

Our Curbstone Observer. ON THE COAL QUESTION.

LET no person get frightened; I have no intention of entering into the history of the great coal strike, nor to dwell upon all the anxieties that a lack of fuel has caused during the past few months. That coal has become a necessity in a country like ours no person is going to question. Some one remarked that in our father's time they heated themselves very well with wood; that is true, but in our father's time there were no furnaces, as we have them today, and no pipes to freeze if the coal was lacking. Conditions have changed since the "good old times," and while we are perfectly prepared to admit that our fathers lived and prospered and were contented without many of the so-called luxuries of the present hour, still they would not have been so happy, nor so contented had they known and experienced what we have. Besides in those days due preparations were made for the winter, and we cannot deny that both such preparations and the carrying out of them during the winter months, entailed a very great amount of labor, of sacrifice, and often of suffering, that we are not obliged to undergo. Since we have tenement houses and flats, with their hot water furnaces, we must have coal; there is no way out of that—no matter what our fathers did. It is as great an act of charity to provide a poor family with fuel as it is to give them food or clothing. Consequently this coal famine has afforded not a few some admirable opportunities of doing good to others. That advantage is taken of such occasions by all is something problematical. What caused me to approach this subject, in this issue, is a remark that I heard the other day, and one that shot through me like an arrow.

"BUSINESS FIRST."—One day last week I had occasion to enter the office of a coal dealer for the purpose of securing a supply of that material. While I was awaiting my turn to be served, a poor, but evidently very respectable woman came in. She was the wife of a tradesman, and their family depended upon the husband's weekly earnings to secure the necessities of life. What he brought home on Saturday had to procure for them with all they required for the next week. Consequently they could only buy fuel in limited quantities. She stated that she had three small children at home, that their coal was run out, and that they were actually cold and suffering. She purchased three bags of coal and paid for them. After getting her receipt she asked the dealer if she could have it sent at once. He gruffly said "no." Then she asked if he would send it before noon—it was then eight o'clock in the morning. He again answered "no." She explained that as she only needed three bags he might allow one of his drivers, in passing, to drop off her share, or even one bag, or half a bag. This he would not do; she would have to wait her turn; he had several more important orders ahead of hers. "But," she said, "I tell you the little ones are cold at home." The answer was: "I don't care whether they are cold or not; that's none of my business; cold don't cut any ice in business;" and he laughed, just as if he had said something witty, or imagined that he had given evidence of some kind of cleverness. As the woman went out

I could see that her heart was very big, and her eyes were very full.

SENTIMENT PREVAILED.—When she had taken her departure one of the customers, who had purchased a ton, and who had asked to have it delivered early, was told that he would have it in his cellar by ten o'clock. "Are you sure of that?" he asked. "Without fail," said the dealer. "Then," answered the other, "give that woman, who has just gone out, my turn, and I will wait until it is convenient for you to send my load afterwards." I had been a silent spectator of the entire little play, and I thought that I suddenly perceived a species of halo forming around the brow of that man. Who he is I do not know; but I thanked him from my heart. I felt a gratitude towards him, not only for the special act of kindness that he had one-act of charity I should say—but also because he had lifted my hopefulness and re-established my confidence in my fellow-man. The refusal of that half-bag of coal to the woman who had paid for six times the amount, under such circumstances, was a shock that one can scarcely describe. Possibly, in the strict business sense, the dealer was right; it may be that he was legally justified in not infringing upon the claims of those who had given earlier orders; in a word, he may have been following the heartless code of "business;" but I have yet to learn that "business" interests preclude the dictate of common charity. And even though the dealer could not have violated his rule by permitting of a slight exception, under exceptional circumstances, still there was no necessity of adding insult to the privations that the poor woman suffered. What grated most upon my sensibilities was the harsh expression that he did not care whether her children were cold or not, that it was none of his business. There was something so unfeeling, so very unchristian in that word that I could never translate into language the effect it produced upon me.

