LABOUR COLONIES.

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THE numbers of unemployed who congest our manufacturing centres present a problem of increasing difficulty which demands serious attention and early solution. Various remedial measures have been suggested, but the growth of the evil is not checked, on the contrary it indicates a steady and marked increase.

Public efforts, benevolent and philanthropic schemes, and the Poor Law system have all proved unsuccessful in arresting the ever rising tide of unemployment.

Enquiry on the continents of Europe and America show that this condition is not confined to England, but is a follower in the train of the march of modern civilization, where it has been recognized as a National question, and in many directions is receiving comprehensive treatment.

The strength of a nation is the aggregate value of the character of the men and women composing it. When the national character is in peril, it is the duty of the legislature to accept the responsibility, and provide a remedy, which the scientists and practical men are both competent and willing to suggest.

The unemployed are detrimental to the common good, and should be sequestered in order that their power for evil should be arrested.

This can be accomplished by the establishment of labour colonies, on a scale sufficiently large to accommodate the human by-products of our labour market. Within the past 40 years this has been a steadily increasing quantity. The toiler is too old for work at 50 years of age; while in the "good old times," he was provided with occupation so long as he could "do a turn"; and a fine bond of sympathy existed between master and man. This in our day is but a fragrant memory of the past. Modern legislation and labour saving appliance are responsible for this change. The Employers' Liability Act destroyed the personality of the employer, who has been assimilated into a Board of Directors, where his identity is lost and the ancient friendship which existed between

the employer and the employed severed, each being driven into antagonistic camps, which may possibly be brought together again by Boards of Conciliation.

The Employers' Liability Act has further strained the relation between capital and labour by transferring the employers' obligations, in cases of disablement, to the tender mercies of the insurance company, which limits its risks, by declining to cover workers who are other than able-bodied or advanced in middle life. The consequence of this action is that a large number of workmen, both skilled and unskilled, possessing many years of good work, are cast aside as undesirables and become a drug on the labour market.

Labour saving machinery, which has displaced workers in every branch of industry, is responsible for much of the present unemployment which is so general, and requires readjustment. Trade societies and friendly societies have done splendid service to the State in teaching the principles of thrift, temperance, and self-reliance amongst their members, but these laudable efforts have only been able to affect about one-tenth of the industrial classes who are associated in the various fraternities.

The Government should have recognised the quality of Friendly Society work and supplemented their efforts, which would have proved a powerful auxiliary in emancipating the toiling masses from their miserable industrial environments. The Old Age Pension, which takes effect at 70 years of age, leaves a break of 20 years between the period of incapacity for following a usual vocation, and the nation's bounty, in the form of a pension of 5s. per week.

Scant justice is measured out to industry and honesty, for the inmates of our prisons cost the taxpayer 10s., and the inmates of the workhouse 8s. 6d., or an average of 9s. 3d. per week; while the decent workman, who has struggled through 70 years of fair weather and foul, battled with good times and periods of adversity, is rewarded with a miserable 5s. per week. Honesty may be the best policy, but it does not secure the highest reward.

The prison is expensive, and not a desirable residence for the honest working man; while the workhouse is costly, and has played its part, and should be removed from the scene as an institution which is not in keeping with the progress of the times. The schoolmaster is abroad, and altered conditions prevail which must be dealt with on broad, generous, and humanitarian principles, which will eventually prove most economic.

Those who are our first and chief consideration are the respectable

unemployed, who crave work and spurn charity. They desire the opportunity to earn their daily bread. Why should their petition fall on deaf ears? They have by their toil contributed to the national prosperity, and are anxious to add their quota to the labour market. Surely it is the duty of the nation to provide occupation and the possibilities for existence!

The establishment of labour colonies promises the remedy, which will relieve the general condition, and exercise an improving influence on the personality of certain grades of inmates.

The colony settlement should contain a free and a compulsory department.

The free colony should provide for the industrious unemployed, who are out of work through no fault of their own, but because of circumstances beyond their control, where they should be able to obtain employment, or assistance to obtain work, either in their own district or elsewhere, to which they would be assisted by the Labour Bureau or Labour Exchange, which would be linked up and form part of the system.

The second or compulsory colony would accommodate the unemployed, foremost among whom we find the professional vagrant who despises work, and is always on the search for opportunities for plunder, or violence to persons or property. It would also include the weak-willed inebriate, the mentally deficient, and the epileptic. For each class some special treatment must be devised, in order that the vicious shall not be permitted to contaminate the weak or irresponsible. To remove these persons from our towns and cities, our highways and byeways, is a great undertaking, but it is freighted with possibilities which are full of great promise, and which will amply reward the effort.

County, urban, and rural authorities should have the power to combine for the purpose of establishing joint labour colonies, which, to prove successful, must be carried out on an extensive scale in order to embrace the numerous and important provisions necessary for dealing in a satisfactory manner with the various sections of the great army of the unemployed. For example, if the five northern counties, Northumberland, Newcastle, Durham, Westmoreland, and Cumberland, were to associate for this purpose they would possess ample materials for the undertaking, as there are within their area nearly a million of acres of waste land, waiting for cultivation, and presenting an ample field for agriculture and afforestation, which in a few years would supply a large portion of the ten million tons of timber which we annually import; while the agriculturalist would by labour transform thousands of these barren acres into fruitful plains, rich with Mother Nature's bounty, for the maintenance of the people. The

hungry and discontented would be transformed into industrious and contented husbandmen. Workshops and suitable industries should be introduced to provide occupation when work on the land is impossible, and to provide a variety of pursuits, for all men are not fitted for following agriculture.

