection that it only affected tradesmen, and the shipowners and professional classes profited at their expense. These obstacles have always lain in the way of attempts to assess personal property on its capital value, and there can be little doubt that they were raised by the inhabitants of Liverpool in 1725. But the Vestry, fortified by the opinion of counsel, upheld the demands of their officers, and the rate, though always resented and often evaded, was not finally abandoned until the beginning of the nineteenth century.¹

By this time the administration of relief was passing beyond the capacity of the unpaid officials. The Minutes show that the Vestry had during the previous twenty years been making various experiments with a view to securing efficiency. The number of the overseers varied between two and four. They were divided into collectors and distributors, and different districts were allotted to different officers. But in 1724 the Vestry adopted

¹ See the Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1724, 1725, 1726, 1739, 1740, 1744, 1745. The rate on stock-in-trade was abolished in 1812. See Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1813, and *post*, p. 146.

another course, and appointed the first salaried official. Mr. Edward Crane, who had been overseer in 1723, was in 1724 allowed £15 "for his trouble in assisting the overseers and paying the roll weekly, which he undertakes to do for the year ensuing, having one of the overseers to go along with him weekly."¹ There is no record of his appointment in the next year, but in 1726 he proposed to undertake the management of the poor for the year ensuing, and stated that a tax of 1s. per pound on houses and 1s. 3d. per pound on lands would be sufficient to defray the expense. It was accordingly ordered "that he be employed therein, and that the Overseers of the Poor be accountable to him, and pay the money as they raise it by the tax into his hands, and that he disburse the same and take care of the Poor, and be accountable to this Vestry for his management therein." Next year he received an "allowance" of £20.² This was the only case in which the Vestry adopted the vicious system of "farming" the poor. In many parishes the "farmer" was not even resident in the neighbourhood, and he was frequently a person of small substance, without any proper means of carrying out his contract. The arrangement was always open to abuse, and there were abundant opportunities for fraud and jobbery. It does not appear that there was any misconduct on the part of Crane, but this appointment was not continued. After two years the Vestry again tried the experiment of increasing the number of their unpaid officials, and appointed no less than eight overseers. It is evident that the change was made in the interests of economy. Special provision was made for collecting the rate. It was to be levied monthly, not exceeding 1¼d. on houses, 1½d.

¹ Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1724.

² Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1725, 1727.

on land, and 2s. for every £100 of stock-in-trade. The overseers were to make the rate monthly, and collect it monthly, and their accounts were to be made up every quarter.¹ These overseers were soon after again divided into two "payers" or "distributors," and six "collectors" or "assistants."² Special provision had to be made in 1729, when three collectors refused to perform their duties, and the allowances of some unfortunate paupers fell three weeks into arrear. The churchwardens were directed to present the recalcitrant officers at the cost of the parish, and the other overseers were ordered to hire three proper persons to do the work until the issue was determined.³

The entries in the Minutes up to this point are almost entirely concerned with the business of the churches, and, with the exception of a few casual references to poor relief, the first secular entry is that which deals with the care of the parish fire-engines in 1731.⁴ But after 1732 the whole aspect of affairs was changed. The church and clergy continued to attract a large part of the attention of the Vestry. But from that date the business of poor relief became more and more important, and a number of other matters of public interest came gradually within the scope of parochial activity. The most important event in the history of the parish is the building of the first workhouse in 1732. From the changes which its erection produced in the organisation of the parish sprang all the complex fabric of government by salaried officials and a representative committee.

The increase in the number of overseers, and the various experiments in the allocation of duties,

¹ Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1728.

² Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1729.

³ Minutes of Special Vestry, 17th June 1729. The presentment was presumably made to Quarter Sessions.

⁴ See *post*, p. 133.

show a steady growth in the volume and complexity of parish business. Outdoor relief was again displaying its tendency to outrun the control of the officials. The Poor Rate increased by two-thirds in three years.¹ At last it was decided to provide a workhouse. Negotiations were begun with the trustees of the Charity School, and the Annual Vestry of 1732 confirmed the arrangements which had been thus made by the churchwardens and overseers. The difficulty of raising the necessary capital was overcome in the same way as before. The trustees undertook to build a house, and to let it to the parish at a rent amounting to 5 per cent. on the capital expenditure. The two wings on the south side of the school, containing thirty-six houses already in use, were added to this workhouse. The churchwardens were directed to join with the overseers in making all proper contracts. When the building was erected, the poor were to be set to work, and no rent was to be paid or relief allowed for any person who refused to come into the house.²

This marks the end of a definite period in the history of the Poor Law in Liverpool. The system of outdoor relief had steadily become more complicated, more expensive, and more inefficient. The registers of paupers and the provision of houses had been only temporary checks. The policy of increasing the number of officials and the "farming" system had been tried without avail. The Vestry now determined to abandon outdoor relief altogether, and to impose the test of labour and residence in the workhouse itself upon all who applied for assistance.

¹ In 1727 it was 1s. on houses, and 1s. 3d. on lands. In 1729 it was 1s. 8d. on houses, and 2s. on lands. See the Minutes of the Annual Vestries.

² Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1732.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONSTITUTION
(1734-1769)

The constitution of the parish was, in 1734, still of the simplest description, and no departure had been made from the lines laid down by the statute of Elizabeth, except that the number of the overseers was eight instead of four. In the next forty years enormous changes were made. In many parishes corruption and mismanagement began as soon as the parochial business passed beyond the capacity of the unpaid officials, without previous experience, and holding office only for a year. The inhabitants of Liverpool, with more wisdom or better fortune than most of their contemporaries, contrived to develop a remarkably practical system of administration. All was done without regard to statutory powers or the general law of the land. In its completed form the constitution combined in an unusual degree efficiency and popular control. The work of relief was done by permanent salaried officials: a treasurer superintended the financial department; the master of the workhouse managed the indoor relief; and the overseers and collectors looked after the collection of rates and the external administration. The churchwardens exercised a general supervision over the whole; and a committee, elected by the ratepayers at the Annual Vestry, gave advice, decided policy, checked accounts, and reported at regular intervals the condition and progress of the fortunes of the parish. The greater part of this complex organisation reached its complete form before the year 1769.

The growth of the parochial constitution accompanied a great increase in the wealth and population of the town. Trade was advancing with

gigantic strides. The industrial revolution was beginning, and the iron and cotton manufactures of Lancashire already showed signs of their future greatness. Canals and roads provided better communication with the interior than Liverpool had ever known before. Ropeworks, potteries, and windmills sprang up in all parts of the town. Its ships were busy, not only in the regular trade with the Continent and the Plantations, but also in smuggling in Spanish America, and in the most lucrative of all Liverpool trades—the slave trade. All this increase of activity meant that the citizens had less leisure for the management of public business, and representative government was the only means of securing efficiency. It meant also an increased population and more paupers. The volume of business was at first reduced by the erection of the workhouse, and some estimate of the great improvement effected by the new arrangement can be gathered from the fact that the Poor's Levy was immediately reduced by one-third.¹ Still further reductions were effected in the following years. The rate of 1736 was only 9d. on houses and 1s. on lands. In 1729 it had been 1s. 8d. and 2s., a level which it did not again reach until 1763.² Even if allowance be made for the increased value of property, it is obvious that the substitution of indoor for outdoor relief enabled the officers to reduce the expenditure by a large amount. But the number of persons to be relieved steadily increased; the workhouse itself required the appointment of some special officers; and the superintendence of the officers meant the delegation of some part of the authority of the open Vestry.

¹ Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1733. In 1734 a levy of £600 was found sufficient (Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1734).

² Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1729, 1736.

There is no statement in the Minutes of 1733 that any new officers were at once appointed. But there are references in the later records to an indefinite body of persons called "Trustees of the Workhouse," and to a governor and governess. Two of the overseers were in 1733 called "Overseers of the new Workhouse."¹ The duties of the trustees are nowhere defined, but they seem to have performed the duties which were afterwards assigned to the parish committee, so far as the workhouse was concerned. There are very few references to them in the Minutes. They varied considerably in number, and the churchwardens and overseers appear to have been *ex officio* members. The exact relations between the master, the overseer or superintendent, and the trustees are very obscure. The overseer apparently regulated the work, while the trustees visited the place at regular intervals to give advice, and to see that discipline was preserved.²

The trustees were merely an offshoot of the parish organisation, and had little connection with the development of the whole. The most remarkable feature of the new constitution was the parish committee, which is to be found exercising a general control over all business at the end of the second period of the history of the parish. Prior to the recognition of this permanent body it was usual to appoint special committees. The first steps were tentative, and took the form of the appointment of auditors of the accounts. Some-

¹ Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1733, 1734, 1735, 1736. The assistant-governor and assistant-governess make their appearance in 1746 (Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1746).

² The appointment of trustees is mentioned in the Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1737, 1739, 1740, 1745, 1747, 1750, 1762, and 1766. In 1750 twenty-seven were chosen. In 1766 they were no fewer than seventy-two. This is the last entry which refers to them, and they seem to have been merged in the parish committee after the construction of the second workhouse in 1769.

times a year or two passed without any such appointment. Then it became regular. Other special committees were elected. These gradually developed into a standing committee. The standing committee was united with the trustees of the workhouse, and more and more powers were entrusted to this body. Finally it acquired supreme control, subject only to the authority of the inhabitants at large. Some of the officers were directly appointed by it; all appointments were made with regard to its recommendation; it conducted inquiries, carried on legal proceedings, superintended the poor relief, opposed and supported Bills in Parliament, and regulated all the parish affairs, both lay and ecclesiastical. Its report was presented at every Annual Vestry, and the Select Vestry, appointed in 1821 under Sturges Bourne's Acts, was nothing more than the old parish committee, with a new title and statutory powers, but pursuing the same objects, and animated by the same disinterested zeal for the public service."¹

The Minutes of the committee, with some few exceptions, have not been preserved. The Vestry occasionally confirmed their resolutions and made them standing orders.² But the only continuous records of their deliberations are contained in the

¹ Audit committees are mentioned in the Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1733, 1739, 1743, 1746; Special Vestry of 14th April 1743, November 1747; Annual Vestry, 1748, 1750, 1752, 1754, 1755. The committee of 1750 was ordered to make a new survey of the town. That of 1752 was empowered to borrow money to pay the outstanding debts. A Special Vestry on the 21st September 1752 made some of their resolutions, which deal principally with ecclesiastical matters, standing orders of the Vestry. This is the first entry in which the term "Parish Committee" is used. The committee was sometimes described as "The Gentlemen of the Parish." After 1764 the Annual Vestry ceased to appoint the members by name, and the order usually took the form "that the Parish Committee be continued," with such additions as the Vestry thought necessary.

² Minutes of Special Vestry, 21st September 1752; Annual Vestry, 1766.

Minutes of a few meetings which were held between the years 1769 and 1774. These deal principally with the building of the new workhouse. The committee allotted the contracts for brickwork, carpentry, and glazing and plumbing. It was left to the Mayor's discretion to enter into a contract with the person who made the lowest tender for gates and palisadoes. The committee settled the plans for the new building, leaving small alterations to Mr. Brooks, the treasurer. They authorised borrowing, directed Mr. Brooks to insure the building, and decided such trifling matters as the style of the clock. Other entries in the Minutes refer to the collection of arrears of rates, recommendations to the Vestry as to burials, the division of the parish into three parts with separate collectors, allowance of the treasurer's accounts, a scheme for the employment of the paupers, sexton's fees, coffins, church registers, the expense of watchmen at the docks, and numbering the houses in the parish. These Minutes cease with the entry of the 1st March 1774. But those which remain show clearly enough that by that time the committee were the real governors of the parish. It was inevitable that the standing committee, once established, should appropriate to itself the management of all matters of parochial interest. A permanent representative body will seldom confine itself to the performance of its original duties.¹

¹ See the Minutes of Parish Committee, 1769 to 1774. In 1788 the committee apparently ceased to exist, and the Mayor and Justices assumed the duty of inspecting the workhouse and examining the outdoor poor. The committee was, however, again elected in 1790 (Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1788, 1790). No explanation is given of this extraordinary abandonment of the most important part of the parochial machinery. The committee after 1790 contained the Mayor, Recorder, and Justices, as well as the rectors, churchwardens, and sidesmen. The physicians and surgeons of the dispensary were added at a later date. The subsequent development of the committee, and its industry in the service of the parish, may be observed in the Minutes of the Vestry and its own Reports, most of which last are preserved in the Minute Books.

While the open Vestry was in course of delegating its powers of control to a representative committee, it converted the small body of officials, changing each year and serving without pay, into a permanent staff, who were regularly re-elected and received fixed salaries. The churchwardens were not affected by any alterations during this period, though they became at a later date the most important officers of the parish. But the records of the other offices exhibit a bewildering diversity of title and function. The "Overseer of the Workhouse" soon ceased to exist, but was reproduced in the treasurer. The "Overseers" were frequently confused with the "Overseer of the Workhouse" and the collectors, and it was not till 1752 that all the offices were definitely separated and the executive assumed something like its final form.

