

## WORK FOR THE WORKLESS.

"Stick to the unemployed, John; in work lies our salvation!" This touching exhortation, addressed to John Burns by a convict in Pentonville prison, has, he says, rung in his ears ever since, as a stimulus to further efforts for this most unhappy class. He takes it as in some measure a text for his recent article on the subject of Work for the Unemployed (in the Nineteenth Century, for December), in conjunction with Carlyle's well-known remark that "The man able to work, willing to work, and unable to obtain work,—is one of the saddest sights which fortune's inequality produces under the sun." His paper is full of practical suggestions for solving the great problem of "the unemployed" on a thorough and business basis; and notwithstanding a lack of sympathy with what he calls the "palliatives" of Christian philanthropists, who labour for the moral and spiritual, as well as the material uplifting of individuals,—natural, no doubt from his points of view,—his suggestions should be carefully studied by all who desire to promote a radical cure for this festering sore on our modern civilization.

For the condition of the unemployed seems to present an anomaly on what we have been accustomed to regard as the Divine law of labour,—an apparent contradiction to the Christian's faith that, for every human being, there is a post of usefulness in the great human family. But for the labourer who has but his hands, and can find nothing for them to do, wherewith to earn the daily bread for himself and his family,—what seems left save to beg or steal, or sit down and die,—if he do not in desperation, as some have done, go and hang himself?

Few of us, perhaps, are inclined to welcome enthusiastically our long, cold winters; but let any one with a little imagination try to think what it means for the unskilled labourer who has four or it may be five months before him during which he can expect no regular work, only a chance job now and then, if he be fortunate enough to secure that! Other people—most of them, at any rate—find their work go on as usual; perhaps they are even busier in winter. And, besides the regular work that keeps the wolf from the door and robs the dreary months of half their tedium, most other people have their cosy homes, with all their home comforts, books, papers, abounding interests, to make them forget the external dreariness; if, indeed, warmly wrapped up to face the weather, they do not find in the bracing cold an actually pleasurable stimulus! But how about the day-labourer, who has toiled cheerfully, perhaps, all summer, for the maintenance of himself and his family, and who, despite all that is said of the "thriftlessness" of our labouring classes would have had to practise a somewhat heroic self-denial, in order to be able to lay by any adequate store against the idle days of frost and snow? For, considering the average pay of the day-labourer, and the average size of his family, added to his liability to be laid up by accident or illness during the "shining hours," which he, like the bee, must improve unceasingly, or come to grief, it is no great wonder if he does not find them sufficient to provide for the whole year. And if, as often happens, he has been laid up for some weeks, winter of course finds him quite unprovided for its demands on his slender means. As the short,

cold days come on, when larger supplies of fuel, food and light are absolutely necessary for health and comfort, he has to face them without any prospect of work and pay. Month after month of semi-starvation must drag itself by, while he sits in his poverty-stricken home, generally too pervious to the winter blast, with his depressed wife and ill-clad, hungry children, or wearily paces the streets in the vain search for work, happy if he may by any chance pick up an odd job. What wonder if, heart sick and despondent, he falls an easy victim to the first prevalent epidemic; or, if he escape physical disease, becomes a prey to the attractions of the saloon, in which for a few cents he can find at least temporary comfort and forgetfulness of his misery?

These are no fancy pictures, but actual experiences of many a working man in Canada, not only in this present winter, but every winter to a greater or less extent, in all our large cities. Every year there is the same dismal monotony of distress, which weighs heavily on the hearts and sympathies of those who try by the poor palliative of a little charitable assistance, to bridge the winter's "Slough of Despond" caused by the almost entire suspension of out-door work for men.

