

UPON GIVING BADGES TO THE POOR

Headnote

Composed September 1726; published posthumously, 1765; copy text SwJ 479 (see Textual Account).

This fragment is dated September 1726, and was written in the aftermath of the *Drapier's Letters*. The giving of badges to licensed beggars was not uncommon in contemporary Ireland, and this was Swift's first attempt at a subject which was discussed in Sir William Fownes's *Methods Proposed for Regulating the Poor*, in 1725. It joined considerable contemporary writing concerned with poverty and vagrancy, particularly with regard to the distress in the countryside and how such problems moved into Dublin (see Introduction, above, pp. xxx, lxxii). The practice of badging resident beggars was already borrowed from England, where the Poor Law intended to admit the aged and infirm, but not sturdy beggars. The Irish never enacted this, but seemed to adopt the idea of returning beggars to their own parish (a process already operative in the north of Ireland and some Dublin parishes). Swift himself was seeking to interest Archbishop King in his proposal, both as a friend and because of King's interest in poverty: King's papers in Marsh's Library (Z.3.11) contain a number of writings relating to the Dublin workhouse and to the problem of poverty more generally.

As well as its relation to the context of Swift's other pamphlets on the social effects of Irish economic problems from 1728 (most famously *A Modest Proposal*), Swift would return to the abiding question of controlling vagrancy in 1737, in his more extensive *Proposal for Giving Badges to the Beggars* (see below, pp. 305–19). *Upon Giving Badges* was first published posthumously in 1765, though the present copy text – the manuscript from the Forster Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum – has not been published before.

UPON GIVING BADGES TO THE POOR

The continuall Concourse of Beggars from all Parts of the Kingdom to this City having made it impossible for the severall Parishes to maintain their own Poor, according to the antient Laws of the Land.¹ Severall Lord Mayors did apply themselves to the Lord Arch^{bp} of Dublin,² that His Grace would direct his Clergy and the Churchwardens in the sd City, to appoint Badges of Brass, Copper or Pewter to be worn by the Poor of the severall Parishes.³ The Badges to be marked with the Initial Letters of the Name of each Church, and numbred 1, 2, 3, & c. and to be well sewn and fastned on the right and left shoulder of the Outward Garment of each of the sd Poor, by which they might be distinguished. And that none of the sd Poor should go out of their own Parish to beg Alms; whereof the Beadles⁴ were to take Care.

His Grace the Lord Archbishop, did accordingly give his Directions to the Clergy, which however have proved wholly ineffectual, by the Fraud, Perverseness, or Pride of the sd Poor, several of them openly protesting they will never submit to wear the sd Badges, and of those who received them, almost every one, either keep them in their Pockets, or hang them on a String about their Necks, or fasten them onely with a Pin, or wear them under their Coats, not to be seen; by which means the whole design is eluded, so that a Man may walk from one end of the Town to the other, without seeing one Beggar regularly badged, and in such great Numbers,

- 1 *the antient Laws of the Land*: in fact, Ireland differed from England in that until the statute of 1665, parish vestries were not legally permitted to raise money from the inhabitants in order to relieve the poor, earlier Irish acts having only provided for the licensing of beggars: Rowena Dudley, 'The Dublin Parishes and the Poor: 1660–1740', *Archivium Hibernicum* 53 (1999), 81.
- 2 *Lord Arch^{bp} of Dublin*: William King (1650–1729), bishop of Derry 1691–1703, archbishop of Dublin 1703–29, for whom see *ODNB*; *DIB*; Philip O'Regan, *Archbishop William King . . . and the Constitution in Church and State*, Dublin, Four Courts Press, 2000; Christopher Fauske, *A Political Biography of William King*, London: Pickering & Chatto, 2011.
- 3 *to appoint Badges . . . of the severall Parishes*: in order to distinguish those licensed to beg, according to the major Irish poor law statutes, of 1537 (33 Hen. VIII c. 15) and 1634–5 (10 & 11 Car. I c. 4) which for this purpose required the registration of the impotent poor in every parish. On the practice of badging beggars, see above, pp. lxxii–lxxiii.
- 4 *the Beadles*: inferior parish officers, whose duties included the maintenance of order and the punishment of petty offenders.

that they are a mighty Nuisance to the Publick, most of them being Foreigners.⁵

It is therefore proposed, that his Grace the Ld Arch. Bp would please to call the Clergy of the City together, and renew his Directions and Exhortations to them, to put this Affair of Badges effectually in practice, by such Methods as his Grace and they shall agree upon. And I think it would be highly necessary that some Paper should be pasted up in severall proper Parts of the City signifying this Order, and exhorting all People to give no Alms except to those Poor who are regularly badged, and onely while they are within the Precincts of their own Parishes, and if something like this were delivered by the Ministers in the reading desk two or three Lords days successively, it would still be of further use to put this Matter upon a right Foot.

