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PRICE ONE PENNY

THE FACTS

— ABOUT THE —

UNEMPLOYED.

An Appeal and a Warning.

BY

[H. H. Champion ?]

→* ONE * OF * THE * MIDDLE-CLASS.*←

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Beholding with the dark eye of a seer
The evil days to gifted souls foreshown,
Foretelling them to those who will not hear,
As in the old days, till the hour will come
When truth shall strike their eye through many a tear.
—*Prophecy of Dante.*

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1886.

But these have not the rich man's grave
To sleep in when their pain is done.
These were not fit for God to save.
As naked hell-fire is the sun
In their eyes, living, and when dead
These have not where to lay their head.—*Swinburne*.

To bring these hordes of outcast captainless soldiers under due captaincy? This is really the question of questions, on the answer to which turns, among other things, the fate of all Governments, constitutional and other—the possibility of their continuing to exist or the impossibility. Captainless, uncommanded, these wretched outcast 'soldiers,' since they cannot starve, needs must become banditti, street barricaders—destroyers of every Government that cannot make life human to them.—*Thomas Carlyle*.

Socialism, in that sense, is the application of the power and resources of the State to benefit one particular class, especially the most needy. There stares us in the face the fact that the duty of maintaining the most necessitous class of the country by the public funds has, for three centuries, formed part of the law of the land. That is so strong a fact that it vitiates every argument which we can use from what is called sheer principle against measures of time.—*Lord Salisbury*, 30th September, 1885.

The typhoon itself is not wilder than human creatures when once their passions are stirred. You cannot check them; but if you are brave you can guide them wisely.
—*Froude*.

People are all very glad to shut their eyes. It gives them a very simple pleasure when they can forget that the bread that we eat, and the quiet of the family and all that embellishes life and makes it worth having, have to be purchased by death—the deaths of men wearied out with labour, and the deaths of those criminals called revolutionaries, and the deaths of those revolutionaries called criminals.—*R. L. Stevenson*.

Hyde Park in the season is the great rotatory form of one vast squirrel cage: round and round it go the idle company, in their reversed streams, urging themselves to their necessary exercise. When they rest from their squirrellian revolutions, and die in the Lord and their works do follow them, *these* are what will follow them. They took the bread and milk and meat from the people of their fields; they gave it to feed, and retain here in their service, this fermenting mass of unhappy human beings—news-mongers, novel-mongers, picture-mongers, poison-drink-mongers, lust and death mongers, the whole smoking mass of it one vast dead-marine store shop—accumulation of wreck of the Dead Sea, with every activity in it a form of putrefaction.—*John Ruskin*.

Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Behold the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth; and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.—*St. James*.

Yet there is a pause, a stillness before the storm; lo, there is blackness above, not a leaf quakes; the winds are stayed, that the voice of God's warning may be heard. Hear it now, O chosen city in the chosen land! Repent and forsake evil; do justice; love mercy: put away all uncleanness from among you.—*George Eliot*.

In God's name, let all who hear nearer and nearer the hungry moan of the storm and the growl of the breakers, speak out! The past, wise with the sorrow and desolation of ages, from amid her shattered fanes of wolf housing palaces, echoes SPEAK! But alas! the Constitution, and the Hon. Mr. Bagowind, M.P., say, BE DUMB.—*J. R. Lowell*.

Balance the two things against each other. At present you have what you call "freedom of trade" in these respects—*i.e.*, every capitalist has almost unlimited scope for his "arrangements," so as to screw out of his workmen the largest possible amount of labour for the smallest possible remuneration. But then what have you to do with it? A population becoming more and more wretched, more and more vicious, more and more discontented, and who only need, at any moment, an able leader to be prepared to revolutionise the Empire.—*Remedies for the Perils of the Nation* (1844).

The Writer will be glad to hear from anyone who agrees with his conclusions.

THE FACTS ABOUT THE UNEMPLOYED.

FOR years past the optimist philosopher and the complacent statistician have declared that the material condition of the masses of the British nation has been steadily improving. But hard facts have a logic of their own, before which pretty theories and judicious compilations must give way when they are found out not to agree with the actual circumstances. Gradually the impossibility of taking a rose-coloured view of the condition of the people has forced itself upon the intelligent public. The occurrences of last winter arrested attention, but the eventful struggles of political life have caused forgetfulness of the truth that whatever changes have taken place on the surface one thing remains unchanged—the monotonous misery of the struggle for a living amongst a large proportion of our countrymen. So short are men's memories, so prone are they, in their suspicion of the exaggerations of hysterical philanthropists and unscrupulous agitators, to discount estimates of distress, that it is necessary to repeat here the deliberate statements of officials writing in cold blood.

It is impossible to give details as to the whole country, but those for the metropolis will serve as a guide, and are by far the most important on account of the danger arising from the congestion of misery in this huge city, where the striking contrast of squalid destitution and immense wealth is ever present. But if the numbers of the Unemployed in London in the winter of 1885 were greater than elsewhere, the misery has been even more intense in many provincial towns where the municipal institutions and local public feeling have enabled earnest if inadequate efforts to be made to mitigate the distress. In Hartlepool, Gateshead, Newport (Monmouth), Brighton, Gloucester, Sheffield, Jarrow, Northampton, Southampton, Pontypridd, Liverpool, Ashton-under-Lyne, Salford, Wolverhampton, Dover, Burton-on-Trent, Derby, Walsall, Stoke-upon-Trent and many other towns all the horrors of famine have been experienced. This autumn, threats of reduction of wages and dismissal of "hands" show only too clearly to those who will take warning that before Christmas 1886 the destitution will be yet more widespread.