The value of the labour colony has been ascertained by our continental neighbours, who have supplied us with an object lesson in successful administration which we might follow with advantage. Belgium, Switzerland, and Denmark have solved the problem, and are gradually collecting their unemployed in colonies, where they are classified according to their requirements. The system is working admirably, relieving society of an undesirable element, while the interests of the unemployed are carefully safeguarded, with the result that an encouraging percentage are transformed into respectable citizens.

It is evident that the maintenance of a number of vagrants and undesirables in labour colonies will reduce the prison population, and relieve the State of an expenditure. The amount thus saved should be contributed to the cost of the colonies, so dividing this cost between the local authority and the national exchequer.

Labour colonies should be organised on economic lines, and not supply food, clothing, and shelter on a luxurious scale, and superior to that to which the inmates have been accustomed. The comfortable accommodation and ample provisions supplied by the prisons and workhouses have popularised these institutions with the wastrel, where the so-called "*ins and outs*" enjoy the ever open door, and hospitality provided at the expense of the community.

The average earnings in H.M. prisons are less than 5s. per week, and the cost, after making allowance for labour, is £23 per annum, or about 9s. 6d. per week, about 1s 6d. more than the cost of maintenance in the workhouse; so that the cost of dealing with our unemployable averages 9s. 3d. per week, while it will be generally admitted that this expenditure does not accomplish the object in view. Society reaps no advantage, and the betterment of the submerged tenth is not achieved.

In February, 1906, a Departmental Committee investigated the vagrancy question, and recommended a complete scheme the centre of which was the establishment of colonies, the closure of the casual ward, and the removal of this class from the jurisdiction of the Poor Law Authorities. It further suggested that the *bona-fide* work-seeker should receive preferential treatment and material assistance, when he takes the road in search of employment. Indiscriminate doles are censured, as responsible

for encouraging mendicity, and assisting thereby to maintain vagrancy as a profitable and easy mode for obtaining a living. Every case should be investigated and verified, and the information tabulated, in order that the cases should be classified before they are dealt with, and this will be performed by the labour bureaux or exchanges, which in time will have a complete record of the units coming within the sphere of their operations.

Philanthropy is too often abused, and is frequently the means of increasing the evil it hopes to remedy. The secretary of a society which has sent a large number of persons to the colonies, complains that about 50 per cent. of their good work is thrown away on unworthy objects who return to their old haunts and habits.

All unemployment should be dealt with through the official and recognized channels of the service. The unemployed must be collected in colonies under authority and sorted. Those who possess the possibilities for betterment should be afforded the opportunity for emancipation.

The incorrigible habitual should be detained under observation where the possibilities of causing further injury to society would be limited, and his general conditions safeguarded.

COUNCILLOR W. F. ANDERSON (Glasgow) said that the Distress Act was one of the greatest absurdities which had ever emanated from Parliament. Last year in Glasgow there were 24,000 unemployed men, and it was ascertained that 54 per cent. of this number had never made application previously for assistance, but because of long-continued distress they were compelled to do so. He pointed out that Denmark had recovered from periods of distress by the cultivation of the dairying industry. In his opinion the two obstacles to a solution of the problem of unemployment in this country were the liquor laws and the land laws. There were millions of acres of unemployed land, and thousands of unemployed men, and it was obvious that they should be brought together. The practice at present was to help the pick of our workmen to emigrate and to assist the wastrel to remain a wastrel. He animadverted on the insistence of trades unions upon a minimum rate of wages, and deplored that a workman was often thrown on the scrap heap because his employer could not afford to pay him the minimum rate, though his labour might be worth to the employer much more than a living wage. In conclusion, he said that the question of unemployment would not be solved either by tariff reform or by socialism, though he considered that a solution would certainly be arrived at if municipalities, either alone or in combination, set themselves to consider it in all its bearings.

MR. R. LAMBIE (Lanark) said it was an undoubted fact that the holding up of the land was one of the chief factors in creating distress. Once the land was

subject to a measure of control by the people themselves for the purpose of living in its wider sense then we would find a better distribution of employment, better housing, and a higher standard of living all round. The attainment of such a condition of things rested with the people themselves, and he hoped that we were now fairly on the way to secure it.

ALDERMAN NEWTON, in replying, urged that Parliament should be requested to establish labour colonies. Legislation should, among other powers, empower local authorities to acquire land for the purposes of colonisation. Intemperance was a factor, but only a factor, in the problem of unemployment. The great majority of the unemployed were stranded by economic causes over which they had no control, and for which they were in no respect responsible.

ADMINISTRATION OF NOTIFICATION OF BIRTHS ACT.

By COUNCILLOR W. F. ANDERSON, J.P.

ABSTRACT.

AT the end of June, 1909, the Act had been adopted in England in 19 of the Metropolitan boroughs, 44 county boroughs, 36 non-county boroughs, and 41 urban districts. It came into force in Glasgow on January 1st, 1908, so that they had statistics available for the whole of 1908. Of the 23,743 births occurring in that year no less than 20,485 were notified to the medical officer of health under the provisions of the Act. Of this number 568 referred to still births. It was of interest to know that 45 per cent. of the total number of births were under medical care. The question might very well be considered whether Parliament should not be approached to provide for the registration of all still births, and to prohibit the burial of any still-born child unless a medical certificate was produced as to the fact of still birth. In Glasgow there were five small committees of voluntary visitors who co-operated with the sanitary department in keeping under observation children who were receiving milk from the Corporation milk depot. These district committees had now been formed into an association called "The Glasgow Infant Health Visitors' Association." There were about 300 voluntary visitors connected with the association, and their work was fully under the supervision of the lady assistant to the medical