When the workhouse was erected two of the eight overseers were appointed "Overseers of the new Workhouse," and the other six "Overseers and Collectors." The two workhouse overseers were John Brookes and his partner Thomas Cockshutt. They were again appointed by the next Annual Vestry, and received "A present of Ten Guineas value at the charge of the parish." Cockshutt alone was appointed after 1734, and his salary was gradually raised to forty guineas. He continued to act until his death in 1742. The duties attached to his office were to oversee the workhouse, to lay in provisions and materials for manufacture, and to receive and expend the money collected by the other overseers.¹ After his death Thomas Hall was elected master of the poorhouse, "to superintend and take care of the maintenance and employment of the poor therein." He, in fact, performed the same duties as Cockshutt, and was

¹ For the overseer of the workhouse, see the Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1733, 1734, 1735.

required to live in the house. He seems to have combined the functions of superintendent or overseer with those of the master, who was appointed in 1733.¹ In 1744 he was succeeded as superintendent by Mr. Charles Gore, but was continued as master. Mr. Gore was a person of substance, as is shown by the fact that he stood surety for Hall in the previous year in the sum of £500.² For some years after this date there is no appointment of a superintendent or overseer of the workhouse, and the references to the visits of the trustees seem to show that the regular system was that of management by the master under the supervision of the trustees and the parish committee.³ But in 1768 a treasurer was appointed, who assumed all the authority which had been exercised by Cockshutt. His duties were primarily financial, and it was only the peculiar character of the first holder of the office that made him an important executive officer.⁴ This treasurer was Mr. Joseph Brooks, who, for the first twenty years after the erection of the second workhouse, exercised almost absolute authority over the business of the parish, an authority which was all the more powerful because it was based upon respect and not upon forms of law.⁵

For many years the Vestry made no distinction between the overseers and the collectors, and the unravelling of this tangled skein is the most difficult of all the tasks of the student of the Minutes of the Liverpool Vestry. Six collectors who were

¹ The first master was Thomas Devias (Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1734). For Hall's appointment see Minutes of Special Vestry, 12th October 1742; Annual Vestry 1743.

² Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1744.

³ Special committees to superintend the workhouse were appointed by the Annual Vestries of 1756 and 1758 (see the Minutes of these Vestries).

⁴ The committee recommended the appointment of a treasurer in 1766. See the Minutes of the Annual Vestry, 1766, 1768.

⁵ For some account of Mr. Brooks, see *post*, p. 124.

appointed in 1733 seem to have been retained until 1743. Then at the Annual Vestry two "Overseers and Collectors" were appointed, and there is no mention of the six "Collectors." Some of these six continued to act, and it is most probable that they were reduced to the condition of assistants.¹ The two overseers and collectors did not act very long in their dual capacity, and they resigned the office of collectors three weeks after the Annual Vestry. Mr. Thomas Wharton, of Kirkdale, who offered to perform their duties for £20 a year, was appointed "to be an Overseer with them," and received his gratuity of £20.² Wharton continued to act as collector for some time, and he was always appointed an overseer by a separate resolution from that which appointed him collector. The number of overseers, including Wharton, was constantly changed, and varied between two and seven.³ Finally the Vestry ceased to make experiments. In 1752 Stephen Tillinghast or Tollinghurst succeeded Wharton as overseer and collector,⁴ and next year the number of overseers was fixed at five. Some unimportant changes were made after the end of the second period of the history of the Vestry.⁵ But the main

¹ Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1743. Mr. Thomas Wilkinson, who was one of the six elected in 1741, complained of some refusals to pay taxes in 1743. The committee refer to the negligence of the collectors in 1765.

² Minutes of Special Vestry, 26th April 1743.

³ Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1743 to 1751. In 1744 there were three overseers; in 1745, five; in 1746, seven; in 1747, two; in 1749, four; in 1751, five. One of the assistants received a salary in 1752. After 1762 all of them were paid.

⁴ The terms of his appointment are fully set out in the Minutes, Annual Vestry, 1752.

⁵ The town was divided into two collecting districts in 1765, into three in 1770, and into four in 1780. In 1787 the committee were empowered to appoint a single collector, but it appears from the treasurer's report of 1794 that assistant collectors were employed. In 1817 the Vestry elected four collectors and four assistant collectors (see the Minutes of the Annual Vestries). The appointment of overseers remained in the hands of the Vestry. In 1780 they were three in number, one of them being the "out" or "active" overseer. They

outlines of the constitution were by that time fixed, and the subsequent alterations affected only details of administration. No reason is given in the Minutes for these astonishing variations in the number of the executive officers, and it can only be conjectured that the Vestry halted between the two opinions that a large parish required a large staff, and that to control a few officers was easier than to control many.

The other officers who are mentioned in the Minutes of this period (1734 to 1769) are the churchwardens and the vestry clerk. The churchwardens did not at this time play a very prominent part in the lay business of the parish, though their influence must always have been great. Their accounts were copied into the Minute Books with great regularity, and show them at first entirely occupied with Church affairs. At a later date they were frequently employed in the more dignified kinds of public business, as soon as that extended beyond the mere maintenance of the churches and outdoor relief to the poor. Their most important duty was the care of the fire-engines, which were put in their charge in 1731.¹ They were frequently members of committees,² and always sat on the parish committee when it took its definite place in the parochial organisation. But it was not until a much later time that they became, what they were in 1821, the leaders of the parish.

were definitely separated from the collectors in 1787. In 1791 two assistant overseers were appointed. In 1792 there were three overseers and no assistant overseers. In 1796 there were two overseers. In 1809 an additional overseer was appointed to collect arrears. After 1815 the Vestry elected two overseers at a Special Vestry held a week before each Annual Vestry (see the Minutes of the Annual Vestries and Special Vestries, 1815, 1816).

¹ Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1731; Special Vestry, 2nd May 1750. For some account of the early system of fire-police, see *post*, p. 133.

² Minutes of Special Vestry, 8th July 1746, 8th May 1750; Annual Vestry, 1759.

There is no record of the appointment of a vestry clerk until the year 1780. The early accounts and Minutes seem to have been kept by Thomas Sandiford, who received two shillings a year for the work from the churchwardens. But at some later date a regular officer was appointed, who wrote the Minutes of the Vestry and apparently of the committee also, and conducted litigation and prosecutions on behalf of the parish. For a long time he was the same person as the town clerk, and it was not until 1780 that the Vestry had a clerk of its own, though the term "Vestry Clerk" is used in the Minutes of 1752. No salary was attached to the office until the election of the Select Vestry in 1821; but the charges which the clerk made as legal adviser amounted to a considerable sum, and before 1821 his income was more than £1000 a year. During the second period of the history of the Vestry his income must have been much smaller than this, as the civil and criminal business of the Vestry cannot have been very extensive.¹

The full development of the machinery of government took place during the first three-fourths of the eighteenth century. The delegation of the powers of the inhabitants to a representative committee, the establishment of the permanent staff, the separation of the collection from the expenditure, and the division of the administration

¹ The first reference to the clerk is contained in the Minutes of the Annual Vestry, 1750. His bill is constantly mentioned. He frequently failed to present it, and the arrears accumulated to the great vexation of the ratepayers. See, for instance, Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1752; Special Vestry, 21st September 1754; Annual Vestry, 1753, 1754, 1760, 1762, 1763. He was generally a member of the audit committee (Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1752, 1753, 1754, 1756, 1757, 1758). For his income see the pamphlet, "Parish Economy," by Joseph Dutton, 1816. It is there calculated that he received more than £500 a year from ordinary routine work, including litigation about settlements and bastards. Extraordinary litigation brought him as much again. For appointments of vestry clerks see Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1780, 1797, 1830. His duties are fully set out in this last entry.

of relief, were all completed within a few years of the construction of the new workhouse. The death of Mr. Brooks in 1788 ended the anomalous career of the treasurership, and the subsequent form of the parochial constitution differed only in details from that which was replaced by the Select Vestry system in 1821.

It is not easy to discover the condition of the poor throughout the thirty-seven years which separated the building of the first and the second workhouse. The Poor Rate was fairly steady during this period, though it rose rapidly in the last few years. The most remarkable feature of this time is the complete breakdown of the system of indoor relief. The Vestry of 1733 ordered the churchwardens and overseers "to provide a stock and all things necessary to set the poor at work therein as soon as finished, and see that all the poor be employed therein in such proper work they shall be found capable of and will tend mostly for the advantage of that undertaking, and that no rents or relief be allowed to any person whatsoever out of the workhouse." This was a definite attempt to abolish outdoor relief. But it was not long before the officers broke away from this rigid policy, and in 1752 the Vestry ordered that no relief should be given out of the house except upon an order in writing signed by the Mayor or a Justice of the Peace.¹ In 1761 the Vestry again turned its attention to the weekly pensioners, and ordered that only those persons whose names were on a list settled by the parish committee should continue to have pensions, but that the Mayor and the committee might relieve others whom they thought proper objects of relief.² In 1763 the

¹ Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1752.

² Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1761; Special Vestry, 26th November 1761.

Vestry made its last attempt to stop the expensive and demoralising practice. The workhouse had been enlarged in 1757, and again in 1762,¹ and the parishioners ordered in 1763 "that no outpensions be allowed to any poor out of the house except to temporary and casual sick who can't be removed to the said house."² But even the erection of the new workhouse in 1769 failed to achieve their object. The treasurer and the parish committee kept down the expenditure, and the employment of the inmates in the manufacture of clothes and bedding produced a small revenue. But the number of the poor steadily increased, and far exceeded the capacity of the house, in spite of successive additions and alterations. The statute of 1796³ established the position of the casual pauper. The Irish poured over in an endless stream. The end of the French war produced an enormous sum of poverty, which drove the rate-payers of Liverpool almost to despair. By the time that the Select Vestry came into power, a vast army of the miserable and the degraded were in receipt of that casual and indiscriminating charity which produces the greater part of the evil which it professes to relieve.

THE PERIOD OF CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT (1769-1820)

This third period is perhaps the most interesting in the history of the parish. At the time when the

¹ Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1757, 1762.

² Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1763.

³ 36 Geo. III., cap. 23. It repealed so much of the Act of 1722 (9 Geo. I., cap. 7) as prohibited relief to poor persons in their own houses, and permitted the overseers, with the approbation of the Vestry or the sanction of a Justice, to grant such relief. Justices were empowered to order relief for any industrious poor person at his own house, and the overseers could not refuse to obey. The Poor Law Commissioners in 1832 described this Act as "the great and fatal deviation from our previous policy."

Select Vestry succeeded the parish committee the position of Liverpool was firmly established. The few industries which the town possessed steadily decayed, and nothing of any great importance remained except shipping. But it was a seaport at the mouth of the Mersey that was required above all things by the country, and the citizens of Liverpool could afford to abandon their other occupations and throw themselves entirely into the business of transport. The industrial revolution changed the face of England. The demand for coal and iron caused a great increase in the population of Lancashire and the North. Foreign trade, the Colonial trade, and especially the trade in slaves, became more and more lucrative, and Liverpool was steadily ousting Bristol from its position as the chief port of the country outside London. But in spite of its great natural advantages, the prosperity of the town was seriously threatened more than once during these fifty years. The American war crippled the most important part of the trade—that with the Colonies themselves and that with the West Indies. The great war with France let loose a swarm of privateers and men-of-war, and at the end of it the Orders in Council did almost as much harm as the enemy's ships. But in spite of these obstacles the wealth of the town on the whole increased, and the population at the beginning of the nineteenth century was little short of 100,000 persons. This astonishing growth was not without its disadvantages. It produced an enormous mass of casual labour, a burden from which Liverpool is not yet free. The proximity of Ireland caused a steady influx of the most desperately poor peasantry of the west of Europe. Wealth was concentrated in a few hands, and the prosperity of the merchants and shipowners was shared only in a small degree by the humbler

citizens. So far as the poor relief was concerned, this period was a period of constant struggle against the increase of a poor population, gaining their livelihood by the most casual of occupations amid the most miserable surroundings. For many years the Vestry was able to cope with the increasing demand for relief, but the war proved too great a strain, and the breakdown of the constitution in 1817 made the election of a Select Vestry the only means of salvation.

The constitution suffered little change until the end of this period. The most conspicuous feature was the remarkable influence exerted by the first treasurer, and the subsequent rise of the churchwardens. Mr. Joseph Brooks was elected treasurer in 1768. His duties were purely financial, but his success was great and immediate. During his first term of office the administration of relief was conducted in such a way that more than £800 was saved to the parish. The Annual Vestry of 1769 took advantage of this good fortune, and ordered that a new workhouse should be built according to the plans produced by Mr. Brooks. This building scheme required the superintendence of some responsible officer, and made the treasurer for the time being the most important person in the parish.

Mr. Brooks held a unique position. He acted as treasurer for nearly twenty years, and throughout that time exercised the closest supervision over all parochial business. All the accounts passed through his hands. He superintended the construction of the new workhouse, and managed it after it was built. The provisions were laid in according to his instructions, and he purchased the materials used in the manufacture of clothes and bedding. His exertions saved large sums of money every year, and the parishioners never failed to

acknowledge the debt which they owed to his diligence and economy. Successive Vestries vied with each other in their expressions of gratitude for his past services, and the earnestness of their requests that they should be continued. The Vestry of 1774, as a token of its appreciation, ordered that his portrait should be painted "by one of the most masterly hands in this kingdom." The work was entrusted to Richard Caddick. The picture was hung in the Board Room of the parish offices, where his severe but kindly countenance presides to this day over the deliberations of his successors. Mr. Brooks was one of those disastrously rare persons who find adequate opportunity for the exercise of generous aspirations. He was a member of the Unitarian Church, a society which, in Liverpool, has long identified citizenship with religion. He acquired a comfortable fortune at an early age, and found in the public service a nobler occupation than the pursuit of wealth. He served the parish, without fee or reward, almost to the day of his death; and few citizens of Liverpool have done more to deserve the affection of their contemporaries and the gratitude of posterity.¹

Mr. Brooks died in 1788, and after a few years the treasurer ceased to occupy the principal situation in the parish. The Annual Vestry of 1789 appointed Mr. Robert Oddie as successor to Mr. Brooks, and voted him a salary of 100 guineas. This meant no alteration in the duties of the treasurer. But he sank at once from the position of an honorary official to that of a paid servant. He was always a man of superior character. But in England a peculiar dignity clings around those who perform public services without remuneration, and this

¹ References to Mr. Brooks are contained in the Minutes of the Parish Committee up to 1774, and in the Minutes of the Vestry till 1787.

ceased from this time to attach to the treasurer of the parish. The only officers who now acted gratuitously were the churchwardens, and the most formal and dignified duties which were required by the Vestry were performed by them.¹ The rise of the churchwardens began as soon as Mr. Brooks died, and at the end of this period they were practically supreme, subject only to the control of the Vestry. They were members of most of the special committees that were appointed, whether to inspect the workhouse, to negotiate with the Corporation, to prosecute felons, to audit accounts, to build churches, or to prepare petitions to the House of Commons. They were associated with the parish committee in the general superintendence of parish business. With the overseers they paid regular visits to the workhouse. They occasionally helped in the purchase of provisions for the inmates, and regulated the allowances of the outdoor poor.² During the war with France they were authorised on several occasions, with the assistance of the

¹ The subsequent history of the treasurership can be gathered from the Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1789; Special Vestry, 26th October 1791; Annual Vestry, 1792, 1797, 1798, 1799. The report of 1794 was made in the name of the treasurer, but all the other reports which are preserved (except that of 1799) were made in the name of the Committee. That of 1799 was entitled "The Report of the Churchwardens, Sidesmen, and Parish Committee." When the treasurer was appointed in 1821, he was expressly restricted to the control of the financial department. It is not clear when the general superintendence of parish affairs passed from him, but the records show that this duty had been assumed by the churchwardens long before 1821. See Minutes of Special Vestry, 3rd July 1821.

