

UNLIKELY ANGELS.

Manchester's Welfare Office has enlisted some surprising recruits - the city's 700 dustmen - for its campaign against loneliness. The Welfare Office knows there are hundreds of old people in Manchester who lead lonely lives - and since the dustmen know who's who probably better than any other council employees, they've been asked to keep their eyes open for the lonely ones and report. Dustman Bill Gee is the champion reporter - but others are doing pretty well, too, in this odd sideline.

Bill Gee talks to Mrs. Mathison, who is 71, and lost her husband in the First World War. The older you get, the fewer of your friends are left - and it's people like this that Bill and his workmates are looking for. So Mrs. Mathison's name goes on the list.

Miss Margaret Thomas is one of the 400 voluntary visitors who makes up the other wing of the scheme; and she loses no time in making friends with Mrs. Mathison - in a practical way, too - fetching the shopping for her and so on. Mostly, these old people just want someone to talk to. The dustmen find plenty of names to keep the volunteers busy - but they all think it's a great idea. And so do we.