

CHAPTER VI

THE COOPER REPORT

It has already been shown that the purpose of the Cooper Inquiry was political, and that after the Guardians' Election Mr. Cooper decided to conduct his Inquiry in secret. How did he set about it? He abstracted from the records of the Guardians certain information, much of which the Guardians had themselves made public, and most of which was already in the possession of the Ministry of Health. His report contained no new information whatever, but fulfilled its purpose by acting as an excuse for a concerted, but somewhat disappointing, press attack upon the administration of the Poplar Board.

The same political prejudice displayed in the compilation of the report was repeated in its publication. Days before the Poplar Board received a copy, a biased summary, highly unfavourable to the Board, was issued to the Press by the Ministry of Health.

The report, merely a record of personal opinions, was used as a piece of most impudent official anti-Labour propaganda. Mr. Cooper made no real investigation into the work of the Guardians. He attended no committees or meetings of the Board, interviewed no member of the Board. In the hope of finding some small cause for political scandal and abuse, he poked about amongst case papers, pried into records and account books, work which a competent office-boy could have done, and have done better.

"No attempt was made by the Guardians," says Mr. Cooper, "even in a modified way, to put in force any Labour Test. In all cases relieved the Guardians grant the full amount according to their scale." But the duty of a Guardian is to care for the poor, to relieve the destitute, not to act as a judge of the moral character or social desirability of particular individuals. It is a virtue that, in the main, the Poplar scales are applied without variation, for, with such huge numbers to deal with, that is the only method of ensuring that justice is done. There is no cringing, begging, or fawning at the relief offices, and no such thing as a deterrent policy exists. Practically every applicant knows what he is entitled to receive, and sees that he gets it. No assumption of virtue will get him more, no show of independence will cause him to receive one penny less.

When Mr. Cooper laments the absence of a Labour Test at Poplar, he forgets that this is not an issue to-day, either at Poplar or elsewhere. The Ministry of Health has been obliged, by the pressure of the unemployed and the Labour Movement generally, to abandon the idea that men and women should not receive relief outside a workhouse or labour yard. The sole