VISIONS AROSE.—"How fleet is the glance of the mind," in that brief moment, even as one in a prolonged dream of the night-time, I had visions that certainly did not arise before the mental eyes of any person then present. I saw the genius of greed crushing the poor remnant of life out of the spectre of indigence; I saw the "pound of flesh" demanded again; and I thought that Shakespeare must have been stirred by some similar scene when he conceived the "Merchant of Venice." I looked further adown the future and I saw the "Almighty Dollar" seizing upon the heart of man and chilling it into stone by the petrifying effect of its contact. I saw selfishness going abroad over the great world and with its poisonous breath, blasting and withering the most cherished flowers of sentiment, the roses of charity, that strew the "pathway to the grave." It is all business; and yet the real and only business of life is overshadowed and obliterated by that gorgon. I saw the Pharisee pass along and decline to touch the poor victim by the way-side; I saw the Samaritan bend over the fallen and suffering one and lending what assistance was in his power. And I heard a Voice asking, as it asked of old amidst Judaean scenes "which one of these two was that man's neighbor?"

so quick to avail themselves of new discoveries and inventions. The millions from foreign lands who have founded homes here are making other millions in the Old World thankful that America exists. We are indeed a source of hope and confidence to all, in whatever part of the earth, who love justice and liberty, who believe in a higher and more blessed social and religious future for mankind. Already we are the possessors of greater wealth than any other nation possesses or has ever possessed; and though a few men, whose names stare us in the face from the pages of the newspapers, have fortunes that seem almost fabulous, there is diffused among the masses of the people a well-being and comfort such as exists in no other land. This may be perceived in the housing of the people, in their clothing, in the wholesomeness of their food, and above all in the spirit of courage and hopefulness which pervades our whole life.

There is no gulf between the rich and the poor, but a gradation of generally distributed possessions. Nevertheless it is obvious that when there is question of American life, a merely optimistic view is a shallow and a false view. There are great and widespread evils among us, as also tendencies which if allowed to take their course will lead to worse evil. There is the universal political corruption. There is the diminished sense of the sacredness of property. There is the loosening of the marriage tie and the sinking influence of the home. There is a weakening of the power to apprehend spiritual truth, and a consequent lowering of the standards of value, a falling away from the vital principles of religion, even while we profess to believe in religion. There is, indeed, enough and more than enough to keep all who cherish exalted ideas of the worth of human life and who love America lowly-minded and watchful.

One of the most certain signs of decadence is a failure of the will, and one might think that we are threatened with this. Our ability to react against abuses is growing feebler. The social organism is so vast and so complex that it seems hopeless to attempt to interfere, and as we permit things to take their course, abdicating the freedom and the power of will in the presence of an idol which we call Destiny. The more public opinion is shaped by the ideals of evolution as the supreme law of life the less capable we become of bringing reason and conscience to bear upon human affairs, or recognizing God's presence in the world, and holding to truth and love as something higher and mightier than a universe of matter.

The course of things is, indeed, but partially subject to human control. Human progress nevertheless depends chiefly on human intelligence and energy, which, if they cannot create, can shape and guide. The one means of promoting the welfare of man is labor and effort. It alone can develop his mind, can form his character, can protect his mind, can form his character, can protect him from the blind forces of nature, and provide him for what is necessary for his comfort and dignity. The end of labor is the strengthening and enrichment of life, and the best measure of its value is the effect it produces on man, individually and collectively. The end is not abundance of riches, but noble life, healthful, pure, intelligent, brave, and loving. No wealth can enrich the brutal and the base; no possessions can purchase joy or peace for the slaves of appetite. Where right human life is led—a life of faith, hope and love, of thought and self-control, of industry and self-denial—to live with as few material and animal wants as possible ennobles man. To learn to live with as little as possible and to waste nothing that is needful is the sum of practical wisdom. Socrates was happy in thinking how many things the world is full of which he did not need. Simple pleasures are the best. Expensive luxuries harm those who indulge in them, and bring misery to many. The highest ambition springs not from the desire to rise in the world, but from the will to lead an honest helpful life, whatever one's circumstances. One may be a wise, good, and happy man, or a foolish, wicked, and miserable man, whether rich or poor. We must have food, shelter, and clothing that we may live; but we should live not to be fed and housed, but to grow in knowledge and virtue, in helpfulness and holiness.