² See, for example, Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1786, 1788, 1791; Report of Special Committee; Minutes of Special Vestry, 26th October 1791; Annual Vestry, 1794, 1798, 1801; Special Vestry, 22nd September 1803; Annual Vestry, 1804. A curious extension of the system of electing churchwardens was made in 1779, when two churchwardens were elected for the new Church of St. Paul's, and again in 1786, when two more were elected for St. John's. No wardens were ever elected for any other church, and no sidesmen were ever elected save for St. Nicholas'. These secondary officials of St. Paul's and St. John's never attained to the position held by the old wardens, who were always dignified by the title of "Churchwardens of the Parish."

overseers and the committee, to raise volunteers for the navy.¹ The cause of their increased importance was the fact that they acted gratuitously. They were men of superior wealth and position, while the overseers and collectors were men to whom a salary was of importance. After the treasurership of Mr. Brooks they acquired the supremacy, not only in Church affairs, but also in the administration of the Poor Law and in the business of local government.

While this period was not distinguished by any important changes in the constitution, it was remarkable on account of the many different kinds of business which were managed by the Vestry through their committee. The committee was by this time the only body which was in any sense representative of the great body of the inhabitants of Liverpool. Any ratepayer could vote on any matter which came under the notice of the general Vestry. The Common Council, on the other hand, was the closest of close corporations. The Mayor, Aldermen, and Councillors confined themselves almost entirely to the management of the valuable Corporation estate, including the docks and the markets, which were controlled entirely by the Council. But the convenience of the inhabitants at large was somewhat neglected by the Corporation, and the prevention of crime, the extinction of fire, the public health, and the repair of the streets, other than the ancient streets, were left entirely to the Vestry. The defence of the port during the French war, and the enrolment of volunteers and militiamen, were managed partly by the Corporation, partly by the Vestry, and partly by private enterprise. The Minutes of this period accordingly refer to a great variety of subjects which were in no way connected with poor relief, and were only managed by the

¹ Minutes of Special Vestry, 21st March 1795, 3rd December 1796.

parish committee because it was the real representative authority of the town.

It is possible during these years to obtain a much clearer idea of the policy and methods of the Vestry in connection with its main business, that of poor relief, than at any preceding moment in its history. The reports, which were annually presented by the committee, have, with a few exceptions, been copied into the Minute Book, and add largely to the scanty information supplied by the Minutes themselves. The workhouse was at first the most important part of the system, and it grew almost as rapidly as the outdoor relief. Six houses were added to each wing in 1776. It was further enlarged in 1791, and again in 1796, and in 1820 it was the most extensive of its kind in the kingdom, and accommodated more than 1500 persons.¹ After the death of Mr. Brooks the management of so great an establishment more than once proved beyond the capacity of the master. In 1791 the scandal was brought to the notice of the rate-payers at the Annual Vestry, and they appointed a select committee of eighteen to conduct an inquiry. The committee's report confirmed to a great extent the charges which had been brought against the master.² The Vestry set to work with great energy to remedy the abuses which had been brought to light. The special committee were continued till the next Annual Vestry. £2000 were voted for the necessary alterations to the building. The dispensary physicians, surgeons, and secretary were added to the committee. The parish committee and the select committee were invested with the full power "for regulating the several denomina-

¹ Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1776; Special Vestry, 26th October 1791; Parish Committee, 19th July 1796.

² Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1791; Special Vestry, 26th October 1791.

tions of the poor." At the next Annual Vestry Mr. William Halliday was elected treasurer and chief governor, while the master was reduced to the rank of sub-governor.

The new arrangement had all the effect which had been anticipated, and the treasurer's report for the year 1793 was printed at the expense of the parish. The appendix to the report shows that all the inmates of the workhouse, except those who were physically unfit, were engaged in some employment. The greatest number were cotton-pickers, but wool-spinners, cotton-spinners, knitters and seamstresses, and smiths formed a substantial proportion of the whole. The remainder were occupied in various ways, including boatbuilders and swineherds, nurses and yeomen of the smithies.¹ For some years all went well. But the Annual Vestry of 1799 relieved the treasurer of the duty of residing in the house, and the system again fell to pieces. By 1804 discipline was at an end. The consumption of food and drink had increased to an astonishing degree. The paupers stole clothing and shoes, and carried out of the house every portable article on which they could lay their hands. These things were pawned or sold, and the money so obtained was used to purchase the parish wine, which was distributed by the nurses and surgeon's apprentices as they pleased. In the six weeks from the 9th July to the 19th August 1801 no less than 306 gallons of wine were consumed, and the entries in the doctor's wine-book filled more than eighty pages. The clothing was given out as lavishly as the wine. In 1802, 850 inmates required £2067 worth of clothes. In 1829 between £500 and £600 provided all that was needed for 1500. The election of Mr. Hardman as governor in 1804 stopped all this corruption,

¹ See the Treasurer's Report of 1794.

and the workhouse was the department in which the Select Vestry found least cause of complaint.¹

By the end of the eighteenth century the activities of the Vestry extended to a number of matters not connected with either the churches or the workhouse. The entries in the Minutes refer to hospitals and prisons, fire-engines and watchmen, the defence of the town against the French, and the enrolment of militiamen and volunteers for the navy. But it cannot be claimed for the inhabitants of Liverpool that they displayed as much genius in all their business as in the development of their constitution. With the exception of the workhouse and the hospitals, there were few institutions which could compare favourably with those of other towns.

The system of police was lamentably inefficient, and little alteration was made throughout the eighteenth century. The first mention of any means of extinguishing fire occurs in the Minutes of the Vestry of 1732. But it was not until 1747 that the ratepayers decided to maintain a regular force of police in the town. The Vestry occasionally ordered payments to be made out of the Poor Rate for prosecuting thieves and rioters,² but the prevention of crime seems to have been left, with lighting and scavenging, to private enterprise. In 1738 it was represented to the Vestry that the old custom of making each housekeeper watch in turn, or provide and pay for a proper substitute, was no longer sufficient. The Vestry accordingly divided the town into two districts, one to the north of Water Street and Dale Street, and the other to the south, and directed that a separate watch should be kept in each.³ The uselessness of this irregular

¹ See the statement of Mr. Hardman in the *Liverpool Mercury*, 16th April 1830.

² Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1738, 1746.

³ Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1738.

system was soon apparent, and the Vestry of 1747 ordered that a petition should be presented to Parliament for liberty to make a levy "for the keeping a Regular Watch, Cleaning, and Lighting the Streets of the Town. To be regulated by the Vestry from time to time." In 1748 a committee was appointed "for giving Instructions to get an Act of Parliament" for the same purpose.¹

The Act was obtained without any difficulty, and a special Vestry, held on the 17th October, appointed eighteen commissioners "for putting the said Act into Execution." A levy not exceeding 6d. in the pound was ordered to defray the expenses of administration. There are very few references in the Minutes to the commissioners and their duties. They were elected annually by a special Vestry, and their names are always set out in full in the Minute Book.²

The organisation of this early police force is obscure. The same persons, sixty in number, performed the duties of watchmen, lamplighters, and scavengers. The scavenging seems at first to have been done under the superintendence of a contractor, and afterwards under that of one of the overseers.³ The whole system was very bad, and as late as 1768 it was a common practice to empty privies into the street at midday.⁴ While the cleansing of the streets was neglected, little was done to prevent crime, and the inhabitants found voluntary associations the best protection. In 1787 the condition of Toxteth Park was so unsafe that the Earl of Sefton and other gentlemen formed one of these associations to protect their houses and orchards, and raised a special fund for the prosecution of

¹ Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1747, 1748.

² See, for example, Minutes of Special Vestry, 17th October 1748, 26th April 1758.

³ Minutes of Special Vestry, 2nd May 1750; Annual Vestry, 1753.

⁴ *Liverpool Chronicle*, 11th February 1768.

burglars.¹ The parishioners at last came to the conclusion that the number of watchmen was insufficient, and a special Act was obtained which authorised an increase.²

The cleansing of the streets at the end of the century was even less well done than the prevention of crime. The dirt was collected from the streets, as the character of the pavement allowed, but it was permitted to remain in great heaps, sometimes for as long as ten days. On dark nights these heaps were a constant danger to passengers, and exhalations disturbed the health and comfort of all who came near.³ In 1804 the commissioners listened to the universal complaint, and published a series of resolutions prescribing the duties of the watchmen. These resolutions were printed in the form of a pamphlet. The town was divided into nine districts, and two commissioners were allotted to each. The chief executive officers were the two captains. Under them were nine foremen. The streets were to be swept twice a week, and on two other days the watchmen were to sweep the sidewalks, kennels, and passages. Their wages were proportioned to their diligence, and fines were imposed on those who neglected their duties. The dirt collected from the streets was deposited at lay-stalls, where it was sold by the captains for manure. The proceeds of the sales belonged to the watchmen in common. The rules conclude with a series of "General Orders to the Watchmen," which lay down their duties in case of fire, nuisance, and crime.

¹ *Chronicle*, 12th April 1787.

² Minutes of Special Vestry, 15th November 1787. The number varied according to the season, and advertisements were issued for able-bodied men who were willing to serve during winter. See an example of these advertisements in the *Advertiser*, 20th September 1790.

³ See the description of the anonymous writer quoted in Picton, *Memorials of Liverpool*, i. 255.

This protean body was assisted to some extent by the Corporation watchmen, and there was a special force for the protection of the docks.¹ The Corporation divided the town into five wards, and provided five head constables and ten assistant constables. In 1811 this number was increased to twenty-one. The strength of the united force was at that date less than 150 men, who were required to protect the lives and property of a population of 100,000. The prevention of ordinary crime was not more beyond the capacity of the watch in Liverpool than in other towns. But breaches of the peace were far more violent, and the police had frequently to deal with extraordinary riots.² A seaport will always attract a larger proportion of the turbulent and disorderly than an inland town. But Liverpool has added to its natural disadvantages the religious antipathies of Ireland, and fights between Orangemen and Catholics were as numerous and bloody as in the streets of Belfast or Waterford. The anniversary of the Battle of the Boyne was the usual time for these demonstrations of religious zeal. On one occasion the police were besieged in their own lock-up, the doors were beaten in with axes and crowbars, the captain of the watch was nearly killed, and the assistance of 100 special constables and a detachment of the 80th Regiment was required before the crowd was finally dispersed.³

The history of the Fire Brigade resembles that of the police. Fire-engines were from time to time presented to the parish, and it was not until 1773 that an engine was provided out of the public

¹ Originally paid by the parish, but afterwards by the Corporation. Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1772.

² See, for instance, Picton, i. 293, 354, 464, 601.

³ *Mercury*, 13th July 1835. The Vestry in 1829 resolved that some magistrate should be desired to attend the meetings of the commissioners, that reporters should be admitted, and that lists of contractors supplying goods to the commissioners should be produced every year. Minutes of Vestry, 29th April 1829.

funds.¹ The Minutes contain few references to these engines. They were placed in the charge of engine-keepers, who oiled and cleaned them, and provided water when required.² The general superintendence was at first entrusted to the churchwardens, who were directed to have the engines played at regular intervals to see if they were in good order.³ In 1750 an attempt was made to put the apparatus in charge of the commissioners of the watch, but this order seems to have been ignored.⁴ There are occasional orders for the removal of the engines to more convenient situations.⁵ The whole system seems to have been most haphazard, and the provision of water was left to chance. In 1754 William Chamberlain was allowed 30s. for a regular supply.⁶ In 1760 the Vestry devised an ingenious system of payment "for the encouragement of persons to bring water to extinguish the fire." The first cart was to be allowed 2s. 6d., the second 2s., the third 1s. 6d., and all others 1s.⁷ The fire insurance offices began to assist the Vestry about this time, and provided fire-buckets. In 1781 the

¹ Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1731; Special Vestry, 24th July 1749; Annual Vestry, 1773. Buckets were occasionally purchased. Minutes of Special Vestry, 29th November 1748; Annual Vestry, 1762, 1773.

² Appointments of engine-keepers are mentioned in the Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1731; Special Vestry, 29th November 1748, 2nd May 1750; Annual Vestry, 1765.

³ Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1731; Special Vestry, 2nd May 1750.

⁴ Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1750; Special Vestry, 2nd May 1750.

⁵ Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1734; Special Vestry, 29th November 1748, 21st September 1752; Annual Vestry, 1754, 1770.

⁶ Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1754.

⁷ Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1760. Water-pipes were provided by the Bootle Waterworks Co. in 1802, and the Corporation Waterworks Co. erected fire-plugs, to the cost of which the Vestry contributed £100. Report of 1802. These pipes were found very useful at the time of the great fire in the Goree warehouses in the same year. An order was made in 1804 for a Bill to be prepared to provide, among other things, "for the better prevention and extinction of fire." Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1804. Nothing apparently was done in pursuance of this order.