At the end of January, 1886, the number of persons applying for relief at the workhouses of London showed no very great increase. From this it was falsely argued that no exceptional distress could exist. But it is the fact that the severity with which the Poor Law has recently been administered denies any relief to persons under 60 years of age who are free from disease. Such "able-bodied persons" are allowed no succour, save on condition of entering the living tomb of the workhouse, which means severance of all family ties, perpetual confinement,

diet worse than is allowed to many criminals, and the abandonment of all hope of being anything but a pauper for the rest of life. It is true that Guardians are allowed to give relief to "able-bodied" males outside the workhouse, on condition of their undergoing the labour test. In actual practice last winter this meant that in three unions skilled artizans, mechanics, clerks, and shop assistants were asked to break from 7 to 9 bushels of stone for a reward varying from 4d. in money, 4d. in groceries, and 2 lbs. of bread to 9d. in money and 2 lbs. of bread. Thus it is small wonder that, in spite of their distress, very few beside the ordinary hardened paupers applied to the guardians for the only forms of relief allowed, viz., imprisonment without hard labour in the workhouse or criminal tasks in the stoneyard. In Westminster, where piecework was offered, and men were able to earn from 2s. to 2s. 9d. per day, the work was eagerly applied for.

Thus the number of applications for relief showed little increase, and this fact was vaunted in the usual way. But when, in February, 1886, Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, as President of the Local Government Board, instituted enquiries as to the extent and nature of distress, he received the replies given below.* They are very significant, for in spite of the horror of "the house" entertained by the deserving poor, the number of persons in receipt of relief in London in September, 1886, exceeds by fourteen hundred the number who had been driven to the Unions at the same season last year. If September, 1885, was the precursor of a winter of such appalling destitution, clearly the following statements only faintly foreshadow the probable sufferings of the workers in the Metropolis during the winter of 1886-1887.

REPORTS OF GUARDIANS.

- ST. MARY ABBOTTS, KENSINGTON.—Doubtless exceptional distress exists among the class who prefer to suffer the severest privation rather than apply for Poor Law Relief.
- PADDINGTON. Distress thought to prevail amongst the classes just above the pauper ranks.
- FULHAM. The medical officers and relieving officers allege that a great deal of distress does exist.
- ST. LUKE, CHELSEA. Distress not excessive.
- ST. GEORGE, HANOVER SQ. No exceptional distress.
- WESTMINSTER. No more than the normal amount of distress.
- ST. MARYLEBONE. Has been an increase of distress.
- ST. JOHN, HAMPSTEAD. Believe distress great and quite unusual.
- ST. PANCRAS. Some increase of distress experienced by the better class of workmen.
- ST. MARY, ISLINGTON. More distress prevailing than usual.
- HACKNEY. No doubt considerable distress chiefly among people who will not apply for relief unless under very extreme circumstances.
- STRAND. More than ordinary distress prevails amongst classes who do not usually apply for relief.
- ST. LEONARD, SHOREDITCH. Exceptional number of struggling poor in distress and yet do not seek relief until actually obliged by acute suffering.
- BETHNAL GREEN. Of opinion that there is a large amount of distress not brought under notice of Guardians.
- WHITECHAPEL, Much distress of a chronic or intermittent character.
- ST. GEORGE'S-IN-THE-EAST. Increase of the always considerable distress.
- STEPNEY. Distress undoubtedly prevailing.
- MILE END OLD TOWN. Working people experiencing great privation.
- ST. SAVIOUR'S. Large numbers of able bodied men with families out of work.

* These extracts are taken from the Blue Book, Return "Pauperism and Distress." Printed by order of the House of Commons, 8th May, 1886. Price 1s. 9d., or second-hand copies, for which Members of Parliament apparently can find no use, can be procured for a few pence.

ST. OLAVE'S Distress slightly more prevalent, about 1,100 men out of employ.
 ST. MARY, LAMBETH, Severe and unusual distress among ordinary self-maintaining working people.
 ST. GILES, CAMBERWELL. Large amount of distress among people who will not seek parochial relief.
 WANDSWORTH and CLAPHAM. Exceptional distress.
 LEWISHAM. 211 honest and industrious workmen compelled to seek employment in labour yard.
 WOOLWICH. Exceptional distress among families who will not come on the parish.
 HOLBORN. A large number of able-bodied men with families applying for relief.

In addition to these answers from the Guardians of the Poor, the following replies were sent by

VESTRIES & DISTRICT BOARDS OF WORKS.

