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PRISON LABOR VS. FREE LABOR.

THE *Globe*, in an editorial on "Prison Labor," speaking of the new law in New York forbidding convicts to work except in making articles required in the penal institutions of that State, says that it will cost the State \$400,000 more to keep its prisoners this year than last—that the law condemns 3,440 rascals to idleness where they used to be made to earn their livings in prisons; that under the new system the health of the convicts is being impaired by the enforced idleness, and that "probably the trades with which prison labor comes chiefly in competition are injured more by having to maintain prisoners in idleness than they are by the competition of their labor." No doubt prison wardens would like to have their penitentiaries self-sustaining; and from a certain standpoint it may be desirable thus to have them; but for many long years, and until quite recently, the element of convict-made goods as in competition in the open market with free-made goods, created a condition of affairs exceedingly inimical not only to free labor, but also to the employers of free labor in the particular industries in which the convicts were employed. This was the fact particularly noticeable in the stove-moulding trade in and near Albany, where hundreds of convicts were employed under contract by certain stove manufacturers, to the detriment and disorganization of the business generally, and which contributed largely to the development of that antagonism on the part of labor organizations which resulted in the enactment of the present law. It was urged by those in favor of employing convicts in those industries which would afford the greatest money returns to the State, that the several hundred convicts employed in the business should be considered in the light of just so many workmen employed in that particular industry; but while there are thousands of free stove moulders employed

in the business in New York, the convict labor competition was most keenly felt. The convicts were never out of a job, but the free men were frequently laid off, and while the employers of convict labor were steadily becoming richer and richer, the outside manufacturers frequently faced the problem whether it would not be better for them to permanently close their works, invest their money in other industries, and allow their free workmen to obtain other jobs as best they could.

A difference between humanitarians of the *Globe* type and those who take a more practical view of the situation is, that with the one the present and hereafter interests of convicts are of paramount importance, while with the other the first care is bestowed upon the welfare and happiness of free men upon whom wives and children depend for support, the comfort and convenience of convicts being of but secondary importance. According to the *Globe*, under the new system the convicts complain that they are kept in enforced idleness; and certain humanitarians complain that they are not self-sustaining. The answers to these objections are, that the manufacture of articles required in the penal institutions of the States involves a certain amount of the labor of the convicts, and that the time in which they are not thus employed might just as well be devoted to instructing them in other than mechanical industries. Thus, it might be well to organize the unfortunates into classes with suitable professors, and teach them law, medicine, surgery and divinity, so that when they had performed their allotted service to the State, when they are discharged and turned loose upon the community, they would be in a condition, as far as education goes, to become lawyers, doctors, surgeons and clericals. It might be said that all these classes require a higher order of intellect for proficient than do the mechanical trades, but this is an open question. The increase by a few thousand to the roster of professional gentlemen would be a small matter compared with the unbalancing of mechanical industries and the consequent suffering of helpless women and children.

The *Globe* says: "The absurdity of the dread of the competition of prison labor is seen when it is pointed out that the proportion of long-term criminals to the population is not more than one in a thousand." There was no explanatory diagram accompanying this astute statement. Free laboring men are not as deeply concerned as to whether the terms of convicts are "long" or "short," as they are as to the competition against which the *Globe* wants them to contend. The salient fact, as shown by the *Globe*, is that there are nearly four thousand convicts in the penal institutions of New York, who are now prevented by law from competing in the mechanical industries with free labor, but who the humanitarians desire should be employed in such industries. The dread of this competition may be "absurd," but it is a tangible possibility against which both free labor and the employers of free labor stand shoulder to shoulder to oppose and prevent.

INDUSTRIAL EDUCATION.

In our last issue we published a circular letter issued by Hon. George W. Ross, Minister of Education of Ontario, to a number of manufacturers, skilled mechanics and others, inviting them to meet him on the 19th instant at his office, for con-