

ART. VI.—“THE UNEMPLOYED: A NATIONAL QUESTION.”¹

THIS is a book which ought to be widely read, for it is just the book which was wanted on this subject, which at the present time is causing so many of us such great anxiety. It is short, it is extremely clear, and its tone is eminently fair and judicious. Its author speaks with authority, for he speaks from unusual fullness of knowledge and experience. It is, too, a very *hopeful* book; and hopefulness as to the possibility of a satisfactory solution of such a problem as that of the unemployed is a feeling much to be welcomed, especially when, as in Mr. Alden's case, it is based upon an intimate acquaintance with all the various factors of the problem; and is certainly not justified through evading or ignoring any one or more of its many difficulties.

I would lay special stress upon this feeling of hopefulness, because one of the temptations of the present time is to feel oppressed by the apparent *hopelessness* of this problem. The social sore appears to be both so deep and so widespread that we are inclined to regard it as incurable; and we are apt to think that all that can be done is to mollify it by means of temporary relief funds, or relief works, and by the provision of free meals, etc.

Mr. Alden looks the facts in the face. He considers the problem from both sides: (1) The men that want work, and (2) the works that want men. The real problem is to connect the two. He helps us to see that to make this connection ought to be by no means impossible, and his book may be said to explain the methods he would pursue. Before we enter upon an examination of these let us note that (1) as for twelve years Warden of Mansfield Settlement in West Ham, (2) as a member of the Mansion House Unemployed Committee and (3) as Honorary Secretary to the Guildhall Conference of 1903, he does not lack experience. But, in addition to this experience, he brings two other qualifications to his task. First, he has most carefully studied and digested the various recent Blue Books on the subject, many of the conclusions of which are embodied in his own chapters; and secondly, he has personally visited and studied the arrangements of many of the labour colonies in Germany, Belgium, and Holland.

The book contains nine short chapters, followed by seven short appendices and a very brief bibliography.

¹ “The Unemployed: a National Question,” by Percy Alden, M.A. London: P. S. King and Son, Orchard House, Westminster, 1905. Price 1s. 6d. net.

In Chapter I. we have a sketch of the chief causes and processes which have gradually produced the present position. By far the most powerful of these has been, of course, the rural exodus. How many people realize that the number of persons engaged in agriculture in the United Kingdom to-day is *nearly 50 per cent. less* than it was only forty years ago? A second most powerful cause has been the dislocation of an immense amount of hand labour by the introduction of machinery, a cause which is still at work, and will probably continue to be so. A third cause is the increasing keenness of the competition between masters, together with a decreasing “margin of profit”; consequently the demands of the masters upon the men must also increase. Only the young, the active, and the skilful can meet these; others are not wanted, for the master cannot afford to employ them. I would, from my own observation, add a fourth cause: women are in many branches of many trades (they work for somewhat lower wages) gradually displacing men, and with a very evil result.

Each of the first three causes Mr. Alden believes can be checked by the creation of a corresponding force which shall act in the exactly opposite direction. With regard to the fourth cause, it is surely at least conceivable that the area could be enlarged within which the members of trades-unions could show themselves sufficiently strong to be able to forbid the competition of women. Could a larger number of young women, by the sheer necessity of earning a living, be compelled to enter domestic service, a double benefit might accrue: there might be many more places found for men, and employers might have to offer men, at any rate, a somewhat higher wage than they are now paying to young women.

Let us consider the position at the present time. Partly owing to the Factory Acts and the Employers' Liability Act, we have thousands of labourers past the prime of life, or in some way or other below the standard, walking the streets and competing fiercely with each other for any casual work they can obtain. The longer these men remain unemployed the greater is the danger of their becoming demoralized and degraded, because no man can be idle for long without suffering at least some moral deterioration. This fact should not be forgotten.