ST. MARY ABBOTTS, KENSINGTON. Unquestionably a large number of the labouring class out of work.
 FULHAM. Special distress is existing.
 CHELSEA. No exceptional distress with which we are unable to cope.
 WESTMINSTER. Persuaded that distress is exceptional.
 ST. MARYLEBONE. Believe there is considerable distress amongst persons who do not or would not apply for relief.
 ST. JOHN, HAMPSTEAD. Exceptional amount of distress.
 ISLINGTON. A very great amount of distress.
 ST. MARTIN'S-IN-THE-FIELDS. Painfully recognize the fact that large numbers are out of employment.
 HOLBORN. Distress exceptional.
 ST. LEONARD, SHOREDITCH. Undoubtedly considerable distress owing to lack of employment.
 BETHNAL GREEN. Believe there is considerable distress.
 WHITECHAPEL. Exceptional distress exists.
 ST. GEORGE'S-IN-THE-EAST. A great deal of distress. Much acute suffering. Signs of still further diminution of labour.
 MILE END OLD TOWN. Undoubtedly a great number of mechanics out of work.
 POPLAR. Distress exceptional among better class of artisans. In many trades lack of employment, seems no hope in the future. Of 61 lads at Board School, fathers of 22 out of work.
 NEWINGTON. Distress exceptional. Chiefly among artisan and labouring classes.
 ST. OLAVE'S, SOUTHWARK. Distress always throughout the year.
 BERMONDSEY. Unemployed labourers somewhat more numerous.
 ROTHERHITHE. Widespread distress. Men unable to obtain work for many weeks past.
 LAMBETH. In suburbs many employes out of work.
 WANDSWORTH. In Battersea, distress exceptional. In Clapham, very marked. Putney, many more out of work than for ten years past. Streatham, distress not very exceptional. Wandsworth, a great many men out of work.
 CAMBERWELL. Great and exceptional distress especially among mechanics, clerks, unskilled workers, &c., who are not accustomed to apply to guardians.
 PLUMSTEAD. Exceptional distress.

Do these dry statements convey to the reader any idea of the suffering they represent? Can an average member of the classes who control the domestic policy of this wealthy nation, figure to himself accurately what being "out of work" even for a few weeks means to men who have to live by selling their labour? To these, hard times do not occasion merely a diminution of an income ample to provide all the comforts and luxuries of existence, but a life and death struggle with starvation. To commence full of hope to search for fresh employment: to gradually sell or pawn the few sticks of furniture which convert the single room, whither poverty has driven you, into a home; to blister the feet in walking from factory gate to factory gate only to meet with disappointment and often with hard words, while hope deferred makes the heart sick and want of nourishment enfeebles the frame: to see your

wife sinking for lack of food and to send your children to the Board School without a bit of breakfast: to know that as you grow each day more gaunt in the face, more shabby in outward appearance, more emaciated in physique, there is less and less chance of getting employment; to return faint and footsore after a long day's tramp and hear those you love best on earth crying for food: to have to answer their moans by telling them that because you are not allowed to work for your living, Society has doomed them to yet another twenty-four hours of starvation; despairing, to beg from the stranger in the street and be met with a contemptuous dole or pitiless suspicion: to ponder in cold and hunger whether the theft that would save your family from slow starvation is a crime or a duty: to be restrained from suicide only by the certainty that your death must drive your wife and daughters to swell the ghastly army of degraded womanhood that parades the streets of midnight London; to feel drawing ever nearer the day when you will be driven into the workhouse to lose for ever freedom and independence, to part from your wife as surely as if the grave were closing over her and to condemn your children to be brought up as paupers: to feel, through all this, that you have done nothing to deserve it—this was the lot of hundreds of thousands of Englishmen last winter. It is the certain doom of thousands more during the next few months. And terrible as is the state of affairs revealed by these official facts, gloomy as is the prospect they hold out for the coming winter, it is confidently declared by those who made a house to house visitation to collect statistics that they did not adequately depict the destitution which prevailed last year, and which will recur in an aggravated form in the next few months. A Special Commissioner of the *Pall Mall Gazette* visited a typical East End street, and declared that more than half the male adults were out of work. Two members of the Holborn Board of Guardians, Messrs. A. Hoare and S. Brighty, have testified on oath that when a Committee of that Board, mistrusting the reports of the Relieving Officers, made a personal inspection, they found in many streets of Holborn and Clerkenwell 30 to 40 per cent. of the population out of work, and the results of the enforced idleness of the bread winners on the health of their families was so terrible that the Board were obliged to strain the Infirmary Relief Regulations, so as to treat sheer starvation as a prevalent disease!

The above undeniable facts show that the first necessity is an independent and trustworthy report as to the numbers of men now out of work. The investigation made in a slovenly way by Mr. Chamberlain after the windows of the Carlton Club were smashed should now be made in a careful and deliberate manner. This need not entail much expense, at any rate in comparison with what continued neglect of such suffering, if it really does exist, will cost the country. *The Local Government Board should at once require the Guardians of all the Unions to appoint a small committee of their members to visit every house in a dozen streets in the poorer quarters of their districts, and render a report showing the number of men out of work, how many weeks' work each has done in the last 3 months, his trade, the number of children dependent upon his wages for food, and finally whether he would be willing to perform useful labour during eight hours in each day for the equivalent of 20s. per week.**

* This wage is taken as being 37½ per cent. less than the average income of a working class family, according to the estimate of Professor Leone Levi, and, therefore, too little to attract labour from private enterprises.

