

THE PROBLEM OF THE HOUR.

On one of the days last week the unemployed marched to the Parliament Buildings, the procession was accompanied by a well-known and highly-respected minister of the city on a bicycle. He states never in all his life has he seen a group of unemployed demonstrators impressed him more as being genuinely out of work and so anxious to obtain it. Arrived at the Parliament Buildings, this minister overhead the conversation of a small group of citizens among the demonstrators. "I'd get them in about two minutes," said one of them. "How?" asked the minister. "By turning the hose on them," replied the first.

This intelligent (!) appreciation of the serious problem before Winnipeg and other Canadian cities were so prevalent, the danger and magnitude of present conditions would be great. Happily, it is not so. The recent processions, we believe, have convinced the public that a vast majority of this army of unemployed are not loafers, but men, for whom at the present time there is no work. And the danger, we believe further, is not that we are to wait until we have had riots and destruction of property before it faces seriously and squarely this problem of unemployment.

It is very doubtful if the present unemployment is merely temporary and due only to the war. On the contrary, a reasonable argument can be advanced that conditions here would have been even worse but for the large numbers of men drafted into the Canadian Expeditionary Force and the employment given by war contracts. The truth seems to be that Canada has reached a definite point in her development, where the absorption of labor in constructional works of various kinds cannot be counted upon to the extent, at any rate relatively, as in the past. Railway camps and other construction camps have in the past acted very much as regulators of the supply of labor. At this present time this regulating agency is not acting, and, as just stated, we will be able to depend upon it less and less as time goes on.

The path of solution is the land. It is so obvious, so insistent and so unshakable as to preclude argu-

ment. But as to what form the land settlement policy to be decided upon shall take permits of a vast amount of discussion. Indeed the problem is so difficult, and so beset with dangers and pitfalls, that the very best brains of the Dominion, the highest business ability of the Dominion, and last, but not least, the keenest sympathies of the Dominion, must be enlisted in its solution. Many settlement projects are visionary; nevertheless a reasonable and practical project can be evolved if we are determined to evolve one.

In regard to the relief of the Winnipeg unemployed, numbering several thousand men, the present position is, of course, entirely unsatisfactory. The city authorities have undertaken to relieve any immediate need through grants of groceries, etc., but this method, while it will prevent anyone from starving, is the crudest, most uneconomical and most demoralizing of all relief methods. The earnest consideration of some permanent policy must be taken up forthwith and conscientiously pursued to a conclusion.

It appears that the men who took part in the recent procession are for the most part Slavs, chiefly Ruthenians. They have been attracted to Canada by the glowing accounts of Government and transportation agencies. They have undertaken and are willing further to undertake the spade and pioneer work of the Dominion. The fact that these men happen to come from the Austrian Province of Galicia should not be seriously argued against them. They came before the war broke out. They were urged to come. They have many good qualities and will in time make excellent Canadians.

Nearly all the recent processionists were on the land in their home country, the majority as the owners of small farms. They are unused, however, to grain-growing on a large scale by means of expensive machinery. Large numbers of their fellow-countrymen have settled in the mixed farming country between the Lakes, off the Riding Mountains, on the Whitemouth river, and in other parts of the Province. Here they have usually divided the homesteads into small forty-acre farms. In these districts, almost completely neglected by Governments and by the English-speaking community, these Slav settlers have been slowly converting a wilderness into permanent and established settlements.

In districts of this description, notably between the Lakes, there is still a considerable amount of homestead land. And it is seriously suggested in many quarters that this remaining homestead land would lend itself favorably to a land settlement scheme of 40-acre farms—a new homestead policy one might aptly call it. It is estimated that to see these men over the period which would necessarily have to elapse before the point of self-support was reached would cost per family from six to eight hundred dollars, or an annual interest charge of say from thirty to forty dollars. This advance, not more than a thousand dollars all told per farm, could, in all likelihood, be repaid within ten years, when, after two or three years, the men became self-supporting. For the harvest they could probably leave their farms and assist in the grain-growing districts.

The Free Press does not put forward this scheme as heaven-sent, adequate and conclusive, but it appears to us to have much to recommend it and to be deserving of consideration. Moreover, it would not prejudice other settlement proposals. One of the absolute essentials of this or of any scheme for placing the unemployed upon the land is expert supervision. The occupants of the forty-acre farms we have described would need the sympathetic assistance of agricultural experts. Upon this, indeed, the success of the scheme would largely depend.

Many people are probably unaware that the Province of Ontario has now in its employ forty agricultural experts, called district representatives. These are picked men from the Guelph Agricultural College, who go and live with farmers in their homes for two or three weeks and discuss with them on the spot whatever difficulties confront them with regard to cultivation and farm management. We understand that a similar development on a small scale is shortly to be undertaken in Manitoba. If this is so, then these agricultural advisers can co-operate most valuably in any land settlement policy that may be evolved.