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A SCHEME FOR THE UNEMPLOYED.

THREE years ago London was startled by the evidence of its great 'fluid population.' The unemployed, by crowds and riots, forced themselves into notice, and ever since there have been inquiries, investigations, and commissions. Of these inquiries Mr. Booth's has been most to the purpose, and he, having analysed the occupations of the inhabitants of East London, estimates that out of a total of 908,000, about 314,000—men, women, and children—are dependent on casual labour. For the workers of this number work is so irregular that a great part could easily be performed by those in the class of regular workers, and the majority of them may fairly, if not technically, be numbered among the unemployed. What is true of East London is probably true of South London, and will soon be true of North London, where, forgotten by their fellow-citizens, the poor are again congregating by themselves.

This great 'fluid population' makes a greater claim on statesmanship than does even that of Irish discontent. For three years its presence has been evident, and the only statesmanship shown is that which puts off trouble by appointing commissions of inquiry.

Inquiry can add little to what is known. Masses of the unemployed, who are ill-clad, ill-fed, and ill-taught, frequently congregate; they may be seen at meetings, they gather at street-corners, and seem almost to rise from the earth if a street accident happens. Their faces tell the tale of their poverty, and if some of their faces tell also of ill-will and idle habits, the necessity that something should be done is not less, but greater. The existence of such a class numbering in London its tens of thousands is a national disgrace and a national danger.

It is a disgrace to statesmanship that the earnings of workers should be consumed in the support of unwilling idlers, and this happens as long as the unemployed are kept alive, for it must be remembered that the bread which they eat, insufficient though it be for themselves, is taken out of the mouths of others. All who are idle hang like a dead weight round the necks of the busy, and the workers have a right to complain of a system which makes them poor to keep others poorer. It is a shocking thing to say of men created in God's image,

but it is true, that the extinction of the unemployed would add to the wealth of the country.

The disgrace to common humanity is even greater, that in an age enriched by new possessions, material and spiritual, there should be so many thousands 'untaught, uncomforted, and unfed.' There is now no want of knowledge as to the facts, as society during many seasons has amused itself with tales of 'how the poor live.' Everyone who spends his pound, or his thousand pounds, on luxury, knows how he might spend that money on institutes or open spaces, or books, for others' service; and every worshipper who is comforted by good news of God knows that among the poor many perish for lack of that knowledge. The title 'unemployed' covers no longer an unknown quantity. The look of the men, their weak frames, their anxious eyes, their dull faces are familiar. Their homes—the single room: bedroom, kitchen, washhouse, and nursery, with its bit of paper decoration as its owners' claim of kinship with their fellows—have been visited. Their children, those who survive the hardships of infancy, are seen in the schools and pitied because they are ill-fed and ill-clad.

The dull, hopeless, shiftless, and sad life of the poor is known.

Whose is the fault that men and women are untaught and uncomforted? It is the fault of every selfish person, and the disgrace is to our common humanity.

The existence of the unemployed is, though, something more than even a disgrace: it is a danger to the well-being of society, leading the kind-hearted and the vain to all sorts of extravagance, and justifying the selfish in all sorts of hardness. Because of their presence, schemes of maudlin philanthropy or of ambitious vanity get a hearing. The kind-hearted, pointing to their needs, demand gifts of free-dinners and unrestricted out-relief. Talkers, moved by frantic vanity or unlimited suspicion, have it in their power to say: 'In this misery you see what comes of free trade, of monarchy, of property,' or of whatever other cause they themselves are for the moment attacking. Because, too, the unemployed live a low life, the selfish are encouraged to go on saying, 'Nothing can be done,' till their hearts are hardened. A degraded class creates an oppressive class, and the end is a revolution which means 'the death of the first-born.'

