

ple feel that they are free in their work. Moreover, as it is now conducted, the plan appeals only to the thrifty who are eager to learn any lesson of betterment in life.

Such in brief is the present condition of vacant lot gardening in New York city. To extend its work the committee needs the loan of more land, and contributions of money.

It costs about \$6 per family to those who need it. With this aid the recipient is able to produce in vegetables a value of \$10 for each \$1 expended by the committee. Is this kind of philanthropy not better than that in which it requires one dollar in cost of administration to extend one dollar of aid?

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## A PROPOSAL FOR THE UNEMPLOYED.

The Greater Part of a Leaflet Published by the Right to Work National Council, 10 Clifford's Inn, London, E. C.

"Back to the Land" is becoming quite fashionable and commonplace; scarcely a day passes without its being dished up as a pious expression of opinion by the press in some shape or form, in connection with the unemployed and other social problems—cabinet ministers are even found ready to advocate it—in mild form, of course, and with proper "safeguards." Public thought is, therefore, moving in the right direction even if slowly, and "Back to the Land" is at last being recognized as something more than a "fad." A proposal for which there is "something to be said."

To the student of social problems, however, this talk of "Back to the Land" under present conditions offers little hope in the way of a solution, because there is as little chance of getting "back to the land" for the masses of the people as there is getting to the moon. True, the land is here—plenty of it—and some of the best in the world; all that is needed is the opportunity to get at it.

Common sense says that for the idle man to be linked to the idle land is the most desirable thing that can be achieved, but so long as there meets the unemployed man at every vacant piece of land an announcement that "Trespassers will be prosecuted"—which recent events have shown to be no idle threat, "Back to the Land" is little better than a political squib for the political joker.

The unemployed and hungry workers in various parts of the country have, by what is called "grabbing" unused land and attempting to cultivate it, endeavored to prove that it is a slander to label them as "wasters" and "unemployable."\*

It is not intended here to deal with the fundamental evil of the land system which is largely responsible for maintaining the present grave condition of affairs, though we do not hesitate to assert that private ownership of the land—which should belong to the nation—is one of the causes of the unemployed problem. Our object now is to demonstrate that in spite of political differences which divide people, there is a means which lies near to our hand, which, without a large expenditure of money, time, or effort, will provide honorable, healthy and profitable labor for many thousands of our fellow citizens, whereby they can be freed from

the sufferings and degradation which result from unemployment.

We suggest a "way out" for many who are in the depths of despair, and one about which we have no shadow of a doubt. It has been tested in practical fashion and proved successful. Our proposal is to copy the plan adopted in many American cities—the "Vacant Lots" cultivation which in Philadelphia has provided profitable labor for many able-bodied unemployed, by the aid of which they have worked their way back to health and independence.

We do not say that "Vacant Lot" cultivation will produce the social and industrial millennium; we simply say it is a crime against humanity that honest workmen, women, and little children suffer, starve, and die in our midst, or—what is practically as bad—are barely kept alive by the aid of demoralizing charity. By adopting the simple plan suggested, thousands of our workless could immediately—and at small cost—produce sufficient food for themselves and their dependents.

We are not theorizing, we are telling of something that has actually been done—and is being done—in America. What can be done there is possible here. All that is needed to make a success is to harness the "Common-sense team"—the idle man and idle land.

In the early spring of 1894 thousands of idle men were being enrolled in "Coxey's Army" for the avowed purpose of marching to Washington to demand work from the government.

The then mayor of Detroit proposed that all the idle land in the city be turned over to the workless people to cultivate, on condition that they should have all they produced.

An immediate response from landowners of the city which placed at the mayor's disposal many hundred acres of land, was followed by an equally quick response from the unemployed.

Allotments, varying in size from one-fourth to one-half an acre, were prepared and given to nine hundred and forty-five heads of families. Seed potatoes were furnished sufficient to plant each allotment, and in less than four months over fourteen thousand bushels of excellent potatoes were gathered by the allotment workers.

This result inspired confidence and caused experiments to be made elsewhere, notably in Buffalo and Boston. In Detroit the number of cultivators increased to more than fifteen hundred families; these produced on four hundred and fifty-five acres of what had formerly been only idle lots, potatoes and other vegetables to the value of more than £5,400. In 1896-7 other cities took up the work, Philadelphia among the number.

The first year in Philadelphia the Vacant Lots Association provided gardens, seeds, tools and instruction for about one hundred families on twenty-seven acres of ground. At a cost of about £360 vegetables worth £1,200 were produced.

In eight years the work of the association steadily expanded until one hundred and fifty-eight acres were producing crops to the value of £7,500. Many of the gardeners have graduated from vacant lots to profitable little farms of their own, and thus there has been established, on a basis of self-support, many who would otherwise be a burden on the community.

