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The Municipality of Paris and the Unemployed

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adopted by Lord Liverpool had been embraced by Conduitt,<sup>1</sup> but I have been unable to find any authoritative declaration of the law. Conduitt himself seems to admit the existence of persons who doubted.<sup>2</sup>

E. CANNAN

## THE MUNICIPALITY OF PARIS AND THE UNEMPLOYED.

ONCE upon a time it used to be said that one of the most unequivocal of the rights which the law of France secured to her citizens was the right to starve without public interference. But even this lingering "natural right" of freemen is no longer enjoyed without reservation. France has caught the social reform spirit which is abroad equally with other Western countries, and the institutions which have been set on foot in her large towns for the purpose of coping with unemployment and its attendant miseries and evils are many and beneficent. Herein Paris unmistakably leads the way, and a short review—based on the most recent official data available—of the work which is being done by the metropolitan municipality in this domain will not be without suggestiveness for English municipal reformers. It will be understood that the laudable efforts in the same direction which are exerted by private organisations are not touched in this summary.

### I.—*Refuges for Men and Women.*

Beginning with the most needy classes—the homeless, the abandoned, the flotsam and jetsam of the streets—the municipality here relieves passing misfortune and want by means of an admirable series of Refuges, some of them intended simply to offer food and a dry roof for the night, others offering shelter for a certain fixed period. There are three principal Refuges for men. The chief is the Asile Nicolas-Flamel, situated, somewhat ironically, in the Rue du Château des Rentiers. Here there is a workshop in which employment is provided at a moderate rate of pay (2.20 to 3 francs per day) over and above the board and lodging found. In the winter months the least skilled of the applicants for admission are put to the making of resinous fagots for use in various establishments and services of the municipality. This experiment was begun in the winter of 1894, and it has been attended with considerable success. A workman's earnings are retained until he leaves the Refuge, when, as a rule, the sum of from 25 to 30 francs is found to have accumulated in his favour. But other kinds of employment are offered. In general, the municipality contrives, as far as possible, to have all the works of joinery, locksmithry, masonry, painting, &c., which are required in connection with its

<sup>1</sup> *Select Tracts*, ed. W. A. Shaw, p. 222.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217, "The reasons given for lowering the gold are that gold . . . either is not, or ought not to be, a legal tender at any certain rate."

sanitary and charitable institutions, done by the inmates of the Refuges, who are assorted daily at the Asile Nicolas-Flamel, and allotted to the tasks best suited to their capacities or want of capacities. As a rule, employment is only offered for a fortnight at a time. Of course, the industrial operations of the Refuges are carried on at a loss, and the municipality has during the past three years voted no less than 198,000 francs (nearly £8,000) towards this experiment in the relief of the unemployed, the vote for the present year being half of this total.

Different in character, yet identical in aim, are the Refuges for women. There are four principal "*Asiles municipaux pour femmes*." The great majority of the women admitted are domestic servants of various grades who have fallen; and other numerous categories are sempstresses, laundry-workers, and flower-girls, though there are also models, shop-girls, machinists, singers, &c. The usual stay is from one to four weeks; though most of the inmates are discharged within a fortnight. Perhaps the most noteworthy of these Refuges is the Pauline-Roland Workshop Refuge (*Asile ouvrier*), in the Rue Fessart, which has been carried on since 1890. This is intended for the reception of women who are temporarily without work, yet fit for it. Here they are well sheltered and fed, and, at the same time, suitably employed at wages until they can look out for fixed occupation outside. In this they are aided by the directress, whose duty it is to endeavour to procure situations for as many deserving inmates as possible, preference being naturally given to those who most recommend themselves by industry and honesty. The women are engaged in laundry work, and in sewing and mending for other philanthropic institutions.

During the first ten months of last year 801 women and 233 children were received in the Refuge, and worked,—the former 36,665 days in the aggregate (an average of  $48\frac{1}{4}$  days) and the latter 2,431 days (an average of  $10\frac{1}{2}$  days). The estimated value of the sewing done during the period named was 16,286 francs or £651, but the inmates also did all the washing for the whole of the women's Refuges (400 beds), for the men's Refuges (400 beds), and for other municipal institutions. Wages of 10,431 francs (£417) were paid to the women during these ten months, at the rate of forty centimes per day to washerwomen, and twenty to fifty centimes to sempstresses, with full board and lodging. *Crèches* for infants and young children are associated with the Refuge, which contains 166 beds and 50 cradles. This Refuge costs the municipality 100,000 francs (£4,000) yearly, of which 5,600 francs (£224) went last year in staff salaries, and 55,800 francs (£2,232) in food and general establishment charges.

