

THE PETITION OF THE UNEMPLOYED.

(From the Pall Mall Gazette.)

Our readers will no doubt have noticed at intervals during the last few days accounts of a petition by the unemployed working men of London. Its terms and tenor are equally remarkable. It is impossible to conceive anything more heartily and unaffectedly loyal in the best sense of the word, or more emphatically English. The petitioners pray that they may have the advantages to which as they think, their position as members of a great empire entitles them and which, as they also think, the resources of that empire afford. The colonies, they say are part of the national freehold. They were won in some cases, and planted in others, by the energy and valour of our ancestors. Their resources would maintain in comfort all who are in want in England, and our presence, on the other hand, which is an incumbrance here, would be an advantage there. Are you, the Queen of England, our common head, prepared to cut the ties which bind the empire together? Will you not draw them closer? Would it not be possible to find means by which its different parts might be made to help and support each other, and so raise and maintain in unrivalled power and boundless wealth what would be the strongest and might be the most truly united nation in the world? Cannot your Privy Council give some help? Cannot representatives of the various limbs of the gigantic world to frame some means of overcoming our present difficulties, and welding us together into a noble whole? Why should not your majesty follow out that policy which invested your majesty with the title of Queen of India, and become by one great and easy step the head of a nation wider than Russia or the United States, instinct with separate but harmonious life in every member, and destined to take and keep the very highest place among the nations of the world? This is a paraphrase, but it is no exaggeration of the simple and manly terms of the petition. It is to think impossible for any Englishman to read it without respect and admiration, or without feeling that it will be unfortunate for the statesmanship of the country if its prayer is not heard and answered in some shape or other. Consider what such a petition is, and what neglect or refusal of it means. Working people are crying out all over Europe in favour of all manner of wild schemes of communism and revolution. We are told that land cannot be the subject of property, that property itself is a mistake, that the rich all over the world are the enemies and oppressors of the poor, that capital and labour are sworn enemies, and we know not what besides. To a slight extent these theories have found favour, and at all events they have found a voice, among ourselves; but in the midst of such voices comes this petition. How far it really represents the feelings of any large body of people we do not know, but in so far as it goes it appears to us altogether manly and honorable. These men ask for nothing wild. They look to no fantastic body of cosmopolitan dreamers to help them in their trouble, they say not a word against order or property, they ask for help from their Queen and their country, and claim the privileges as they acknowledge the obligations, of English subjects. Surely this, as

far as it goes, is a thing to be proud of. It is something which we can contrast with exultation with Irish disaffection on the one hand and socialism on the other. It will, of course, be asked how their prayer can be granted, and nothing can be easier than to point out the various difficulties which must attend any attempt to do so. Difficulties, of course, there are. It is the easiest of easy things to cut the ties which bind an empire together. It is the highest triumph of statesmanship to mould into one the various parts which might constitute an empire. It is quite impossible to do that difficult thing? It is quite necessary to fall back upon the easy and vulgar task of destruction?

To us it seems that such questions answer themselves; that it is the height of cowardice to shrink from difficulties, and that the first step in national decay is to renounce high national ambition because its accomplishment will involve trouble or it may be, risk. It seems to us as if England just at present had before it two paths, its choice between which will, when once made, be irrevocable. We may, if we will, strike the flag of the British empire; we may haul down with our own hands the colours which our fathers hoisted and which no foreign enemy has ever been able to touch. We may dismantle Malta, and present Gibraltar to Spain with a humble apology for the overbearing rudeness of six generations of statesmen and soldiers. We may make over India to the mild Hindoo and the educated Bengalee, not because we have trained them to take our place, but because the temper of Clive and Hastings and Wellesley has died out, because empire and glory has ceased to attract us. We may give Ireland to the Fenians, turn Australia and Canada, and South Africa and New Zealand adrift with the remark that the connection with them is costly and useless, and we shall have our reward. Great Britain may become the exchange and workshop of all Europe. We shall have a comparatively small population; the rich section will be bloated with wealth and will find it difficult to buy anything worth having with its money. The poor will have high wages and a chance of becoming rich, and England will cease to count for anything in the great interests of mankind. To us, at least, such a destiny appears like death in life, and to accept it would be like treason to all the principles and traditions which have for centuries given to Englishmen perhaps the first, certainly the foremost, part in the history of mankind. Another destiny is open to us if we have the manliness and virtue to work it out. From every English Colony murmurs are rising at our indifference. We may think little of them, but they do not think little of us. Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and the Cape, one and all protest against the notion of being left to themselves. The Canadians are far more English than many English people; the Australians show their view of the enemies of the empire with a peremptory decision which looks almost grotesque; the New Zealanders behave much as a relation who, whilst he knows that he has more or less presumed on his relationship, still hopes that his kinsman will not be able to forget the tie which connects them. In theory we form one people; why should we not do so in fact? The answer, and the only possible answer, to the question is,—Because it is so difficult. Difficult of course it is, but what are men worth, and above all, what are men of our blood and breeding worth, if they are not to conquer difficulties? Was it wrong for our countrymen—for they were our coun-

trymen—to mould the United States into one nation? Was it the work of one day or one man to found the English empire in India? We should consider what a race we are—the fiercest, the most eager, the most strenuous of races. Give us high aims, noble cares, arduous tasks, set us to think or to write, or to fight, or to colonize in a worthy or magnanimous way, and for ends which we can and ought to devote ourselves to in earnest, and our race will continue to breed heroes. Deprive us of high objects, and our force is our bane. We become the most worldly, coarse, and vulgar of mankind.

Now if we could knit into one all the scattered dependencies of this country we should provide a splendid field for the highest gifts of the nation. The operation itself would make a great demand upon our highest powers. When it had been successfully performed it would produce almost unlimited employment for every class of the community. It would force upon our attention all the most vital, social and political problems of the day, and in forcing us to find a solution for them, it would incidentally confer not only upon ourselves, but upon the human race at large, benefits of which we can hardly at present form a notion. Imagine, for instance, a deliberation, call it what you will, as to the terms on which grants of land in Canada or New Zealand should be made to the unemployed poor of London. No existing body can discuss the question from an Imperial point of view. Neither the English nor the Canadian Parliament can do so; but it might be done by an imperial body—the representative and exponent of a common interest which would then be felt to be real. We are not only alive to the difficulty of constituting such a body, but have repeatedly pointed them out; but the effect which would be produced by it would, we believe, be worthy any effort which might be required for the purpose.

CORRESPONDENCE.

AUDITE ALTERAM PARTEM.

To the Editor of the VOLUNTEER REVIEW.

DEAR SIR,—In the letter which you have been pleased to designate as "well-considered, calm and forcible," I did myself the honor to point out where, as I conceive, lies the root of many of the evils under which the Volunteer Force of the Dominion drags out a languishing existence. In doing so I endorsed (if I may use a word which has a smack of egotism) one of the main points insisted upon by "F. O.," and also by yourself additionally, I would now beg permission to turn to the consideration of certain positions in the last letter of "L. C."

I have unfortunately mislaid the Review containing one of that officer's letters, and am therefore uncertain of the period for which he gives us figures in his letter, appearing November 8th. Those figures, however, shew twenty-two battalions in which the strength of companies averages from 54 to 69.

I will not venture absolutely to dispute the correctness of statistics compiled by an officer whose letters bear so strong an evidence of intimate knowledge of the subject of which he treats, but it is only fair to point out that the state of things indicated—em-