\*For a brief account of the "Manchester Grablanders" see The Public of August 11, 1906, page 442.

Mr. R. F. Powell, the superintendent of the Philadelphia Vacant Lots Cultivation Association, in presenting his eighth annual report to the Board of Directors, says:

Each year's experience confirms the fact that the best and most effective way of helping people in need is to open a way whereby they may help themselves. Eight years is a brief span in a great city's life, yet during this short space of time our association has made eight demonstrations of the following facts:

1st. That many people out of employment must have help of some kind.

2d. That a great majority of them prefer self-help, and many will take no other. Nearly all are able and willing to improve any opportunity open to them, especially if it advised how to put opportunity to good use.

3d. That opening opportunities to them does not pauperize or degrade them, but has the opposite effect. It establishes self-respect and self-confidence.

4th. That the offering of Vacant Lot Gardens to the unemployed, with proper supervision and some assistance and instruction, is the cheapest and best way yet devised for opening up opportunities.

5th. It possesses advantages in addition to the main purpose of providing profitable employment—such as the health, self-respect and exertion of those engaged.

The Vacant Lots Cultivation system is a school where the workers are taught a trade, to most of them a new trade—farming which offers more opportunity for employment than all other trades, and less outlay of capital is required to start and maintain the work than in any other field of productive opportunity. The greatest advantage of all is that the idle men and idle land are linked together.

The applicant is allowed a garden on condition that it is cultivated well throughout the season, and the holder does not trespass upon his neighbors. He must respect their right to what their labor produces. A failure to observe these rules forfeits his privilege.

"During the eight years of Vacant Lot work in Philadelphia more than four thousand families have been assisted, many old people who could no longer keep up the rapid pace of our industrial life, cripples whose physical condition held them back in the race for work, persons who on account of sickness or other misfortunes have been thrown out through competition and forced to join the ranks of the unemployed, have had a chance opened to them."

Another main purpose of the association has been not only to open opportunities to men but to teach them how to use these opportunities to the best advantage. Viewed from this standpoint the work has each year shown satisfactory results.

Out of nearly eight hundred gardeners who were assisted last season, more than eighty-five either rented or secured the loan of gardens this season on their own account, and cultivated them at their own expense, while the number of gardens forfeited on account of poor cultivation or trespassing was only three out of seven hundred and fifty-six.

This strong tendency to take up the work on their own account is the best proof of the effectiveness of the work in establishing self-respect and self-confidence.

An important step was taken early in the spring, a nine acre tract was secured. Sixteen families took it over. They had the land thoroughly fertilized and

plowed, and then sub-divided. Some took separate allotments as under the Vacant Lots Association's plan, and others worked for the manager at an agreed rate of wages per hour. The whole nine acres has been thoroughly well cultivated, and a magnificent crop harvested.

As soon as there was produce for sale a splendid market was established on the ground and a regular delivery system organized. . . .

The Philadelphia effort after ten years' existence is still being successfully maintained. . . .

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In these days when things are judged from a money value standpoint, it is not surprising that this somewhat sordid test should be applied, even to an effort of this description, though it is not a proper one. The commercial value of a thousand bricks is easily given, but the value of a thousand men and women cannot be ascertained by any £ s. d. calculation. The rescuing of men, women and children from the suffering, and want, anxiety and disease which unemployment involves, is a factor in the transaction which the multiplication table cannot represent.

The would be critic or reformer who stops to inquire, before approving such a plan, as to whether "it will pay"—provide a profit—is losing sight of the priceless asset represented by health, happiness and more or less independent lives, but even taken upon this basis of money value calculation, Philadelphia proves that the "Vacant Lots" effort pays.

In five years for £3,000 contributed the workers had direct benefits to the amount of nearly £17,000, and indirect benefits of immense value both to them and the community, that cannot be estimated in £ s. d.—improved health and moral tone, increased comforts for wives and children, increased happiness for all.

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## LAND FAMINE AND EDUCATION OF PUBLIC OPINION.

An Address Delivered by Joseph Fels at the Annual Meeting of the University Extension Society in Philadelphia, Jan. 26, 1907.

As a practical man of affairs I have hesitated to speak at this Annual Meeting of the American Society for the Extension of University Teaching. But I have long been interested in helping to change public opinion in matters that clearly demand new adjustments, and especially in those affecting the use of the land. Thus my aim, in its modest way, is the same as yours, and so I have accepted your invitation to tell you something of my personal experiences with English public opinion and the land.

My own general point of view is expressed in the following letter, written to a friend in America by Thomas Jefferson while he was traveling in France in 1785:

The property of this country is absolutely concentrated in a very few lands, having revenues of from half a million of guineas a year downwards. These employ the flower of the country as servants, some of them having as many as 200 domestics not laboring. But after all these comes the most numerous of all classes, that is, the poor, who cannot find work. I asked myself what