À Madame

Mme la Comtesse Ostrowska.

In framing rules for forming a benevolent society, much must depend on local information; there are however certain general principles which, under every form of society, must be kept in view.

The great cause, I believe, of disappointment and failure in such schemes, arises from their attempt to make these plans of benevolence permanent; to consider them as so many endowments as it were, for the aid of poverty; instead of looking to them as temporary expedients for meeting difficulties, & removing obstacles to the permanent prosperity of the Labouring Classes. The accidents of life will always supply abundant claims upon the charity of the rich; but a state of pauperism, which includes in it the larger portion of that largest class of mankind, those who depend on labour for their daily sustenance, clearly points out that there is something vicious in any system under which this exists. Without doubt many social evils may & do contribute to the production of this vicious system; and none aid it more than injudicious attempts to relieve it. The first and main object is to evoke the resources of the labouring classes themselves, to their own aid. Labour, not almsgiving, must be their support; therefore it is most proper to begin with suppressing as far as possible that latter mischievous resource of the poor. It may be necessary in the first

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instance to rely a good deal on charitable contributions, but they should be employed in finding out labour; not in gratuitous support; and the labour thus furnished by charitable funds, should be of such a nature as neither to interfere with established trades or employments, nor to yield such a return as should make the labourers turn to that in preference to the established modes of acquiring employment.

A certain return to skill and capital invested in any employment is necessary, even for the welfare of the hired labourers in that employment whatever it may be. For the master of a given set of labourers would cease to employ his workpeople and to pay them wages, if he did not receive a sufficient remuneration for his time, his skill & his risk of money. Acting on this principle, I was led to condemn, some years back, a manufactory of sacks which I found established in a very large Union workhouse. The articles were pointed out to me & their price given, the poor also in full employment were shown me with considerable triumph: I inquired whether there was a ready sale for the articles; the answer was in the affirmative. There was, I should have stated, a sacking manufacture already and for some years back established in the town. I asked my informants whether they considered it just, in the first instance, to rate a master manufacturer for the means of competing

(and that at a lower rate than he could possibly afford, for the Union House could afford to sink its capital, since the guardians had the power of assessing the town for more, when the first quota of rates was consumed) with the manufacturer himself. And secondly whether it was expedient, since it was manifest that the whole of the sacking manufacture must be transferred in the end, master, labourers and all to the workhouse; where however, it could only be carried on, ultimately, at a loss to the rate-payers, and must degrade & lower the operatives. My representations were attended to, as I found, & I may add upon the testimony of some of the guardians themselves, with the happiest effects. In a country, like this, abounding in capital, more perhaps than in means for the profitable investment of it, there is a great difficulty in supplying eleemosynary labour without interfering with established trades or employments; but a difficulty of this kind, less in other countries than this, may even here be met by care and search. There are many things which it is desirable should be done, but which it is no man's business to do, nor when done to pay for, and therefore tho' every one would enjoy the work when completed none would contribute to carrying it out, especially in the first instance. Such for example is drainage in the low parts of a large town, generally inhabited by the poor part of the population, the cleansing of the same, supplies of water for such parts both for nutriment and cleanliness. Footpaths around a town &c, improvement of public roads,

4 not beyond what is convenient or even ornamental, but beyond what public money raised by taxation would be available for. I mention these as samples of the kind of labour on which the poor should be employed, and one advantage would be that the public would acquire a taste for such an improved state of things, and would, after a time, not only bear an en-creased expenditure to obtain it, but would even require those who had the charge of these duties, to discharge them in this improved manner. The society would then have produced a real and permanent amelioration - they would have improved the taste of the richer portion of the inhabitants, given them greater comfort & a desire for more of the same kind, added to the fund devoted to the remuneration of labour, and thus encreased the means of the laboring classes. The same effects might be produced by timely small and judicious loans to private individuals, who might thus be both enabled & persuaded to make advances in their own employments, which, without such aid, they would not have the means or the spirit to make. But none should come for labour to a public society, like the one you speak of, who can avoid it. A test is absolutely necessary then, to exclude all who are not compelled by urgent necessity to apply; and the very constitution of such a society requires

that the test should be self-acting. No enquiries, no system of inspection will guard effectually against improper persons creeping into employment, unless the society resolutely determines on making the labourers in their employment stand in a worse situation than other labourers: lower wages, more disagreeable employment, if possible, and longer periods of labour should be required by the society, while no aid, except to the sick or impotent, should be extended by them to any person unless in exchange for Labour. It might also be desirable to give a large portion or even the whole of the wages in kind, instead of money, that is, in shelter, clothing, and food. These are however only suggestions thrown out for consideration on the spot. The principle attempted to be inculcated is, "always make the Labourers trust to themselves, as well for finding labour which they are much more able to do, than their superiors, as for husbanding their means" — if they fail in this, whether from inability or recklessness, they must pay the penalty in finding themselves in an inferior condition. This may seem harsh, but depend on it, in the end this will be found most consonant with real benevolence. Again, advancement should be the vivifying principle of all such associations; consequently Saving banks, Loan societies,

Monts de Piété &c &c may very well be looked for, to ~~suspend~~ supersede joint stock companies for providing labour &c &c. Two great causes of failure in such attempts as we are speaking of, are, first a want of reliance upon the principles of human nature which we must endeavour to act upon; in other words, in those principles upon which all sound Economical advancement must be founded; and secondly, an attempt to limit their operation after they have taken root, as well as to a great desire to meddle with them. The gardener sows his seed, keeps his ground well watered, weeded & loosened, but never attempts to dig up his seed to see whether it is growing or how it grows: he gives it room to expand to get its full growth also, but does not attempt to keep it in a state constantly to want his care and support; if his crop be of a climbing nature, he gives space & means for it to climb and rejoices in its luxuriance.

If I have said nothing of Education, it is not because I undervalue it, but because I assume that to be the very ground work of all social improvement; neither have I said anything of providing for the claims of sickness and impotence, whether arising from age, infancy, malformation, or accident. These must be provided for by aid from the fund of the wealthy; but even here we must ever bear in mind that caution is necessary. We must not do too much or too well even

for this class. If we deprive these helpless persons of the sympathy and aid of those in their own rank of life, we must recollect that we cut them off from a fund, in the aggregate, not only larger but more accessible and more easily applicable to their necessities, than any fund which the wealthy could supply. The aid of their own class is ~~almost~~ also the most natural, and brings with it the greatest amount of sympathetic consolation; it unites neighbours most closely & most effectually cultivates the kindly and social feelings. We in England, are suffering dreadfully from that want: the old Poor Law nearly rooted out the natural affections of kindred & connection. Fathers refused to assist their children, children their parents, brothers & sisters withheld aid from one another, & that of the cheapest & most ordinary kind, till they were paid for it, paid that is by an impost or rate on society. And let it be remembered that though a Law may do this evil more quickly, voluntary associations can effect a similar melancholy result. Custom is a kind of Law. The most liberal & benevolent person that ever lived need not fear that these limitations will narrow the field for his benevolence: after all he will find more to be done than he has either time or means to provide for; to which we may add, that even were this not the case, there is no real benevolence in creating distress for the sake of relieving it. As for books it is difficult to recom-

mend them — the principles of poor management & social advancement must be sought & deduced from standard works on Political Economy; such as treat of wages & the laws that regulate them, the distribution of wealth & the laws of population — Malthus & Adam Smith especially — You will find also much that is valuable in "Duchatel de la charité", and "Fregier Des classes dangereuses de la population dans les grandes villes" &c —.