

Extract from WILSON CARLILE AND THE CHURCH ARMY BY EDGAR ROWAN, 1912

" Back to the Land," as a remedy for social dislocation, is a policy which has always appealed strongly to Prebendary Carlile. For many years the Church Army had a small farm at Newdigate, Surrey, which was worked on the same lines as the Labour Homes, and was especially used for inebriates. In 1905 came the gift of Hempstead Hall, in the north of Essex, including an Elizabethan mansion and a fine estate of 740 acres, and the Newdigate farm was given up.

At one time it was thought that it might be possible to cut up a portion of the Hempstead estate into small holdings, to which could be sent families from overcrowded cities, thus securing many of the advantages of emigration at a much smaller cost. Mr. Carlile outlined a scheme in letters to the papers. So far, however, the scheme remains in the future ; one difficulty standing in its path being that families sent away from London seem to pine after the pavements and gas-lamps, and drift back again to the old haunts in a worse case than before. From Canada no such easy return is possible. Emigrants make up their minds to spend their lives there, and consequently succeed when in an English county they would have had to be classed as failures.

Hempstead Hall has therefore been used chiefly as a training and testing ground for men from the Labour Homes destined for emigration. For this purpose it is exceptionally well-fitted, owing to the variety of farming experience which it offers.

Milking is a mystery most necessary to be acquired by the intending emigrant, for a man who can milk can always command a good immediate wage in Canada. Other branches of useful agricultural knowledge taught at Hempstead are ploughing, hedging and ditching, some wood-craft, the care of live-stock, rough carpentry, and various miscellaneous things which will add to the economical value of emigrants who land in the New World.

Of course, two or three months on a farm cannot possibly turn out a finished agriculturist; but men with that experience are very much less at sea, when launched on a farm in Canada, than if their previous experience had been confined to cities. Moreover, there is nothing like life in the fields and among animals for getting the cobwebs out of a man's brain, and giving him a measure of moral strength. There is something in getting closer to nature, though the Hempstead inmates would probably be very much surprised if they were told that they are gaining a new outlook on things and new courage from contact with mother earth. It is the fact, nevertheless, and they show it in their faces. There was a man there once who had been a London barman, and his face and physique generally were what one would expect from a man who spent his life in the fumes of tobacco, whisky, and gas, and never went to bed till the small hours. The change in that man was nothing short of astonishing, and the physical improvement was an indication of the moral and spiritual change.

Of late a number of lads have been sent to Hempstead to prepare for emigration to Australia. This is part of a movement started a year or two

ago with the object of cutting off at its source part of the supply of unemployables who recruit the crowds on the Embankment in winter.

In treating of Church Army work, it is difficult to tell a straightforward tale ; there are so many by-roads down which one is led. I want to discuss Hempstead, and here I am back on the Embankment. The " Lads' Ladder " Department of the Church Army is convinced, and rightly so, that the most prolific source of supply of unemployed and unemployable is the failure of so many lads to acquire a proper trade. Their parents put them, on leaving school, into " blind-alley " employments, which lead nowhere, for the sake of the larger wages, and at 18, or thereabouts, the lads find themselves thrown on the world knowing no trade and without resource, except to swell the already over-stocked casual labour market. Result : unemployment, loafing, unemployability, and cadging for free soup and bread on the Embankment. The " Lads' Ladder " therefore tries, not without success, to induce parents to apprentice their boys to proper manual trades, and to put their girls into domestic service.

In the case of lads who have gone into " blind-alley" work, and have come out at the far end with the most dismal of prospects before them, the " Lads' Ladder " endeavours to get them permanent work at home, often on the land, and in cases which are in every way suitable sends them to Australia. There is a system of nominated passages, which reduces the expenses to next to nothing, and it is one condition of these passages that the lads shall have been for two months on a farm before sailing. Kindly-disposed farmers

supply this need for some of the lads, and for others Hempstead gives the needful training. Under new arrangements there, thirty-five lads can be taken in and trained, in addition to the men in training for Canada.

For many years the Church Army has carried on a policy of emigration, believing that, in suitable cases – this is a proviso of much importance – emigration benefits the individual, the Mother Country and the colony. It may be argued that, while the Empire at large is no better and no worse for the transfer, the Mother Country loses what the colony gains. But if we " think imperially," if (as Professor Seeley says somewhere) we regard the King's dominions beyond the seas as being every bit as much a part of the Motherland as Kent or Yorkshire, the transplanting of citizens of even the best and most capable class from England to Canada will not move us much. If the emigrants are of the class contemplated by the Church Army's operations – people who, while of good moral character and physical fitness, have not been successful at home, and who are, in fact, a burden and a weakness to the Mother Country – we shall regard with gladness their passing to another part of the Empire where they will have a new chance in life, and a prospect of modest wealth ; where they will thus be a source of strength, not of weakness, to the commonwealth.

