UNEMPLOYMENT AND THE LAND

FATHER Vincent McNabb's *The Church and the Land* is a book to be read by all who are concerned and anxious about the pressing problem of unemployment. But it would be a pity if our reading of this stirring book produced no effect except a vague feeling that something was wrong and an equally vague conviction that something ought to be done about it. It would be futile to read it as we might read Vergil's Pastorals—to be thrilled and charmed by the vision of the sower casting his seed, the ploughman turning over his furrow or the harvester swinging his sickle. The flail song in threshing time and the joyous music of the churn when butter is a-making are fine glowing dreams and visions that must not be allowed to evaporate into airy nothings. Every chapter of this book should stimulate into action. Fr. Vincent McNabb describes his work as a bugle-call. Wherefore sound the bugle if there be none to answer the call?

The gist of the book could be given somewhat as follows: There are at the present moment more than a million workers unemployed. They are being paid for being unemployed. At the same time there are millions of acres of good arable land lying untilled; and there are many more acres unworked than there are men out of work.

The practical person will at once say, Yes, but the men who are employed are neither by temperament, training nor inclination the sort of people who would or could till the untilled fields even if it were possible for them to get at them. Let him who feels inclined to urge these uncomforting counsels of despair first of all read a little book entitled *Unemployment: A Suggested Policy*, by J. W. Scott (A. C. Black, Ltd.). Therein Professor Scott analyses the evil of unem-

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ployment and his diagnosis on many points tallies with Father Vincent McNabb's.

In the nineteenth century the people began to leave the land and flock into the cities. England became the workshop of the world. Food-growing countries that had surplus stocks were willing to exchange with us their food products for our manufactured wares. All went well so long as England was the only shop. But now we are not the only shop. Our goods are no longer the cheapest and probably not the best. Anyhow, we have not kept up our sales; our storehouses are full of excellent wares which are unfortunately not eatable, factories are idle and the unemployed are thronging the Labour Exchanges and being supported by the State. It seems then that Industrialism has miscarried. It has had all the wrong effect on our civilization. It was hailed as a blessing, but it has turned out to be a blight.

Professor Scott puts forward a scheme for coping with this depressing state of affairs. He says that Homecrofting is the remedy. He does not claim to have invented either the word or the thing. Kropotkin knew all about it, and did much to make it known. But as a matter of fact, Adam and Eve must have been the first Homecrofters. The central idea of Homecrofting is that a man, instead of spending all his time making money, should spend at least some of it making food. Money is uncertain, and you can't eat it; and it is good to have a steady supply of food when the supply of cash dwindles or entirely ceases.

Professor Scott believes that a steady supply of food can be got from less than an acre of ground, and he suggests *Homecroft Settlements around every industrial centre for industrial workers to dwell in.* He is concerned to save industrialism and not to destroy it; but one can only hope that the industrial workers who became Homecrofters would by degrees come to con-

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centrate all their efforts in their land and shake off their interests in the factory. There are practical difficulties to the working out of the plan in a large congested area such as London, where the millions of workers could not have easy access to the land; but that is no reason why the scheme should not be given a trial in places where it is possible. In fact, the scheme is actually at work in England, and it has met with success in India, the United States and Germany.

'Homecrofting is the art of making your own food with your own hands, so that you do not need to buy it. The suggestion is, to take advantage of the short industrial hours. Aim at two shifts a day for the man; one shift at his industrial work, earning wages; and another shift, with his wife and children, in his garden, producing food.'

A wholesale exodus from the factories to the land is in the present state of things neither likely nor possible. Therefore, this plan of creating a transition stage, when the industrial worker is acquiring a taste for the land and shedding his taste for the factory, seems more likely to present a practical solution of the question, How are we to get back to the land?

Reduced roughly to figures, the scheme would mean providing from £800 to £1,000, at the very most, for the cottage and the acre of land for each family; and this could be repaid within a reasonable span of years for about £1 a week; this is to say, for a few shillings over what a man already pays in weekly rent and with all his food to buy.

The very barest outline of Professor Scott's book has been given here. Those who are interested should get the book and read it. They will see that it is all on the lines of hope. The scheme is an attempt to find a way of escape from hunger. Give people the means of making their own food. Make them owners instead of wage-earners, and the unemployment prob-

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lem has been solved. Here seems a sane way of working out our economic salvation. The money spent on doles and coal subsidies might well be diverted into a constructive scheme of this kind, which provides houses and food for the people. If England was powerful enough to be able to organize every resource of wealth and man-power to prosecute for nearly five years the most colossal war in human history, is she not powerful and great enough to mobilise all her forces in more peaceful ways by giving those who love her the wherewithal to live?

THE EDITOR.

BOOK REVIEWS

MRS. DELANY AT COURT AND AMONG THE WITS. Edited by R. Brimley Johnson. 16/- net. (Stanley Paul, 1926.)

We recollect a certain vivid page in Madame D'Arblay, of which Lord Macaulay has made liberal use in one of his best-known essays, where Mrs. Delany figures as the hostess of a stout gentleman with a star on his breast, and 'What? What? What?' in his mouth. The skill of that unrivalled diarist has made us so familiar with the serene and dignified old lady whom George III thus delighted to honour, and whom Edmund Burke described to Dr. Johnson as 'the highest bred woman in the world,' that we feel we hardly need the present portentously large volume of her Letters and its elaborate Introduction. Still, if there *must* be Biographies on a monumental scale, no one is more worthy of one than Mrs. Delany. Niece of Lord Lansdowne, the poet-statesman, pupil of Handel and Hogarth, friend of Swift, Reynolds, Mrs. Montagu, and Hannah More, she is interesting from her social surroundings. But also eminently so on her own account. 'For over half a century she moved,' says Mr. Brimley Johnson, 'with serene propriety among the Best People; graceful and gracious, sure of herself, a Personality whose friendship was an honour and an education.' She was the Great Lady of her generation, perfect in tact and taste. Her position at Windsor was unique; she alone was not expected to remain standing in the royal presence, the King

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