For the most fortunate men life is full of difficulties and troubles; for the poorest it may be filled with light, peace, and blessedness. To be a man is to think as well as to work, and the more intelligence there is in the work the better shall it be for the workers. Reason as well as religion impels those who work with the head and those who work with the hands to co-operation, not to conflict. The interests of both are best served when they are friends. If labor is not directed by ability it is sterile. The notion that those who work with the hands are the sole producers of wealth is a fallacy which should deceive no one. The vast increase of wealth in the modern world of industry and commerce is the result to a far greater degree of ability than of labor. It has been produced chiefly by the comparatively few men of exceptional gifts, who have invented machines, organized enterprises, opened markets, and thus given work and sustenance to millions who but for them would never have been born. Capital itself, which makes our great undertakings feasible, is largely stored ability—ability embodied and made permanently fruitful in the means of production and distribution. Columbus did not sail his ships, but had it not been for his genius they would not have sailed at all; and had the mutinous crew thrown him overboard, they would have drifted to death and the New World had not been discovered. The natural sources of wealth had existed in America for countless ages, but the savages who dwelt here lived in poverty and wretchedness because they lacked men of ability to lead them to the conquest of the riches of whose existence they were ignorant.

Capital is like an exquisite musical instrument—valueless if there is no one who knows the secret of its uses, and the men of ability who know how to use capital wisely are as rare as excellent musicians. Laborers may be compared to soldiers, who conquer only when they are disciplined, equipped, and commanded by men of ability. It has been calculated that two-thirds of the wealth produced in the nineteenth century were due to ability, and but one-third to the work of those who toil with their hands. This applies to spiritual not less than to material wealth. The great advances of mankind, in whatever sphere, have been made through the genius and under the leadership of a few highly endowed individuals—the prophets of better things, the subduers of the foes of man, the pioneers of progress. Land and labor are the primary sources of wealth, but its production in the modern world is due chiefly to ability, working with capital, which is more than any other agency has created. Nothing is more wonderful than the hand, but its almost miraculous power is due to the fact that it is the instrument of the brain.

In former times the men of ability were drawn to devote themselves to war or government or philosophic speculation, but now more than ever before they throw themselves into industry and commerce, making the pursuit of riches their life-aim. This is the career which seems to promise the most immediate and the most substantial results; and the really able men are so few and the work to be done is so immeasurable and so complex, that the demand for these exceptional individuals is greater than the supply. Every great enterprise, every great business concern, needs for its success what they alone can give. Hence they command salaries which seem to be exorbitant; hence they grow rich, become capitalists and form combinations of capital, which appear to many to be a menace to the freedom and welfare of the whole people. Competition, which begins as a struggle for existence, finally becomes a desire to crush and dominate, becomes a warfare, which if less bloody is not less horrible or cruel than that which is carried on with shot and shell. As in battle the generals, however humane they be, think only of victory and are heedless of the suffering and the loss of life, so in the struggle for industrial and commercial supremacy, the men of ability, the leaders and capitalists are wholly bent on the attainment of their ends, and easily lose sight of the principles of justice and humanity.

It is that makes the organization of workmen into labor and trade-unions inevitable and indispensable. The consciousness that if they do not protect and defend themselves they will be ground by the wheels of a vast machine or reduced to a condition little better than that of slaves, compels them to unite lest they be deprived of the common rights of man. In ancient times laborers were slaves; it is not long ago since multitudes of them in our own country were slaves; and however the fact be disguised, the natural tendency of greed, of the love and pursuit of material things as the chief good of life, is to deader the sense of justice and humanity, to make the strong, the men of ability, feel that they have the right to do whatever they are able to do. They are not necessarily unjust or cruel, but they become the victims of a false belief and the agents of a system which is as pitiless as a law of nature.

