

he was a good servant of his country, and contrasted very favourably as a diplomatist with his successors on the Liberal side of the house.

But foreign affairs during the rule of the Grey cabinet were by no means so important as home matters. The years which followed the Reform Bill were full of constructive legislation intended to make up for the arrears of the barren time since 1815. The most important of the bills introduced by the Grey cabinet was that which dealt with the Poor Laws; but second only to this was the one which finally did away with negro slavery in our West Indian colonies.

The Poor Law as it stood in 1832 was the most fertile source of misery that existed in the United Kingdom. Its unwise administration during the last forty years had done more to bring about social evil and political unrest than any other factor in the long list of popular grievances. For nearly two centuries the principle which governed the dealing of the State with pauperism had been a wise and sound one, laid down in the Poor Law of 1601

—that a clear distinction should be drawn between aged and impotent persons unable to work, and idle and improvident ones who could work but refused to do so. The former were entitled to relief from their parishes; the latter were to be compelled to apply themselves to labour, and even to be punished if they preferred the life of the tramp and beggar. This radical distinction drawn between the able-bodied pauper and the unfortunate victim of old age or disease was always kept in sight till the middle of the reign of George III.

It was not until 1782, one of the troublous years of the old American war, that the first step in the wrong direction was made, by an Act of Parliament (generally called Gilbert's Act) which allowed the guardians of the poor in each parish to find work near his