Far be it from me to say that this condition of things has been reached in London; but when one part of society is content with a low life and another part of society is indifferent to that content, class warfare is not far distant. There are tens of thousands, with the thoughts and feelings of men, living the life of beasts, greedy for what they can get, careless of the means of getting, rejoicing in low pleasures, moved by a blind sense of injustice ready to take shape in foolish demands and wild acts; there are, on the other side, thousands with the knowledge that such lives are lived by their

neighbours, who go on making themselves comfortable and happy, and their hardness of heart takes shape in commissions, in lucid expositions over dinner tables that 'the statistics of pauperism show no increase,' and in admirable reasons, founded on political economy, that 'nothing can be done.'

This state of things is dangerous. The unemployed may be driven by the police out of the thoroughfares, they may have no place in poor-law returns, but their existence cannot be denied, and if their ignorance and their sense of injustice are allowed to increase, they may some day appear, to overturn not only the 'admirable administration of the poor law,' but also the very foundations of our trade and greatness. They—manifest, that is, in their misery and bitterness—may at some moment be the extra weight to turn the scale against free trade, indoor relief, or religion. The existence of the unemployed is a fact, and this fact constitutes a danger to the wealth and well-being of the community.

Alongside is another set of facts equally striking. Farms near London are going out of cultivation, and agricultural labourers are coming into the towns because there is no demand for their labour in the country. A farm, which is actually crossed by a railway, was recently offered at 5*l.* an acre, and other farms in Essex can be had for 10*l.* an acre. Certain economists view this state of things with equanimity; they say that the same causes which operate in other trades operate also in the farming trade, that land is going out of cultivation because cultivation does not pay, and that labour is wisely transferred to other occupations. But the question arises: 'Are we to accept the idleness of the land as we accept the idleness of the Spitalfields loom? or are we to explain it as we explain the fact that there are many starving sempstresses while cloth waits to be made up for want of good sempstresses? In a word, is the idleness of the land to be taken as the result of progressive industry, or is it due to want of skill?'

The first answer will commend itself to those who believe that self-interest, left to its own devices, must discover the right road, and that the self-interest of farmers who have given up their farms and of labourers who have left their work must, after some pain during the period of transition, lead to a healthier state of things.

The second answer will commend itself to common minds, who know that vegetables, fruit, and poultry are brought into England, to the value of some millions of money yearly, which have been raised on land and under a climate no better than our own. They will be disposed to think that greater skill might make English land worth cultivation. Signs are not wanting of this absence of skilled labour in the country. A clause in a report published by a Mansion House committee states: 'No case of an agricultural labourer resident in London for six months was brought under notice.' Agricultural

labourers, that is to say, find good work in town, and the country is therefore drained of all who are skilful, or energetic, or ambitious.

A Londoner, who writes her experience of a successful farming experiment which she undertook when she fled from starvation in town, warns any who might follow her example against 'taking advice from a countryman, whose ways of work, whose knowledge, and whose method are all old-fashioned;' and a London man, describing operations which were going on in his own county, tells that a smart townsman may soon be taught to milk five cows while the agricultural labourer is milking two cows. If it be that skilled labour, with all it includes of energy, adaptability, and resource, is rare in the country, there is at once a reason why land lies idle.

Granting, however, that land in England is not worth cultivation, and surrendering the argument which might be founded on the moral and physical advantages derived for the nation from country pursuits, there is still the English land beyond the seas which skilled labour could make yield corn, and wine, and oil. Carlyle's words are fifty years old, but still they pierce all who wait for 'the painless extinction of the unemployed' as the solution of the social problem. He tells of a world 'where Canadian forests stand unfelled, boundless plains and prairies unbroken by the plough on the west and on the east, green desert spaces never yet made white with corn—nine-tenths of the world, yet vacant or tenanted by nomads, is still crying, Come and till me, come and reap me!' 'Where,' he asks, 'are the leaders who will lead out their fellows to occupy and enjoy?' The answer he gives is 'preserving their game,' and the modern answer differs only in not suggesting so active an occupation.

