

GEMS FROM GEORGE.

Excerpts From "Protection or Free Trade."

Near the window by which I write a great bull is tethered by a ring in his nose. Grazing round and round he has wound his rope about the stake until now he stands a close prisoner, tantalized by rich grass he cannot reach, unable even to toss his head to rid him of the flies that cluster on his shoulders. Now and again he struggles vainly, and then, after pitiful bellowings, relapses into silent misery.

This bull, a very type of massive strength, who, because he has not wit enough to see how he might be free, suffers want in sight of plenty, and is helplessly preyed upon by weaker creatures, seems to me no unfit emblem of the working masses.

In all lands, men whose toil creates abundance are pinched with poverty, and, while advancing civilization, opens wider vistas and awakens new desires, are held down to brutish levels by animal needs. Bitterly conscious of injustice, feeling in their inmost souls that they were made for more than so narrow a life, they too, spasmodically struggle and cry out. But until they trace effect to cause, until they see how they are fettered and how they may be freed, their struggles and outcries are as vain as those of the bull. Nay, they are vain. I shall go out and drive the bull in the way that will untwist his rope. But who shall drive men into freedom? Till they use the reason with which they have been gifted nothing can avail. For them there is no special providence.

Under all forms of government the ultimate power lies with the masses. It is not kings nor aristocrats, nor land-owners nor capitalists, that anywhere really enslave the people. It is their own ignorance. Most clear it is that the present system rests on universal suffrage. The workingmen of the United States may mold to their will legislatures, courts and constitutions. Politicians strive for their favor and political parties bid against one another for their vote. But what avails this? The little finger of aggregated capital must be thicker than the joints of the working masses so long as they do not know how to use their power. And how far from any agreement as to practical reform are even those who must feel the injustice of existing conditions and who are in labor organizations. Though beginning to realize the waste of strikes and to feel the necessity of acting on general conditions through legislation, these organizations, when they come to formulate political demands, seem to unite upon any measures capable of large results.

This political impotency must continue until the masses, or at least that sprinkling of more thoughtful men who are the file leaders of popular opinion, shall give heed to larger questions as will enable them to agree on the path reform should take.

DOES PROTECTION RAISE WAGES? One thing or the other must be true—either protection does give better opportunities to labor and raise wages, or it does not. If it does, then, under the law of Carey, have rejected the Malthusian doctrine, but only to set up an equally untenable optimistic theory which serves the same purpose of barring inquiry into the wrongs of labor, and which has been borrowed by continental free traders as a weapon with which to fight the agitation for social reform.

HALTING ON THE THRESHOLD. That, so far as it has yet gone, the controversy between protection and free trade has not been carried to its logical conclusion is evident from the positions which both sides occupy. Protectionists and free traders alike seem to lack the courage of their convictions. If protection have the virtues claimed for it, why should it be confined to the restriction of imports from foreign countries. If it really "provides employment" and raises wages, then a condition of things in which hundreds of thousands vainly seek employment, and wages touch the point of bare subsistence, demands a far more vigorous application of the principle than any protectionist has yet proposed. On the other hand, if the principle of free trade be true, the substitution of a revenue tariff for a protective tariff is a ridiculously inefficient application of it.

INTELLIGENCE FOR THE MASSES. We may safely leave many branches of knowledge to such as can devote themselves to special pursuits. We may safely accept what chemists tell us of chemistry, or astronomers of astronomy, or philologists of the development of language, or anatomists of our internal structure, for not only are there in such investigations no pecuniary temptations to warp the judgment, but the ordinary duties of men and of citizens do not call for such special knowledge, and the great body of a people may entertain the crudest notions as to such things and yet lead happy and useful lives. Far different, however, is it with matters which relate to the production and distribution of wealth, and which thus directly affect the comfort and livelihood of men. The intelligence which can alone safely guide in the choice of the means of intelligence of the masses, for as to such things it is the common opinion, and not the opinion of the learned few, that finds expression in legislation.

