

EDITORIAL

THE MOST PRESSING PROBLEM

“The most pressing problem which confronts you is that of unemployment, consequent upon a world-wide restriction of trade, and *this may be alleviated, but cannot be cured* by legislative means.” (The King’s Speech at the Opening of Parliament, Feb. 15th.)

THIS most pressing problem concerns intimately and personally over a million people, to say nothing of their dependents, who are without work and, except for the Unemployment Insurance allowance, without the means of livelihood. If there is any Christian decency and human feeling in the land, this tragedy of unemployment should concern the rest of the community too. The cool admission—uttered so dispassionately—that unemployment is an evil that may be alleviated, but not cured by legislative means, should arouse very real distress and alarm. If we must accept without demur the uncomfortable saying that the present evil of unemployment is an incurable disease of the social body, then there is only one course for us—despair.

It is true that our Lord said, “The poor you have always with you.” He Himself embraced poverty in order to enrich us spiritually; but the poverty that Christ made divine was not synonymous with unemployment. It is insincere to pretend that poverty is a necessary and inevitable element in the Christian scheme: it is hypocrisy on our part (especially when we have all the necessities of life, and perhaps more than our share of the superfluities) to say that poverty is a useful spiritualizing leaven in a world of iniquity. The world will always contain a large number of persons who live honestly by the sweat of their brow without any surplus of wealth. There will, our pessimists assure us, always be poverty in this vale of tears in all its forms and degrees. Does the accept-

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ance of this unpleasant fact imply our acceptance of the most utter and degrading degree of poverty for so overwhelming a proportion of the people of the land? If the presence of the poor in our midst is helpful for fostering the Christian virtues and for giving scope for charity among backsliding humanity, at least the poor need not be unemployed and should not be allowed to starve. Poverty, plus the grace of God, plus a man's good will, is a noble thing we give to God and call an evangelical counsel; but poverty by itself is an evil, fruitful of endless other evils, physical and moral.

His Eminence Cardinal Bourne, in a circular letter to all the clergy of the archdiocese of Westminster, November 3rd, 1920, drew attention to this most pressing problem of unemployment. He said:

“It is officially stated that ‘there are at this moment probably not less than a quarter of a million disabled and fit ex-service men and ex-officers of His Majesty's Forces still out of employment.’”

And His Eminence expressed the hope that the clergy would, by references in the pulpit and by any other means in their power, assist the appeal that was being made on behalf of the unemployed to employers of labour throughout the country.

Another appeal was made at a meeting of representatives of different religious denominations in Trafalgar Square on Saturday, February 19th. The following resolution was passed:

“That this meeting insists that the present crisis of unemployment is but one more sign of the radical failure of our present social order, and affirms that the final remedy for unemployment can only be found in a fundamental recasting of our industrial system.

“At the same time it demands that the immediate need shall be drastically dealt with and, while urging

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that all possible steps shall be taken to employ as many as possible in useful work at standard wages, demands adequate maintenance for all for whom work cannot at once be found.

“ Finally it calls on the Christian Church to recognize the special and acute responsibility in regard to this matter and to raise its united voice in regard to it in no uncertain tones.”

This pronouncement of the Cardinal Archbishop and this resolution of a body of sincere religious men may cast a ray of hope upon a very despairful situation. If there is no cure for the pressing evil of unemployment *by legislative means*, a remedy may be found elsewhere. “ But all agree, and there can be no question whatever, that some remedy must be found, and found quickly, for the misery and wretchedness pressing so heavily and unjustly at this moment on the vast majority of the working classes.” (Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*.)

Perhaps something more than an alleviation of the evil would be found by a more diligent study and more whole-hearted acceptance of the Christian principles enunciated by Pope Leo XIII in his Encyclical on *The Condition of the Working Classes*. Therein unemployment is called a crime. “ The labour of the working man,” says Pope Leo XIII, “ is not only his personal attribute, but it is *necessary* ; and this makes all the difference. The preservation of life is the bounden duty of one and all, and to be wanting therein is a crime. It follows that each one has a right to procure what is required in order to live ; and the poor can procure it in no other way than through work and wages.” The three main causes of evil conditions of the modern working-man are, say the Pope :

1. “ Rapacious usury, which although more than once condemned by the Church, is, nevertheless,

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under a different guise, but with like injustice, still practised by covetous and grasping men.”

2. “ The custom of working by contract.”

3. “ The concentration of so many branches of trade in the hands of a few individuals ; so that a small number of very rich men have been able to lay upon the teeming masses of the labouring poor a yoke little better than that of slavery itself.”

We would strongly recommend the study of this Encyclical to all who are interested or concerned in the pressing problem of unemployment.

THE EDITOR.



BENEDICT XV

SOLE voice of peace amid the raging sea
Of hate and slaughter, cries and counter-cries
Of stricken, bought and sold humanity,
Sole voice of truth amid the storm of lies ;

Sole voice of love amid the roar of hate
That sunders race from race and man from man ;
When all the thoughtless world is desolate
Sole king and seer the Law of God to scan ;

His Law thou meditating day and night
Unto a blind bewilder'd world dost speak,
Unwearied, swerving never left or right,
Blessing and blest, rock-steadfast, valiant, meek.

H. E. G. ROPE.