Liverpool Fire Office took the engines in charge, and undertook to provide proper men to work them, and this scheme seems to have been retained until the establishment of the first fire-police by the Select Vestry and the Corporation in 1826.

The reputation of the Liverpool charities was acquired at a very early date. The various almshouses, orphanages, and funds for the maintenance of seamen's widows were not all controlled by the Vestry, and call for no special mention.¹ But the Vestry was one of the first in the kingdom to make public provision for the sick poor, and its treatment of the hospitals of the town deserves more than a passing notice. The first step was apparently taken in 1768. In 1769 Dr. Goldie was appointed "to take care of the poor at the same price as he had last year, having discharged his duty to the satisfaction of the parish and poor in general."² The duties of the parish physician seem to have consisted of attendance on the sick in the workhouse and regular visitation of the outdoor poor in their own homes.³ But in 1778 the Vestry made a great step in advance. Proposals were laid before the parish committee for the institution of a public dispensary, and the Vestry ordered that the treasurer, as soon as the building was erected, should pay 100 guineas a year to the committee of the dispensary. This grant was continued by the next Vestry, "it appearing to the Vestry from the return of patients from thence that upwards of two thousand have been admitted thereto since the thirty-first of August last."⁴ So great was the success of the first institution that a larger and better

¹ A full list of the Liverpool charities was published by the Vestry in 1794. A copy is preserved in the Minute Book.

² Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1769.

³ Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1776.

⁴ Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1778, 1779.

equipped building was erected in 1780. The Corporation gave the site, and the Vestry lent £1000 to defray the cost of building. The management of the institution was left to the subscribers or their committee, and the Vestry continued its grant for several years without interference. But the financial crisis produced by the great war almost crippled the dispensary, and after a severe struggle with the economical party, headed by Mr. Joseph Dutton, the grant was increased to 300 guineas.¹ The Select Vestry in 1823 raised the contribution to 500 guineas, on condition that they should be governors of the dispensary, and should have an unlimited right of recommending patients.²

The dispensary was not the only charity which was endowed by the parish. In 1786 four houses were provided for hospitals for casual paupers.³ A lunatic asylum was built by private subscription in 1787,⁴ and regular payment was made out of the rates for all inmates who had a settlement in the parish. The salaries of the parish midwives were increased to £30 a year by the Annual Vestry of 1790. The care of the sick in the workhouse was as good as could be provided in a badly planned building. The special committee of 1791 found the arrangements insufficient, and alterations were carried out under the supervision of the physicians and surgeons of the dispensary. But it was soon apparent that infectious diseases could not be safely treated in a building which was crowded with healthy paupers. Dr. James Currie began to agitate for a separate fever ward. He was opposed, curiously enough, by the wealthy and well-educated, and found his strongest supporters among the small

¹ Minutes of Special Vestry, 6th August 1816; Annual Vestry, 1817, 1818, and the reports of these Vestries in the *Mercury*.

² Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1823, 1824.

³ Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1786.

⁴ Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1787.

ratepayers. After more than one unsuccessful attempt, he succeeded in carrying his motion in a crowded and excited Vestry in 1796. The physicians and surgeons were added to the parish committee "for the purpose of taking into consideration the necessity of making or building a more commodious Fever Ward than the present either within or without the walls of the workhouse." They recommended certain alterations, which were carried out under the direction of the chief governor. But the influence of the opponents of sanitary reform, who feared that a separate building would spread infection and depreciate neighbouring property, was exerted upon the committee, and the appropriation of part of the House of Correction as a fever ward was postponed until the conclusion of the war.¹ Dr. Currie refused to abandon his project, and the Vestry of 1801, on his motion, ordered the ward to be built on the ground to the south of the workhouse. The work was completed with some alteration in the site, and the cost was paid at first out of the Poor Rate, and subsequently by a special rate imposed in 1802.² There was at first some resistance to this new rate. But the arguments of the committee were irresistible, and they were able to report in 1803 that the collection of the rate was proceeding without unusual delay.

Additional medical officers make their appearance in the Minutes. An apothecary was appointed in 1802. A house surgeon to the workhouse is mentioned in the Minutes of the Annual Vestry of 1823.³ By the same Vestry the workhouse was

¹ Minutes of Parish Committee, 19th July 1796.

² Report of 1802; Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1802. The rate was 9d. in the pound. See also the Reports of 1803, 1804, and the *Memoir of Dr. James Currie*, by W. W. Currie, 1831, vol. i. pp. 338-343. The fever ward was extended and a Lock Hospital added in 1824. See the Report to Annual Vestry, 1824.

³ Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1823, 1826.

thrown open to the medical profession generally. The honorary officers are mentioned in this last entry. They were at first appointed by the Select Vestry, but after 1823 by the ratepayers, and there were frequently contested elections.¹ Two hundred guineas were voted to the Infirmary in 1831, and the same sum was given to the Northern Hospital in 1834.² When the numerous institutions which were maintained by private donations were added to those which were supported by the rates, it is clear that the warfare against disease was waged in Liverpool with better weapons than were available to the majority of towns in the country. So highly developed was the charitable system that the Select Vestry complained that it was the cause of a large part of the influx of vagrants into the town.

The history of the management by the Vestry of other departments of public business may be gathered from the Minutes and the Reports of the Parish Committee.³ On more than one question the parish came into direct conflict with the Corporation, and the quarrels about the repair of the streets, the rating of the town dues and the docks, and the rent of the workhouse, deserve special mention. Neither party displayed any bitterness in these controversies, but neither was wanting in that determination with which local

¹ See, for example, Minutes of Special Vestry, 18th May 1826; Annual Vestry, 1829, 1830; Special Vestry, 18th May 1832, 28th February 1833. The polling sometimes lasted for three days, and several hundred persons voted.

² Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1831, 1834.

³ Special Vestries to raise volunteers for the navy were held on the 31st March 1795, 3rd December 1796. See the Minutes of these Vestries. Another meeting was held to prepare defences against invasion. Minutes of Special Vestry, 4th May 1798. Another meeting was held for a similar object in 1803. Minutes of Special Vestry, 28th July 1803; Report of 1804.

authorities are accustomed to conduct litigation. The condition of the streets had long been a public scandal. At the end of the eighteenth century Clayton Square and the lower part of Islington were the only streets which had flagged footwalks. The roadways were paved with blocks of stone, with little regard to the evenness of the surface. In 1799 the occupiers of some houses and shops in Lord Street began to lay down flags opposite their own premises.¹ But private enterprise was too irregular to provide an adequate remedy, and in the same year the Corporation determined that the disgrace should be removed. A petition was accordingly presented to the House of Commons, and leave was obtained to bring in a Bill.

The Committee laid the matter before a Special Vestry on the 1st February 1799. The Vestry naturally resolved that the Corporation were bound to repair the streets at their own expense, and authorised the Committee to appoint a deputation to confer with the Common Council. Nothing of importance was done until 1803, when a decision at the Assizes cast the burden of repairing all except "ancient streets" upon the inhabitants at large, that is to say, upon the Vestry. The Committee assumed the duty with their usual energy. The Corporation lent them every assistance. Six of the Committee were appointed Surveyors of highways. A rate was levied to raise the money required, and the Corporation not only advanced all that was needed immediately, but placed their own men at the disposal of the surveyors.

The parish were more successful in their other struggles with the Corporation, and succeeded in recovering from their adversary at least as much as they lost in the expense of repairing the streets.

¹ *Liverpool Advertiser*, 11th July 1799; Brooke's *Liverpool in the Last Quarter of the Eighteenth Century*, p. 451.

It was not a time when the Committee could afford to neglect any means of increasing the parish revenues. The great war was causing a steady increase in the parochial expenditure, and the Minutes and Reports of the Committee contain constant references to the burden of debt and the growing numbers of the poor. The price of provisions rose, and trade was steadily declining. The Committee, by the exercise of rigid economy, contrived to avoid any heavy increase in the Poor Rate. Outdoor relief was given as sparingly as possible.¹ The collectors were stimulated to greater activity.² But the demands on the parish were increased directly as well as by the collapse of trade and the want of regular employment. An Act of 1793³ added the maintenance of the families of militiamen to that of the regular poor. An Act of 1796⁴ gave legal sanction to the system of payment in relief of wages, a system which in many parishes meant the complete demoralisation of the labourers, and cannot have been without some evil effect in Liverpool. The renewal of the war after the Peace of Amiens taxed the resources of the parish more heavily than before. In 1802 the Committee reported an increase of 250 in the workhouse, and an immense addition to the out-expenditure. A further increase was noted in 1809. In 1812 the Committee stated that "during a year of unexampled distress and with an increase of Poor never before equalled . . . means adequate to the demand have been raised on the occasion under the immediate direction of your Churchwardens." The churchwardens had, in fact, re-

¹ Report of 1807.

² Report of 1799.

³ 33 Geo. III., c. 8. The Bastardy and Militia Department was constituted in 1798. Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1798; Report, 1799.

⁴ 36 Geo. III., c. 23. See *ante*, p. 122.

sorted to the desperate expedient of borrowing, and the debt which was incurred at this time was not finally discharged until after the appointment of the Select Vestry. But on the whole, the conduct of the Committee during this time of stress and anxiety was beyond praise. The nominal amount of the rate remained at the same level throughout the war,¹ and it was not until the coming of peace that the parish entered upon a course of extravagance which nearly reduced it to bankruptcy. But whatever the diligence of the Committee, they could never have maintained the rate at such a low level but for their success in discovering fresh sources of revenue.

It was inevitable that their attempts to impose rates on property which had previously been exempt should meet with strong opposition. Their attention was turned first to the dock duties, then to the Corporation tolls, and lastly to the profits of ships registered in the port. The Vestry of 1786 ordered "That the several Docks be rated in aid of the Poor Tax, &c." The rate was made, but the Corporation, as trustees of the docks, refused to pay. The Vestry retaliated by ordering a rate to be laid on the Corporation tolls, as well as the dock dues. The Corporation then made a fresh move, and objected to pay the rate on the tolls on the ground that some money was due to them from the Vestry as rent for the site of the workhouse.² The quarrel extended over several years, and it is difficult to understand why legal proceedings were not begun at a much earlier date. The Vestry ordered this step to be taken in 1788, but the

¹ The rate was 2s. 6d. in 1790. In 1794 it was reduced by 6d. In 1795 it was again 2s. 6d., and it remained at this level till 1802, when it was increased to 2s. 9d. In 1807 it was 2s. 2d. In 1810 it was 3s. ; in 1814, 2s. ; in 1815, 2s. 6d. ; in 1816, 2s. 3d. ; and in 1817, 2s. 6d. The average for the twenty-seven years was therefore 2s. 9d.

² Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1786, 1787, 1788, 1790.

rate on shipping was proposed, ordered, disputed, accepted, and levied before the negotiations about the dock dues were completed.

At a Special Vestry in 1793, Mr. Robert Carr, a Tory solicitor, who was the moving spirit throughout this matter, gave notice that at the next Annual Vestry he would move that a rate be levied upon shipping. There seems to have been some doubt whether the rate would be upheld, but Mr. Carr cited the case of Poole, where the Justices had recently confirmed the assessment of ships, and his motion was carried.¹ The shipowners objected that ships were not personal property within the parish, and declined to pay the rate. The Vestry of 1794 heard the objections which were made by the committee of merchants, and appointed a committee of six to confer with them. The negotiations were unsuccessful. Mr. Carr was elected churchwarden in 1795; an attempt was made to enforce the rate, and the Vestry were defeated. In 1796, in spite of the opposition of Mr. Carr, a motion was carried "that no more parish money be paid or expended in the defence or prosecution of any suit touching the said rate on shipping."² The merchants, having thus secured their own position, proceeded to divert the attention of their adversaries to a more easy victim. At the same Vestry the claim against the Corporation tolls was at last revived, and a committee was appointed to confer with a committee of the Common Council upon all matters of dispute between the parish and the Corporation.³

The special committee presented its report on the 4th October 1796. The objection of the Cor-

¹ Minutes of Special Vestry, 15th January 1793; Annual Vestry, 1793. A similar rate was supported by the King's Bench in 1824. *R. v. Hull Co.*, 3 B. & C., 516.

² Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1794, 1795, 1796; Treasurer's Report of 1794.

³ Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1796.

poration was not to the principle of the rate upon the tolls. They claimed only that they had a right to set off against the demand of the parish a claim for rent for the site of the workhouse. The workhouse had been built on Corporation land in 1769, and no rent had ever been paid. £4000 had been borrowed from the Corporation to pay for the building, and interest had been regularly paid on this at the rate of $4\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. No lease of the land had ever been granted, and the only reference to a rent being required for the land itself was contained in an order of the Council appointing a committee to determine its quantity and boundaries. Under these circumstances the joint-committee arranged a compromise, which was ratified by the Vestry. The Corporation granted a lease of the land at present covered by the workhouse and its outbuildings, and of three neighbouring plots, for the term of 1000 years. The consideration for this lease was £1050, which was to be credited by the Vestry as paid by the Corporation on account of the disputed rate. The interest then due on the £4000 was to be treated in the same way. The balance of the rate was to be paid forthwith by the Corporation, and the committee undertook to recommend to the Vestry that the £4000 be paid as soon as possible, with interest at 5 per cent.¹

The attack on the shipowners was renewed in 1797. The indefatigable Carr procured the rescission of the order preventing expenditure of parish money in supporting the shipping rate, and the Vestry ordered that his costs of defending actions should be paid by the parish. Ships were then rated at 3d. per ton.² The resistance was again stubborn, and the parishioners more than once

¹ Minutes of Special Vestry, 4th October 1796. The debt was finally discharged in 1798. Report of 1799.

² Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1798.

ordered the churchwardens and Committee to take legal proceedings.¹ The trial of a feigned issue was expensive, and if the appropriate remedy of distress was tried, the Committee pointed out that "every distress would be followed by an action, and thus the parish would be kept in hot water to a time not to be named."² Nothing short of an agreement by which each merchant would feel himself bound could settle the matter. Finally, a small sub-committee met a few representatives of the shipowners. The latter denied their liability. The Committee thereupon, after more than thirty meetings, worked out what they thought a fair system of rating upon the basis of treating the profits of ships as a species of personal property. This system was very effective. The rate on ships and other personalty would have produced £2037, 10s. 9d. in 1800. In 1802 it was calculated to produce £8502. The great majority of the merchants acquiesced in it as soon as it was made. But the Committee referred with grave disapproval to a few, who, "living without the boundaries of the parish, but exercising their business within them, thereby added wealth to their already vastly accumulated fortunes, and increasing the number of the poor; yet, under these circumstances, have refused to contribute, in common with the poorest housekeeper of the parish, their mite to the relief of the distressed."³ The Committee referred in their Report of 1802 to the arrears on the dock and town dues, which by this time amounted to £12,000.⁴ Application had been made to the magistrates, and judgment would be delivered at their next meeting. The Committee were confident that it would be in favour of the

¹ Minutes of Annual Vestries, 1799, 1800, 1801.

² Report of 1800.

³ Report of 1801, 1802.

⁴ Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1798; Report of 1800, 1802.

parish. Their confidence, so far as the town dues were concerned, was not misplaced. The parish won its case, and the Committee found themselves in possession of a warrant of distress, which was perfectly useless to them, owing to the fact that the Corporation had practically no property upon which the warrant could be executed. But it was eventually agreed that the matter should be tried at the Assizes.¹ The Corporation were beaten, and the parish received £9592, 13s. 2d. in payment of arrears.² On the question of the dock dues the Court was found on the side of the Corporation. The law's delays contrived to postpone the decision until 1807, and shortly after the Annual Vestry of that year the King's Bench decided that the Corporation could not be assessed on the amount of their receipts from the dock dues, as they were not in beneficial occupation of them. The decision was wrong. But the similar cases which were decided about this time received such different treatment at the hands of the different judges, and the true principle had become so obscured by the multitude of conflicting decisions, that the Committee were probably right in not pushing on their appeal.³

Ships and Corporation tolls were assessed for

¹ Report of 1803.

² Report of 1804.

³ Report of 1808. They anticipated defeat. (Report of 1804.) The true principle on which receipts from dock dues are rated is expressed in the exhaustive judgments of the House of Lords and the majority of the judges in *Mersey Docks v. Gibbs* (House of Lords Cases, vol. xi.). The fact that those who receive the dues do not expend them on themselves, but on public purposes, does not make them any the less beneficial occupiers. Beneficial enjoyment does not mean personal enjoyment, and the only persons who are exempt are those who hold property as representatives of the Crown itself. In 1826 the constitution of the Dock Board, which had previously been merely a committee of the Common Council, was modified by the introduction of some elected members. An attempt was made to rate the dock dues under the new Act, which provided for this alteration, but the Court again decided against the parish. *R. v. Inhabitants of Liverpool*, *Barnewall & Cresswell's Reports*, vol. vii. p. 61.

some years without dispute. But the rate on shipping was found difficult both to assess and to collect. Several actions were brought in the King's Bench, and after four or five years of costly litigation the rate was abandoned.¹ The rate on stock-in-trade soon followed it.² The shipping rate is constantly described in the Reports of the Parish Committee as equalising the burdens of the "merchants" and the "tradesmen." But the difficulty of collection and assessment was even greater in the case of stock-in-trade than in the case of ships. The Annual Vestry of 1813 decided to give up the attempt to recover a rate which caused irritation among a large body of parishioners. It resolved, Mr. Carr protesting, that "the assessment on stock-in-trade is unjust in principle, and found incapable of being collected with impartiality, and therefore that it be discontinued."³

By this time the condition of the poor in Liverpool was desperate. Prices rose and wages fell. The vast expenditure on the war drained the blood of industry, and the enemy's ships and the orders in Council combined to choke the foreign trade of the town. Dock labourers, porters, and carters were thrown out of work in hundreds. The Irish found Liverpool less dreadful than their own country, and the stream of immigration never ceased. Bad houses, bad drainage, and an enormous number of public-houses drove the people deeper and deeper into the abyss of misery and degradation. There were 1300 paupers in the workhouse, and 8000 in the streets. One inhabitant in every

¹ See the speech of Mr. George Cooper at the Annual Vestry of 1832. *Mercury*, 27th April 1832.

² The last orders for rating stock-in-trade occurs in the Minutes of 1763 (Poor Rate) and 1767 (Church Rate). It seems, however, to have been continued. The committee was directed to consider it in 1776. Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1776.

³ Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1813.

ten received parochial relief in one form or another. Voluntary effort helped manfully to grapple with the gigantic evil. But upon the top of distress came maladministration, and the parish abandoned carefulness and economy at a time when there was more need of both than at any other period of its existence.¹

THE BREAKDOWN OF THE CONSTITUTION

The history of the parish had hitherto been marked by an unusual absence of corruption or misconduct on the part of its servants. But the increasing volume of business, the claims of other occupations upon the time and attention of the Committee, and the difficulty of keeping alive the interest of the large and fluctuating body of parishioners, gave opportunity for abuse, of which the officials were not slow to avail themselves. The reports of the Committee were not copied into the Minute Book after 1812. The Minutes of the Annual Vestries for the few years following 1810 are comparatively scanty, and the only important resolution which they contain is that by which the tradesmen procured the abolition of the rate on stock-in-trade in 1813. This was intended to relieve the shopkeepers at the expense of the tenants of offices and private houses. But the ultimate result, as might have been expected, was to add to the amount which the tradesmen were compelled to pay as occupiers. Finding their burdens as great as before, the parishioners began to make inquiry into the expenditure, and some ominous resolutions appear in the Minute Book. In 1815 the Church and Poor Rates were ordered to be kept

¹ A perusal of the contemporary newspapers will disclose an amazing condition of wretchedness and vice. See, for example, *Mercury*, 23rd April 1813.

distinct, "and applied to the respective purposes for which the Rates will be laid." The same Vestry passed a vote of thanks to Messrs. Moss, Dale, Rogers, and Moss, who had accommodated the parish with various loans "in times of pressing necessity."¹ The parish was, in fact, borrowing to pay the expenses of administration.

The Vestry of 1816 passed several very important resolutions. Mr. Joseph Dutton had recently published an able pamphlet on "Parish Economy," and most of the parishioners were in possession of a copy. Mr. Dutton, during the next few years, took a very prominent part in parish affairs. He constantly proclaimed that he was no party man, and, but for the abuses which he was fortunate enough to discover, he would probably have remained in that obscurity which in England always hangs about independent virtue. But a time of stress and difficulty, and especially a time of extravagance and inefficiency, seldom fails to give such a man his opportunity. One party will support the abuses. The opposition of the other will seem insincere. But the independent citizen, who has not obtained the respect of one faction by losing that of the other, will obtain a ready hearing from all who pay the rates. Such a man was Mr. Joseph Dutton.

It appears, as the result of his investigations, that no less than £11,000 was spent every year in the collection and expenditure of £28,000 of parish money. The accounts, though showing some improvement of late, had been irregularly kept. The debt had greatly increased. Large sums were spent in salaries to unnecessary officials. Arrears were allowed to accumulate to the extent of two-thirds of each annual assessment. Contracts were signed, and payments made for ornamental and

¹ Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1815.

unnecessary works. No corruption was suggested. But a spirit of extravagance prevailed in all departments of parochial administration, and the committee found it difficult to discover, and still more difficult to check any particular acts of impropriety.

The perusal of this pamphlet made the Annual Vestry of 1816 a crowded and indignant meeting. Dinners at the workhouse at the expense of the parish were forbidden. Money was to be voted to individuals only on motion made in the Vestry, and after a minute in writing had been given to the Clerk. No sum exceeding £200 was to be laid out by the churchwardens and overseers without the consent of a Vestry. All works of that magnitude were to be executed under contracts for which sealed tenders were publicly invited. The treasurer's salary, which the last Vestry had increased to £400, was reduced to £300, and the recommendation that the salaries of the governor and matron be increased was summarily rejected. In the midst of their struggle for economy, the parishioners did not omit to press their disapproval of a monstrous regulation of the churchwardens, which forbade any Dissenting minister to visit the sick in the workhouse. The Vestry declared that in future Dissenters should be put upon the same footing as the clergy of the Established Church and Catholic priests.¹

In spite of these drastic resolutions, the abuses still continued, and a Special Vestry was called on the 6th August. An attempt was made to put the constitution of the parish upon a legal basis. The churchwardens proposed that application should be made to Parliament for a Special Act to enable a Vestry to appropriate out of the proceeds of the Poor Rate a sum sufficient to pay the salaries of the

¹ Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1816.

officials. Mr. Dutton attacked the motion on the ground that by placing the administration in the hands of a committee it violated the Poor Laws and subverted the principles of the constitution. He saw clearly enough that bureaucracy and popular government could not exist together, and preferred the dangerous incidents of the old system to the vicious principles of the new. His amendment was carried. An attempt was then made to increase the grant to the dispensary. Mr. Dutton again opposed the motion, and succeeded in postponing it to the Annual Vestry. The meeting closed with a vote of thanks to the indefatigable champion of economy.¹

In the midst of these efforts to reduce the burden of the rates, the conclusion of the war with France flung an additional load upon the parish. A Vestry was called in January 1817, and ordered a special rate of 6d. in the pound. A committee of three was appointed "to inquire into the cause of the enormously heavy County Rates." The Vestry also resolved, with startling vividness of language, that the frightful increase in the numbers of the poor was due to "the unmitigated pressure of Taxation, a Taxation which, in its insatiable cravings, swallows up the Means of honourable Employment for the Industrious, strips the Poor of their scanty means of existence, and threatens those who have hitherto been able to maintain their Stations in the middle Ranks of Society, with immediate ruin and beggary." The last of this remarkable series of resolutions directed a petition to be presented to the Commissioners of the Treasury, asking them to abstain from the forcible collection of the taxes on dwelling-houses, which appeared to the Vestry to be the most pressing burden upon the shoulders of the inhabitants.²

¹ Minutes of Special Vestry, 6th August 1816.

² Minutes of Special Vestry, 28th January 1817. The petition was rejected.

The Annual Vestry of 1817 made further efforts to secure economy. It appointed a Committee of Finance "to act with the Churchwardens in making all Contracts respecting their Office, and in the examination of the Demands of Tradesmen and others upon the Parish." The churchwardens and overseers were directed to appeal against the County Rate. A fresh survey was ordered. The Committee were asked to divide the town into districts for the purpose of a stricter inquiry into the condition of the poor. It was ordered that the assistant collectors of taxes should be remunerated by a percentage on the amounts which they collected.¹ But all the good which was produced by these resolutions were destroyed by the appointment of Mr. John Dennison as churchwarden, and the parishioners found to their cost that no system of government can be better than the men who administer it. The only authority recognised by the law was the churchwarden. But the good sense of the parishioners and the acquiescence of the magistrates had supported the whole complicated fabric of parochial administration upon the steadiest of all political foundations—the goodwill of the governed. Mr. Dennison proceeded to shake the edifice from summit to base.

Even the grave and formal entries in the Minute Book convey some impression of the horror and indignation with which the parishioners followed his headlong course. He was not a thief. He put no money into his own pocket, and his adversaries acknowledged that the collection of the taxes had never be so thorough. But he was arrogant and headstrong. He disobeyed the express orders of the Vestry, flouted the Committee, and cared no more for the protests of his indignant colleague than Cæsar cared for those of Bibulus. The Vestry

¹ Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1817.

ordered the assessments to be reduced to three-fourths of the annual value. Dennison refused to obey, and in some cases actually increased the assessment. The Committee met twice, and were told that the churchwarden had no objection to informing them of his intentions, but would not obey their instructions. At the second meeting Mr. Dutton warned Dennison that he would appeal against any improper charges. After this intimation Dennison proceeded as before. The Committee were never summoned. The weekly dinners in the great banqueting-room at the governor's house were continued in all their former splendour. Enormous quantities of wine were consumed at these feasts and distributed among the clergy of the various churches. There were unnecessary additions to the buildings of the workhouse. Large sums were expended out of the Church Rate on stained-glass windows for St. Peter's, chimes, fire-bells, and a Gothic archway in St. Nicholas' churchyard. Smaller improper payments were made for umbrellas for surveyors, half-a-dozen fine-laced hats, hat-bands at Mr. Barrow's funeral, and 5s. for "Mrs. Taylor's pudding Receipt for Christmas."

Smarting under these impositions, with the demand of the Government for a large sum appropriated by one of the collectors of taxes looming over their heads, the parishioners met in great wrath on the 25th March 1818. Dennison was solemnly condemned in several resolutions, and a special committee was appointed to make a minute inquiry into his accounts. But Dennison's resources were not yet exhausted. Mr. Archdeacon Clarke refused to take the oaths of the new churchwardens and sidesmen, and Dennison continued to act as the senior churchwarden of the parish. He attempted to pass his accounts at a Special Vestry which he summoned for the 20th May. In a hand-

bill which he issued on this occasion (at the parish expense) he invited "the friends of the CHURCH" to support him against the parish committee, and to check "that spirit of opposition and dissent which has of late years characterised every Parish meeting, and almost nullified the solemn obligations and necessary Duties of a Churchwarden." His appeal to the English love of order, established authorities, and the Christian religion was cleverly designed. But he might have remembered that he was dealing with a people who had cut off the head of a most religious king because he tampered with their money.