In the year 1905, when the first edition of this book was published, Church Army emigration reached its high-water mark, under the stimulus of terrible distress among the unemployed. About 3,000 persons were sent out that year. The

numbers dropped somewhat in the two following years, and then the stream suddenly became a mere trickle, the reason being that the Dominion authorities, in fear, apparently, of the country being overrun by the failures and degenerates of the Old World, and particularly of England, issued new regulations very seriously limiting the immigration of persons assisted by any public body or philanthropic society.

So far as the Church Army is concerned, these fears were altogether groundless. The Canadian Government possesses very large powers of deportation of immigrants who, within two years of landing, appear to be undesirable citizens, either on moral or physical grounds. Of the thousands whom the Church Army has assisted to go to Canada in the last few years, the number deported is less than 5 per cent, of the whole, and these include those whose health has broken down under the Canadian climate.

This fact is an eloquent one, and there is another which speaks even better for the precautions devised by Mr. Carlile against sending out the unfit. Each Church Army emigrant signs an undertaking to repay out of his earnings the amount advanced to help him to emigrate, by certain instalments. Let it be borne in mind that these people were practically destitute when they sailed from England. The fact that the great majority of them are repaying their instalments with regularity, and with no special pressure being put upon them, is proof positive that they have, even in the early years of their residence in Canada, attained a degree of wealth-producing capacity which could probably never have been theirs

at home.

In other words, these emigrants were making a failure of life in England. In Canada they are succeeding, and at the same time building up a strong population of British blood ; an important circumstance in the interests of the Empire, considering the enormous influx into Canada of late years, not only of immigrants from the United States, whose sympathies are not wholly with British institutions, but of all the flotsam and jetsam of Eastern Europe and Scandinavia.

It must be clearly stated that Church Army emigrants are not wastrels, but potential good citizens. Canada has no use for the loafer and the vagrant, and for him there are the Church Army Labour Homes. This question of vagrancy is one which naturally engages much of Mr. Carlile's attention, in its bearing not only upon the common tramp, but on the genuine working-man tramping in search of work. At present he is driven to the very unsatisfactory refuge of the casual wards, and often ends by becoming a regular tramp, with no ambition for anything save to get each day's food, drink, and tobacco at someone else's expense and with a minimum of trouble.

To meet the needs of the honest, penniless man, who wants to move about the country in search of work, Mr. Carlile some years ago formulated a promising plan. It was to plant small lodging-houses, each a day's march apart, along the principal highways, so that a man in London, for instance, wanting to go to the Midlands or the North in search of work, could travel along a chain

of these Homes, resting at one each night. In 1897, largely with the help of Mr. G. P. Gooch—whose name is a guarantee that the idea was on sound and practicable lines — and the Rev. Beresford Potter (afterwards Archdeacon of Cyprus), Mr. Carlile put forward his " Lodging-House Union Scheme."

The idea was that a man who wanted to go " on the tramp," not as an end in itself, but as a means to an end, i.e., to get work, could be given a " way-bill " at the " Labour- Lodging Home " nearest to his point of departure. This would only be given when his bona-fides had been proved. From this Home he would start for the next. On arrival, he would do his spell of work, receiving in return supper, bed with sheets, and breakfast. In the morning, having performed any balance that remained of his task, he would start on tramp to the next Home, with probably some bread and cheese to last him on the road. His " way-bill " would be examined and endorsed at each Home, so that it could be seen at once if his tale were true, and if he were really making a journey with some definite object.

In the Church Army Annual Report issued early in 1898, Mr. Carlile wrote :-

" It is intended, as far as possible, to have the lodging-houses of the Union at a distance not Exceeding ten miles apart, and tending towards the important centres. At all the lodging-houses a labour register is kept, and some members of the local committee should endeavour to find work for the most deserving men. The chief gains of the

system are : -

" 1. Preventing the genuine work-seeker from being contaminated by mixing with criminals, by lodging in low-class lodging-houses, and from being degraded in his own eyes by having to resort to the casual ward.

" 2. Limiting the charity of the benevolent to those deserving of it.

" 3. Eliminating tramping as a profession by doing away with indiscriminate charity, work-tickets being given instead of money."

This refers to books of tickets, supplied to subscribers, to be handed to beggars instead of money. Each gives a list of Labour-Lodging Homes, and is practically an order of admission. Such a mention of work, instead of doles, horrifies the vagrant, and does not injure the really deserving. Mr. Carlile once saw a pretty comedy in this connection. A whining tramp came up to a benevolent old lady, as she left church, and begged for coppers. " Poor man!" she exclaimed; "but I won't give you money ; I'll give you a Church Army work-ticket !" (Disgust of tramp.) Then the old lady, in an extra outburst of charity, added, " There, I'll give you all the tickets !" Happily for the old lady's ears, the tramp was struck speechless for some moments by this gift of tickets, which entitled him to work for over a week !