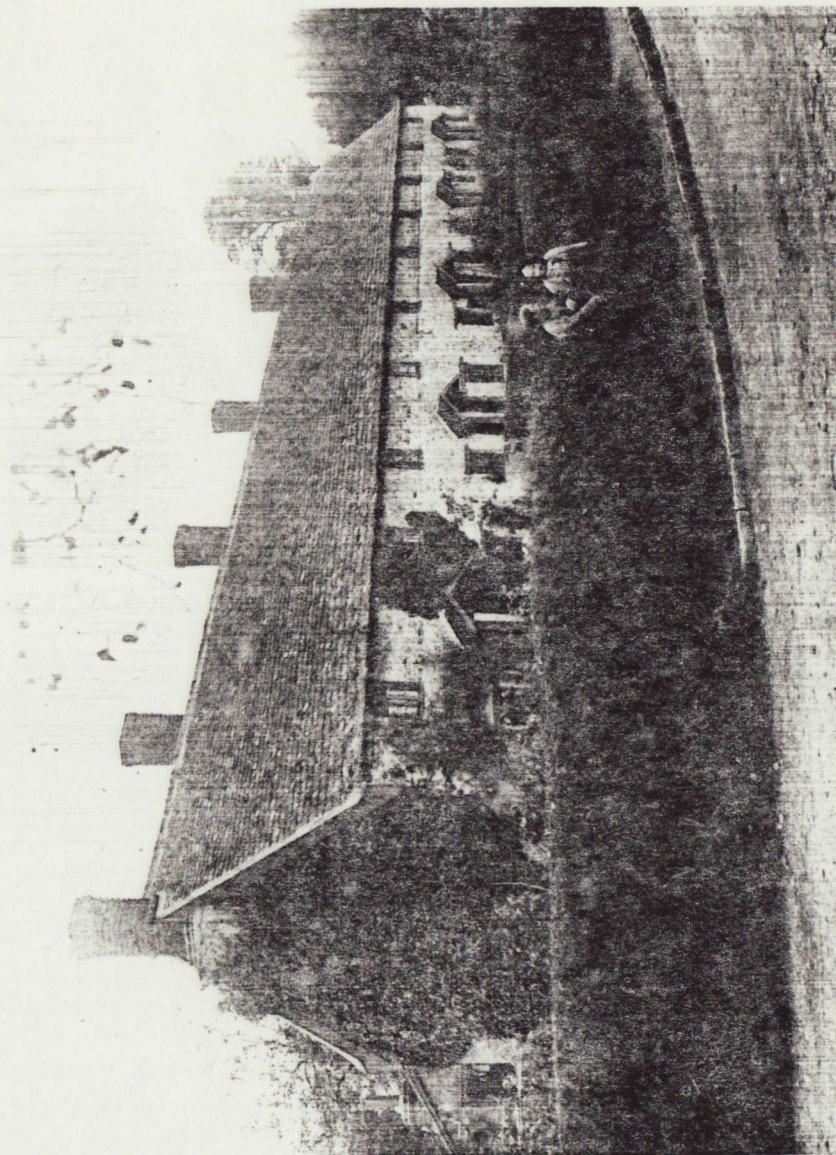


CHAPTER VII  
THE VILLAGE CHARITIES

Beneficus est qui non sua sed alterius causa benefice facit.—CICERO.

**T**HE good that men do is said to live after them, and our village is indebted to the charitable instincts and benefactions of those who lived in days that are past. Chief perhaps amongst the endowed charities of the village may be reckoned the Almshouses' Charity, commonly known as Martin's Charity, dating from 1641, and so called after the name of the benefactor, Sir Henry Martin, of London, Knight. The charity originally consisted of eight houses, and about the year 1850 Archdeacon Berens, then Vicar of Shrivenham, completed the founder's scheme by building two additional houses at his own expense.<sup>1</sup> The houses are built of grey stone, with stone-tiled roofs, and though with their little garden plots enclosed by a yew hedge they present a picturesque appearance to the passer-by, yet they are now far below the present standard of dwellings for the poor. The sitting-rooms are low and dark, and the bedroom accommodation is bad. They are, however, much in request when a vacancy occurs amongst the beneficiaries of the Charity. The endowment of the Charity originally came from the rent of land in the parish of Stanford-in-the-Vale, and from cottage property

<sup>1</sup> These two houses are at the east end of the row.



