

The French Municipal Farm for Indigents.

By Edward Conner.

This establishment has for its aim the rescue from among the crowd of applicants to the municipal night refuges of Paris such unfortunates as apparently present the conditions of likelihood to regain by work an honest and an assured living. The farm consists of 265 acres, is the property of the Paris Municipal Council, and is managed by a director. La Chamelle, where the farm in question is situated, lies in the Department of the Marne, near the railway station of Essarts La Forrestiere. The institution, or Colonie Agricole, as it is officially described, accepts only male inmates. Ninety-three individuals out of work were admitted in 1896, but 113 passed through altogether. Almost all were from the municipal night refuges. Only two persons were accepted from private charitable institutions, but they refused to remain. The admissions are severely controlled, as La Chamelle is neither an agricultural school, destined to teach farm labor to those who have never practiced it, nor is it a reformatory institution for beggars, vagabonds and the idle. It is a kind of farm hands' registry office, destined to restore to field-labor the workmen who have quitted the rural districts who came to Paris attracted by chimerical hopes and ultimately drifted into misery. No individuals are admitted who are aged less than 25 years or older than 45 years of age, or who have never exercised the profession of agriculture. Thus, of the 93 newly admitted in 1896, 73 had been more or less connected with the cultivation of the soil. The twenty others declared they were so employed in their youth, though four had become cabinet-makers, bakers, masons, whitesmiths, etc. The establishment only accepts bachelors or widowers. It is difficult, as all who are engaged in the work of relieving the indigent are aware, to find permanent or stable employment for the sojourners at the night asylums. However, in 1896, La Chamelle found situations for 53 and in 1895 for 75 per cent. of its inmates. The result would have been higher, only of late the refuges for indigency now largely provide various kinds of work for the unemployed, which, in addition to paying for their support, produces a surplus of earnings. This they allow to accumulate, hence they prefer to remain in Paris rather than go to the agricultural colony and become farm laborers. Indeed, it is this desire to return to city life which forms the ambition even of those who, though secured a good situation through La Chamelle, resign it willingly for the flesh-pots of Egypt.

The "amateurs" who would like to try the establishment generally change their minds on being convinced that, if admitted, continuous work would be exacted along with good conduct. Of the 93 admitted 20 were aged between 25 and 30; 37 between 30 and 35; 32 between 35 and 40; 4 were more than 40 years of

age, but were excellent farm hands. Only 4 inmates had been expelled, and 11 who had been secured situations had been readmitted, having lost their employment from circumstances over which they had no control. The rules and regulations of the establishment are very precise and strictly enforced. When the bell rings in the morning the inmates open the windows of the dormitory, place there their bedding, descend to the kitchen to breakfast, return to make up their beds and then proceed to work for the day. None can sit down to or quit the table before the bell rings. After the evening meal all can repair to the dormitory, but they must make no noise or cause any trouble. Lights are extinguished at nine o'clock. The administration supplies each inmate with a full suit of clothes, or "trousseau," and he is held responsible for its due care, less ordinary wear and tear. The clothing is periodically inspected by an official, but after two months' regular residence in the establishment it becomes either wholly or in part the property of the wearer. Those who desire to leave before being secured a place must inform the director four days in advance. As all inmates are sent from Paris by rail at the expense of the municipality the latter will not pay the return fare for the discontented who leave, but it pays the traveling expenses of those to the place where employment has been provided for them. Every Sunday half a franc is handed to the inmates out of their accumulated earnings to buy tobacco or letter paper. If ever they require a larger advance they must state the reason why and the nature of such a demand, and if deemed reasonable a "bon," or order, for such on a tradesman will be given, so their savings can never be wasted on drink. A new arrival will be allowed the usual weekly pocket-money to cover thirteen Sundays. Every month the inmates are invited to come and note the surplus of their earnings and to attest same by their signature.

Discipline has to be stringently but not harshly maintained. Warnings privately or in public, fines, refusing Sunday outings, withholding pocket-money or dismissal—such are the penalties inflicted upon the inmates. The fines form a fund to reward meritorious workers. Immediate dismissal can follow disrespect or disobedience to those in authority, drunkenness, refusal to work or misconduct outside the establishment. The cost of food is nearly to within a fraction of one franc for the year's average per day. The farm raises and supplies nearly the half of the food necessities. Between June and October—the farm work being more severe—the men receive a more liberal diet. The average ration of bread per day thirty ounces. A little cider or wine is given. The estimated cost per day per inmate for heating, lighting, laundry, repairing, bedding and cooking—in a word, the material usage—is 27 centimes, a fraction over a quarter of a franc. The health of the men is good; the total on

the sick list was equivalent to one person ill during 243 out of the 365 days. Two facts La Chamelle has to combat—the tendency after a residence of four months of the inmates to retire; next to squander their savings in dissipation. They are paid regular wages. So long as they are subject to discipline, kept well in hand, all goes well, but with the resumption of liberty and the temptations to return to Paris, where they generally arrive, the result is to fall again into their old misery. Four men have been in the establishment for over one year—during 1896. Now, these are paid the usual rate of farm hand's wages. When neighboring cultivators are temporarily pressed with labor inmates of the La Chamelle establishment, as a reward, are allowed to work out, but they must lodge all money so earned to their frugalities already banked for them. The municipality is disappointed, but not discouraged, at the difficulty in inducing the men to remain permanently in situations which the institution procures for them. Those who have the courage to resist the temptation of a resumption of a vagabond life are ever grateful and comfortable. But the irresolute are so hurried to quit the berths found for them as to decamp without even claiming the wages due to them.

The farm is well cultivated, and equal in money returns to holdings in the neighborhood. Of the total area under cultivation—265 acres—145 are cropped with cereals, 25 are under potatoes, beets, carrots, etc., 51 are devoted to fodder crops, 4 form the kitchen garden and the remainder is pasture. The total agricultural outputs amounted in money to 27,400 francs in 1896. The milk sold at half a franc per gallon and the butter at a fraction over one franc per pound. The rent of the farm is 2,500 francs per annum, and the taxes, insurance, etc., amount to 2,200 francs. The salary of the director is 4,000 francs, and the salaries for the other paid officials absorb 11,900 francs, materials, which include food, clothing, etc., 12,000 francs, and farm expenses, as cattle feed, seeds, fertilizers, etc., 9,800 francs. The government has accorded 50,000 francs to enlarge the establishment, that sum being an allowance out of the taxes levied on the race course bettings. But the ordinary annual deficit is met by the municipal council. That deficit in 1896 was 15,900 francs, incurred to reform, say, 100 indigents at an out-of-pocket cash expenditure of 159 francs per head.

Room for the Discarded.

The announcement is very generally made by the Methodist conferences that they have far more young men on hand for the ministry than can be found missions. The young gentlemen who are crowded out of the sky pilot business have always one grand opening. Ontario has millions of acres ready to furnish homes of comfort and manly independence.