3 The Provincial Crusade: Results and Reactions

THE SELECTION OF POOR LAW UNIONS FOR ANALYSIS

Focus now centres on a number of provincial Poor Law unions which either had the reputation of applying strict anti-outdoor relief policies during the LGB crusade or where such strictures might reasonably have been expected because of the establishment of a nearby Charity Organisation Society. When viewed in the context of the national pattern and accepting the law of averages, other unions must have been unusually lenient in dispensing out-relief. The majority of unions which, after acquiescence in the early years, tended to cock a snook at the stricter out-relief doctrines were rarely featured in LGB Annual Reports or at Poor Law Conferences, other than to provide objects of derisory criticism. In contrast, to quote the Webbs, throughout the 1870s and 1880s the few ‘bright and shining examples of “orthodox Poor Law policy” were made the subject of perpetual laudation; they were advertised in the publications of the LGB, and quoted endlessly by Poor Law Inspectors; they were studied at COS meetings and discussed at Poor Law Conferences, without, in the result, finding imitators among the 600 other Boards of Guardians ...’¹ The general reduction of out-relief paupers in the early years of the crusade indicates that over this period the Webbs’ estimate of 600 non-conforming unions was an exaggeration. However, it became much nearer reality from the mid 1870s when around 90 per cent of Poor Law unions largely disregarded further LGB exhortations to reduce outdoor relief dramatically. This realization provides an essential backcloth for the following discussions concerning the strict unions. By the end of the century the chairman of one formerly strict Poor Law union was claiming that those following the ‘guidance of the Charity Organisation Society can be actually counted on the fingers of one hand’.²

William Chance, the Hon. Secretary of the Poor Law Conference and one of the most unremitting propagandists of the strict LGB policies, was still campaigning in 1895 to direct guardians towards ‘better administration’ and listed unions which had followed an ‘anti-relief policy’ from the 1870s.³ The non-metropolitan unions listed by Chance will be used as examples of those which in his words either ‘practically give no relief’ or administered ‘outdoor relief strictly’.⁴ They include the rural unions at Wallingford and at Bradfield (both in Berkshire),

Brixworth (Northants), St Neots (Huntingdon) and Atcham/Shrewsbury (Salop) together with the urban unions at Reading, Manchester and Birmingham. According to Goschen's Minute of 1869 and subsequent LGB expectations in the early 1870s, an important adjunct to the stricter interpretations of the Poor Law was that organized charity would be locally available to support deserving cases rejected by Poor Law officials as not being eligible for legal benefits. Consequently the second group of Poor Law unions examined here are located nearby provincial enthusiasts determined to apply COS concepts and whose local influence might have been expected to persuade guardians to support the LGB crusade. They include Birkenhead, Brighton, Leamington (Warwick union), Liverpool, Oxford and Southampton. Each of these localities featured in COS publications over the years as provincial examples of how the London influence was seemingly being beneficially applied in the provinces. In a few urban centres, notably Liverpool and Manchester, prior to 1870 there had already been long-term formalized attempts to structure local philanthropy which later moved towards absorbing COS ideology, as discussed in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

Figure 3.1 shows that nationally the LGB crusade succeeded in sharply reducing the numbers of outdoor paupers from 1871 to 1877. The average of

![Figure 3.1 Paupers: England and Wales (average of daily counts 1870–1889).](image-url)