If the knowledge required for the proper ordering of public affairs be like the ordering of a public dinner, the prediction of an eclipse, the making of a chemical analysis, or the decipherment of a cuneiform inscription, or even like the knowledge required in any branch of art or handicraft, then the shortness of human life and the necessities of human existence must condemn the masses of men to ignorance of matters which directly affect their means of subsistence. If this be so, then popular government is hopeless, and, confronted on one side by the fact, to which all experience testifies, that a people can never safely trust to any portion of their number the making of regulations which affect their earnings, and on the other by the fact that the masses can never see for themselves the effect of such regulations, the only prospect before mankind is that the many must always be ruled and robbed by the few.

AN "ISRAELITE" PROBLEM. Whether protection does or does not increase national wealth, whether it does or does not benefit the laborer, are questions that from their nature must admit of decisive answers. That the controversy between protection and free trade, widely and energetically as it has been carried on, has as yet led to no accepted conclusion cannot therefore be due to difficulties inherent in the subject. It may in part be accounted for by the fact that powerful pecuniary interests are concerned in the issue, for it is true, as Macaulay said, that if large pecuniary interests were concerned in denying the attraction of gravitation, that most obvious of physical facts would have disputed. But that so many fair-minded men who have no special interests to serve are still at variance on the subject can only, it seems to me, be fully explained on the assumption that the discussion has not been carried far enough to bring out that full truth that harmonizes all partial truths.

THE SIMPLEST OF THE SCIENCES. Political economy is the simplest of the sciences. It is but the intellectual recognition,

as related to social life, of laws which in their moral aspect men instinctively recognize, and which are embodied in the simple teachings of Him whom the common people heard gladly. But, like Christianity, political economy has been warped by institutions which, denying the equality and brotherhood of man, have enlisted authority, silenced objection, and ingrained themselves in custom and habit of thought. Its professors and teachers have almost invariably belonged to or been dominated by that class which to-day is questioning of social adjustments that give to those who do not labor the fruits of labor's toil. They have been like physicians employed to make a diagnosis on condition that they shall discover no unpleasant truth. Given social conditions such as those that throughout the civilized world to-day shock the moral sense, and political economy, fearlessly pursued, must lead to conclusions that will be as a lion in the way of those who have any tenderness for "vested interests." But in the colleges and universities of our time, as in the Salamin of old, it is idle to expect any enunciation of truths unwelcome to the powers that be.

POLITICAL ECONOMY DISCUSSED. Adam Smith demonstrates clearly enough that protective tariffs hamper the production of wealth. But Adam Smith—the university professor, the tutor and pensioner of the Duke of Buccleuch, the prospective holder of a government place—either did not deem it prudent to go further, or, as is more probable, was prevented from seeing the necessity of doing so by the atmosphere of his time and place.

THE POWER OF THE MASSES. Life at any rate failed to carry his inquiry into the causes which from "that original state of things in which the production of labor constitutes the natural recompense of wages or labor" had developed a state of things in which natural wages seemed to be only such part of the produce of labor as would enable the laborer to exist. And, following Smith, came Malthus, to formulate a doctrine which throws upon the Creator the responsibility for the want and vice that flows from man's injustice—a doctrine which has been longer continued, the discussion might have been pushed further than the question of revenue tariff or protective tariff; but, ending as it did, the capitalists of the Manchester school were satisfied, and in such discussion as has since ensued English free traders, with few exceptions, have made no further advance, while American advocates of free trade have merely followed the English free traders.

On the other hand, the advocates of protection have evinced a like indisposition to venture on burning ground. They have the virtues of protection as furnishing employment, without asking how it comes that anyone should need to be furnished with employment; they assert that protection maintains the rate of wages, without explaining what determines the rate of wages. The ablest of them, under the name of Carey, have rejected the Malthusian doctrine, but only to set up an equally untenable optimistic theory which serves the same purpose of barring inquiry into the wrongs of labor, and which has been borrowed by continental free traders as a weapon with which to fight the agitation for social reform.

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BEING "IN SOCIETY."

[From "Wives and Daughters" for September.]