Mr. Alden thinks that the theory of non-interference—“that it is best to leave men to fight for their own interests, since the most deserving are sure to obtain employment, while the rest can, if necessary, be provided for by the Poor Law”—can no longer be maintained. He thinks that the opposite view—viz., that the *community* has a responsibility towards the unemployed—is becoming more and more generally

accepted. The corollary to this view is, of course, that the community must discharge this responsibility by enabling the unemployed to obtain work. Charity, however well meant, is no remedy; it only intensifies the evil by lessening the independence and power of self-effort of those who receive it. On the other hand, “the Poor Law, by inflicting upon the man who applies for relief the stigma of pauperism, tends to place him permanently in the pauper category.”

The problem, then, is to find sufficient work, and work of a suitable nature, for those who to-day are without work. Is this problem insoluble? Mr. Alden believes it is not. The rest of his book may be said to contain his justification for this opinion.

He commences with that class of the workless whom it has become the fashion to call “the unemployable.” The term is expressive, but it is apt to be misleading; for among those so described there is not *one* class, but *many* classes, which must be grouped under at least two chief heads.

One of the chief causes of failure in our present methods of dealing with distress is our lack of sufficient discrimination. This arises from two main reasons: First, from circumstances we feel obliged to act in a hurry; we form relief committees, and obtain information, and decide upon methods, when the distress is actually upon us; second, we expect that, with very little machinery, and that by no means of a high order, we can produce a great deal of good work. Only the other day I came across an appeal to the voters in a certain union upon the gross extravagance in the administration of the Poor Law. This charge of “gross extravagance” arose from an attempt (1) to appoint certain additional officials, who were absolutely necessary for the proper administration of the law, and (2) to pay these an adequate salary, which was certainly necessary if capable men were to be obtained. In this union an additional capable relieving officer would more than save his own salary by being able to check out-relief being given in wholly unsuitable cases.

We must, then, have discrimination; and, if this is to be adequate, the administrative power to insure it must also be adequate, and for this power we must be prepared to pay. Money so spent will be a wise investment for the community.

Of the so-called “unemployable,” Mr. Alden points out, as I said just now, that there are two great divisions: (1) All able-bodied men who refuse to work, or are refused work owing to defects of character; (2) the physically or mentally deficient. Both these classes must be *educated* to work, but they must be educated by very different methods.

Careful discrimination will show several separate classes within each of these main divisions. Among the first we shall find (1) criminals, (2) semi-criminals, (3) vicious vagabonds, (4) the incorrigibly lazy, etc. All these require, and should be compelled to undergo, reformatory treatment. The casual ward, as it exists at present, should be abolished in favour of the relief-station, now so common in Germany and Switzerland. The man on the tramp, who is seeking for work, should be compelled to carry identification papers, and should these not be found in order he should be detained by the police until proper investigation as to his identification and antecedents can be made. Above all, there should be a graded system of labour colonies, the lowest class of which would differ little from a prison; the highest would be a settlement in which we find men to all intents and purposes free and enjoying the results of their own labours. To these labour colonies it should be in the power of the justices to commit any man for habitual vagrancy, idleness, or refusal to accept work. The object of one and all must be to teach men to work, to prevent the existence of idleness.

The initial expenses connected with these colonies would doubtless be great; but character is a national asset for which we must be willing to pay something; and if we think of the cost to society at present of the criminal, the semi-criminal, the vagabond—the idle and vicious classes who infest the slums of our towns—the additional cost to the nation would not be so very great; and if these colonies were carefully placed and skilfully managed, a considerable return might be obtained in the improvement of the estates on which they were established.

The second class of the unemployable—the physically and mentally deficient—Mr. Alden divides into four sections: (1) The aged; (2) the physically weak and maimed, including the blind, lame, and deaf, and men with weak hearts; (3) epileptics; (4) weak-willed inebriates and the mentally deficient. Taking these various classes together, we feel that what is needed for them all is "a system which would allow us to utilize to the full any powers that these poor men and women may possess, at the same time imposing upon them nothing in the shape of punishment or of stigma for that which is entirely beyond their own control."