This could be done in a few days, and should the event prove that distress amongst the deserving poor is severe, wide spread, and increasing, there can be no excuse for refusing to take steps for their relief. To begin with, it is intolerable that, under the exceptional circumstances, the sturdy independence which leads the sufferers to dread becoming paupers should be broken down. It is sheer brutality to give the Unemployed no choice but the workhouse, or a useless, and in the long run, costly labour test, if it be made manifest that the distressed are really skilful and hard working men. For the immediate pressure it will be necessary to place a certain amount of discretionary power in the hands of the Committees of the Guardians, to enable them, when they are satisfied that the suffering is genuine, to give out relief to men out of work. This should be strictly limited to relief in kind. Doles of money would inevitably go straight from the hands of men out of work, who are naturally in arrears with their rent, straight into the pockets of their landlords, too many of whom are on these Parochial Boards. The best form which the relief could take, would be the provision of a free dinner to children in the Board Schools. Whatever may have been the crimes or follies of their fathers, these children have done nothing to deserve the tortures that the poverty, whether deserved or not, of their parents inflicts upon them. They cannot be "pauperised" by the enjoyment of food from public funds, and the interest of the future of our country demands that thousands of children should not be again forced to starve for a few months, and so contract the physical, and consequent mental and moral infirmities, which will prove so great a burden on the next generation. It is undoubtedly true that the endowments and charities of the City parishes would be ample and sufficient to cover the cost of providing a free meal to all the Board School children in London. These funds* are squandered in a variety of foolish ways, there being now no congregations in the City Churches, and no poor resident in the City parishes. The best interests of England will be better served by securing the nourishment of starveling infants than by maintaining clerical sinecures, in order that sermons of thanksgiving may be preached to empty aisles on the anniversary of the defeat of the Spanish Armada, or of the detection of Guy Fawkes. Much of this money is already spent in providing free dinners, not in Board Schools for the children of the poor, but at the Star and Garter at Richmond, or the Trafalgar at Greenwich, for the officials who administer the funds.

But if the distress be as wide spread as is supposed, it is impossible to provide for it from local resources, more especially as the demand would be heaviest where the ratepayers are poorest. In the working class districts of London a large proportion of the rates are contributed by persons who are largely dependent, as lodging-house keepers, small tradesmen, &c., on the welfare of the working classes, and the state of affairs which denies the workers a chance of earning wages, means, to the poorer ratepayers, rents in arrears, and trade reduced to the vanishing point. If on the top of this Poor Rates were largely increased, thousands, who are now by the most strenuous exertion keeping out of the pauper class, would be overwhelmed in one common ruin. It is, besides, absurd that able-bodied workmen, who only ask to be allowed to

* See Reports of the School Board for London on the matter.

earn their living, should be compelled to be idle when there is so much necessary and productive work undone. The Embankment of the poor man's side of the Thames, and the building by public bodies of wholesome working class dwellings on vacant sites throughout London, would provide really useful work for hundreds of men. The demolition of the buildings and the preparation of the sites of Clerkenwell Prison and the House of Detention for artisans and labourers' dwellings would provide employment for a large amount of unskilled labour.* The reclamation of waste lands and foreshores† would entail little expenditure beyond what was actually paid in wages for manual labour. If England can recruit and equip her sons to defend the suspicious interests of bondholders in Egypt, if £10,000,000 of British gold can be poured into the sands of the Soudan with no other result than the destruction of human life and happiness, surely even a large expenditure of wealth in the effort to save life is justifiable!

But this State or Municipal organisation of labour *can* be done effectively and economically if the will is not wanting. When similar works were undertaken in Lancashire during the cotton famine by Sir Robert Rawlinson, £1,500,000 of public money were profitably expended, and though the bulk of the workers were factory hands unaccustomed to outdoor labour, the *per centage* laid out in plant and superintendence amounted to only 6·3 of the total expenditure. The attempts made at the end of last winter in a few London parishes on a smaller scale show that the thing can be successfully done, if it is energetically undertaken.‡ But so slow are the officials to move that public opinion has

* A company is now building artisans dwellings in Central London, and has proved the possibility of clearing 8 per cent. on capital by providing houseroom on highly-rented ground at an average rent of 2s. 6d. per room. Nothing has been done to provide the workers with wholesome lodging within their means since the report of the Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes, and the passing of the Act of August, 1885, which allows the issue of loans at 3½ per cent. interest for this purpose. The Act has remained a dead letter; but if its provisions were enforced, the money raised, and the work done without the intervention of a contractor, the saving of his profits would allow the lower rate of interest to be paid if only half the rent were demanded for accommodation much better than is offered by the above-named commercial undertaking. But public bodies, many of whose members are pecuniarily concerned in their own vested interests in the extorting of high rents for unwholesome tenements, are not likely to encourage this form of competition save under tremendous pressure.

† At a recent meeting of the British Association at Barrow-in-Furness it was stated that 40,000 acres of land round a neighbouring estuary would pay to reclaim.

‡ See the Report of M. Geo. R. Strachan, Surveyor of Chelsea, in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, October 2, 1886, from which the following are extracts.