No sooner had Dennison moved that his accounts be passed than Mr. Dutton rose, and moved that the meeting adjourn till the special committee presented its reports. This was carried by a majority, and after directing proceedings against the Archdeacon the meeting dispersed. Fresh difficulties soon arose. Dennison professed to levy a rate for the current year, and nearly one hundred appeals had been entered before the adjourned meeting was held. The report of the committee was presented on the 9th June, and repeated all the charges which had been made by Mr. Dutton. The Vestry resolved with great solemnity that it owed it "as an imperious duty to itself, to the parish at large, and to posterity (as well as a warning to all future Churchwardens) in an exemplary manner to punish the late Churchwarden John Dennison." It declined to pass the accounts, and forbade the treasurer and all succeeding churchwardens to pay those which were still undischarged. The churchwardens were ordered to issue a writ of account against Dennison for those improper payments which had been actually made. As the defence of the appeals which were to be brought against the new rate would cost the parish £1400 or

£1500, the magistrates were to be asked to quash the rate without hearing the appeals. The Vestry noted the fact that Dennison was collecting a Church Rate, and ordered the churchwardens to see that that duty was performed by the proper collectors. Finally it thanked the churchwardens-elect for their declared intention to act with economy. The last indignities were not spared the fallen enemy, and the tablet which he had erected in St. Peter's Church, "and bearing his name," was ordered by the Annual Vestry to be pulled down.¹ This Vestry also accorded its "most grateful thanks" to Mr. Dutton for his "eminent services," and suggested that a subscription should be instituted to repay him the expenses which he had incurred in the public interest.

There remained only the repayment by Dennison of the sums which he had improperly expended out of the parish funds. He attempted to make terms with the committee through his solicitor, Mr. Radcliffe. But the committee, under the influence of Mr. Dutton, refused to consider his proposals until he had paid the sum of £681, 10s. od., which the magistrates had disallowed on Mr. Dutton's application. The payment was made unconditionally, and the committee recommended that the Vestry should consider the propriety of giving some compensation to Dennison as an act of grace.

Honour being satisfied, and the recalcitrant officer brought to his knees, the Vestry resolved to purchase from Dennison some of the goods which he had bought. The total cost of his improper purchases was £2149, 11s. 10d. The Vestry decided that, subject to the committee's approval, bills amounting to £1630, 2s. 2d. should be settled out of the Church Rate, and that the articles in question should be taken over by the parish. The

¹ Minutes of Annual Vestry, 13th April 1819.

committee ultimately allowed the payment of all these bills subject to some discount. The rest of the accounts remained open, and the proceedings were for a short time dropped. But the friends of Dennison took up his case with great energy. It seems clear that he had not acted corruptly. His splendid dinners were no more expensive than those of his predecessors, and his other extravagances had tended to the glory of the town rather than to his own profit. There was also no doubt that some items had been improperly disallowed, though Mr. Dutton claimed that these were balanced by those which had been improperly admitted.

By July 1822 a requisition for a Special Vestry to consider his case was signed by no less than 105 "very respectable Inhabitants." Nothing was done until the 15th April 1823. In the interval Mr. Dutton and his opponent carried on the campaign with great vigour. Two motions were made at the Vestry—the first that Dennison should be paid £1500, on condition that he gave up three painted windows ordered by him, and now in his possession; the second, that certain items in his accounts, amounting to £677, 14s. 6d., should be allowed and paid by the parish. The discussion was the longest that had ever taken place in the history of the Vestry. The meeting lasted all day, and was adjourned to the 16th. Mr. Dutton and his supporters then debated until the time of evening service, and a second adjournment took place. On the 17th Mr. John Smith, one of the Dutton party, moved, first, that Dennison's claims be rejected; and, second, that the 105 "most respectable and wealthy Inhabitants" who had supported his claim should themselves subscribe the sums necessary to reimburse him. As a slight relief to Mr. Dennison he proposed that the parish should pay £189 for the three windows. The second of the two original

motions was then withdrawn, and the wrangle went on until five o'clock.

On the 18th an opinion of Dr. Lushington was read. The 2nd May was devoted to the consideration of other opinions of counsel. All agreed that though it was undoubtedly illegal to levy a special rate for the purpose of paying the claim, yet it was open to the Vestry to pay it out of any moneys actually raised and in hand. Finally, it was decided to take a ballot on the two substantive motions. The ballot lasted no less than twelve days. The second day left a majority for the first motion of four persons and 137 votes. As each ratepayer had a number of votes proportioned to the amount of his assessment, it appears that Dennison was at first supported by the wealthier portion of the population. But the next day found him in a minority, and on the last day of the ballot the majority against him was 317 persons.

The story was not yet finished. The Annual Vestry of 1826 considered two motions—the first, that the churchwardens should enter into arbitration with Dennison; and the second, that he should be paid 1000 guineas out of the Church Rate. A ballot took place, and after three days the amendment was carried by a majority of 102 persons and 607 votes, again showing the support of the plural voters. Whether from want of funds or from wilful disobedience, this order was not carried out, and the next Annual Vestry, after a ballot lasting four days, directed the same payment to be made by a majority of 151 persons and 549 votes. A second claim was rejected in 1829, and a petition from Mr. Dennison was ordered to lie on the table. Another claim was rejected in 1831. Yet another application was made as late as 1834. A letter was read at the Annual Vestry from “Mr. John Dennison of Kendal,” asking for the payment of

his accounts. Mr. W. W. Currie moved that a committee be appointed to inquire into the matter, but this was negatived on a show of hands, and the claim was never renewed.¹

The most important result of the breakdown of the illegal system of government by a committee was the election of a Select Vestry under Sturges Bourne's Acts.² These Acts were the result of the investigations of a Select Committee of the House of Commons, which made its report in 1817. In many parts of the country the administration had broken down. Open vestries were disorderly mobs. Close vestries were nests of robbery and corruption. The overseers were frequently without experience and authority, and those who had a strong sense of duty were often thwarted by the charitable Justices of the Peace. The rates were increasing rapidly. Relief was distributed without investigation and without limit. Money was paid by the parish to make up deficiency in wages, and the employers profited at the expense of the public. The condition of many workhouses made their name a mockery, and the idle and profligate were as sure of subsistence as the industrious and deserving. Mr. Sturges Bourne endeavoured to provide more efficient machinery, as well as to enforce better principles of relief. The appointment of permanent salaried officials was for the first time made legal. Select Vestries were to be chosen by the ratepayers, whose votes were proportioned to the amount of their rates. It was hoped that some uniformity of policy would be obtained by the employment of permanent officials, and that the representative body would be more careful of the parish funds than a

¹ A full account of the early part of this controversy is contained in Mr. Dutton's pamphlet, "Proceedings against Mr. John Dennison," 1824. Other details are supplied by the Minutes of the Vestry and the accounts in the newspapers.

² 58 Geo. III., cap. 69, and 59 Geo. III., cap. 12.

committee chosen on an open franchise. The great vice of the Acts was that they were not binding on any parish that did not formally adopt them. In Liverpool it was only after a struggle of some years that the Select Vestry was appointed.

The Special Vestry, which received the report on Dennison's misconduct, resolved that a Vestry be called to appoint a Select Vestry. But the parishioners disregarded, upon reflection, the resolution to which they had in their wrath committed themselves, and the meeting was never held. The attack of the party of economy was renewed. The Committee for the Investigation of Parish Affairs published a series of reports. These reports pointed out the growth of casual relief, the want of control over expenditure, and the convincing fact that the rates were now more than 7s. in the pound. In August 1820 a Special Vestry was summoned upon requisition to elect a Select Vestry. There was a long and violent discussion. The Radicals attended in large numbers, and denounced the system of plural voting upon which the Vestrymen were to be elected. The motion was treated as a motion of want of confidence in the present officers. An amendment was moved "that the grateful thanks of the Vestry be presented to the parish officers for their great and disinterested services, and that they be respectfully requested to continue the same." On the show of hands the amendment was carried by 130 votes to 24.¹

The defeat was only temporary. The next Annual Vestry brought a second notice from the party of economy, and on the 10th May the election began. The opposition was vigorous and protracted. Two motions for adjournment were defeated, and it was decided by 151 votes to 21 that a Select Vestry should be appointed. The actual

¹ Minutes of Special Vestry, 22nd August 1820.

elections took place on the two following days. The Radicals were not very numerous, and they soon gave up the contest. On the first day nearly 400 persons voted, on the second day less than 300. Three members were unanimously elected. There were twenty-six nominations, and ten candidates were defeated, leaving a Select Vestry of sixteen members.¹

With the appointment of the Select Vestry came an alteration in the titles and mode of election of the parish officers. Every officer was after this date an "Assistant Overseer."² The Minutes are fuller and more formal, and are always signed by the Chairman. The Select Vestry presents two reports every year—the first to the Annual Vestry, and the second to a Vestry which meets, in accordance with the Acts of Parliament, on the 25th October.

GOVERNMENT BY SELECT VESTRY (1820–1835)

The effect of these alterations in the parochial constitution was greater than might be expected. The outward form was practically the same as before, and the spirit which animated the Select Vestry was no purer than that of the Parish Committee. But the Select Vestry had behind them what the Parish Committee never had, the force of statutory authority, and they were supported by an indignant society of ratepayers. Once more the historian of democratic sympathies is bound to admit that extravagance is not a monopoly of aristocracies. Few bodies are more capable of preaching economy than a popular assembly. The failure of the Liverpool Vestry is not the only evidence that few are less capable of practising it.

¹ Minutes of Special Vestry, 9th June 1818, 22nd August 1820; Annual Vestry, 1821; and Special Vestry, 10th May 1821.

² They were first appointed by Special Vestry, 3rd July 1821.

The Select Vestry was not wanting in industry, and in protecting the important principle of private property, they defended also the vital principle of public honesty. They set to work with great energy to investigate the abuses which had crept into the administration of relief, and their reports give valuable indications of their general policy. From the first they set their faces against that indiscriminating relief of poverty which was at this period practised throughout the country, and had affected even the severity of the Parish Committee of Liverpool. The control of the Committee had, as a rule, been strict. It was first relaxed about the beginning of the century. There is an ominous reference in the Report of 1800 to the fact that the churchwardens had increased the allowances of the outdoor poor, in some cases as much as twofold, "to all according to their wants." It is not surprising to find in the next Report the statement that there was "an immense addition in the out expenditure." But it was not until the last few years of the old system that the pursuit of economy was abandoned. The cost of casual relief for the year ending in March 1815 was £5588. In the next twelve months it was £6152. By March 1817 it rose to £11,230. In 1818, 1819, and 1820 it was more than £18,000 a year. The Poor Rate in 1817 was 1s. 9d., with the addition of a special rate of 6d. In 1820 the rate was 4s. 4d., and in 1821 no less than 7s. 2d. All this excess was steadily reduced by the Select Vestry.

Their first duty was to check the corruption which had already begun, and could only be stopped by an authority armed with extraordinary zeal. An accountant named Edwards was directed to examine the books, and his report, on the whole, was most unfavourable. The churchwardens had been guilty of extravagance and unnecessary expenditure; pay-

ments of accounts and salaries had been allowed by the treasurer without the written order of the churchwardens; the churchwardens themselves had habitually paid large sums to parish officers without requiring regular accounts; the expenditure on wine and spirits had always been excessive. Finally, "the accounts were confused and irregular to a degree, calculated to admit of great loss, profligate expenditure, and even designed frauds." Whole streets had been passed over in making the assessments, to the great profit of the landlords and loss of the parish. Not more than one-third of the sums actually assessed were paid, and the proportion of dwelling-houses which paid rates was not even one-fourth of the whole number assessed. Many of these houses were occupied by persons in receipt of outdoor relief.

Abuses in the distribution of relief were numerous. Persons to whom relief had been granted in cases of temporary need, such as illness or childbirth, had remained on the books for as long as thirty years. Some had applied for relief on the ground that they could not otherwise support their children, and had continued to receive it when the same children had acquired sufficient means to support their parents. All the evils which were so heartily condemned by the Poor Law Commissioners in 1834 were at this time flourishing in Liverpool, and they were destroyed by the adoption of those principles which the Commissioners recommended. The Select Vestry found that the best remedy was the rigorous application of the labour test. Pecuniary relief was only to be granted "in cases of occasional and temporary emergence." Men were employed in making roads, in cultivating a piece of vacant ground known as the "Rectors' Fields," in cutting stone in the quarry at Brownlow Hill, or in breaking stones for the highways. Children of the

outdoor poor were employed in making pins, and when this was found unprofitable, in weaving. Many of these children were apprenticed to manufacturers, and their good character and the double supply of clothing with which they were equipped maintained a great demand for their services. The paupers in the house were set to whitewash the cellar dwellings of the town. Every man, woman, and child, whom age or infirmity did not make physically incapable, gave the parish some return in the form of labour for the sums which were expended in relief. The most striking testimony to the wisdom of the new policy is afforded by the reduction in the number of paupers, and the amount of the annual expenditure. In the first six months of 1819 the number of indoor poor was 6410, and of outdoor poor 14,800. In the corresponding periods of 1822 the numbers were 3901 and 6694. The expenditure had in the meantime fallen from £21,210 to £10,395.¹ During the years ending in March 1820 and March 1823, the average weekly numbers and the total expenditure were ²—

Year.	Number in House.	Cost.	Outdoor Poor.	Cost.
1819-20	1562	£12,819 19 2	3553	£25,494 19 0
1822-23	1142	7,027 0 0	1719	10,049 13 0

At the same time, residence in the workhouse was made less attractive by cutting down the supplies of articles of luxury. Tobacco and snuff were distributed only to the aged. Ale was allowed to nurses, foremen, and others in confidential situations, and the ordinary pauper could only obtain it in case of illness. The Select Vestry adopted this policy "from the conviction that the Law does not authorise the providing the poor with anything beyond a sufficiency of plain and wholesome food ;

¹ Report of October 1822.

