

(a) PRESENT CONDITION.

The first element in the condition of these persons to which we desire to call attention is their age. The average age of all such persons is probably somewhere between thirty-eight and forty-five years of age, but there are many both younger and considerably older than that average age. There are some as young as, say, thirty-two or thirty-three years of age, and there are others as old as seventy. The age of these men is a material element in the problem of expecting or assisting them to adequately maintain themselves and their dependants. Those of them whose ages range about the average we have referred to—namely, thirty-eight to forty-five years—are men who are perhaps past the period of maximum adaptability, and they are liable by reason of this fact, and of the family responsibilities usually associated with that age, to experience more difficulty than the normal younger man in finding and retaining employment in the community as at present constituted.

Those whose ages are substantially below or above the average we have referred to are apt to be under peculiar difficulties referable to their ages. For instance, the evidence taken by us satisfies us that many young men understated their ages when enlisting, with the result that youths of between seventeen and twenty years of age were sent away in our Expeditionary Forces. They were boys who up to the time of enlistment had found no place in our economic or industrial life; not only had they had no training, but they had never faced the conditions or assumed the mentality of those who take on employment and begin to earn their own living. Their war experiences, which, according to common knowledge, had an unsettling tendency, had a particularly detrimental effect on these young fellows when it was sought to repatriate them. They had never found a place in the economic or industrial machine, and the mentality engendered in them, firstly by their experiences at the front, and secondly by the extravagant expectations with which, unfortunately, many of them were encouraged to rejoin our community, made them difficult material for moulding into the scheme of things. Leave and demobilization found these men with accrued balances of pay, and for a while many spent more freely than wisely. When the necessity for work was realized, many, being then used to spending freely, sought only casual work (as returning the highest wages) rather than to again take up apprenticeships with comparatively small wages. Furthermore, as they had by this time reached the age of, say, twenty-one to twenty-five years of age, they could not bring themselves to face a start at the bottom in competition with boys of sixteen and seventeen in any semi-skilled work, and yet they were not fitted for anything else in many cases. The liberality, organized and unorganized, which was the expression of the country's gratitude to them immediately after their return, and the period of artificial prosperity which obtained for some years after their repatriation, enabled them to carry on without any particular hardship until about, say, the year 1923. Since then many of them have suffered hardships, and by marrying and begetting families have associated the lives of others with them in the experience of these hardships. The drift with very many has been from casual work to casual work, and it is only now, when approaching the average age mentioned above, that the deepest anxiety and despair are being felt at the prospects for the future, not only for themselves but for their wives and children. This anxiety and despair is breaking the nerves of many men, and so deteriorating the material which it is desirable that we should endeavour to rehabilitate.

Then there are those at the other end of the scale. One typical case is that of a man who, at fifty-seven years of age, in a good position, enlisted in a spirit of patriotic fervour, stated his age as forty-five, was accepted, passed the medical test, and was sent to the front, only to prove that his spirit was younger than his body. When he came back he was a man of over sixty, his old occupation was gone, and it has proved a hopeless task for him to try to get back into the ranks of those who are maintaining themselves. He put his history pithily and somewhat wittily in answer to a question from a member of the Commission. He said the only comment the doctors made when he stated his age as forty-five was that he showed an unusual tendency towards corpulency, and he added feelingly that the tendency has not been apparent since that date. This, as far as the actual