'But,' it is said, 'the unemployed are not fit to work on the land; they could not be induced to emigrate.' These people have not, that is, the spirit of adventure which is born of hope, nor the skill which comes by training. It ought not to be impossible to give the training and inspire the hope. 'Why, the four-footed worker has already got all that this two-handed one is clamouring for! There is not a horse in England, able and willing to work, but has due food and lodging, and goes about sleek-coated, satisfied in heart. And you say it is impossible. The human brain, looking at those sleek horses, refuses to believe in such impossibility for English men.' It ought not to be impossible to use these men, who are of more value than many horses. The ignorance which makes them unfit for work—'not worth 4*d.* an hour to an employer'—and undesirable as colonists could be removed by training; their timidity and indolence, which makes them refuse to try new fields, could be removed by hope. It ought not to be impossible for politicians and lawyers and clergy and guardians to evolve a plan for giving these unemployed training and hope.

A word here is due to the character of the men whose labour has no value. They are not all loafers and idlers, nor all bitter and

antagonistic to society: a large proportion of them are steady, honest men, with the will to work. A witness not inclined to be partial tells how eagerly many rush to any jobs, and the same witness credits them with a sharpness and a versatility which enables them to easily pick up the knacks of new occupations. It is the experience of their neighbours that men, whose physique has been lowered by want of food, and whose education has been such as to leave them ignorant, do work, when work is possible, with an energy, and do resist temptation with a will, hardly to be understood by their comfortable critics. The homes of the so-called unemployed, though they be only single rooms, and though the labour of the inmates be without economical value, are often schools in which are taught lessons of the patience with which hardships may be borne and of the love which is stronger than poverty. The faults of many of the unemployed are due to ignorance and despair, and might be remedied.

The obvious course to pursue is to put them on the unworked lands, and give them the promise of the ultimate possession of a portion in England or the colonies. They would thus gain the skill to reap and to dig, and there is no hope so powerful as that of 'possessing a bit of land.'

An agricultural training-farm—a technical school in land work—a workfield as a supplement to the workhouse, is a suggestion which must occur to many minds.

It may be assumed that sufficient land could be bought for such a purpose within a hundred miles of London. The persons selected for employment would be able-bodied men, such as seem likely to be both able and willing to profit by the training to be given on the farm. They would be then called on to do the work of the place, to clean the land, to dig, to look after cattle, and to do rough carpentry. They would be instructed when they needed instruction, and would be taught some of the elementary rules which govern the growth of crops or the care of animals. They would be called on to submit to all the regulations of the superintendent; but it would be understood that the regulations should not be merely vexatious, but framed for the better education of each labourer. They would receive board and lodging and be credited with a small wage payable at the expiration of the term on the farm. Lastly, admission would only be offered to men for whose wives and families support was by some means, charitable or other, assured in town. The length of stay would be at the discretion of the superintendent, three months, six months, or a year; but to those who proved themselves efficient the offer would be made of a fixed tenure of land in England or of emigration to the colonies.

Such is the bare outline of a scheme obviously open to many developments; but for it the claim is set up that it is practicable and meets the necessities of the case.

It is practicable because it is an extension of a system of industrial training now given in schools and workhouses. If boys and men are trained by school managers and guardians to make mats and brushes, they may equally well be trained in agricultural labour. The scheme moreover meets the necessities of the case more adequately than a training which sends out mat and brush makers to compete in a crowded market. It aims to give skill to develop an almost dead industry, to put power into hands which would increase wealth by increasing the produce of the earth, to bring out affection for the land which God has given them into men grown careless of anything higher than a livelihood, and further it aims to offer the hope which alone makes work effective, which brings out interest, intelligence, energy, and persistence. 'By hope we are saved' is as true in the economic as in the spiritual world.