² Report of April 1823.

consequently that, if they allow indulgences which are not attainable by vast numbers of the industrious and independent poor, they exceed the Powers with which they are entrusted as dispensers of the parish funds, and become fairly liable to the charge of offering a direct premium upon Pauperism."

The cold-blooded administration of the Select Vestry drew some protest from charitable rate-payers, and in the Report of the 25th August 1822 the Vestry defended its policy in words which should be inscribed in letters of gold in the office of every parochial authority in the kingdom.

"Having already trespassed upon your time to an extent far beyond their original intention, the Select Vestry will now close their Report by submitting one or two observations to such persons as may be of Opinion that, in the exercise of the discretion with which they have been vested, they have distributed relief with too sparing a hand. The arduous and responsible Duty which devolves upon men who have the distribution of public funds will not be disputed; but it is sometimes overlooked, that although some discretion is permitted, that discretion is regulated and limited within narrow bounds. Relief is to be granted by Rule, and according to Law, and not capriciously, or from the irregular impulses of compassion. He who dispenses from the public purse is bound to recollect that the money he bestows upon one man has been previously taken from another; that what he is about to confer upon a pauper has been drawn from the earnings, perhaps from the hard and laborious earnings, of independent labour; that the existence of Parish Rates is in itself an evil, only to be tolerated in the choice of difficulties, consequently that the appropriation of the parish funds, in every instance, can be justified only by the necessity of the case."

In spite of the reduction of expenditure in relief and economies effected by alterations in the staff, the Select Vestry were confronted with serious difficulties in their efforts to lessen the burden of the ratepayers. The town swarmed with ale-houses and dram shops. Mr. Dutton stated in his "Parish Economy" that every ninth house in the town was one or the other. In their Report of the 21st October 1821 the Select Vestry said that the number of licensed houses was twice as large in proportion to the population as the average of the other large towns of the kingdom. They found the existence of these establishments to be the cause "of the wretched and abandoned state of a great number of the poor of this Parish," and sent a deputation to the Mayor to represent to him the importance of gradually diminishing the number of licenses. In the meantime, they were determined to enforce in the most summary way the payment of the sums assessed upon these premises towards the relief of the distress for which they were so largely responsible.

A second difficulty was the large number of vagrants in the town. About this period we find the first traces in the Minutes of the great invasion of Liverpool by the Irish labourers. These unhappy people came over in great crowds to seek in England the sustenance which they could no longer find in their native land. The melancholy procession passed through the town and spread itself over the surrounding districts in search of work. The vast majority found themselves no more fortunate in England than in their own country, and returned in misery and despair to wait about the streets of Liverpool until they were shipped back to Ireland. The cost of this fell in the first instance upon the parish, and it was not until the town clerk reduced his law charges in 1823

that it was worth while to apply for repayment by the county. Two-thirds of the poor who received casual relief were Irish.¹ The number of those who were passed over to Ireland in 1825 was as large as 1100. The Report presented on the 31st March 1827 stated that more than 7000 had been sent back in the preceding twelve months. No less than 3343 of these were chargeable to the parish of Liverpool. Some of them came from the south of England. So great were the advantages which were afforded to the suffering poor in Liverpool, that many came even from Bristol. A building was provided in which the poor wretches were housed pending the departure of their ship. So foul did this become, that in 1829 it was reported to the county magistrates as a public nuisance. But it was not until 1832, when a visitation of cholera was daily expected, that the Select Vestry awoke to a sense of its responsibilities, and part of a building at the back of the parish offices was fitted up for the purpose of a pass house.

The Select Vestry, on assuming office, found a great inequality in the mode of assessment of small houses. Many of these were altogether omitted from the Rate Book, and only a small portion paid the rates which were actually laid upon them. By one of Sturges Bourne's Acts, when houses of a yearly value of less than £20 were let for any less term than one year on any agreement by which the rent should be reserved or made payable at any shorter period than three months, the occupiers were exempt from the Poor Rate, and the burden was thrown upon the owners. In Liverpool this Act withdrew from liability the tenants of a very large proportion of the houses. In 1823 the small tenements were about 14,000 in number, or nearly

¹ Minutes of Vestry, 1st October 1824.

two-thirds of the whole.¹ No town has suffered more severely than Liverpool from the misdeeds of past generations. The main object of the citizens of the eighteenth century was the acquisition of wealth. The glory of the city, the health of the inhabitants, and the ease of posterity had been thrust into the background. Hospitals, poor relief, and other ephemeral remedies had been generously applied. But the paving of the streets, the supply of water, the system of sewers, and, above all, the housing of the poor, had been shamefully neglected. Many thousands of persons dwelt in houses which had neither water-pipes nor sewers.² The dank and noisome cellars, spread with filthy straw, were the sleeping places of thousands more. The rents of these dwellings were as precarious as the lives of those who inhabited them, and they had never yet paid rates. It was at one time a common practice to let them to the miserable and degraded for the express purpose of avoiding the demands of the parish collectors. A respectable and industrious tenant would probably be rated, and the rent which he could afford to pay would be reduced accordingly. But an idle, thriftless, and irresponsible person could claim exemption from rates on the ground that he had not the means of paying them. It was therefore to the interest of the owner of this type of property to fill it with incorrigible rogues, trusting that the occasional rents which he might be able to exact from them would amount in the whole to more than he could obtain from the regular payments of a decent member of society. So widespread had this mischief become that, in 1769, the parish com-

¹ Report, 1st April 1823.

² Whitechapel and Paradise Street were frequently flooded. In 1789 large numbers were driven out of their houses, and the vacant wards of the infirmary were turned into temporary residences for them (Brooke, p. 452, Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1790).

mittee ordered the collectors to apply to the magistrates "for Warrants to levy the Taxes upon Persons in Arrear and especially on Tenants who take House or Lands to clear them of Taxes."¹ At the same time the Mayor and the committee published a remonstrance, pointing out that this practice was filling the streets with begging women, children, whores, and thieves, and by giving multitudes of poor people a settlement in the parish was only increasing the burdens of the ratepayers.²

Soon after the Select Vestry came into power, an attempt was made to recover rates from cottage property. A Special Vestry, held on the 6th December 1821, ordered, by a majority of 195 persons and 1536 votes, that the immediate lessors of houses yielding between £6 and £20 yearly should be assessed, a reasonable deduction, not exceeding one-half, being made from the full nominal rent. The opposition was violent. The landlords pointed out that the rents were precarious, that the repairs were costly, and that the burden must ultimately fall upon the unfortunate tenants. Mr. Churchwarden Benson stated in reply that, with a single exception, all the persons to whom he had given relief had told him that it served to pay their rent and not to provide them with food. The landlords were, in fact, drawing their rents from the parish rates, to which they refused to contribute a farthing. The war which thus began lasted intermittently for nearly twelve years, and ended in the complete victory of the landlords.

Its course can be traced in the Reports of the Select Vestry from 1823 onwards. Negotiations failed to produce any effect. When legal proceed-

¹ Minutes of Parish Committee, 12th December 1769.

² *Liverpool Chronicle*, 28th December 1769. This proclamation is set out in full in Troughton's *History of Liverpool*.

ings were taken, the landlords proceeded to evade the statute by making their tenancy agreements by the year, but collecting the rent by the week or month. This state of things was allowed to continue until 1830. The Select Vestry then reported to the Annual Vestry that out of 26,230 tenements in the parish "upwards of 18,000 assessed at £225,000 have evaded the payment of Parish and County Rates." A Bill had been introduced in the House of Commons by Mr. Slaney in 1829, and again in 1830, and the Select Vestry had presented a petition in its support. They had communicated with other parishes labouring under similar grievances, and had great hopes of success. The Vestry directed that if the Bill failed to pass, the Select Vestry should take proper measures to obtain a local Act.

Slaney's Bill was not carried into law, and a Special Vestry met on the 27th January 1831 to consider a local Bill. The approval of this meeting drove the landlords to present a requisition for a Special Vestry to rescind the order. The meeting was packed by the landlords and their supporters, and their motion was carried. But they were beaten at the end of a single day's poll by such a heavy majority that they gave up the contest. The Bill was supported in Parliament with all the energy of a local authority seeking to increase its revenues. It was opposed with all the energy of landlords seeking to protect their own. It is not surprising that even in a Whig House of Commons the owners of real property had the best of the contest. The Bill was only saved by its supporters consenting to reduce the maximum annual value of houses affected by it from £15 to £12.

The landlords attempted to retaliate at the next Vestry meeting. A clause had been originally inserted in the Bill which gave the landlords a power

of taking summary possession of their houses, in case the tenants failed to pay the rent. This clause was struck out of the Bill. The landlords accordingly moved that the Select Vestry should apply for a special Act containing the lost clause. The motion was carried on a poll as well as on a show of hands. "But Mr. Wotherspoon, a Ratepayer, attended at the taking of the Votes, and protested against the Proceedings altogether as having no relation to Parochial business, and gave notice to the Churchwardens that he should oppose the passing of their Accounts if they contained any Item of Expenditure on account of the Summary Possession Bill." This very reasonable objection seems to have had effect. The Bill was never prepared, and at the Annual Vestry of 1832, the Select Vestry reported with satisfaction that they had received £4230 in respect of cottage property.

All these meetings were the scene of the wildest disorder. The slight opposition which had been shown on the original appointment of the Select Vestry had soon vanished. The efficiency of the new administration, and the consequent reduction of the rates by one-half had disarmed even the most vigorous champions of popular rights. But the rating of cottage property stirred up hostility not only to that particular measure, but to every proposition made by the Select Vestry, and to the principles upon which its constitution was based. One honest grievance begets many bastards. The church was crowded at every meeting by angry Radicals, who opposed every motion made by the official party. The sacred watchwords of liberty and economy were declaimed with increasing vigour. The nominees of the Select Vestry were opposed. The salaries were cut down. Scandals were discovered at the workhouse. The accounts were not passed. Every possible opportunity was

taken for attacking the policy and methods of the Select Vestry. Even a meeting summoned to consider the measures to be taken against cholera ended in a wrangle about cottage rates. The defenders of the Special Vestry were greeted with howls and hisses, and cries of "He's not a rate-payer!" "Pay your rates!" while Dr. Collins and the other popular champions spoke amid thunders of applause. The demand for a poll, which followed every defeat of an official motion, was the signal for renewed uproar, and meetings were sometimes prolonged, amid incessant clamour and interruption, from midday to six o'clock. It is significant that every amendment which was carried in the church was beaten at the poll by a majority containing the larger proportion of plural voters.

The struggle lasted until the Annual Vestry of 1833. At the Vestry of 1832 the opposition moved that cottage owners, owners of ships or stock-in-trade be exempt from the rates, and that the Small Tenement Act be repealed. The official party moved that ships and stock-in-trade only be exempt. The usual wrangle followed. The meeting was packed by the Select Vestry, and they were successful both on the show of hands and at the poll. But the tide soon turned. At the Vestry of 1833 the landlords triumphed over their adversaries. It was moved that the Small Tenements Act be repealed. The churchwardens said that they would not oppose the motion, and it was carried unanimously "amidst great cheering and clapping of hands." The contemporary account proceeds: "This concession acted like oil on the troubled waters. All was instantly harmony and good-humour, and several of the amendments were withdrawn."¹ It is rather melancholy to find that with the liability of the cottage owners vanished all the

¹ *Liverpool Mercury*.

grievances against which they had fought so strenuously. This Vestry was perhaps the most turbulent of all that had met since 1821. Those which followed it were conducted with all proper decency and order. There was some heated discussion about the Church Rate, and occasional attacks upon individuals. But the salaries were passed without question, the accounts were hardly discussed, the officials were unanimously elected, and nothing more was heard of abuse of the inmates of the workhouse. The Select Vestry itself had lately been denounced as a wealthy oligarchy, which employed an army of useless and expensive officials to grind the faces of the poor. After 1833 it was permanently restored to the affections of the parishioners, and at the Vestry of 1836 a motion to abandon Sturges Bourne's Act found only a handful of supporters.¹

The fourth of the great difficulties with which the Select Vestry had to contend was the inequality of the County Rates. The total of these rates in the year 1815 was only £200, 12s. 11d.² The first report of the Select Vestry stated that they now amounted to an income-tax of no less than 5 per cent. upon the ley-paying property within the parish. So unfair was the assessment over the whole county that a rate of 3d. in the pound throughout the district had to be met in Liverpool by a rate of 1s. 1d. The assessment was based on a survey of 1815, and remained unchanged in spite of the great alterations that had taken place in the value of property.³ The rental of Manchester was undoubtedly greater than that of Liverpool. But the rateable value of Manchester was taken at £303,732, and that of Liverpool at £584,687.

¹ *Mercury*, 9th April 1836.

² Letter from Mr. George Forwood, *Mercury*, 2nd March 1821.

³ Report to Annual Vestry, 1825.

The total amount levied upon Liverpool in 1820 was £13,705, 17s. 8d., and in 1821 £13,477, 10s. 5d., while Manchester paid little more than half of those sums.¹ The Select Vestry sent a complaint to the County Magistrates on the 29th September. They pointed out the grievance under which they laboured, and showed that during the three years 1818, 1819, and 1820 the average parochial assessment had been only £387,800, and that rates had been paid on no more than £258,600.

