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J. D. DUTHIE, EDITOR

C. B. FULLER,
FIELD REP.

U.S. Representatives—
JAS. A. BUCHANAN
CHAS. M. BEER
1313 MARQUETTE BLDG.
CHICAGO, ILL.

AUG.

"The Job-less and the Loafer"

1914

OUR GUARANTEE

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WHAT IS TO BE DONE that has not been done to solve the problem of the unemployed? Some few years ago when things were humming like an all night threshing outfit, hustling citizens stuck their thumbs into their waistcoat armholes and declared with great satisfaction: "There is work for all; this is no country for the loafer!" Canada certainly has no reservations for loafers but why has she got such an army of these on her hands at the present moment? Why are there so many jobless men and women on the market in the face of the fact that there are so many menless jobs going abegging? These are questions that cannot fail to intrude themselves on everyone's notice in these days. In all the western cities we observe out-of-works sitting around on the verandah of almost every boarding house, in the hotel rotundas or taking a long nap under the shade trees of the city parks.

TRADE CONDITIONS ARE BLAMED in a loose general way, and we have suffered no doubt from a lassitude in business but nothing more than what overtakes the commercial life of every community at recurring periods. It comes and goes in spite of all sorts of economic theories that profess to account for them. The "theories" neither find the cause nor provide the remedy, and as we have seen again and again, the stagnation comes and it goes, inexplicably, whether we are at war with our neighbors or at peace with all people. No genius has yet arisen who seems to have the wisdom and the administrative capacity to regulate things at these times. There are features in them that seem to be beyond the reach of man, but surely this matter of the unemployed is something that we can take a hand in to some purpose.

"NO MAN WILLING TO WORK need be without a job," we have been assured by men who toil incessantly themselves and who are also employers of labor. We used to discount that assurance but have come to feel that it has a big backing of fact. At Winnipeg Exhibition the other day it was astonishing to hear the number of visiting farmers complain of the difficulty they found in obtaining farm help while there is an army of able-bodied men in Winnipeg alone, following Micawber's profession of "waiting for something to turn up." It is rumoured that the Dominion Government contemplate putting the gag on the immigration in so far as, for some time, to block the entry into the country of all candidates who are not going on the land. If this can be done, it offers some reasonable prospects of helping to level things up, but what of the crowd now in the cities walking the streets or dawdling away the time until an opening occurs in their own line? There are vast numbers of these "own line" workless ones, too.

THE WORDS IN ITALICS are significant. They mean, in fact that the greater portion of those workless folks will rather kill months in idleness than work at anything that is not in the line they have been accustomed to, or that is out of the city. Those of them who cling to the city like limpets to their rock, have been born and reared in a city, probably London or one of the densely populated provincial towns of England. They abhor a farmer and the farming business so heartily that they "cannot stick it at any price," to quote their own expression. What a mistake it has been to encourage people of that type to come in! To deal with them as vagrants unless they consent to go on the land would not be kind to the farmer on whom they were foisted, were he looking for help that did not require another man to watch it all the time.

WE KNOW THE FARMER IS DISTRUSTED to a very great extent by numbers of those people. There is probably some justification for this because there have occurred instances in which the farmer has made a poor shape in fulfilling his side of the contract. But we know a very respectable number of farmers on whose fidelity we can bank as on the best security on earth, who are looking for help and in whose employ any earnest man cannot fail to be enriched in experience. If the farmer cannot afford, if the nature of the unskilled labor doesn't warrant a "handsome" salary, it is a decent wage and with the very best of feeding, domestic comfort and the living force of a good example, it has a standard of value all its own. It is not to be compared with any cold-blooded weekly emolument doled out by city corporations or government departments.

"I'D WILLINGLY HAVE PAID FOR IT could I have afforded it," said one, who recently came into the city after having put in a winter and early spring with one of Manitoba's representative stock-breeders. "I was broke, but Bruce Walker put me right on the track, and from the night I reached the farm I was in clover all the time." That young Englishman had been "raised" as a furniture and carpet salesman, but when he landed in Winnipeg with a few dollars in his pocket he found there were too many salesmen looking for jobs. So he decided to make his first experiment in farming. It was not a disappointment on either side and it is a pleasant tribute to the farming race to hear a man say he would willingly have paid for the treatment he had received and the experience gained. It seems to us that something simple is wanted in the nature of a guarantee of good faith as between farmer and hired man. Most of all to protect decent and capable men from being exploited and hounded by unscrupulous farmers.

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