If the scheme is said to be one involving great expense, it is to be remembered that no expense can be greater than that now incurred. The unemployed are now kept, their earnings are taken out of the food-cupboard of those almost as poor as themselves, their support is a national cost, a charge which the people pay as truly as that of the army and navy. The mischief is that the support of the unemployed has now no result but to increase the number of the ill-fed and ill-living. If their support on a training-farm turned only one in ten into a wealth-producing member of the community, the gain would be great.

There must, it is thus clear, be some means better than that in use for keeping the unemployed. The extension of out-relief has been fully condemned by experience; the artificial limitation of population is equally condemned by the moral sense of the community; some form of education, technical or other, has been recognised as the only effective means of relief, and a training-farm is a form of education. The open question remains: 'Shall this farm be directed by legal or by voluntary agency?' It may be granted that the help of both guardians and of the charitable will be needed, but the question is, 'Must the farm be initiated and managed by the poor law or by some voluntary association?'

At present there is a consensus of educated opinion against guardians undertaking the duty. At great cost of time and thought a few men have hardly established the principle that the poor law is a means of education, and that the use of relief to meet a temporary need is demoralising. 'Out-relief,' Mr. Pell urges, 'is one of those tender mercies which in its effect on the poor themselves is cruel in the extreme.' 'An attractive form of help is too great a temptation for ordinary human nature, and rapidly develops pauperism,' is the text of some of the most able pamphlets.

Reformers who have done a good work for the poor are naturally afraid lest the evil they have driven away in the shape of outdoor

relief may return in some new form of indoor relief. They argue now that the offer of work on a farm will make pauperism attractive, that labourers will thus be tempted to degrade themselves, and that laziness and low wages will ensue. They say the scheme is wrong in principle because it offers to the poor 'an eligible' maintenance. That is to say, they rely on the disagreeableness of indoor treatment to sting men into activity. A prison-like garb, a prison-like task of stone-breaking, a prison-like system of control, a vexatious set of rules against talking, a stigma attached to the term 'pauper,' the solitary confinement of the casual ward—these constitute the deterrent force against too ready a reliance on State help, and the mitigation of this force by the establishment of a farm is deprecated.

The offence of the proposed scheme is that its offer is 'eligible.' The arguments of its opponents are based, it will be seen, on the assumption that ineligibility or disagreeableness must be the condition of every offer of relief, so that applicants may be 'deterred.' Is mere disagreeableness a deterrent worthy a civilised community? In a barbaric state it may deter wrong-doers to take an eye for an eye; in a civilised state such a punishment is considered brutal, and the wrong-doer is treated as one to be educated. In our prisons the schoolmaster and the trademaster take the place of the executioner, and instead of a brand the criminal, at the end of his term, receives wages he has earned. It would seem therefore that the disagreeableness and the vexations with which poverty is punished belong to the barbaric stage. Men and women who have become poor have as much right to be educated as the criminals; they cannot be driven to work by brands and bullying any more than the criminal can be driven to righteousness by giving an eye for an eye. May it not therefore be assumed that in these days a form of deterrent must also be a form of education. A mere deterrent—the treatment which is hateful to the loafer but which is also repulsive to the honest poor—represents a worn-out system. These brands of pauperism, this stone-breaking, this solitary confinement of the casual can only rouse effort by rousing resentment. By submission to God's punishments a man finds his way back to life; by obedience to these invented vexations a man becomes an enemy to society. A system of mere deterrents cannot long survive; one must be devised which if it punishes does not degrade; State relief must not indeed be attractive, but neither must it be so repulsive as to offer to the honest and ignorant man no means of fitting himself for work, even if he submit to control. It is not fair to deprive a man of heaven, but it is fair to say 'he must work out his own salvation.' A deterrent must be a form of education, a law which, if a man obeys, he will be improved thereby.