At the Asile Michelet (Rue de Tolbiac), whose accommodation has during the present summer been extended from 100 to 200 beds, sewing (simple garments) is also provided, but it is voluntary. Here there are most inmates, and a very large proportion seek admission for maternity. In the first ten months of last year 1,280 persons were

admitted (128 per month), and 1,730 had to be sent away from want of room. No children are taken here. The greater number of women were between fifteen and thirty years of age, and only eight were above forty. It is noticeable that of the unfortunates who sought entrance, four were born in the provinces to one born in Paris. The Asile Michelet costs the municipality 110,000 francs (£4,400) yearly.

Passing over the Asile Ledru-Rollin (2 Fontenay-aux-Roses) with its 100 beds,—fifty for women and fifty for children—carried on at a yearly cost to the municipality of £3,200, special mention should be made of the Asile George Sand (3 Rue Stendhal). This is a smaller establishment, which costs the municipality but 20,000 francs (£800) a year, and the admissions average 300 a month—240 women and sixty children. A special work here is the provision of baths for girls attending the nearest communal schools twice a week—on Thursday and Sunday. Dated tickets are distributed amongst the mistresses for the purpose, and as a rule 160 free baths are supplied monthly.

The Women's Refuges are administered by a committee consisting of the Prefect of the Seine as president, five municipal councillors elected by the Council of Paris, five members nominated by the Prefect of the Seine, two doctors similarly nominated, the Director of Municipal Affairs, the Inspector General of Public Health, and the chief of the Municipal Bureau of Labour and of Charitable Institutions as Secretary. The administrative staffs consist of directresses, who are paid from 1,800 to 2,600 francs per year; housekeepers (1,000 to 1,400 francs), women overlookers (800 to 1,200 francs), attendants (600 to 1,000 francs), and servants, and the medical staff of practising doctors, who are paid from 1,800 to 2,600 francs per year; assistants, who are paid 3 francs per visit; certificated midwives, whose pay is from 800 to 1,200 francs a year; and certificated nurses, who receive 600 to 1,000 francs. All the members of the permanent staffs, with the exception of the doctors, have board and lodging free or proportionate payment extra. The directresses are given twenty days' leave in the year and the rest of the staff fifteen days, without deduction of salary, and all *employées* can claim two free days a month.

## II.—*The Agricultural Colony of La Chalmelle.*

A more important experiment in the treatment of the unemployed is the Agricultural Colony which the municipality established in 1892—that of La Chalmelle, in the department of Marne. The estate chosen to work upon was one of 128 hectares of not over-fertile soil. When taken over the farm was in a very unpromising condition, having for three years been unoccupied. The land had gone back in cultivation; weeds grew where corn should have been; and the buildings were dilapidated. Now all is changed; the former desert is a scene of industry, and the produce of the estate is a yearly increasing quantity.

Primarily the colony is intended for the reception of agricultural

labourers who have unwisely drifted from the provinces into the metropolis and there become stranded. M. Faillet (vice-president of the governing committee), in a recent report to the Municipal Council, has described its ideal in the following words :—

“To restore to regular land work the labourers who have come from the country to Paris in the illusory hope of obtaining higher wages and an easier existence, all ignorant of the fatal laws of competition, and who have then in discouragement and misery sunk into the municipal Refuges.”

In a word, the object of La Chalmelle is to get rural labourers back to the land in a more efficient condition than when they left it. As, however, intemperance, improvidence, and unwillingness to work are the principal causes of the social downfalls which furnish the Refuges with their occupants, and thus the colony with its settlers, the task is a difficult if a laudable one. Now and then *bonâ fide* unemployed countrymen seek shelter here—men who have come to Paris with certain slight means, and who, having spent all and failed to secure fixed work, have thrown themselves upon the charity of the municipality, but the average colonist belongs to a far less deserving class.

On entering the colony every settler is clothed in a suitable outfit (clothes, linen, and shoes), the cost of which (about 45 francs) is placed to his debit, to be paid off in labour ; and this outfit he is allowed to keep if he remains two full months, but not otherwise. As the daily wage is 50 centimes it would take 90 days' labour to purchase the modest wardrobe outright, but the authorities are not always concerned to drive a close bargain. Such earnings as are not swallowed up by clothes or by advances for the purchase of tobacco, notepaper, stamps, and similar necessities of civilisation, are allowed to remain on deposit until the time comes for leaving the colony. Thus 110 colonists who were discharged in a recent year took away with them 1,648 francs in money, an average of 15 francs, though some had earned as much as 70 francs during their stay.

The duration of residence is limited to several months, but while the majority leave before the fourth month a few are retained for twice that time, and now and then able and useful men are offered permanent employment on the colony at moderate remuneration. The *régime* of La Chalmelle is serious and systematic ; there is no playing at farming either by master or man. At the head of the colony is a practical manager, well equipped by theoretical study and practical experience for the direction of so important an undertaking, and through his hands about 100 men pass every year, though the establishment rarely exceeds 30 at one time.