"In response to the public demand, in the early spring of this year, the Chelsea vestry on the 20th of February last instructed me to pave the macadamized part of King's Road with wood, and further instructed me to employ and pay the men without the intervention of a contractor. The pay was to be 4d. per hour, and of this two shillings was to be paid each night in order to get the men food. It was questioned whether there would be 100 applicants for the work, but on the day appointed to take the names no less than 300 were at hand. There is much discussion as to a test for distinguishing genuine cases of distress from the loafers and the ne'er-do-weels. I venture to suggest that a man who will hack up a macadam road like King's Road for 4d. per hour has earned the right to be considered a genuine case. The number of men employed was increased to 230, among whom, to my own knowledge, were carpenters, plasterers, bricklayers, fitters, shoemakers, watchmakers, printers, hatters, gentlemen's servants, and tailors, as well as general labourers, each of whom commenced work at 4d. per hour. The severe work tried many of the men at the beginning. When paying the men each night their two shillings, I noticed that many of them had been punished by their particular job, and where it was possible they were given a lighter job the next

to be heated to a dangerous degree before they can be made aware that the punctual drawing of their salaries and pigeon-holing of all communications is not their whole duty. The pressure necessary to stir them entails mass meetings of hungry and wretched men, injudicious interference by officious policemen, and then, perhaps, riot and bloodshed, for which the whole responsibility rests on those who will not hear any other appeal.

But these measures are merely stop-gaps. Extension of out-door relief and provision of employment by public bodies will prevent deaths from starvation for the time, but they will do nothing to avert the recurrence of a state of affairs which would be an amusing satire on human intelligence if it were not for its tragic side. On all hands over-production, so it is said; too great an abundance of all the commodities which labour makes. Yet in every great town threatening crowds of workers complain that this very superfluity of the good things of this world keeps them in want of the merest necessities of life. The means of producing wealth have been so improved and multiplied that it is impossible for the workers to get enough to keep them and their families in health. The burden of the evidence taken by the Royal Commission on Depression of Trade is, not that the volume of trade is decreasing, but that the intense competition is ruining every industry. In the decade 1874 to 1883 all the great industries of the country showed a great increase of production, with only a trifling increase, or even a decrease, in the number of persons employed.* That is to say, improved methods had enabled each man to produce more, and had consequently denied work to many. Thus it is certain that the distress we are now witnessing is no passing symptom, but destined to increase in intensity with every advance in the modes of production.

day. At first they did not earn their money, but as they got food into them they visibly improved. Where a man was found capable of better work than hacking the road up he was put to mixing the concrete, for which he received 5d. per hour. When it came to laying the blocks, the artisans among them were advanced to that work, and were then paid the usual wage of a pavior—9d. per hour. . . . One scarcely knew the men again. Nine weeks' work had enabled them to turn round in the world. They had rescued their clothes, which in many cases had been "put away," and there they were, a body of contented men, forming a striking contrast to the hungry men who struggled for work when the names were taken down. Altogether, a sum of £2,000 was circulated to these men as wages, and I have no hesitation whatever in saying that it gave assistance to men who were deserving of consideration, and that it saved many a wife and her little ones from hunger and suffering.

But did it pay? Yes. These roads cost 9s. 10d. and 9s. 7d. per square yard respectively, all told, which included superintendence, printing, testing, and a substantial allowance for the depreciation of plant and tools. The price could not be bettered for the quality of the work. The work is satisfactory as regards execution. The vestry and the parishoners were so satisfied with the works that they resolved to continue them, and I am now engaged in paving Pont Street with wood under the conditions named. There is an eagerness for work that is equal to that at the beginning of the year, and though the men are not so starved as they were then, yet they are out of work. If 300 men—all Chelsea men—were wanted, they would be forthcoming in two days. This opens out a serious prospect. Should the winter be a severe one it will be necessary to relieve the distress. I submit that there are few better ways than by employing the men in useful public works. Our wood pavement experiment is only one class of work. It would be a desirable precaution for all the local authorities to look up the works they could put in hand if the emergency arises, so as to be ready.

The surveyor who has such work entrusted to him has a strange team to drive over a new course, and he cannot have his rein hand or his whip hand pulled at, if he is to get over it successfully. He should be given a free hand while the work is on, and made to render a strict account when it is done."

* See "The Emigration Fraud Exposed," by H. M. Hyndman.

Mr. Hugh Owen, C.B., the Secretary to the Local Government Board, has pointed out, very wisely from his point of view, the danger of allowing the Unemployed to entertain the idea that it is the duty of Government to provide them with wages. And certainly, relief works, whether undertaken by the National or Municipal authorities, must come to an end sooner or later. If the stress of poverty passes away the industrial regiments that have been enrolled may be disbanded with impunity. But should the permanent causes which have brought about scarcity of employment remain in action, should the distress therefore continue to augment, the State will have on its hands an ever-increasing army of desperate men who have been taught that if they agitate fiercely enough the State will provide for them. It is not a pleasant prospect. Surely it is wiser, while undertaking special measures for the momentary pressure, to at once go boldly to the root of the matter.

The question is really the one with which the ruling classes are now face to face in all countries in the world. "Why are the workers poor?" This is the riddle of the modern Sphinx, which our civilization has to answer or perish. Poverty, the material degradation of a large proportion of the population, means that long hours of work for low wages are alternated with these long spells of want of employment and sheer starvation. There is one way and one way only to put a check on this—the establishment of a shorter working day—and this can be best effected by the

1. Reduction of the hours of labour in all Government employments to eight a day.

2. The prohibition by law of more than 48 hours per week being exacted from their employés by any railway, tramway, or omnibus company.