Of course there are the women and children left; and to their credit be it said that, in general, they do what they can. But this is very precarious and uncertain. I observe that an optimistic friend, who seems to know but little of how "the other half of the world lives," scouts at the very idea of "child-labour" in Ontario. Now I happen to know a good deal about a good many poor families in a city which, I believe, is much like other Canadian cities and towns, and I know that in few of these families is there a boy over ten, who in winter is not set to some kind of work—if it is only that of going for an hour or two to "do chores" for some one who can pay him a little for so doing—or if nothing else offers, at least to try his luck at selling papers. I have known a little boy, only seven years old, obliged to be out in the cold, dark evenings, for hours, trying to sell papers, because neither father nor mother could procure work! Again and again I have known the Factory Act contravened by sending children under age to work, because of the sad necessity of the family; and as to the wives and mothers, I know of no case in which any healthy woman has shown unwillingness to take any work she was able to do. On the contrary, there are always far more applicants for woman's work in winter than there is work to do. Our optimistic friend, aforesaid, refers to some difficulty experienced in securing a competent charwoman, and to the necessity of giving her a good breakfast and dinner, as an illustration of "this high standard of living among the lower classes"! It is possible he may not have known where to look for the right kind of charwoman, and may have stumbled on a small capitalist, in her way, who may have been indifferent as to whether she got a job or not. But I could match his one case by many cases of women who, at this present writing, are only too anxious to secure such work, or any! And have seen in Toronto as well as in Montreal, numbers of poor women trooping weekly into the Industrial Homes, where charitable ladies give out plain sewing—women with hunger-pinched faces, glad to earn their fifty cents a week, by needle-work, for their destitute families. The difficulty, indeed, usually is, how to provide

enough of this kind of work, and to dispose of it after it is done. Certainly, of workers there is always an "Embarras de richesses."

But now, as to the dollar a day for washing and ironing from eight till six, and the "hot breakfast and dinner thrown in," as an evidence of this high standard of living. Our friend, being of the masculine gender, does not seem to know, what every intelligent woman knows, that washing and ironing for a whole day is very exhausting work, and also that it is "skilled labour," since no one can be a good laundress without much training and experience. It is about as hard work in its way as that for which an ordinary unskilled labouring man usually gets his dollar a day, at least; and why should not the labouring woman, especially the skilled labouring woman, be as worthy of her hire as the labouring man? A dollar may seem a good deal to give for a day's washing. But our friend, if he stood in the laundress' place, would not find it a great deal to get, especially if the earnings of two or three days a week had to be the whole support of a family! As to her not arriving in our friend's kitchen till eight, did it ever occur to him how the previous hour or two had been spent? If, as is likely, she was the mother of a family, she had in all probability several small children to care for and provide with breakfast, before leaving them for the day; and then to plod some distance, perhaps through snow or slush or mud, to the house where she has to work. Is it much wonder if she may not arrive till eight o'clock, or if she is ready enough for the "hot breakfast" when she gets there? As for the "hot dinner" she needs that too; for the work of a laundress is exhausting, especially to any one not as a rule well fed; and, during the trying winter months, many of these poor women and their children live for weeks at a time on little more than bread and tea! The charwoman, with her long day's steady muscular exertion, needs a good deal more nourishment than the average man or woman engaged in light sedentary occupations; just as our furnaces need a double supply of coal when they have to produce a double quantity of heat. The work of the laundry would inevitably suffer, if the laundress did not have her two good meals, the provision of which is simply a necessary bit of household economy.

Now the fact, of which I have actual personal knowledge, that in winter there are more women seeking work—work of the hardest drudgery and involving the whole day's absence from their own little families,—than there are people needing such work to be done, is itself an evidence of the bitter poverty which, every winter, overwhelms our labouring class. For many of these poor women have husbands,—husbands whose strong arms should be amply sufficient to maintain their families, if they could but find work for those arms to do. But, beyond a rare chance of a stray cord of wood to cut, or a little ice-cutting or street-cleaning after a snow-storm, what can they find? "My husband walked five miles this forenoon looking for a bit of work,"—said one poor woman this very day, taking thankfully a little coarse sewing to do, in default of something better. And this has to go on, month after month, among those "lower classes" who, we are sometimes told, are so superfluously comfortable!

And the very circumstance that so many women are obliged to seek work which takes