The conduct of the settlers, thanks to judiciously firm discipline, is reported to be on the whole very satisfactory ; during the year 1896 only one man had to be expelled, and the offence was one which to him probably counted as a positive virtue—insuperable laziness. For a large portion of the colonists—and this is one of the chief purposes of

the colony, as it is one of its chief merits—permanent work is found, in nearly every case on farms. To quote M. Faillet :—

“The unemployed who enter the colony begin to learn how much more advantageous it is to wait for a situation offering assured home and food, than to return to Paris, whatever be the savings they have amassed at La Chalmelle.”

Most of these situations are offered by friends of the colony, for as yet the farmers' associations have not taken great interest in the experiment, and the unknown applicants for labourers “are often bad employers who seek to exploit the misery of our *protégés*.” During the year 1894-5 140 farmers in various parts of the country wrote to the colony for workers. But in passing from the colony the time-expired settlers do not pass from the notice of its conductors. They are kept in sight as long as possible ; where practicable they are occasionally visited for the sake of encouragement, in other cases contact is preserved by letter. As M. Faillet says :—“A man who has suffered has always moments of weakness : a word of encouragement, a kindly message, a friendly letter may be able to sustain him.” This fact is steadily kept in view, and the results are highly gratifying, for it is affirmed that of the colonists who have left the establishment to fill situations fully fifty per cent. have been restored to a regular and moral life.

It need hardly be said that the colony is not as yet self-supporting. The cost to the municipality in 1892 was 21,600 francs, in 1893 44,791 francs, in 1894 42,440 francs, in 1895 45,400 francs, and in 1896 42,300 francs, while this year the grant is fixed at 43,300 francs or £1,732. It is, however, hoped that before long no subsidy will be required. “We are convinced” (so reports M. Faillet to the Municipal Council) “that the colony, seriously encouraged, methodically developed, having a constant equipment of a hundred or more settlers, will in a near future be able to maintain itself. . . . But if La Chalmelle has succeeded, in spite of so many difficulties, it is largely owing to the devotion and the tenacity of the Administration (of Paris).”

### III.—*The Labour Exchange.*

The Bourse du Travail of Paris is still a unique institution, notwithstanding that its copies are many. Originally established in the Rue Jean-Jacques-Rousseau in 1887, it soon outgrew its provisional quarters, and the municipality voted no less than £80,000 for the erection and equipment of a larger building, more appropriate to the purposes in view. This is situated in the Rue du Château-d'Eau, and was opened in May, 1892, since when the parent Exchange has served as an *annexe*, devoted to the uses of special trades.

The principal structural features of the Bourse du Travail are an assembly hall of large proportions on the ground floor, capable of holding 2,500 persons, a second spacious hall below (the *salle de grèves*),

and above a suite of 150 rooms intended for the meetings of the workmen's associations—nearly 300 in number—which are affiliated to the institution. Such affiliation is open to all “syndicates of workmen or *employés* legally constituted and carried on in accordance with the law (on trade combinations) of March 21, 1884.” These may occupy offices in the Exchange for the purpose of mediating employment for their members, and of promoting their individual and collective interests in all legitimate ways. Ostensibly on account of the failure of certain associated syndicates to conform with this law, the Exchange and its *annexe* were, in July 1893, closed by a decree of M. Dupuy, then Minister of the Interior, and they remained closed until April of last year, when a new set of regulations was introduced. Before that time the municipality had given a tolerably free hand to the trade associations so far as the conduct of the Exchange and their own proceedings within its walls went; and the consequence was that political agitation got the upper hand, and the Exchange fell into disfavour with a considerable section of the Municipal Council and of the citizens. When its doors were reopened, the associations were subjected to stricter supervision. In place of self-government, very wide powers of control were entrusted to the Prefect of the Seine (the Chief Mayor of Paris), whose sanction is now requisite before a trade syndicate can use the Exchange, who nominates the administrative officials, and who approves the expenditure, in conformity with the resolutions of the Municipal Council. The old Trade Unionist monopoly has also been broken down, and it is required that the hiring hall (*salle d'embauchage*) of the Exchange shall be open indiscriminately to all workmen and *employés*, whether Unionist or not. In the words of the new regulations, “Whoever wants work, or has work to offer, will have free access here.” Yet the Exchange is probably more rather than less efficient, even as a means of promoting the interests of labour, by virtue of this change in its system of government, while public confidence has been restored. Certainly the working classes of Paris cannot accuse the Municipal Council of parsimony in the treatment of their famous labour market. Besides providing the Exchange free of charge, it applies no less than £9,200 yearly to its maintenance and work. Nowhere else in the world does a civic authority incur equal expenditure in the same behalf.

WILLIAM HARBUTT DAWSON

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### HOMEWORK IN BERLIN.

AN enquiry into homework by Fräulein Dyhrenfurth appears in the series of *Staats-und socialwissenschaftliche Forschungen*, edited by Professor Schmoller, giving the results of an investigation, undertaken by the author with the help of several assistants, into the work-