3. The establishment of communications with foreign countries in order that an international agreement may be arrived at for curtailing, in each State, the hours of labour in manufactures and industries which are affected by international competition.

Some objections will be raised to these proposals, but there is not the slightest doubt that any Government which enforced the first of them would be amply supported by public opinion. The public have too often lately supped on horrors provided by the graphic descriptions of the life of the poor not to be willing that any practical steps should be taken for their relief. It only needs to be pointed out that, for instance, plenty of Government work is given out to contractors who over-drive their men, that many of the uniforms of our soldiers, policemen, postmen, etc., are made on the "sweating system," for men of every class and every shade of political belief to unite in declaring that as citizens they object to what, as individuals, they may themselves be forced by competition to do, and that even if low profits drive the employing class to reduce wages and lengthen hours, this wealthy nation shall not take advantage of the necessities of the poor to grind their lives out of them. This one measure would at once give employment to many thousands who would be called in to fill the vacancies created.

But some difficulties would be experienced in passing an Act

of Parliament compulsorily reducing the hours of adult males in the employment of companies of capitalists. Such interference has always been deprecated, by those interested in maintaining long hours and low wages, on the ground that if the men really desire it they would combine and enforce a reduction through a trade union by strikes etc. To this the reply is: that large numbers being out of work, the employers could readily fill the places of any number of men who struck for a reduction of hours: that the same circumstance drains the funds of all existing trade societies as they are also benefit societies and pay all members out of work,* and therefore cripples them for undertaking strikes; that strikes are a barbarous method of effecting such a change and to be successful must be backed up by at any rate a certain amount of intimidation, boycotting etc. Much vigorous opposition will be raised by the shareholders in these enterprises and their numerous supporters in Parliament. They undoubtedly will suffer by being deprived of the right to make profits by overworking their employés, but it is not possible to undo injustice and remedy hardships without appearing to injure someone. Advantages to the community at large must be weighed and a decision taken on that ground. There are some 360,000 men employed, for instance, on the railway system of this country. Their average hours are 12 per day† and their average wages are under 20s. a week. The compulsory reduction of the hours to 48 per week would therefore mean the taking on of 180,000 workers and the expenditure as wages of nine millions of pounds which now go into the shareholders pockets as dividends. This is less than one per cent. of the capital invested in railways in England. Now admitting that individual cases of hardship will occur, but also remembering the awful and wide-spread distress which is now devastating the "lower orders," the question for the community is whether one per cent. interest is worth more than the devotion of that sum to wages would effect, *i.e.* increased leisure for 360,000 men, and a chance of earning a living to 180,000. There can be no question as to the opinion of the working class on the point, and even the well-to-do may see it in a different light, when it is borne in upon them that some hundreds of thousands of unemployed men must *somehow* be provided for, either by charity, private or public, or by legislation, and that it may be cheaper, easier, and *safer* to meet such a proposal as this half-way than to seek to evade the inevitable.

This applies still more strongly to tramway and omnibus companies. They exact longer hours and their victims are consequently still less able to combine, and for unskilled work such as theirs the competition, even at such miserable wages, is terrific.

There are many other trades and occupations in which the enforcement of a shorter day of labour is necessary. Where competition has reached a point when its disastrous effects are patent to all, when individuals are powerless to control it, it surely becomes the duty of the

* It is on this account that the Amalgamated Society of Engineers had a deficit of over £43,000 last year. The Union of Operative Bakers cannot prevent many employers exacting 18 hours work a day. The Boiler Makers show 23½ per cent. of their members out of work and £45,000 paid to them; the Brass-founders (Liverpool), 17 per cent. unemployed, the Amalgamated Carpenters, 18 per cent. See Returns "Pauperism and Distress."

† The average hours of drivers are 10, goods guards 11 to 12, passenger guards 12 to 15, porters all work 12 and over. For further particulars see a pamphlet by T. Mann, entitled "What an Eight Hour Working Day Means."

organised community to fix a limit beyond which the excesses of competition must not go. In the cases mentioned above the difficulty is not complicated by the presence of foreign or oriental underpaid labour. There can be no doubt whatever that under what is called Free Trade—"the unrestricted competition to which Parliament in its wisdom has decided that this country shall be subjected"—the market of the world will confer its custom on those countries where, other things being equal, labour is cheapest, and that our artisans will some day have to accept the wage of Belgians and Italians, or English manufacturers will be beaten. And there is nothing more certain than that in each of the foreign countries, whose competition we may have to dread, there is a strong feeling in favour of international legislation on these labour questions. To that end communications should at once be made to foreign governments, and should they be unwilling to come to reasonable terms, it will certainly be found in England, as in every country where the workers have any voice in national policy, that the democracy is in favour of a war of tariffs to coerce the recalcitrant countries.

