

## POVERTY AT PRESTON.

### FEEDING HUNGRY CHILDREN.

OVER 1,000 DINNERS PROVIDED  
DAILY AT 1d. PER HEAD.

There is an appetising odour in the air, a meaty fragrance which makes the hungry "out-of-work" pause and gaze wistfully about him. But he is not bidden to the feast. There are children—perhaps hungrier than he is—all waiting, in a line, like the queue at the theatre, till the big doors open and Mr. Williamson, in his kindly paternal way, pilots them into the large room, where tables are set with mugs and spoons, and a delicious thin fog of vapourised soup—still more attractive and titillating to the nostrils than that which has escaped into the outer world—hangs over all. The "out-of-work" takes a lingering look through the open door, then tightens his belt and passes on, perhaps feeling thankful that though he must go without a meal the little ones are not forgotten.

The day is brilliant—almost summerlike. Though we are in November, winter tardily approaches, and the winds are mercifully tempered to the shorn lambs. But one looks with anxiety to the immediate future, when the bitter cold begins to assail the thinly-clad children, with stark hunger keeping it close company.

All the children are now merrily chatting as they rustle into their seats. Are they underfed? Judging by physical appearances one would say that, as a whole, they are not. It is difficult, however, to form any judgment from a casual inspection, and even medical examination might be ineffectual in determining whether these children are deprived of their proper sustenance. But their circumstances are

known, and the poverty of the homes—in many cases the breadwinner being out of work, with a family of six or eight children to provide for—is a fact of sufficient strength to warrant the classification of these children among the necessitous.

But whether underfed or not, and whatever may be the definition given to the term, they are hungry—some of them ravenously hungry. There needs no scientific investigation to discover this truth. It is almost pitiable to see these children sitting with their noses over these fragrant bowls, toying nervously with their big metal spoons, gripping them with their little fists, smiting them on the table while they are waiting desperately for the signal to commence, and, no doubt, thinking hard things of the iron discipline of the schools and those who invented "Grace before meat."

#### NO BUMBLEDOM.

The temptation of St. Anthony is nothing compared to it. Here and there a child furtively takes a sip with his spoon, another boldly sets to, while a third clasps his basin and takes a long and satisfying pull. At last the tension is relieved, and from a hundred throats bursts forth the supplicatory hymn almost like a war cry—"Be present at our table, Lord!" Chunks of bread are dipped into the savoury stew, and, when the children have finished the bowl, like Oliver Twist, they do not hesitate to ask for more. Fortunately, there is no bumbledom to say them nay.

The children are fed daily with the exception of Saturday and Sunday—at four centres in the town—Shepherd-street Mission Room, Marsh-lane and Maitland-street Domestic Schools, and Barlow-street Council School. Over a thousand children receive dinners daily at a cost which works out to a little over a penny a-head. The Catholics provide for their own scholars, who are included in the estimate, and they receive from the Education Committee, who administer that part of the Mayor's Distress Fund ear-marked for children's meals, one penny per head per diem.

A sub-committee of the Education Committee, called the Underfed School Children's Committee, has been formed with a number of co-opted members. The dietary has been prepared by Miss Kneale, superintendent of the Preston Domestic Subjects Centre, and is varied every day, the menu being as follows:—Monday, pea or lentil soup, costing, with 24 loaves, 6s. 6d. to feed a hundred children; Tuesday, Irish stew, 8s. 4d.; Wednesday, meat and barley stew, 8s. 2d.; Thursday,

beef and beans, or meat and potato hash, 8s. 2d. or 8s. 8d.; Friday, green pea soup, 6s. 2d.

Where the income of a family is under three shillings per head the committee consider that the absolute necessities of life are unattainable without assistance, and in all these cases the children are given dinners, tickets for which are distributed to them by the teachers at the schools which they attend. The centres were opened on September 30th, when 180 children were fed, and the number now dealt with fluctuates about the figure of 1,000 per diem.

#### SAD CASES.

Very careful inquiries are made by the authorities, and some sad cases of poverty have been brought to light, due solely to the lack of employment on the part of the bread-winners. These receive welcome relief from the Unemployment Fund as well as the Children's Meals Fund. Among cases that might be mentioned are the following:—A man—four months out of work—with wife and eight children—total weekly income 7s. 6d. from an apprentice; widow with five children (out of work through mill closing) total income 3s. a week, from a lodger; a family of nine; skilled artisan, with three little children, income 2s. a week.

The committee receive contributions of bread and provisions suitable for the soup and stew, and the many kind-hearted tradesmen of the town, who are always ready to help in times of distress, are not backward with seasonable gifts. Much useful work of an investigating and administrative character—which has to be delicately and tactfully carried out—is being accomplished by Mr. Berry (the Director of Education), Mr. Danson, Dr. Murray, the schools medical officer, Superintendent Moss, and his staff of school attendance officers, while the untiring efforts of Inspector Wilcock, of the N.S.P.C.C., have brought to light many painful and deserving cases. The teachers at the domestic centres have been most kind in their ministrations, and the authority have had the advantage of the experience of Mr. Williamson, who has placed the Shepherd-street Mission Room at their disposal, and proved himself to be a most active worker. The photograph illustrates the gathering of children outside the Shepherd-street Mission.

It should be stated, in conclusion, that the conditions under which the dinners are served out at the four centres are irreproachable as regards cleanliness, order, and general management.

