

for the relief of the poor of the parish, which was administered by the church-wardens. In addition to all this there was much private indiscriminate charity, which like monastic charity was on the whole as baneful as beneficial.

It can easily be shown that the relief supplied by the monasteries was insufficient, as it failed to reach all classes of poor, and especially the most needy class, and, what was worse, that it was injurious, in that it gave "sturdy beggars" a livelihood without work. The Dissolution, indeed, "abolished a number of centres of pauperization," and the cessation of such poor-relief as they gave, was one of the happiest results of the abolition of the monasteries. It has been argued that the destruction of the monasteries but little preceded, and therefore made necessary, the Elizabethan Poor Laws; but this is some of those hasty "post hoc, ergo propter hoc" conclusions against which the historian is on his guard. Professor Ashley says justly that "the new Poor Law was called for, not in order to remedy the evils produced by the abolition—so far indeed as it took place—of the charitable institutions of the Middle Ages, but to cope with evils which had grown up in spite of these institutions." It will be safe to concede that the Dissolution rendered more apparent the poverty which existed and temporarily increased the burden of pauperism on the general public. But part of the monastic wealth passed into the royal exchequer, where it postponed and partly removed the need of increased taxation. The change of ownership increased also the amount of property liable to taxation. So far as the change from monastic to private landlordism hastened the introduction of competitive rents, or brought waste or commons land under cultivation, it must have degraded some of the old customary tenants to the rank of paupers, a loss which in general was probably quite counterbalanced by the abundance and cheapness of the means of subsistence due to the greater productiveness of the new methods of agriculture.

The wisdom and justice of the suppression, the methods adopted, the motives of Henry VIII., Cromwell and their agents, have thus been the subjects of the bitterest controversy. Apologists for the suppression do not find it an easy task to defend many of the harsher features of the policy of Cromwell. On the other hand, why did the abbots and other friends of monasticism make no defence? It was not because there were not sufficiently