There is one objection from the worker's point of view which remains to be met. Reduction of hours would no doubt provide work for those out of employment, but would it not reduce the average rate of wages? Especially where men are paid by the hour it seems on the face of it so certain that a week of 48 instead of 60 hours must mean a proportionate reduction of income. But this is not so. The main factor in the pressure which keeps wages down is the eagerness of men who are out of work to accept it on any terms. The employer, perhaps smarting from a diminution of his normal income, feels justified in reducing wages when he sees that thousands would be only too glad to be taken on even at the reduced rate. As long as "the reserve army of labour" is there to draw upon, unscrupulous employers are in a position to do exactly what they please, and, by the action of competition, force better men to have recourse to the same villainies in order to escape bankruptcy. If the Unemployed are provided for, and the pressure on the labour market reduced, the same laws of supply and demand which now make the capitalist the absolute arbiter in matters of work and wages will then destroy his present advantage. Every man who is looking for work is an ally of the capitalist and an enemy of his fellows. The reduction of hours, by absorbing the Unemployed, will inevitably raise wages until further developments of machinery and invention increase the productivity of labour, and bring about a repetition of the miseries of the last few months.

Not the least significant fact about the recent agitation on the subject of the Unemployed is that it has been allowed to remain entirely in the hands of a body of men who form the Social-Democratic Federation, the oldest and best known of the English Socialist organisations. Of these men Mr. Geo. R. Sims, whose knowledge of the poor in London is great, says that their influence over the workers is enormous, and Mr. Arnold White, the well-known philanthropist, admits, while attacking them zealously, that "they are slowly and surely winning the confidence of the masses." From time to time their doings are chronicled in the papers, but some of the following facts should be more widely known.

On Monday, February 8th, 1886, a large meeting of men out of work was held in Trafalgar Square. Speeches were delivered by some Social Democrats, who afterwards headed a portion of the large crowd towards Hyde Park. On the way stones were thrown at the Reform and Carlton Clubs in Pall Mall. The accidental absence of police showed that this could be done with impunity, and portions of the crowd broke hundreds of pounds worth of plate glass, ill-treated the passers-by, and sacked two shops in Piccadilly, and several in May Fair, before they were dispersed. On the following day London was in a panic, but no further riots occurred. Four of the Social Democrats, who were reported to have used very strong language, were indicted for seditious speaking and inciting to violence, and after five days' trial at the Old Bailey were acquitted on April 10th, Mr. Justice Cave stating in his summing up that they deserved "some considerable credit" for their vain efforts to bring the dangerous nature of the distress among the working classes to the notice of the proper authorities.

So much is notorious. What is unknown is the real origin and meaning of occurrences without parallel in modern times. The following summary can be readily verified from reports of the meetings and of the testimony of witnesses at the trial:—

In the winter of 1883, when the distress began to be seriously felt, the Social-Democrats made themselves conspicuous by vehement attacks on the supporters of emigration as a panacea for working class poverty. During that and the following winter they repeatedly carried amendments by unanimous votes in the meetings convened by the advocates of emigration. This made them very popular all over the country, especially in East London, and gave them an influence they were not slow to utilise.

In February, 1885, the Social Democratic Federation convened a meeting of the Unemployed (even then very numerous) on the Thames Embankment, whence a deputation proceeded to ask the Local Government Board to urge various remedial measures for the distress of the thousands stated to be then out of work. In the absence of Sir Charles Dilke, the Under Secretary, Mr. G. W. E. Russell, stated that nothing could be done by the central authority at Whitehall, and advised the deputation to "bring salutary pressure to bear on the local authorities." This advice was not immediately followed, probably owing to the approach of summer and the consequent diminution of the suffering. But early in 1886 proceedings were again commenced, and the methods taken by a branch of the same organization in Clerkenwell were closely followed in Marylebone, Hampstead, Bermondsey, Hackney, Westminster, Limehouse, Battersea, and other parts of London, but the description of the one agitation applies with more or less force to all. Determined to put "pressure" on the Guardians of the Holborn Union, the members of this body instituted a house-to-house census of the poorer parts of the district, in order to satisfy themselves as to the distress. They summoned the Local Members of Parliament (one a Conservative, the other a Liberal), who declared themselves willing, but impotent, to effect any remedial legislation. On January 27 a deputation attended the meeting of the Guardians, and pointed out—(a) That their investigations had showed 40 per cent. of the bread-winners to be out of employment; (b) That the workhouses were overcrowded; (c) That in accordance with the strict regulations denying outdoor relief to persons under 60 years of age and free from disease, succour was refused to the

sufferers; (d) That the reports of the Relieving Officers showing that comparatively few persons applied for relief were misleading, since artizans out of work did not apply: firstly, because they were not of the "pauper class," secondly, because they were well aware that application for relief would be vain, unless they entered the workhouse and broke up their homes. They further demanded that—(1) The Guardians should personally investigate the distress; (2) Should apply to the Local Government Board to relax the rules, and grant discretionary relieving powers during the winter; (3) Should urge the Vestries and Boards of Works in the districts to employ men on any works of real utility, such as artizan's dwellings, baths and washhouses, or street improvements; (4) Should insist on the Metropolitan Board of Works carrying out the recommendation of the Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes by clearing the sites of Clerkenwell Prison and the House of Detention, and erecting on these and other available sites working class dwellings, to be let at the lowest rents which would cover the outlay; and (5) Should try to procure the immediate commencement of the new Admiralty and War Office proposed for Whitehall. The Guardians listened very patiently, and there being some thousands of Unemployed men outside their Board Room, decided to adopt all these proposals—with the following results. They appointed a committee who made a house-to-house visitation in their locality, and found the severest privations, and even starvation, being suffered, owing to lack of employment, by hundreds of families of even the better-to-do artizan class. Of all this no hint had been given in the reports of Relieving Officers and Local Government Board Inspectors, who merely record the individuals who apply for relief. The Local Government Board, or rather Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, was not so far carried away by the impulses of the "political humanity," on which he spoke so eloquently to working class audiences during the electioneering campaign, as to relax the rules, owing to the stringency of which so much patient misery had remained unnoticed and unrelieved. A "labour test" was imposed, and the skilled artizans and watchmakers of the district were invited to prove the reality of their distress by breaking stones all day for a remuneration of ninepence and two pounds of bread. Of the few who accepted this test many suffered severely from cut faces and blistered hands. On more than one occasion these men, who lost their right to vote by entering the labour yard, broke into open revolt. But the majority said that it would be just as pleasant to die of starvation outside the stoneyard as inside.

