

The Outlook for the Laborer.

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From earliest times there have always been at least two classes of people in a community; those that were compelled to labor, and those controlling the labor. The class which exerted the control were also laborers in a certain sense, though their labor was not operative, but executive and and speculative, according to the classification of labor by President Fairchild.

The strongest ruled. He who could subject others and compelled them to labor to his advantage. Much the same condition exists today, though instead of Kings and Lords ruling over serfs, we have the capitalist dictating to the laborer. In modern times the quality of strength in arms has become unnecessary to the control of labor. Civilization makes it possible for a few, stronger in mind than their fellows to accumulate wealth with safety. This wealth used in the production of more wealth has become of late years a power perfectly appalling in its ability to both affect the finances of nations and reduce the poorer classes to a condition of practical servitude.

In the last few decades the separation into the two classes spoken of has gone on very rapidly indeed, caused by the centralization of capital within one class, leaving the other to comparative indigence.

At the time of the revolution wealth was pretty evenly distributed among the colonists. Every laboring man was contented as he had a future before him in which his lot could become bettered by diligent toil. About thirty years ago Charles Dickens said that every American was "a prospective lord". He could well hope for a time when he would be independent of the labor of his hands, and could spend his declining years in ease. Now we see this promising appearance of things materially changed, for the wealth of the country has to an enormous extent passed into the hands of the few and from various other causes besides, the outlook for the poorer, laboring classes has come to be very gloomy indeed.

The position of capital against labor is aggressive, and the stand that labor takes toward capital is none the less so.

Smarting under many personal grievances

and having a knowledge that the capitalists have it in their power to control nearly all legislation if they wish to, is it any wonder that our laboring classes have become almost desperate in their attempts to secure remedies for their condition?

One class of laborers, whose chief characteristic is moral turpitude suggest anarchistic remedies, but the obstacles they met at Chicago a few years ago lead even our least educated Americans to conclude there is no hope in that direction.

Labor unions have undeniably done a great deal of good in a few ways, but the number of their successes with strikes does not compare at all with the number of their failures. A strike even when successful gains at best but a temporary advantage. For, the prices of materials used in production, and following these the prices of products too, must vary with the law of supply and demand. Hence we see that wages cannot always remain stationary. Besides this there can be no effectual compulsion upon the employer. He can do as he pleases about raising and lowering the wages he pays and the law will always protect him from forcible demands. This right from the nature of the case is one of which he cannot be

deprived.

The farmers of the various states are trying the political remedy and have achieved some success in the way of electing representatives with their views to congress and state legislatures. Should they gain control of legislation, which they may do if capitalists do not corrupt their representatives, nothing can be said against them if they consider all classes equally with their own in the making of laws. But if they aim to legislate specially for themselves their course will be substantially wrong, as class legislation is never to be avoided on account of the pernicious effect of an unequal distribution of benefits. This is a case where the end does not justify the means.

One thing the new movement may, and I hope will accomplish, and that is the stopping of all subsidizing schemes and so reduce the expenditures of the government; for, a people can never be prosperous or happy so long as its government is extravagant or injudicious in the use of public funds. In my opinion a "billion dollar congress" gives an immeasurably small benefit to the masses compared with the danger it incurs to future prosperity.

Our lawmakers instead of being economical seem to be striving in every possible way to get rid of the nations money.

A further burden upon our nation is the debt created during the civil war. Part of that debt was paid, but over a billion remains, saddled upon us in a most objectionable fashion. It is easily seen that the capitalists alone derive a benefit from this for they for the most part hold the untaxed bonds, while the more indigent class are taxed to furnish the immense amount of interest required. Were this debt paid the generally beneficial effect would soon be apparent. Hundreds of millions of money hitherto lying idle would at once be thrown into the channels of trade. To get a profit upon the money thus thrown back into his hands the capitalist would be compelled to embark more extensively in commerce or build up our nations industries to meet the requirements of his capital. An increased demand for labor would follow, and consequently the wages paid would be higher. This general effect is something which labor unions with all their strikes and coercive measures cannot bring about. Then, with a greater portion

of the laborers of the nation employed at fair remunerative wages the magnitude of the labor question would materially diminish.

But by the action of our wise legislators this happy alleviation of the present strained condition has been put off for a considerable length of time. Patriotically we submit. Meanwhile, thousands of our people are daily out of employment. Homes are being deserted and their former occupants, unsuccessful in their attempts to find work turn away to swell our already large army of tramps and criminals.

How is this deplorable condition to be bettered? Is it necessary that there should be a great civil revolution in order that labor and capital be reconciled? Reason answers no. We are now in a period of intellectual warfare. The brightest minds of the nation are battling in the cause of philanthropy. That solution which is best adapted to mend the present difficulties will in time be adopted. All great reforms move slowly. The one in store for us is indeed a great reform, and hence it cannot come about all at once.

But wild and visionary remedies are offered as well as practical, useful ones. Of these let us beware. Communism or socialism in any country is an impossibility. Never since the wretchedness of the poor began has there been a fair example of their success though later European history gives many a count of pitiful attempts of the starving peasants and laborers to better their condition by those means. History would but repeat itself if communism or socialism were tried here.

Laying aside these wild schemes, let us consider those remedies of whose success we may be reasonably certain. Our wisest thinkers believe the best condition of things will never be inaugurated until we have cooperation and association between our capitalists and laborers. But organization will be necessary to success in this reform. In this fact has lain one of the greatest disadvantages to the laboring classes. Capital has always been fully organized, labor has never been. The farmers and independent operators are educating themselves up to a full conception of the situation and organizing in a way so that the grinding power of capital will have its minimum effect on them.

But another class of our laborers require more attention. Remedies for their condition are few and hard to grasp. They are almost powerless even to combine for mutual protection. The farmer is a speculative, as well as an operative laborer but this great mass to which I now refer are operative laborers alone, who have no thought for the morrow save what their wages will bring. The price of their hire is brought down to the lowest limit of necessary wages. There is a more ignominious servility than that of the slave for, though exercising every prerogative of free citizens they are completely at the mercy of moneyed tyrants. One word from him who wields the power can send them starving, despairing into the streets. The question is a pertinent and perplexing one as to what can be done for them.

The salvation of this comparatively helpless class lies greatly in the humanizing of capitalists. The examples of such men as Peter Cooper can be taken to show a proper treatment of employees by the employer. Do practically illustrate, the price of the wages received by this class must be raised above the limit of necessity, or a share in the

extra profits must be given them. The last instance especially is commendable as it will give each laborer a responsibility to his fellows and so make more of a man of him. When this is accomplished, strikes, riots and other desperate measures will be things of the past. Our laborer will have a home of his own in which to rear his children. The capitalist will be thought of as a being to bless instead of as an object to fear and dread; a drag upon civilization and a menace to the nations safety.

Then instead of compelling his child to struggle with him the laborer can send it to school and develop its talents to the best condition of utility.

When the rich and poor live together in our world in these amicable relations the incentive to crime in nearly all cases will be gone and society can exist in greater security.

Better conditions will elevate the laborer to a higher moral plane. His dormant intellectual faculties will be expanded to their fullest capacity. His speculation, or powers to conceive lines for future action will become better developed and

he will become better equipped for the struggle of life alongside of him who now holds the advantage. He will be enabled to accumulate wealth too and embark in enterprises of his own.

It is hard to tell how soon this relation between labor and capital will become general, but as civilization advances, and it is never stationary with our people, we may hope for a steady improvement. Yet it is only when working in full harmony as I have attempted to show that our vexing labor question will be satisfactorily answered. Then only will capital be seen by all as a most powerful factor in civilizing and enlightening the world.

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