The application unfortunately failed. A committee was appointed by the County Bench, and reported in favour of a revision of the assessment. At a second meeting a dilatory amendment was brought forward, and the motion was lost by a great majority. The Select Vestry applied for a mandamus. But the Court held that the matter was in the discretion of the magistrates. They had the report of their committee before them, and levied a rate. The fact that the committee advised against the rate did not give the Court jurisdiction to interfere with it. The dispute continued for several years. More than once the Vestry ordered legal proceedings to be taken, or directed the Select Vestry to apply to the County Bench for a fresh survey. The Annual Vestry of 1827 complained that the County Rate was no less than £15,837, and the Select Vestry said that their inactivity was due to the enormous expense of the legal proceedings that would be necessary. The Vestry approved of a rate of 9½d. in the pound to meet the charge, and ordered a Special Vestry to be called if the County Magistrates took no steps at their next meeting to secure a more equal assessment. Mr. Bootle Wilbraham, who had throughout exerted himself on behalf of the parish, again attempted at the meeting of the magistrates to carry his motion

¹ Pamphlet, "County Rates," 1827, Appendix VI.

for equalisation of the rates. But he was again beaten. The Special Vestry met on the 25th October, appointed a committee of five with full powers to deal with the matter, and ordered 5000 copies of the Select Vestry's report to be struck off for the use of the parish. The County Rate at the next Annual Vestry was fixed at 9d. in the pound. But the troubles of the ratepayers were nearly ended, and the October Vestry had the satisfaction of hearing that the County Magistrates had made a new assessment.

The magistrates had never denied the unfairness of the old system. But they found, as conservative bodies always find, that the expense and trouble involved in making the change made it undesirable that justice should be done. No local authority had ever appealed against the rate, and in the absence of any judicial decision, they were not prepared to alter the assessment. The Select Vestry accepted the invitation, and appealed against the rate. The hearing took place on the 9th July. The townships which were alleged to be benefited by the assessment were West Derby, Walton on the Hill, and Preston. The appeal against Walton was dropped at an early stage, and the case against West Derby was not heard. But against Preston the Select Vestry won a complete victory. It needed nothing more than to compare the parochial and county assessments of the town. The former was £61,483 and the latter £34,936. The Bench accordingly decided that the county assessment of Preston ought to be raised to £63,271.

The magistrates met on the 11th September, and decided that the whole county should be assessed on a new valuation. All overseers were required to send in sworn returns of the annual value of their townships. Tenants were summoned to give evidence as to the actual rent of their

premises. The case of Liverpool came on on the 11th February. Nearly 400 persons were examined on oath, and the average difference of their parochial and county assessments was applied proportionately to all the property in the parish. The proceedings ended in three days, and the result was that the assessment of the whole county was raised from £3,106,039 to £4,214,634, and that of Liverpool from £584,687 to £751,126. Taking the average of the County Rates for the past four years, the committee estimated that the saving to the parish would be £792 per annum, and with this ridiculous mouse the ratepayers had to be content. The committee endeavoured to make the news more palatable by adding that the value of land and buildings in Liverpool had increased so rapidly that in a year or two the process would have automatically abolished the inequality. By way of further consolation, they added that the costs of the whole business would be little more than £250.¹

The relations of the Select Vestry with the great body of the ratepayers were on the whole those of mutual trust and confidence. The violent agitation against the Select Vestries and all other oligarchies, which convulsed England during the struggle for Parliamentary reform, was felt to some extent in Liverpool. But nothing is more clear than that the outbreaks at the annual meetings were almost entirely due to the hostility of the owners of cottage property. The reports gave a full and candid account of the acts of the Select Vestry, and of the policy which they intended to pursue. The discussion which took place every Easter Tuesday was never avoided or repressed, and attention was

¹ See the Minutes of the Annual Vestries of 1822, 1824, 1825, 1826, and 1827; the Reports of the Select Vestry; and the pamphlet, "The County Rates."

always paid to the recommendations and orders of the open Vestry. The character of the members of the Select Vestry was the same as that of the members of the old Parish Committee. They were generally chosen from the wealthy merchants and professional men, classes which in Liverpool have provided a long succession of capable administrators and faithful representatives. The growth of religious toleration opened the parish offices to men of all varieties of opinion. A Dissenter was elected churchwarden in 1830, for the first time in the history of the parish,¹ and a Roman Catholic was appointed to the Select Vestry in 1831.²

The Select Vestry occasionally fell short of its lofty standard of public duty. In 1829 it was alleged at the Annual Vestry that "a certain brewer contrived to engross a great deal of parish business; he supplied the workhouse with liquor, barm, and grain at his own prices; he was a surveyor of highways, and a treasurer, and carried his corruption so far that he even compelled the paviours, in the employ of the parish, to take their ale from him. When this man was required to furnish accounts to the parishioners, he said he despised them all, threw up his trust and kept the money." The Vestry accordingly resolved that a list should be produced at each Vestry showing the names of all who had supplied articles for the use of the poor during the preceding six months.³ At another time the practice grew up of allowing blank cheques to be signed by members of the Select Vestry and completed by the Vestry Clerk.⁴ It was admitted that this was not a regular practice, and it was

¹ Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1830.

² Minutes of Special Vestry, 4th November 1831; *Mercury*, 6th November 1831.

³ Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1829. A similar resolution was soon afterwards passed dealing with the Watch Commissioners.

⁴ *Mercury*, 15th March 1833.

apparently not continued. With these two exceptions there were no charges brought against the Select Vestry which were not defeated either by the disclosure of the facts or the discovery of the motives of those who made them.

The Select Vestry did not confine itself to the performance of the duties which were imposed upon it by law. Sturges Bourne's Acts permitted the authorities which they created to administer the Poor Law and nothing else. But the Select Vestry of Liverpool succeeded the Parish Committee in all its functions. Its reports deal with all matters which affected the interests of the ratepayers, whether connected with the churches or with the business of local government. Questions of public health were not neglected. The nuisance of smoke was vigorously suppressed.¹ Cellar dwellings were whitewashed by the paupers.² The advantages of vaccination were impressed upon the parishioners.³ The grant to the dispensary was continued, and similar grants were made to the Infirmary and the Northern Hospital.⁴ A Board of Health was established to cope with the cholera.⁵ The collection of the King's taxes and the parish rates was consolidated.⁶ The Select Vestry, on behalf of the parish, watched the course of events in Parliament, and promoted and opposed legislation. They fought the excessive charges of the Corporation Water Bill.⁷ They opposed the intended repeal of the

¹ Reports of 25th October 1821 and 25th October 1826.

² Reports of 25th October 1821, and to Annual Vestry, 1829.

³ Report to Annual Vestry, 1823.

⁴ Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1831, 1834.

⁵ Minutes of Special Vestries, 2nd February 1832, 17th February 1832; *Mercury*, 3rd and 24th February 1832. This was violently opposed by the cottage owners.

⁶ Minutes of Vestry, 3rd May 1822; Reports of 25th October 1822, 25th October 1823; and to Annual Vestry, 1827.

⁷ Minutes of Vestry, 29th May 1822; Report to Annual Vestry, 1823.

Dog Tax, which the parishioners desired to enforce "with a view to lessening the Number of useless Dogs which infest the public Streets."¹ They helped the Corporation to establish the first fire-police, and at last provided adequate means for the prevention of fires.²

One department alone was free from the control of the Select Vestry. After their quarrel with the Corporation about the paving of the highways, the parishioners had continued to execute such repairs as the demands of commerce and industry could induce them to undertake. But the work was very poor, and Liverpool had the reputation of possessing the worst streets in the kingdom. In 1826 a special highway authority was at last constituted. Twenty surveyors of highways were elected, and were recommended to the Justices for appointment. These surveyors seem to have escaped the interference of the Select Vestry, in spite of the fact that they were always subject to the control of the Open Vestry. More attention was paid to the forms of law in connection with them than in any other part of the parish business. The existence of the Justices is ignored throughout the history of the Open Vestry and the Parish Committee, and their control must have been purely nominal. They are not mentioned a score of times in the records of 140 years. But in dealing with the accounts of the surveyors of highways the Vestry was always careful to order that they should be laid before a Justice of the Peace, and that an application should be made to the Justices to fix a rate.³

It was not long before the parish and the Corporation again came into conflict over the state of

¹ Minutes of Annual Vestry, 1823.

² Minutes of Vestry, 8th December 1825 ; Report of Special Committee, 26th January 1826.

³ Minutes of Vestry, 5th October 1827.

the pavement. A Special Vestry met on the 1st October 1829 "to take into consideration the subject of the present sewerage of the town and the expediency of applying to Parliament for an Act for its better sewerage." Negotiations with the Corporation were begun, but a dispute soon arose about the liability of the Corporation estate. The Corporation eventually threatened to introduce a Bill, and the Vestry voted £500 out of the church rate to defray the expenses of opposing it. The opposition failed, and the Bill was carried into law. It established a board of twenty-four commissioners for paving and sewerage, and the first election ended in the appointment of nine common councillors and fifteen ratepayers.¹ This board, like the surveyors of highways, was not subject to any control by the Select Vestry.

The general policy of the Select Vestry has already been indicated. The report of the Assistant Commissioner of 1832² describes in some detail the condition of things at that date, and supplements the regular reports of the Select Vestry itself. The Select Vestry was divided into five boards or committees. One of these sat on each week day except Tuesday, and was assisted by the secretary. The name and address of every applicant were written on a card, which was given to the paid visitor. The visitor made a report to the Vestry, and, after a second examination of the applicant, relief was granted if necessary. It was only in exceptional cases that a few shillings were given on the first application. In cases of temporary distress the pauper was re-

¹ Minutes of Vestry, 15th October 1829, 7th January 1830, 24th June 1830.

² Mr. G. Henderson. His report is printed in Appendix A to the Report of the Poor Law Commissioners, Part I., p. 912A *et seq.*

quired to appear before the Board once a week, and a medical certificate proving sickness was the only excuse which was admitted. If the vestrymen were satisfied that the man was not honestly trying to get work, his relief was stopped altogether. More serious cases demanded other remedies. Cards were given for a period of three or six months, and in cases of permanent incapacity for work, the revision was made at intervals of a year.

Special attention was still paid to the Irish. These wretched people, displaying all the signs of abject poverty, besieged the parish offices, and clamoured for the amount of their passage money for Dublin. Many of them were in better condition than they seemed, and resorted to all sorts of tricks to arouse the sympathy of the vestrymen. Some sent their wives and children, others left their clothes and money in the hands of a friend, and presented themselves covered with rags and dirt; others hid their money in their stockings. The Vestry always refused relief to the young and healthy, and generally to all whom they suspected of deceit. By this means some imposition was avoided, but those who were sufficiently regular in their attendance, and sufficiently careful to appear ill-clothed and ill-fed, must constantly have eluded the vigilance of the Board. The numbers showed no signs of slackening, and in the year 1832-33 no less than 2975 Irish were sent over to Dublin.

Inside the workhouse the Select Vestry found their greatest difficulties in the separation of the sexes and the classification of the various kinds of paupers. The first object had been secured in some measure shortly after the appointment of Mr. Hardman in 1804. Married couples lived in small houses separate from the main building, and care was taken to allot rooms in the same houses to people of congenial dispositions. But the separation of the adults

from the children, of the criminal from the unfortunate, of the prostitutes from the respectable women, required more space than the Vestry could command.¹ In this respect the Liverpool workhouse was no worse, and probably much better, than nine out of every ten in the kingdom.

The policy of requiring work from the inmates was maintained. All above 80 years of age were exempt; all under that age were employed except in time of sickness. Henderson's report shows clearly enough the beneficial results of this system. Out of 1600 paupers, only 20 were able-bodied men. More than one-third were less than 15 years old. An even greater proportion were above 50. Only 377 were between the ages of 15 and 50. Those unable to work from sickness or infirmity numbered 437, and 430 children were too young to be employed. These children were, as a rule, the offspring of paupers. But the workhouse was to some extent a technical school. The children of poor persons living in the town were frequently admitted to the workhouse for the purpose of instruction in some trade. At first they received 1s. a week. When they attained a certain proficiency this was raised to 1s. 6d., and after two years' instruction they received in addition the ordinary diet of the workhouse. The study of the various reports and of the comparative tables of expenditure shows that, with the exception of a few errors of judgment, the history of the Select Vestry, as far as concerns poor relief, is almost entirely creditable.²

The ill-feeling which was created by the attempt to rate cottage property led to an attempt to replace

¹ See the Reports of the Select Vestry to the Annual Vestry, 1824, 1825, 1831, 1832, 1835; and Henderson's Report, *supra*.

² A comparative table of expenditure is given by Mr. Henderson. Another has been discovered in the remains of one of the old account books in the parish offices.

the Select Vestry by a board elected under Hobhouse's Act of 1832.¹ But many of the votes recorded in favour of the adoption of the Act were bad, and the Select Vestry, after a careful scrutiny, decided that a clear majority of the parishioners had not voted for it.² The usual accusation of fraud was made against the Vestry, but their statements satisfied all but the owners of cottages, and may be reasonably accepted by the historian. The end of this dispute was the end of the troubles of the Select Vestry, and the last few years of their career were years of calm and steady progress. The series of reports which have been preserved shows the multitude of their activities and the wisdom of their policy. Their administration of the Poor Law received the rare and valuable praise of the Commissioners. Their maintenance of the rights of the parishioners against the claims of monopolies, their suppression of public nuisances, their increasing warfare against disease, and their resolute determination to secure purity and economy in the conduct of public business, deserve the praise of the historian. It is probable that in the case of Liverpool the municipal reforms of the great Whig Government might have been omitted without danger to the public. The Parliamentary electors were among the worst in the kingdom. But if democracy has seldom been more venal, oligarchy has seldom been less corrupt. Few townships of that day could point to a more blameless history. Few could claim that the government both of the town and of the parish displayed such a lively spirit of enterprise and such an enlightened sense of public duty. The Municipal Corporations Act and the Poor Law Amendment Act laid broader and deeper foundations for the edifice of local government.

¹ This provided for election by single votes.

² Report to Annual Vestry, 1833.

The growth of commerce and industry provided inexhaustible sources of revenue. But though the successors of the ancient authorities have frequently outdone them in the magnitude of their public works, they can never hope to surpass them in the spirit with which those works were conceived and executed.