Few practical steps of any use whatever were taken by the Vestries or Metropolitan Board of Works.

The Members of Parliament for London, irrespective of party, were summoned to an informal conference, which appointed a Committee. After a delay of some two months the Committee reported that the distress was exceptional, and that it was quite beyond their province and powers as only a section of the Legislature to deal with it. With this ended the interest displayed in the matter by members of Parliament, for the proposal made by two Republican "working class representatives," Mr. George Howell and Mr. Joseph Arch, that the Queen's Jubilee should be antedated by a year, in order that public festivities and wasteful expenditure might improve trade, can only be regarded as a piece of shameless sycophancy or ill-judged pleasantry.

The Social Democrats, however, convened a meeting in Holborn Town Hall on 3rd January, 1886, to which all Members of Parliament for London were invited. With one consent they made excuse, and not a single Member put in an appearance. The hall was crowded with men out of work, who unanimously passed resolutions demanding remedial measures. No notice whatever was taken of this. On February 8th, 1886, Patrick Kenny, a well-known promoter of public meetings on all sorts of subjects, who had previously persuaded the Lord Mayor to open a Mansion House Fund for the Unemployed, convened a mass meeting of men out of work in Trafalgar Square for the purpose of denouncing Free Trade and demanding Protection. The Social Democrats attended, as did thousands of hungry and desperate men. Being recognised by the crowd and called on to speak, the Socialists harangued the assembly, who deserted the conveners of the meeting to hear John Burns, H. H. Champion, H. M. Hyndman, John Williams, and others. At the close of the meeting, Burns, who had in his hand a red flag, led the way into Hyde Park. It was proved at the trial of the four chief speakers that no disorder occurred until some real or fancied insult by the gentlemen at the windows of the Reform Club enraged the crowd. Stones were thrown at the windows, and no police were present. Encouraged by this circumstance, the rougher and more desperate portions of the crowd broke hundreds of windows, and even rifled some shops, until, on reaching Hyde Park, the majority, on the advice of the speakers of the Social Democratic Federation, dispersed to their homes, while a small band went through May Fair, damaging a good deal of property, until stopped by a small band of police. On the following day crowds again collected in Trafalgar Square, but the Social Democrats went to Mr. Chamberlain at the Local Government Board, who, on their representations, issued the circular to the local authorities, whose replies are summarised above. After some delay, Mr. Childers, the Home Secretary, summoned up courage to proceed against Burns, Champion, Hyndman, and Williams for seditious speaking. They were committed for trial, and on April 10th acquitted at the Old Bailey before Mr. Justice Cave. It was proved, to the satisfaction of the jury, that their advice had *not* been that of Timon of Athens,

Break open shops, nothing can you steal
 But thieves do lose it
 Large handed robbers your grave masters are—
 And pill by law.

but not more seditious, if more sincere, than many speeches delivered by Privy Councillors.

Since that time various attempts have been made by the Social Democrats to induce the local as well as the central authorities to prepare for the inevitable distress of this winter, but absolutely without effect.

If the rulers of England do not want to have another Ireland at their own doors they will do well to show that redress for grievance, in London at any rate, can be obtained without recourse to violent methods of agitation.

No one can doubt that if the Unemployed had pursued the tactics which have hitherto been so successful on the other side of St. George's Channel, their condition would now be occupying the serious attention of our statesmen. The poor are learning this lesson. When they have mastered it, what will be its application in London?

Lord Rosebery has pointed out that you cannot go on for ever sucking the social wreckage of all other towns into the vast maelstrom of misery that lies east of the Bank of England. City missionaries and bishops are for ever dinning their warning into the ears of all who will hear. No one now attempts to deny the danger to society caused by the contrast between undeserved poverty and riches too often equally undeserved. But while the danger comes ever nearer, no attempt is made to grapple with the causes of it. It is not too much to say that the winter of 1885—1886 may be a turning point in the national history. If instead of dry reports of Commissioners, who sit to collect evidence which is never utilised, something is *done* to remove these evils at their root, all may yet be well. If this winter passes leaving the permanent causes of social misery just where they were, and the poor still more hopeless of peaceable changes, and chafing still more bitterly under a sense of injustice, we have before us a prospect of bread riots put down by arbitrary force, and martial law opposed by secret conspiracy. And, if this be the result, who is to blame? YOU, if you agree with the above proposals, and yet do nothing to support them. YOU, if not agreeing with them, you fail to put forward better proposals of your own.

H.H.C.