All who offend against this to be treated as Vagabonds and Sturdy Beggars⁶

Deanry. House.
 Sept. 26 1726.

Jonath Swift.

⁵ *Foreigners*: not belonging to the parish.

⁶ *Vagabonds and Sturdy Beggars*: the Irish Acts of 1537 and 1634–5 also provided for the punishment of able-bodied beggars, denoted in the former as ‘vagabonds and mighty strong beggars’ and in the latter as ‘rogues, vagabonds, [and] sturdy beggars’.

CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT
MAINTAINING THE POOR

Headnote

Probably composed September 1726; published posthumously, 1765; copy text 1765a (see Textual Account); the footnote that forms part of this text was provided by the editor, Deane Swift.

A fragment printed alongside *Upon Giving Badges to the Poor* in 1765, and generally thought to be from the same period of composition (c. 1726), *Considerations* revisits the same issues of poverty and vagrancy, reflecting the deteriorating situation in Dublin from 1726 onwards, which marked the beginning of continuing bad harvests for three years. It was becoming increasingly clear that the Dublin workhouse could not cope with the increased numbers of indigent coming to the city from the countryside, and there was therefore much discussion of amelioration.

Near the end of the fragment, Swift refers to a complaint against the workhouse under its former governors (see below, pp. 308–9). This might indicate (if the reference is specific, rather than general) that the draft was written after the restructuring of its governing body after an Act of Parliament in 1728, and not at the same time as *Upon Giving Badges*, as is usually assumed.

CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT MAINTAINING THE POOR.

We have been amused, for at least thirty years past, with numberless schemes in writing and discourse, both in and out of parliament, for maintaining the poor, and setting them to work, especially in this city;¹ most of which were idle,² indigested, or visionary,³ and all of them ineffectual, as it hath plainly appeared by the consequences. Many of those projectors were so stupid, that they drew a parallel from Holland and England, to be settled in Ireland;⁴ that is to say, from two countries with full freedom and encouragement for trade, to a third where all kind of trade is cramped, and the most beneficial parts are entirely taken away. But the perpetual infelicity of false and foolish reasoning, as well as proceeding and acting upon it, seems to be fatal to this country.

For my own part, who have much conversed with those folks who call themselves Merchants,⁵ I do not remember to have met with a more ignorant and wrong thinking race of people in the very first rudiments of trade; which, however, was not so much owing to their want of capacity, as to the crazy constitution of this kingdom, where pedlars are better qualified to thrive than the wisest merchants. I could fill a volume with only setting down a list of the public absurdities, by which this kingdom hath suffered within the compass of my own memory, such as could not be believed of any nation, among whom folly was not established as a law. I cannot forbear instancing a few of these, because it may be of some use to those who shall have it in their power to be more cautious for the future.

- 1 *We have been amused. . . especially in this city*: bills had been introduced in the Irish Parliament for the relief of the poor in 1695, 1697, 1698, 1703, 1709, 1711, 1717, 1723 and, most recently, in 1725. With the exception of the Dublin Workhouse Bill of 1703, none had been enacted. There had been something of a rush of printed proposals in the mid-1720s: Edward Gosnell, *Ireland's Redress, from Popular Grievances Attempted; a Scheme for Employing the Poor. . .*, Dublin, 1723; Francis Hutchinson, *A Letter to a Member of Parliament, Concerning the Employing and Providing for the Poor*, Dublin, 1723; Robert, Viscount Molesworth, *Some Considerations for the Promoting of Agriculture, and Employing the Poor*, Dublin, 1723; Sir William Fownes, *Methods Proposed for Regulating the Poor. Supporting of Some, and Employing Others: According to Their Several Capacities*, Dublin, 1723–4; repr. 1725; *Enquiries into the Principal Causes of the General Poverty of the Common People of Ireland. With Remedies Propos'd for Removing of Them*, Dublin, 1725.
- 2 *idle*: worthless, ineffectual (*OED*).
- 3 *visionary*: incapable of being carried out.
- 4 *Many of those projectors. . . settled in Ireland*: see above, pp. xl–xliii.
- 5 *Merchants*: wholesale traders, especially those involved in overseas trade.

