

# SCIENTIFIC CANADIAN

## MECHANICS' MAGAZINE

PATENT AND OFFICE RECORD

Vol. 10.

AUGUST, 1882.

No. 8.

### THE LABOR STRIKES.



FOR the first time since the summer of 1877, made memorable by the great railroad riots, there are symptoms of a general disaffection among the working classes in the States, which has manifested itself in the organization of extensive strikes for higher rates of wages. These have followed each other with such rapidity and method that they would appear to have been the outgrowth of a plan carefully and deliberately considered in advance by the great labor organizations that of late have grown powerful and aggressive.

The iron manufacturing and railway interests, among the most important of the country, and the most vulnerable to attack, have, as usual, been made to bear the brunt of the conflict. What the outcome will be it is difficult to foretell with certainty, but it is more than probable that, as is nearly always the case, the men will lose in the end. Both the time and the conditions of trade are unfavorable to them. There has lately been a lull in the iron trade—a natural reaction from the extraordinary activity of the previous year, and one that was the inevitable consequence of a poor crop and the collapse of numerous and vast speculative operations. On this account, and also because of the existence of a large stock on hand, the iron manufacturers can look with comparative serenity upon the situation, consoled by the reflection that the leaders of the labor organizations could not have chosen a time to precipitate the conflict that would have caused less inconvenience and loss to the masters, than they did.

So far as their ability to withstand an organized labor conflict, the railroads, in consequence of the disastrous war of rates carried on during the past year, are not in so strong a position financially as they should have been; but another element in their favor, which the movers in the strikes must have overlooked, and which more than counterbalances their weakened financial condition, is the continual flow of immigration to

the shores of America. Last year for example, immigrants landed at the unparalleled rate of nearly 2,000 per day; and this year they are pouring in still more rapidly. These newcomers are made up largely of men in the vigor of life, and who are therefore available for immediate employment.

The trade unions have had time to replenish their coffers since the disasters of the panic years 1873-'77; but we gravely question whether the result will not prove the present movement to have been an act of supreme folly. It must be admitted, to the honor of the strikers, that their movements have been in the main quiet, orderly and dignified, and that but few instances of violence and intimidation have had to be recorded against them; but the initiation of the great strikes of the iron workers, and of the freight handlers, the former of which is still in progress involved in both cases a discreditable breach of faith. The iron workers rejected plans for arbitration that they themselves had suggested and approved; and the freight men, without even the formality of asking for the additional pay they afterwards demanded, abandoned their work, apparently thinking they could easily coerce the companies into compliance with their demands. In this the men were seriously mistaken, and the indications at the present writing are that both strikes will terminate in complete failure for the strikers.

Irrespective of the merits of the issues for which the present warfare is being waged, it is certain, if long continued, to entail great disaster, suffering and misery upon the laboring classes who engage in it, and on this account will be regretted by all. As regards the iron trade, however it may be productive of results more far-reaching and calamitous than the organizers of the strike have dreamed, for whatever be the issue, the fight cannot but aid the British iron trade to the detriment of the Americans. The English papers are already rejoicing over the prospect. One of them, puts the case plainly: "If the men succeed, the increase in wages obtained will cause a rise in prices, and with the rise of prices the export of British iron to the United States in large quantities will become possible. Even last year there were somewhat over three quarters of a million tons of iron imported into the United States, and if prices were now to be raised, the import would be enlarged until prices rose here also to counterbalance the rise in the United States. Even if the