Among these various classes the "weak-willed inebriates" are the most difficult with which to deal. Probably the best, if not the only, remedy is the farm, or labour colony, in which they may be so long compulsorily detained as may be requisite to effect a cure. In such a colony they would "work under healthy conditions at suitable employment, and under strict

medical supervision; they might then regain their strength of mind and restore their wasted energies.”

Having dealt with the unemployable, we are now in a position to consider the genuine “unemployed”—the genuine workers who are *unable* to find work. We will not discuss the question of the probable number of these, which, of course, varies with the season and the state of trade. It is, however, under the most favourable circumstances, probably very much larger than most people imagine.

Mr. Alden would first divide the unemployed into three main classes: (1) “Those who are unemployed owing to dislocation in trade, the death of a trade, or changes in methods of industry, and are therefore superfluous in such trades; (2) those who are unemployed owing to temporary depression in trade or a severe winter; (3) those whose labour is seasonal or casual.”

Among many suggested remedies, Mr. Alden thinks something at least might be effected by (1) “improved education and technical training.” For while it is true that a certain number of skilled workers are to be found among the unemployed, on the other hand, the better the education, and the greater the technical skill among our own workpeople, the less liability is there for trades which require these to a high degree being driven abroad (*e.g.*, to Germany) in search of them. (2) Another remedy may be found in legislative and other means of combating drink and gambling—both fruitful sources of individual unemployment. This suggestion opens out a wide field, one which, so far, in this connection, has not received the attention it deserves. Only those who have tried to compute the loss to the resources of the country by the evils of drink and gambling have any idea of the immense sums which are thus squandered; and the material or financial loss is only a small part of the whole loss. We have to think of the losses to national character, national health, etc. (3) A third need Mr. Alden believes exists in more “effective trades organizations, especially for unskilled labour.” Here we enter upon a subject which must, to a great extent, be left to the expert. But that is only to say that it requires more knowledge, more investigation, more careful study, than has yet been bestowed upon it. (4) “The reform of taxation.” This is a favourite remedy with a certain class of reformers: and here, again, we are in a field which belongs to the expert. There are those who assert that unemployment is due primarily to under-consumption. “The unearned elements of income are being capitalized at so rapid a rate that the demands of ordinary consumption are not able to proceed *pari passu* with the production that results” (p. 38). “The

object of the statesman should, then, be to make taxation tend to the greater distribution of wealth—*i.e.*, of power to consume." (5) "The checking of the exodus from the country to the town." This is of all remedies, I believe, really the one from which we may hope for the best and the most permanent results for good. And every means and every opportunity should be taken for putting it into effect. There are no doubt many difficulties in the way. The questions connected with a sufficient supply of cottages, of small holdings to be held by the municipalities, of security of tenure for tenants of small plots, of credit banks, etc., will all need to be carefully worked out. But when we think what is done in Denmark; when we remember that "five-sixths of that country is occupied by peasants with small holdings, while dairy-farming on co-operative lines, encouraged by the Government, is pursued with almost unparalleled success"; when we think of the immense sums spent upon imports of dairy produce by this country, we should surely feel that the time has come to devise some plan or method of producing the necessaries of life at home.

I have dealt with the first three chapters of this book at such length that a brief indication of the contents of the remaining chapters must suffice.

Chapter IV. deals with "suggested direct remedies for all classes of genuine unemployed." Among these the first is that of "the appointment of a Minister of Commerce and Industry, together with the reorganization of existing departments dealing with Labour." At present not only the Local Government Board, but the Home Office and the Board of Trade, are all concerned with Labour questions; while the Commissioners of Woods and Forests and the Board of Agriculture are also interested in rural industries. Whatever other reforms are made there should be a special department to be held responsible for the question of unemployment. The second suggestion is that "municipal and other local labour bureaux be established in every place of any size." These must not be, as too often at present, mere hastily devised adjuncts to relief works. What is really needed is a "clearing-house" in each district, which not only registers the unemployed, but systematically classifies them after investigation, and furnishes the Government with a statement of the numbers of unemployed, both skilled and unskilled, in the district under consideration, and finally brings together employers in need of men and unemployed in need of situations, in the briefest possible space of time.