The first was the building of the barracks,⁶ whereof I have seen above one half, and have heard enough of the rest, to affirm that the public hath been cheated of at least two thirds of the money raised for that use by the plain fraud of the undertakers.

Another was the management of the money raised for the Palatines,⁷ when, instead of employing that great sum in purchasing lands in some remote and cheap part of the kingdom, and there planting those people as a colony, the whole end was utterly defeated.

A third is the insurance-office against fire,⁸ by which several thousand pounds are yearly remitted to England (a trifle it seems we can easily spare), and will gradually encrease until it comes to a good national tax. For the society-marks upon our houses (under which might properly be written, *The Lord have mercy upon us*) spread faster and farther than the* colony of

* This similitude, which is certainly the finest that could possibly have been used upon this occasion, seems to require a short explication. About the beginning of this current century, Doctor Gwythers, a physician and Fellow of the University of Dublin, brought over with him a parcel of frogs from England to Ireland, in order to propagate the species in that kingdom; and threw them into the ditches of the University-park; but they all perished. Whereupon he sent to England for some bottles of the frog-spawn, which he threw into those ditches, by which means the species of frogs was propagated in that kingdom. However, their number was so small in the year 1720, that a frog was no where to be seen in Ireland, except in the neighbourhood of the University-park: But, within six or seven years after, they spread thirty, forty, and fifty miles over the country; and so at last, by degrees, over the whole nation.

6 *the building of the barracks*: for the activities of the Barrack Board, the body established by Act of the Irish Parliament in 1701 to oversee the building of army barracks across the kingdom in accordance with a scheme approved in 1696, see Edward McParland, *Public Architecture in Ireland, 1680–1760*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2001, ch. 5; Charles Ivar McGrath, *Ireland and Empire, 1692–1770*, London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012, ch. 4. In the Irish parliamentary session of 1717, concern had been expressed at serious overspending on the annual barrack fund, a situation which persisted into the 1730s and beyond, despite adverse comment in the House of Commons and the persistent scrutiny of the accounts committee. In 1724, the Commons had carried out an inquiry into the management of the barracks, to which Lord Carteret had responded in such a way as to prompt a vote of thanks for the ‘rules’ he had ‘prescribed . . . for their future regulation’ (McGrath, *Ireland and Empire*, p. 92).

7 *the management of the money raised for the Palatines*: money to support the settlement in Ireland in 1709 of refugees from the Rhineland – ‘the poor Palatines’ – had been raised by public collection, and administered by commissioners. By 1711, two-thirds of the Palatines who had come to Dublin from London had returned to England. See Vivien Hick, ‘The Palatine Settlement in Ireland: The Early Years’, *ECI* 4 (1989), 120–4.

8 *the insurance-office against fire*: following a failed attempt to establish a fire insurance company in Ireland in 1720, two English companies, the Royal Exchange Assurance Company and the London Assurance Company, had set up in business in Dublin in 1722: see F. B. Relton, *An Account of the Fire Insurance Companies . . . and Schemes Established and Projected in Great Britain and Ireland During the 17th and 18th Centuries*, London, 1893,

frogs.⁹ I have, for above twenty years past, given warning several thousand times, to many substantial people, and to such who are acquainted with Lords and Squires, and the like great folks, (to any of whom I have not the honour to be known:) I mentioned my daily fears, lest our watchful friends in England might take this business out of our hands; and how easy it would be to prevent that evil, by erecting a society of persons who had good estates, such, for instance, as that noble knot¹⁰ of bankers under the style of Swift and Company.¹¹ But now we are become tributary to England,¹² not only for materials to light our own fires; but for engines to put them out; to which, if hearth-money be added, (repealed in England as a grievance)¹³ we have the honour to pay three taxes for fire.

p. 198; Rowena Dudley, 'Fire Insurance in Dublin, 1750–1850', *Irish Economic and Social History* 30 (2003), 24–5.

⁹ *the colony of frogs*: in June 1706 Swift wrote from Dublin to John Temple that 'about seven Years ago, Frogs were imported here, and thrive very well' (Woolley, *Corr.*, vol. I, p. 161). The story of their introduction was told in the *Tatler* 236 (12 Oct. 1710), (*Tatler*, vol. III, pp. 218–19), where it was dated to about 1692:

. . . an ingenious physician, to the honour as well as improvement of his native country, performed what the English had been so long attempting in vain. This learned man, with the hazard of his life, made a voyage to Liverpool, when he filled several barrels with the choicest spawn of frogs that could be found in those parts. This cargo he brought over very carefully and afterwards disposed of it in several warm beds that he thought most capable of bringing it to life. The doctor was a very ingenious physician, and a very good Protestant; for which reason, to show his zeal against popery, he placed some of the most promising spawn in the very fountain that is dedicated to the saint, and known by the name of St Patrick's Well, where these animals had the impudence to make their first appearance. They have since that time very much increased and multiplied in all the neighbourhood of this city.

