

## Mr Kauble's Donation In Aid of the Local Poor

Mr Kauble held the office of Father of the Poor in the Third Quarter. For the past twenty years he had devoted all his energies to the fulfilment of his duties. It was he, first and foremost, who decided the allocation of permits for the distribution of free coal to the poor; he was a member of the Municipal Board of Elders and of the Commission for Local Poor-Relief.

Fixed to each of the three doors of his flat was a metal plate bearing the legend: 'Contributor to Local Poor-Relief'.

These little signs did not cost him a penny, for he had a stock of them at home and handed them out to anyone who made an annual contribution of twenty crowns for the benefit of the local poor. Not that the beggars ever saw a brass farthing of it, for it was all gobbled up by the costs of poor-relief administration. The Poverty Officer drew a salary of 2,400 crowns a year and then there was an official who got 1,600 and an attendant who was paid a hundred crowns a month. The rest went on various outgoings, such as trips by members of the Poor-Relief Department to attend conferences on poor-relief. They hadn't enough left after that to do anything for the beggars.

At those houses where previously they had been given alms, their attention was now drawn to the little sign on the door which said: 'Contributor to Local Poor-Relief'.

It was a good idea, then, to call a conference on Ways of Reducing Street-Begging. A local journal had previously conducted a survey of methods by which the level of begging could be brought down.

A number of letters came in, pointing out how widespread begging was in other towns.

So shrewd were these comments, so self-evidently true, that there was nothing for it but to call a conference on the Reduction of Street-Begging.

During the week before the conference, Mr Kauble, the Father of the Poor, roamed the streets of the Quarter, stopping beggars and urging them to stop begging. He also drew the attention of the Police to

a number of beggars. It was a week of fruitful reflection on ways in which he might come forward at the conference with some scheme to reduce the extent of begging or eliminate it altogether.

The conference was also attended by a police-representative and from the District Sheriff's Office came the District Sheriff himself, who fell asleep during the Mayor's address. And during this address, the police-representative assiduously cleaned and filed his nails and Chaplain Bláha, representing the local Church, perused for the fifth time the constitution of a certain Firemen's Association that had happened to fall into his hands.

The Mayor's address made an embarrassing impression.

He kept on saying: 'And now, we shall strive to defeat begging. Now, our aim will be to force it into retreat; now is the time to go on the offensive against it. I take as my point of departure today the principle that we ought to take severe measures against it.' He went on like that for a full half-hour and ended by saying: 'If any gentleman present has any kind of concrete proposal to make, let him please now put it forward.'

Up got the Father of the Poor in the Third Quarter, Mr Kauble.

His face at that moment, as he gazed out at the solemn faces of the members of the conference, was aglow with enthusiasm.

He had prepared himself to tell them everything that he had been turning over in his mind during the last week and thinking over in his bed at night. It's pleasant, as you lie in your comfortable feather-bed, to contemplate the poverty of your neighbours.

Before the conference began, he had got himself a litre of wine and that warm glow in his stomach was now spreading to his heart and soul and he began to speak emotionally about the fate of the widows and orphans.

The District Sheriff slept on and the police-representative yawned.

'Widows and orphans,' cried Mr Kauble in a tone of desperation, 'must be protected. Protect the widows and orphans from ruin. Gentlemen,' his voice rose to a crescendo that made the Town Hall's conference-chamber shake, 'something must be done to help them, something immediate to rescue them from destitution. Gentlemen, I am firmly resolved to make a donation.'

Upon this, the District Sheriff woke up. Sixty pairs of eyes gazed in eagerness and amazement into the eyes of Mr Kauble.

'The best man among us,' whispered the Mayor to his neighbours.

'Yes, a donation,' cried the Father of the Poor in a voice throbbing

with exaltation. 'A donation which will ease the lot of at least one poor widow. I hereby announce the donation of a barrel-organ.' A silence fell all around.

'The best man among us has lost his marbles,' whispered the Mayor to those around him, while Mr Kauble, his eyes flashing, drew a sheet of paper from his pocket and continued:

'I, Antonín Kauble, Father of the Poor in the Third Quarter, house- and estate-owner, President of the Antonín Kauble Charitable Foundation, etc, do hereby make bold to communicate to the public the competitive grant of one barrel-organ to the poor of this town. Application for this grant may be made to the Parish Officer by any blind widow of sixty years and upwards who can furnish evidence of utter integrity, piety, total incapacity for hard labour, and honesty. Evidence of age, death-certificate and certificate of domicile of the spouse and the testimony of an eye-witness should be sent, together with the application, to the Poor-Relief section of the local Municipal Office or to the donor, Antonín Kauble, Father of the Poor. The barrel-organ is to be conferred for life and the beneficiary will have the obligation to pray once a week for the donor's family at early mass.'

When the Father of the Poor had finished speaking, silence fell once more, to be broken eventually by the Mayor, who asked: 'May I venture a comment, Mr Kauble?'

He rose:

'In the name of the whole Poor-Relief Commission, I would like to thank Mr Kauble for his selfless initiative in the interest of alleviating the misery of the poor. I give thanks to you in the name of the whole town, in the name of my suffering fellow-citizens. Our thanks, our ardent thanks to you!'

He ended on an emotional note and the District Sheriff, stepping over to Mr Kauble, offered his hand in a demonstrative manner and said: 'I too, most worthy Sir, must thank you. This example has shown me that the self-denial of the leaders of society in this town knows no bounds. Be assured that I shall not forget your noble action for the benefit of the local poor.'

The days that followed were for Mr Kauble days of pure happiness.

The news of his benefaction was reported in the newspapers and a few days later, in a display-case in a musical instrument-dealer's shop

in the main street, there appeared a barrel-organ with the clearly printed inscription: 'Donated by Mr Antonín Kauble, Father of the Poor'.

Then Mr Kauble had his photograph taken, standing beside the barrel-organ and resting one hand on it.

He had a postcard made from this photograph and became more popular than ever. His happiness was complete and his self-esteem touched new heights. The District Sheriff was giving him the nicest smiles. There could be no doubt that some distinction would be conferred on him at the earliest opportunity.

All this happened shortly before a Distinguished Person honoured the town with a visit.

In the full consciousness of his own worthiness, Mr Kauble went along to the General Audience.

'I will present the postcard with myself standing beside the barrel-organ to the Distinguished Visitor.' This was his final thought as he entered the audience-chamber.

Then all the lights went out for him.

The Distinguished Visitor stood facing him, smiling.

'Anton Kauble, Most Gracious Highness,' he stammered, like a good Czech, in German and added, as he presented the postcard: 'Anton Kauble and his barrel-organ, Father of the Poor.'

'Yes, I am always a Father to the poor and needy,' said the Distinguished Visitor benevolently, went across to his equerry and said something to him, whereupon the equerry came up to Mr Kauble, gave him a gold twenty-crown piece and said in an official tone: 'The audience is at an end.'

To which the Distinguished Visitor added in a friendly voice: 'Don't give up hope, old chap! An old soldier can always get by, even with a barrel-organ.'

The Father of the Poor tottered out through the door, and an hour later the news had gone round the whole of the Third Quarter that Mr Kauble had taken a stick and smashed his donation in aid of the poor to smithereens.