

CATHOLIC ACTION AND UNEMPLOYABLES

'MAKE him a farmer,' used to be the hopeful proposal for the difficult member of the family. It was really a compliment to the oldest of the civilized professions—that farming might do for him what other occupations could not. In general, however, it must be recognized that settling on the land requires qualities of character all too rare and that the agricultural labourer, dull though he may appear to those who do not know him, must possess a resourcefulness of varied skill and knowledge beyond comparison with wage-earners in other trades. The Catholic land movement in the different phases of its development must call for men and women of at least average human qualities. It is to be hoped, however, that in due time its enthusiasts will find themselves able to give some attention to the value of the land as giving training and livelihood for young people of the 'problem' type. So far as 'Catholic Action and Unemployables' are concerned, what follows is purely speculative—a suggestion to the Catholic body, drawn from work done on interdenominational lines by others.

Turner's Court Farm Training Colony is just off the London road, fifteen miles short of Oxford, in the Chiltern Hills. There are some three hundred colonists, divided among five homes, on a 1,000-acre farm; among them some Catholics, varying in number from twenty to forty. The Colony is governed by the Christian Service Union and provides for lads who are 'unemployable.' Almost any defect which places a boy in this wide category may render him eligible for admission; except epilepsy, for which the Union has other colonies at Lingfield and Starntwaite.

Some cases are maintained in fees by private means, but, broadly, it may be said that the majority are at the charge of Public Assistance Committees, that they are of the type whom the public institutions cannot deal with and who, if they were not here or in the workhouses, would be on the roads. The fees and the farm produce supply, we under-

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stand, the cost of working expenses, while such building development as is required from time to time is usually met by donations. The origin of most has been in the slums of the great cities, followed by upbringing in some institution. Some are weakly boys who need filling out by open air life. Some are 'troublesome.' Most are mentally slow. Some thirty, otherwise capable in every way, are unable to retain employment on account of nocturnal incontinence. The material, as a whole, has been labelled incorrigible before ever it came to the Colony. Small wonder that when the longed-for 'job' comes along, on a farm or in house work, it is not always held for long. The Colony, none the less, can show a good record of results at home and, until recent years, overseas. Surely it is no small success that a Board of Control case should qualify for a County milking certificate. The boys like their work, the animals, their gardens, the land. If you count yourself a member of the Colony you will hear few grumbles; if you are an enquiring outsider, you will hear none at all. There are failures, fearful failures at times, but one remembers that if the lads were not at the Colony they would almost certainly be trudging the roadside or dossing in the casual ward. And one remembers that there is no Catholic institution for lads of this age and kind.

The Colony is directed by a Warden, assisted in farm work and instruction by a highly competent staff. For domestic purposes, for personal training, for such home amenities as are possible, each home is under the care of a man and wife, 'house father' and 'house mother.' In living quarters attached to each home are also a number of young men training for social service and known as 'brothers.' The brother's duty is to work alongside with his 'squad' of ten, to get to know them (his own measure, needless to say, is rapidly taken by his charges), to assist, advise, direct and form them in any way he can. He is helped, of course, by consultation with his colleagues and the Warden.

The Colony is 'evangelical' in tradition, but the religion of each boy is now ascertained on admission and he is ex-

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pected to attend his own place of worship. The Catholic boys can go to Mass in a chapel-of-ease at Wallingford, two and a quarter miles away, and a priest visits the Colony every month or two, says Mass on the spot, and gives them opportunity for the Sacraments. It is always an enjoyable visit for the hospitality and cordial welcome given by everyone in the Colony. There are, of course, inevitable difficulties at times by the very nature of farming duties. Cows have to be milked, etc. For Catholics living and working in the country, these religious facilities offer as much as may be expected. But for lads of the 'problem' type more is needed, in reality nothing less than a constant atmosphere of their Faith, with regular instruction and at least a weekly visit by a priest.

In other words, the need is for a Catholic colony planned on the experience provided by Turner's Court. The need for greater institutional provision for defectives has been emphasized by the Report of the Departmental Committee on Sterilization, and such provision would be the most effective answer to the objectionable recommendations of that Report. It would be unfair to suggest that the need should be provided by the Catholic land movement, even when it has passed far beyond its experimental stages. The movement may be able to help, in due time, since the material training and occupation of the lads would be in agriculture. But such a colony would call primarily for a staff equipped with social experience and training. Probably it would be best directed by a religious community already devoted to work with subjects of this type, a community of brothers with traditions, experience and training, pledged to lives of devotion and in contact with scientific methods.

But such a colony would not entirely solve the problem for our Catholic boys. The lowest age for admission to Turner's Court is fourteen, but in a sense many of these boys will remain children all their lives. Any venture such as Turner's Court, therefore, must be concerned not only with the welfare of the lads while in residence, but equally when they have left. It is a matter of finding suitable situa-

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tions, farming or house work, where they will meet with some patience and understanding and where they can be visited occasionally by those who have been responsible for them. This Colony has always endeavoured to keep in touch with old boys and more recently arrangements have been made for systematic rounds of visits.

This follow-up is particularly necessary. At times the 'job' may fail to be held for more than the first few days and the disappointed colonist find himself back again within a week. More often the difficulty will arise perhaps six months later. He is doing quite well on a farm when something comes to turn his head. Unless he has had an occasional letter or a visit to retain contact with those who had his confidence, he will revert to early surroundings, take to the roads and seek the slums, or he will imagine that the wider world has many better jobs to offer him. Or, perhaps deceived and misled by the very fact that he has at last found himself able to earn a modest livelihood, he gives notice and seeks better fortune elsewhere. He, too, falls back speedily to the environment which he left long ago, before ever he came to the Colony, when he was first admitted to a public institution or a Catholic home. Perhaps, shivering and starving, helped on the road by a kindly policeman, he finds his way to our door to seek, too late in a way, that advice which might have kept him to his post if only we had found time occasionally during those months to do our duty to him.

May we add a word of tribute to the travelling mission of the Southwark Diocese. If a Catholic boy from Turner's Court is sent to a farm in Kent, Surrey or Sussex, one feels assured. However far he may be from church, a note to the travelling mission will secure that he is attended to. How often one has wished that one could find, as the Colony desires, situations in Catholic homes for its Catholic boys! Whatever work may be done elsewhere, by ourselves or others, on the lines of Turner's Court, the after-care problem will always remain and must be regarded as a continuation of, rather than a sequel to, the residential training.

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