

Actual Conditions in Winnipeg

An appalling story of destitution and undeserved poverty in the Manitoba Capital

By ALLAN B. HOBBS

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Have the citizens of Winnipeg been feeling the pinch of hard times this winter? Has there been much real distress in the city?

Two answers at once assail the questioner.

"No, no, decidedly not," say the daily newspapers, the bankers, the real estate firms (whose name is still Legion despite the recent weeding out), the municipal authorities, various semi-public bodies and a large percentage of business men. Most of these people fear that the true facts of the case will injure their own business or reflect on the city, the provincial or Dominion government. "Whatever we must hush up, don't knock Winnipeg," is their motto.

But line up the "yeas" and see if they do not constitute the overwhelming majority. We don't hear this side of the story, because indiscriminate boosting gets all the publicity. Most merchants will privately admit, however, that this is the worst season for business in several years. The small storekeepers are being hard hit. If they extend credit they get "stung," and if they don't give credit their customers go to the big stores. The average householder, your typical citizen and taxpayer, has been finding it harder than ever to keep abreast, let alone ahead, of the increasing cost of maintaining his modest home. Even the wealthy class feel the financial temperature chilly, for they have not as much ready cash as they need for their high living. But while the middle and well-to-do classes have felt the stringency in varying degrees, all below this level are feeling the hard times acutely. The number of cases of real hardship and extreme destitution is so great that charity workers shrink from making an estimate for fear they will be charged with disloyalty to the city or with sensation-mongering.

Six Times Usual Distress

The Associated Charities never before in its history has had to relieve more than about thirty families in one month. This winter there has been six times that number applying for food, clothing or other immediate needs. In February over 200 families had to be thus relieved, in January 526 and in December 386 cases were relieved, these figures including some previously helped. The homeless men are treated separately, special lodging and coffee houses being maintained. In December 307 homeless men were given relief, in January 231, and the February figures were still larger. The Men's Own Mission free Sunday breakfast has been attended by an average of 250 men all season. "Lots of married men are coming to these breakfasts," said Rev. A. Allen, the superintendent, "in order to help save what little food they can get for their families. Every bite counts in a lot of homes this winter, as we have found out."

Fed 5,670 Needy Persons

The Salvation Army found more need for charity this year than ever before. Destitute men had been furnished with 4,500 beds, nearly half being free. Meals were supplied to 5,670 needy persons, practically all without charge. Seven hundred poor people were given clothing, sometimes an overcoat, often a complete outfit. Groceries, fuel, etc., were required by 1,300 persons. Out of the thousands of applicants for work, over 1,300 men and women were found jobs.

The Coffee House has an average of only 200 boarders instead of over 350 other winters, largely because the single men who usually can find work in the city have had to leave town. Some married men are staying here who thru

unemployment have had to break up their homes, their wives going into domestic service.

Even if the full statistics of charity cases dealt with by the Associated Charities, Men's Own, Salvation Army and various church relief committees could be obtained, that would not furnish much indication of the number of destitute people in the city. By far the larger proportion of them are self-respecting and independent, and shrink from asking charity as from the deepest disgrace. If a social worker or a church committee stumbles upon their case they are often glad enough to accept the proffered relief, but apply to a charity society—never! While, therefore, one would naturally expect the Associated Charities to come in contact with the less deserving class, yet more than 72 per cent. of their cases in a typical month are due to unemployment, 25 per cent. to sickness, old age and accident, leaving only 3 per cent. whose misfortune seemed to be their own fault. Of the homeless men 67 per cent. were hard up thru unemployment, 21 per cent. thru sickness, and 12 per cent. thru drink, improvidence and laziness. Most of the sickness which makes relief necessary is due to lack of proper nourishment or to insanitary and over-

played, but the labor unions keep track of their own members, and Alderman R. A. Rigg, general business agent, states that 3,000 union men are without work, and have been so as a general thing for the past few months. The building trades have experienced the worst season on record. During the last half of 1913 the bricklayers and masons never had less than 40 per cent. of the union members out of work, while only twelve men out of over 800 were at work recently, when the union officials made out their report. The unemployed in various lines are officially reported as follows: Bricklayers, nearly 100 per cent.; plasterers, 90 per cent.; carpenters, 60 per cent.; painters, 65 per cent.; plumbers, 40 per cent.; electricians, 30 per cent.; linemen, 20 per cent.; steam fitters, 25 per cent.; structural ironworkers, 33 per cent. The C.P.R. laid off 300 men in August and hundreds since, and both C.P.R. and C.N.R. shops have been working for only forty hours a week, while in some departments the men work only three days a week. Twenty per cent. of printers are without work—a very high proportion for this line. Tho these are doubtless the worst hit, yet other trades are known to be suffering from scarcity of work. Even a hasty survey seems to prove that

organizations, private and semi-public, would be quite powerless to cope with the situation. A free employment bureau, accordingly, was established by the city, and hundreds of men and women have been found employment free of cost—a welcome relief from the exploitation of the private employment bureaus which too often regard the out-of-works as their legitimate prey. The civic bureau has concerned itself almost exclusively with married men, as there was not enough work for all, and it was felt that the more needy should have the preference. In October, 676 men were found jobs in the city, mainly as laborers and handy men, and 106 outside Winnipeg. Women were furnished 228 jobs, mostly day service and as domestics. In November, 522 men and 377 women were found work, running from one day to a permanent position. In December the figures were 580 men and 382 women; in January, 403 men and 383 women, and, in February, 581 men and 382 women.