The people who are "not in society" may be divided into two classes—those who cannot get in, and those who will not get in. The few who will not bend their necks to the social yoke allege as reason that society is not life at all, that it is a mere surface existence where no one has prejudices, preferences or ideas, and conversation is kept at the dead level of a child's comprehension. They inquire as to the sense and reason of substituting imaginary duties for the real and very numerous duties with which life is already oppressed and openly scoff at the idleness of attending social festivities which every partaker outside of his or her twenties, inwardly pronounces a social bore. Furthermore, one's own occupation is exhaustive of strength and time. Why should the few hazy moments of leisure be exchanged for that which profits itself not? The power of habit also asserts itself. The habit of reading aloud to one's wife, or husband, or mother, or brother, the habit of retiring at an hour early enough to turn next day's work into pleasure instead of a pain, the habit of conducting one's self in a rational way and occupying a decently elevated spot in one's own esteem—all these habits are seriously interfered with by the custom of going to places where nothing is expected of one but a society smile, and strict conformity to conventionalities. The wish to think well of one's kind is one of the strongest desires of the human heart; but how is this feeling to be gratified by frequent association with perfectly dressed, perfect-mannered puppets, who smile and utter interjections, and smile again? The attitude of the thinking mind toward society is expressed in the query: "Why should I languish in solitude in a well-filled drawing room, when I might as well be enjoying the society of my own thoughts or those of my intimate friends?"

Society (with a capital "S") has no use for piety or intellect, consequently those qualities, though they may exist within its borders, are sternly repressed. It is fond of "flats," providing they reside in a droll-like manner, and makes a pet of genius, when it is flatteringly gossip about. A man may have the brain of a rabbit, but if he dresses and behaves with propriety his fair ears will be considered rather an ornament than otherwise. If he have the soul of a reptile it will not in the slightest degree prevent him from being a complete social success. It is a curious and deplorable fact that every infringement of the laws of purity by a man weighs society's scale, and that the same man who is committed by a member of the "weaker" sex opens them very wide indeed, and gives an expression of the most meretricious intolerance to the orbs beneath.

These being undisputed truths, it is difficult to find any serious-minded person deliberately speaking a good word for society. Mrs. Arrella E. Barr attempts to utter such a word in the last *North American Review*. While practically admitting the brainlessness and heartlessness of the great social system, she says: "Looked at in relation to the human mind, individual souls, society duties do seem to be utter vanity; but what a vast number of people would be at a loss how to dress themselves, and what to do with themselves, if society did not devise their clothing, their habits, their pleasures and their amusements, and if they were not taught to suppress their spontaneity, who give themselves to their company and play their part graciously, who do not take up causes or make their philanthropy conspicuous, who have no extreme views, and who can pay court to the vulgar and stick fast in the unfortunate with an equally charming frankness."

Further, Mrs. Barr says: "We must thank society for preventing much offensive, ill-conditioned personality." But society does not prevent anything of the sort. It merely prevents offensive manifestations of their personality. It matters not to it whether you are above praise or beneath contempt, so long as your behavior is correct. She then draws a contrast between the young and foolish, who practice no decent self-restraint, and the society girls who have been taught to suppress their spontaneity, who give themselves to their company and play their part graciously, who do not take up causes or make their philanthropy conspicuous, who have no extreme views, and who can pay court to the vulgar and stick fast in the unfortunate with an equally charming frankness.

While self-restraint is one of the chief things that make association with one's fellows possible, we do not need society to teach us to be civilized. The teacher is that intelligent little girl of 10 or 12 years can be trained to repress her coarser instincts, to strenuously avoid the barbarity of saying "just what she thinks," to be unselfish and refined in her dealings with others. That is as far as society can take her. It is cool as far as it goes, but it is a very little distance. The practical value of purely society women to this planet is equally little. When society teaches young women to suppress their better selves, to be shy of philanthropy and "shrink from the unfortunate," to care for nothing more exalting than dressing and eating and chatting and smiling, to quell the nobler motives and emotions, and deaden the intellectual and spiritual faculties—then it is not a negative benefit, it is a positive evil.

"What do we live for?" asks George Eliot, "if it is not to make life less difficult for others?" So far as society helps in that direction it is a blessing; so far as it hinders us it is to be avoided.

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