The relief offered on the training-farm will, for example, be in the truest sense deterrent. What loafer would endure to be sent

out of London to occupy a hut apart from his family and his friends, to do dull work in the fields, to submit to continual training of mind and body, to be deprived even of the excitement of gas-light. The loafer hates, above all things, to be improved, and the farm would be more distasteful to him than the workhouse, where he has at any rate the fun of foiling the master's efforts to make him take his discharge. On the other hand, what honest man would not gladly endure loneliness, dulness, or labour if at the end he could see himself able to earn a living and serve his children. Any man who being out of work refused such an offer would get no sympathy or encouragement from his neighbours of any class. An indirect advantage of a training-farm would indeed be the right direction of a sympathy which is now often given to those who say they would starve rather than go to 'the house.' Such sympathy from members of the steady classes makes many agitations dangerous, and may, if it be not guided, help in the overthrow of beneficial action. The knowledge that in the workhouse education and not punishment was offered would be a guide to sympathy, and at last gain for guardians the support of working people.

Another line of argument followed by those who object to the management of the training-farm being under the poor law takes its start from their conception of what is meant by pauperism. 'If,' they say, 'a man receives relief from the rates he is a pauper, and as a pauper will be shunned by his fellows and refused in the colonies.' Now by the term 'pauper' is meant the cringing creature who schemes to escape work; and the question arises whether it is relief, or the method of its administration, which brings a man down to this condition. Children get their education for nothing or for a nominal fee, working men enter the poor-law infirmary or a hospital during illness, state pensioners take their pensions, sons enjoy what their fathers earned—all these have relief and are not made thereby cringing creatures. On the other hand, the recipients of out-relief, the cadgers who beg for coal-tickets, the *habitués* of the workhouse, are degraded. All receive relief, but only the latter may truly be described as 'paupers.'

Pauperism represents a moral condition resulting not from the acceptance of relief, but, like other conditions, more or less traceable to fifty different causes.

The relief offered in the training-farm would aim at exerting an influence which would counteract pauperism; it would not, like out-relief, depending on the chance favour of an official or on the cleverness of an applicant's tale, tempt some to bully and some to cringe, but, offered according to rules capable of being universally understood, it would promote steady action; neither would it, like much indoor relief, be given as if it were wrung out of the ratepayers affording the recipients the demoralising pleasure of being gainers by others' loss, but it would be given with the distinct object of training men to work. No citizen would therefore grudge the expense any more than he grudges

the labour spent on education, and no recipient would be any more degraded than is a man who gets his technical teaching at the People's Palace.

As a final argument it is said that if guardians employ men on a training-farm the belief will be encouraged that it is the duty of the State to find work for the unemployed. In answer to which it must be repeated that the object of the farm is not to give work but to give training. The guardians do already teach such trades as carpentering, baking, and mat-making: there can hardly be such a distinction between working on the produce of the land and on the land itself as to condemn the latter as dangerous. The *Standard*, commenting on the proposal, says, 'An experiment for so well-defined a purpose, and conducted strictly on the principle of making all paupers work hard for their living, would be little likely to be confounded with such pernicious establishments as the national workshops of political dreamers.'

With every sympathy therefore for the objects of those who dread lest poor-law relief should affect the independence of the people, I submit that the establishment of a training-farm is not open to the objection that it is false to the principle of poor-law reform.

Whether the direction of such a farm shall be in official or voluntary hands must be settled simply on practical grounds. For either there is much that may be urged. The guardians have an established position, the command of money, and they do all their work under the public eye. A voluntary association has a certain freedom of action, allows for the play of enthusiasm, and depends for success on public support. The elements which each supply are necessary. In the working of the farm there must be stability and effective control; there must also be individual care and a certain elasticity in management.

Ought the direction to be in the hands of a Board of Guardians, which gives stability; or in the hands of an association, which gives elasticity? Clearly stability should come before elasticity. A firm government must be established before changes can be successfully tried, and there is little doubt that guardians would be recognised as the right body to direct a training-farm were it not (1) that the scheme is suspected as a new departure, and (2) that public bodies are in bad repute.