THE ALMS HOUSES

in Dodd's Lane.<sup>1</sup> All this property has in quite recent times been sold, and the proceeds of the sale invested and held by the Official Trustees of Charity Lands on behalf of the Charity. In addition to this the sum of £14 is received annually from Mrs. Elizabeth Sadler's endowment fund, now in the hands of the Official Trustees. The almspeople are ten in number, and by the terms of the Trust, 'Shall be poor persons of good character, who have resided in the ancient township of Shrivenham for not less than three years preceding the time of their appointment, who have not during the last year received Poor Relief, other than medical relief, and who from age, ill-health, accident, or infirmity, are wholly, or in part, unable to maintain themselves by their own exertions.'

*Poor's Land, or Garrard's Charity*

This is a charity for apprenticing 'poor children, bona fide resident in one of the Tithings of Becket and Shrivenham, to some useful trade or occupation'. By arrangement with the Charity Commissioners the benefit of the Charity may be also given towards the equipment of children for domestic or other service. The endowment of the Charity came originally from the purchase, in 1758, of a field, known as Breach Mead (3a. 1r. 8p.), by the Churchwardens and Overseers of Shrivenham from Richard Garrard. The field has lately been sold, and the money so realized is held by the Official Trustees of Charity Lands for the purposes of the Charity. The business of both this

<sup>1</sup> These cottages came into the possession of the Charity by an arrangement with the Lord Barrington of that day.

and Martin's Charity is administered by seven trustees, two *ex-officio*, the Vicar of the Parish and the Lord of the Manor for the time being; four representative trustees, appointed by the Parish Council; and one co-optative trustee.

In addition to these there are three Educational Charities—Stratton's Charity, Levitt's, and Smith's Charity.

*Stratton's Charity*

This Charity is a charge on the endowments of the Vicarage of £4 per annum, in respect of land given to the benefice by Thomas Stratton, which sum, under the terms of the gift, was 'to be paid to the school master of Shrivenham for teaching and instructing ten poor children of the Tithing of Shrivenham'. On the erection in 1863 of the present school the payment of this annual sum was transferred to the School Managers, who use it for general purposes.

*Levitt's and Smith's Charities*

These consist of sums of money held by the Official Trustees of Charitable Funds, producing respectively £10 (Levitt's Charity) and £3 4s. 4d. (Smith's Charity) annually, paid directly into the account of the Managers of the School.

In connexion with the Village Charities an amusing incident may be here recalled. Grievances lie often deeply seated in the hearts of country folk before any expression of them is made and, though but often ill-founded, are not readily dispelled—nor are suspicion and distrust wholly absent from the rural mind. And such a grievance

was harboured in the minds of some, who suspected that the village was being defrauded of the benefits of a certain Charity. The ground for such suspicion was the removal from the Church porch of a board of large proportions, similar to others which recorded benefactions. The opportunity for airing the grievance and reclaiming for the village its forfeited Charity, as was supposed, was afforded when Parish Councils were given a legal status, and their members acquired certain powers in the ordering and administration of village affairs. The removal of this board from the Church received the early attention of the first elected Parish Councillors, which resulted in a deputation being sent in due course to the Vicarage, where this board was known to be, to bring to light the record of the suppressed Charity! On the arrival of the deputation the board in question was brought forth from an outbuilding where it had been stored, and where it now remains, and which on inspection proved to be a table of Kindred and Affinity, setting forth the prohibited degrees of marriage! Measuring some 9 feet by 6 feet, it had no doubt been removed from the Church porch for the sake of convenience, and one of more modest dimensions set up to take its place. The incident recorded came to be known outside the village boundaries and, finding its way into a local paper, afforded some little amusement at the time. It served, however, to lay the ghost of the suspected suppression, or misappropriation, of the benefits of a village Charity.