In addition to all its other activities, the Associated Charities, under the able supervision of J. Howard T. Falk, has tried to look after the single man who was down and out. A large woodyard has been operated with the idea of finding work where none other was available. For sawing or splitting one-third of a cord a man was given tickets on the Coffee House for three meals and bed. No man is allowed to do more than two-thirds of a cord in order that as many men as possible might be given relief. Sometimes more than seventy men have been sawing and splitting wood at one time. Grace Methodist Church also started a small woodyard, where the more necessitous applicants for help might earn some money and not have their self-respect broken by being the recipients of charity. Eighteen men on an average applied each day for help, which was far more than there was work for.

Scores of down-and-outs, despairing of finding work, have taken to accosting citizens for money or meals. Still others have gone their weary rounds day after day up and down the residential streets asking for odd jobs around the house. There has been little snow this season, so that the general laborers have been without even this casual work.

Nine Living in One Room

In the heart of the city a mother and seven children were found a few days ago living and sleeping in one room, 12 by 14 feet. The father, after vainly seeking work for months in Winnipeg, had left the city in the hope of finding something to do. Up to this winter the family has been independent, but they were forced to give up the home they were renting and move into one room, for which they are paying \$15 a month. The largest hearts sometimes go with the poorest purses. This mother, whose own children were on the verge of actual want, shared her one-room home with a poor young girl who had been turned out of her boarding house and had had nothing to eat for over two days. How nine people could be accommodated by night, let alone by day, what with washing and cooking, was a problem. The mother explained how three of the children had to sleep on the table and three others on the floor during the coldest weather. When an Associated Charities visitor and a Guide representative entered the dingy room, darkened by an adjoining warehouse, the over-worked mother was doing her washing, while a sad-faced little mite of seven was trying to sew on the machine "to help mother."

Sick Children, No Food

A family of eight young children, sick mother and out-of-work father, liv-

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WHAT IS THE REMEDY?

"Every earnest man and woman who reads the article on this page will ask himself or herself what is the cause and where is the cure for the deplorable state of affairs disclosed."

"PROGRESS AND POVERTY" and "SOCIAL PROBLEMS"

Two books by Henry George, contain what many of the best and wisest men of the world today believe is the true answer to this question. Both of these books can be obtained from The Guide Book Department for 35 cents each, post paid.

BOOK DEPARTMENT,
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WINNIPEG, MAN.

crowded houses. Forty-four cases of need every day during February were relieved after due investigation by the Civic Relief Committee. Grocery orders to the number of 894 were sent out, 364 wood orders and 62 coal orders, the total cost of this urgent relief amounting to \$1,445.76.

"Poverty," exclaimed Rev. Dr. McLean, of Bethel Mission, who is in closer touch with the poor of the city than almost anyone else, "I never saw such distress and destitution. I have had an average of six men every day this winter applying for relief. Last night eight men who had nowhere to sleep came to me."

Ten Thousand Jobless Men

"How many men in Winnipeg are out of work?" This question was put to representative persons in different classes of society, and the answers, while varying as to the number, agreed that the unemployment problem was more acute than ever before. Those laborers who have been seeking employment and are always running into hundreds of men on the same quest, naturally exaggerate the condition and talk of "ten or fifteen thousand" men looking for general laboring jobs. No census has been taken of the unem-

ployed, but the labor unions keep track of their own members, and Alderman R. A. Rigg, general business agent, states that 3,000 union men are without work, and have been so as a general thing for the past few months. The building trades have experienced the worst season on record. During the last half of 1913 the bricklayers and masons never had less than 40 per cent. of the union members out of work, while only twelve men out of over 800 were at work recently, when the union officials made out their report. The unemployed in various lines are officially reported as follows: Bricklayers, nearly 100 per cent.; plasterers, 90 per cent.; carpenters, 60 per cent.; painters, 65 per cent.; plumbers, 40 per cent.; electricians, 30 per cent.; linemen, 20 per cent.; steam fitters, 25 per cent.; structural ironworkers, 33 per cent. The C.P.R. laid off 300 men in August and hundreds since, and both C.P.R. and C.N.R. shops have been working for only forty hours a week, while in some departments the men work only three days a week. Twenty per cent. of printers are without work—a very high proportion for this line. Tho these are doubtless the worst hit, yet other trades are known to be suffering from scarcity of work. Even a hasty survey seems to prove that

This leaves untouched the floating casual laborers, the masses of foreigners who in good times count on railway and construction work, and the hundreds of Old Countrymen who have no trade and the hundreds of others whose trades are not represented or in demand here. Nor does this take account of the seasonal drift from the farms and country towns to the city and the continued flow of immigration. Altogether this division of unemployment can hardly be placed at less than five or six thousand. All told, ten thousand unemployed men seems a reasonable estimate, and labor officials consider this within the mark. Many skilled and unskilled laborers have left the city in the hope of work, or the numbers would be a good deal larger.

City Tries to Find Jobs

Early in the season it was recognized by the city authorities that the unemployed were so much more numerous than ever before that the existing or-