If the scheme were an experiment in a totally different direction to any undertaken by guardians, there might be good reason for entrusting it to a body which would commit the State to nothing, and which would die without leaving heirs. As, however, a training-farm is a legitimate development of the industrial training of a model workhouse and of the remedial efforts of an infirmary to help the same class of persons, and as fitfulness of management would be fatal, there is the best reason for entrusting the direction to guardians.

Public bodies, though, are in bad repute. The malpractices which

have been lately disclosed, the common talk about the red tape of officialism, the published reports of the vain discussions on Boards—all these things make official management unpopular. Voluntary associations meet in private, but if their reports were published favouritism would be discovered, delays made manifest, and wasted time shown to be the not unfrequent result of a meeting. In addition their action is spasmodic, depending on windfalls, or fitful, depending on the will of some powerful supporter. They as frequently die as live, and the amount of money and energy which is every year sunk by the weak administration, the badly chosen officials, and the follies of voluntary associations would appal even those hardened by tales of expenditure in public offices.

It is hard to judge between the effectiveness of official and voluntary bodies. It is everyone's business to abuse a Board; it is no one's business to abuse a charity, and it is the business of every supporter to sing its praises. So the common opinion gets a bias against Boards. If I sum up a somewhat long experience, I would say that the fitfulness and uncertainty of voluntary agencies make them more unfit for directing work than does the somewhat wooden stability of public Boards. I recall with pain the method covering a want of method, the affectation of business forms while money was being stolen, and the rapid succession of revolutionary policies which have marked some well-designed societies. At the same time I recall with pleasure the order, the care, and the continuity which have counterbalanced the slowness and density of many public Boards.

On the whole the best results seem to me to be attained when volunteers supplement official action. The guardians, for instance, teach the children in their schools, but lady visitors befriending those children incline the teaching to the needs of life. The relieving officers discover the cases of poverty, but the visitors of the Charity Organisation Society making friends with the poor discover the means of relief. The School Board works the schools, but the local managers make the work effective for higher education. In the present case, therefore, I am disposed to say that the most practical course would be for the guardians to buy the land, admit the labourers, and administer the farm. By this means the experiment could be made with an adequate support of money, and with a fair promise of permanence, and under the supervision of the myriad-eyed public. If it were left to voluntary action there would be the delay consequent on the difficulty of raising money, and then the greater difficulty of getting consistent and persistent management. Because of want of money, or because of excess of zeal, the plan would break down and be discredited without a fair trial.

A training-farm dependent for its support on the moods of the benevolent or on the power of its secretary to write sensational

appeals, dependent for its control on the wayward wills of a committee subject now to one leader and now to another, would have no stability, and no subsidy voted by the guardians would add this essential quality. A training-farm under the guardians might partake of the nature of a workhouse; the administration might be rigid, the application of ideas to forms might be slow, the representation of officials might get undue consideration, but the management would be stable, and the service of volunteers would do much to add the individual care and the development which depends on enthusiasm.

The only practical and practicable course, it seems to me, is for guardians to take the direction of the scheme.

If a further argument be needed it may be found, I think, in the position which guardians occupy in the public mind. They are elected by the ratepayers as the guardians of the poor. They will not be held to have fulfilled their duties if they do nothing but sting the poor to action by refusing out-relief and by making indoor relief ineligible. Tonics are not a universal remedy, and some characters are too weak to endure the tonic of strict treatment. Guardians will be held responsible if, as may well happen during some winter, a chance brings to their gates a starving multitude. They will be asked, why they did not foretell the catastrophe and why they did nothing to prevent it. To be a guardian, and not to guard, is to hold an office without doing its work.

Statesmanship consists in prevention more than in cure. It is for the guardians of London to seek, if even they are unable to carry out, the means of settling the problem of the unemployed, of hushing that cry which is so much more bitter because it rises from men who, for want of knowledge, are in poverty, in misery, and in sin. It is for want of character that so many suffer, and those means alone are worth support which are fellow-workers with God to develop character.

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