The physician concerned was Charles Gwithers (?1664–1700), MD, fellow of TCD, for whom see T. W. Belcher, *Memoir of Sir Patrick Dun (Knt.) . . .*, 2nd edn, Dublin, 1866, pp. 37–8; J. B. Leslie, *History of Kilsaran Union of Parishes in the County of Louth*, Dundalk: William Tempest, 1908, pp. 289–91.

- ¹⁰ *noble knot*: from Shakespeare, *Coriolanus*, Act IV, Scene ii, ll. 40–2: 'I would he had continued to his country as he began, and not unknit himself the noble knot he made.'
- ¹¹ *that noble knot of bankers . . . Swift and Company*: James Swift (d. 1749) maintained a private bank in Dublin: *Econ. Hist. Ire.*, p. 135; J. T. Gilbert, *A History of the City of Dublin*, 3 vols., Dublin, 1854–9, vol. I, p. 26.
- ¹² *tributary to England*: paying monetary tribute to England, in the manner of a conquered people.
- ¹³ *hearth-money . . . as a grievance*: the hearth duty (of 2s p.a. on every fire, hearth or stove), had first been imposed by the Irish Parliament in 1662, as a compensation to the crown for the abolition of the court of wards (T. J. Kiernan, *History of the Financial Administration of Ireland to 1817*, London: T. S. King, 1930, pp. 82–3, 85). In England, this unpopular tax had been abolished in 1689 as a 'badge of slavery' (John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688–1783*, London: Routledge, 1989, p. 95) but it remained operative in Ireland.

A fourth was the knavery of those merchants, or linen-manufacturers, or both; when, upon occasion of the plague at Marseilles,¹⁴ we had a fair opportunity of getting into our hands the whole linen-trade with Spain;¹⁵ but the commodity was so bad, and held at so high a rate, that almost the whole cargo was returned, and the small remainder sold below the prime cost.

So many other particulars of the same nature crowd into my thoughts, that I am forced to stop, and the rather because they are not very proper for my subject, to which I shall now return.

Among all the schemes for maintaining the poor of the city, and setting them to work, the least weight hath been laid upon that single point which is of greatest importance; I mean that of keeping foreign beggars from swarming hither out of every part of the country; for, until this be brought to pass effectually, all our wise reasonings and proceedings upon them will be vain and ridiculous.

The prodigious number of beggars throughout this kingdom, in proportion to so small a number of people, is owing to many reasons: To the laziness of the natives; the want of work to employ them; the enormous rents paid by cottagers for their miserable cabbins and potatoe-plots; their early marriages, without the least prospect of establishment;¹⁶ the ruin of agriculture, whereby such vast numbers are hindred from providing their own bread, and have no money to purchase it; the mortal damp upon all

14 *plague at Marseilles*: bubonic plague had broken out in Marseilles in the summer of 1720. A detailed history was given in *A Brief Journal of What Passed in the City of Marseilles, While It Was Afflicted with the Plague, in the Year 1720*. . . , London, [1721].

15 *the whole linen-trade with Spain*: the impact of the plague on trade between France and Spain was considerable. The port of Marseilles was shut and the city itself isolated. The Spanish also closed border crossings from France, erecting a *cordon sanitaire* to prevent infection: Peter Sahlin, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989, pp. 75–6. There was a further problem with exports of French linen, since clothing was seen as a principal agent of the spread of plague, and the importation of contaminated cloth into Marseilles had been a contributory factor in the outbreak (G. C. Kohn, *Encyclopaedia of Plague and Pestilence: from Ancient Times to the Present*, New York: Infobase Publishing, 2008, p. 254). Although the main centres of linen production in France were in the north, there was a growing manufacture in Provence, centred on Toulon.

16 *their early marriages . . . prospect of establishment*: Hutchinson's *A Letter to a Member of Parliament* had specifically argued against early marriage, which in his view inevitably multiplied the number of the poor. A strict execution of the law, by confining the 'honest poor' to their parishes, and punishing vagrants, 'will discourage young people from Marrying till they have a House to live in, and some probable way for an honest livelyhood' (p. 14).