Two other direct remedies are suggested in this chapter, the first being, "relief-stations and lodging-houses," which

should be situated within a day's walk of one another, in order to facilitate the search for work, and they should serve as labour bureaux for their immediate district. The methods whereby these are governed in Germany and Switzerland are fully explained. As a proof of their usefulness, we find that more than two millions of visits were paid to these relief-stations in Germany in the year 1902. The other remedy is that of "the Extension of Insurance against Unemployment." In England this movement is yet in its infancy, and so far is still confined to certain-trades unions; on the Continent, in various forms, it has been tried in different countries. In Mr. Alden's book readers will find much information on the subject, and those who desire still more complete knowledge will find it in the recently published "Report to the Board of Trade on Agencies and Methods for Dealing with the Unemployed in various Foreign Countries" (Cd. 2304).

Chapter V. deals with the difficult conditions created by a dislocation in trade, the death of a trade, or by changes in the methods of industry. Some years ago it was my lot to work amid, and watch, the agonies of a dying trade; at present I am working in a district where hundreds of capable and willing workers are being reduced to destitution by the rapid introduction of machinery and labour-saving apparatus. In the first case the situation was to some extent saved by the introduction of a new trade; in the present case I see no prospect of such an amelioration.

Mr. Alden's remedies are as follows: (1) "County Council farm colonies, together with a system of co-operative small holdings." I have already cited Denmark, and in both Lincolnshire and Norfolk (where the method of small holdings has been tried) it has been justified by success (pp. 70-72). (2) "Agricultural training schools and farm colonies for 'Town-bred Men.'" These have apparently been tried with success both in America and in Germany. (3) "Afforestation." It is difficult to understand why, after the Report of 1902, this opening for labour has not been utilized. By citing case after case Mr. Alden shows that wherever the experiment has been made it has proved a success. In one district in Germany, where land for agricultural purposes was worth not more than four shillings an acre, the profits of the same land under forest are now thirty-eight shillings an acre. In the Landes district in France afforestation has added, it is reckoned, £40,000,000 to the wealth of the country.

Mr. Alden has still many other suggestions to make, such as: (1) The reduction of the hours of labour; not so much as a cure for unemployment as tending to produce greater efficiency in the workers; (2) emigration of suitable families;

(3) the reclamation of waste lands; (4) the improvement of the canal system. But of these I must not stay to speak.

I would advise all who are interested in the present difficulty—and surely all should be so interested!—to study this little book.

The great danger is that, from want of knowledge and want of initiative, we sit down and regard the problem as insoluble, and then fall back upon the fatal method of temporary relief, and so be content to palliate where we ought to try to cure.

We must face the problem as other countries are facing it, and Mr. Alden's book will at least help to convince us that we have by no means as yet exhausted the possibilities of a solution.

I feel I cannot more usefully conclude this paper than by quoting the sentences with which our author closes his final chapter:

"The one hope for England is that *pari passu* with the growth of our national wealth will spread the desire to see a greater and more equitable distribution of that wealth. The unemployed question is largely an economic question, for which charity, however generous, is no solution. It is the first duty of the State, as also its highest and truest interest, to set on foot such constructive reforms as will check the wholesale demoralization of large sections of the working classes, and restore to the people the assurance, so long denied, that honest work will carry with it a just and certain reward."

W. EDWARD CHADWICK.

Notices of Books.

The Catholic Faith: A Manual of Instruction for Members of the Church of England. By W. H. GRIFFITH THOMAS, B.D. London: Hodder and Stoughton. Pp. xxiv + 462. Price 1s. paper; 2s. cloth.

Two notable features of this manual are the arrangement of the contents and the terse way in which the author puts his points. His book represents not only the reading and study of several years, but the teaching given in the course of parochial work, which accounts to a great extent for its practical character. The need of definite and systematic instruction in Holy Scripture and Christian doctrine is widely felt at the present day. Through lack of this many of our congregations have only the most confused notions of the principles of the religion they profess, and people