

UNEMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION

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IT has become an annual fact in Canada that when the autumn months approach, hundreds of so-called laborers flock to our cities. Then, when the thermometer sinks to its lowest, and housing conditions are congested, and nearly all constructive work at a standstill, the cities are confronted with the problem of unemployment.

Many ardent reformers and philanthropists meet together and discuss the best resolutions to pass, and the best authorities to hand them to. But for all the charities, and organizations, and resolutions, the situation grows a little worse each year. And the newspapers print longer and more pathetic stories of hunger, cold, and lack of shelter. The winter of '29—'30 has been unprecedented in our annals, and it behooves us all to try to strike at the root of the trouble, for cure.

Our law insists that each child in Canada shall attend school from the age of six to sixteen. We teach him to read, to write, to cipher. And we try to instil a love of art into his soul. It is our boast that we are all literate in Canada, that everyone in Canada can both read and write. We do not add that every single child-citizen in this country is a conscript in our educational system. But each child is.

Of what avail is the ability to read, write, cipher, and draw, when one is confronted by the stern spectres of cold, hunger, and lack of shelter?

It is not so long ago that advanced learning was only for the favored few, or self-sacrificing ones. The great mass of people were taught a trade, or some useful form of employment. A scholar entered the professions, or the literary world. Well-meaning intellectualists, who derived great pleasure out of the pursuits of their minds, determined to make education a boon for the masses.

And so began the first form of Socialism.

They entirely overlooked the fact that, for some, mental pursuits are quite distasteful. And they ignored the further fact that without the three basic arts of life—agriculture, weaving and architecture—mankind would perish. In zeal for advanced intellectuality, one professor in Toronto University, twenty-five years ago, taught his students that in order to be "a gentleman",

one must be at least three generations removed from the soil. The fundamental art of weaving was relegated to machinery, and architecture had but few apprentices.

Yet all were given free and similar chance at intellectuality.

But intellectuality is not a matter for legislation, any more than equal distribution of wealth. Odd as it may seem, there are human creatures to whom great wealth is actually distasteful. And the ability to acquire possessions is a talent—quite the same as the talent for music, or sculpture, or painting. The vast majority of people are only moderately endowed with the gift of acquiring wealth. To hurl riches at this majority would certainly cause many strange situations. And not any of these would be more peculiar than the one which has been caused by equal schooling for all.

Observant teachers say that as early as the second grade in school they can pick out the pupils who are suited to go on with higher education. Yet our law forces all children to accept this one standard from the age of six to sixteen, boys and girls alike. Intelligent architecture, intelligent agriculture, intelligent weaving are entirely left out of our calculations as necessary education. Yet these three are the fundamentals of human life. The fundamental things are surely meant for the majority. What shall a boy read if he is hungry? How shall he cipher if he is cold? And where can he write if he has no shelter? It is true that we have our Domestic and Agricultural Colleges, where we teach the older student the scientific basis of life. But where do we teach the art of building, or making material with which to clothe ourselves, or keep us warm?

The professional person is the only one to-day who serves an apprenticeship. Education is to him a means of earning his livelihood and subsistence. At his own expense he spends years after the age of sixteen. But for those who take on other occupations, the employer pays them, while he teaches them their means of living.

"In the sweat of thy face, thou shalt eat thy bread," is the primal law of life. We cannot escape that till we return to dust. Then, why do we build our whole educational system contrary to this first edict of existence? The farther we depart from this principle of life, the more terrible is the problem of unemployment. If the intellectualist does not sweat bodily, he sweats with mind, and greater exhaustion.

In a country so vast as Canada, there is no need at all for hunger, or cold, or lack of shelter. We have, in this agricultural

country, everything to supply those needs. But instead of teaching the people to use intelligently the means for existence, we head the large herd off to fields that they can never conquer. And if they could, the problem would be worse than it is now.

Everyone has a dual brain. One is in the head. The other is in the hand. If a man works with his head, that does not make him superior to the one who uses his hands with equal intelligence. And the one who can feed himself, clothe himself, and shelter himself has his intellectual brother beaten at the start. But attending school from the age of six to sixteen, of itself, does not fit anyone for anything.

Though there was every sort of labor in the cities of Canada in the summer, a very small proportion of it was skilled. Most laborers could both read and write. But they could do neither of these well enough to earn a living. And they had not been trained in any other way.

In the period of peace which follows every great war we need trained and skilled workmen for the revival of all the arts that take a place in the lull which comes after war. When a child has reached the age of sixteen, he is too old to start to learn a trade. The intellectually inclined will acquire learning in spite of everything. But if education is not practical, it fails of its purpose. And surely the yearly unemployment situation proves that our whole educational system needs overhauling and changing, so that it may put the practical means of getting a livelihood into the hands of the weak as well as the hands of the strong.