One of the chief forces by which this tendency is held in check is the religious principle and feeling that

man are the children of God, and have inalienable rights; that work should enable the worker to lead a life not unworthy of a rational being; that riches which are procured at the cost of human misery and degradation are accursed; that what constitutes the proper value of individuals and of nations is spiritual and not material; that there is eternal wrath in store for all who trample upon moral and intellectual good that they may add to their possessions. These truths are accepted by the public opinion of the civilized world, and hence there is a general sympathy with laborers in their efforts to obtain justice and to improve their condition. All who observe and reflect recognize the fact that their lot is hard, that they bear an undue share of the burdens of life, that they are often forced to do work which is destructive of health and happiness, and that they are exposed to greater vicissitudes of fortune than others.

All this, however, would accomplish little for their improvement, if they themselves remained indifferent, if they did not organize, if they did not discuss and come to a fuller consciousness of their grievances, if they did not by strikes and other lawful means make strenuous efforts to increase their wages or to prevent them from falling, if they did not agitate for fewer hours of work and whatever else may give them leisure and opportunity to cultivate their spiritual natures and thus to make themselves capable of enjoying life in a rational and Christian way. Economic laws, which are immutable, make it impossible that wages should rise beyond a given point, or that wealth should be so distributed as to make all men rich. The multitude are poor and can never be rich. It is indeed fortunate that it is impossible that the masses of mankind should ever be able to lead an idle and luxurious life. It is a law of human nature that man shall work and abstain, if it is to be well with him; that to do nothing and enjoy much is impossible. Political Economy, like government, rests on a basis of morality. Moral character alone can give a man self-respect, courage, hope, cheerfulness, and power of endurance. Hence the laborer, and all who identify themselves with their cause, should have a care first of all that they be true men—prudent, self-restrained, kindly, sober, frugal, and helpful; and that this may be possible, also religious. The foe of labor is not capital, but ignorance and vice. In the whole English-speaking world, at least, its worst enemy is drink. More than a combination of all employers, the saloon has power to impoverish and degrade workmen. In their own ranks the traitors are those who preach irreligion and anarchy. The influence of Christianity has been and is the chief power which has brought the world to recognize the rights of the enslaved, the poor, the weak, of all who are heavy-laden and over-burdened. It aroused and it alone can sustain enthusiasm for humanity. If this faith could die out, what would remain but the law of the survival of the fittest, that is, of the strongest, the most unscrupulous, the most reckless of the sufferings and sorrows of their fellow-men? These are the men who prosper among savages, in barbarous states, and in periods of anarchy.

But it is not conceivable that the civilized world should turn from the principles which Christ proclaimed, whose development and diffusion must in the end substitute for universal competition—the war of all upon all—the co-operation of all with all, not merely or chiefly for the winning of the bread that nourishes the body, but above all for the spread of the higher life of truth and love, of purity and goodness. In America, assuredly, we have good reason to take a hopeful view of the future. No foreign power can offer hindrance to our progress in the fulfillment of our God-given rights, which are not only to secure equal rights, liberties, and opportunities to all the people, but so to educate and inspire all the inhabitants of this great continent that they may all work together to shape here a nobler manhood and womanhood than the world has ever seen.

A PRACTICAL HINT.

We notice, says the "Southern Messenger," that in the conventions of nearly all Catholic bodies adopt resolutions in support of the Catholic press. If it could live on resolutions, the lot of the Catholic journalist would indeed be a happy one. If every member of the societies adopting such resolutions were to personally subscribe for a Catholic paper, what an impetus would be given to religious journalism. Resolutions are very well as far as they go; we do not object to them by any means; we only regret that they are not more generally acted upon.

Bishop Spalding On Capital And Labor.

(From Bishop Spalding's new book, "Socialism and Labor.")

The people of America have many things to be thankful for. The material resources of our country are so great that as yet neither we nor the world at large have been able to

measure their extent. Hidden store-houses of wealth are continually being revealed to us. We are energetic, industrious, brave, and untiring. We are convinced of the supremacy of mind over matter, and we make ceaseless and increasing efforts to educate the spiritual faculties of the whole people. We are averse to war and believe that disputes between nations, as between individuals, should be settled by discussion and arbitration. We are opposed to standing armies, believing that the national wealth and intelligence should be devoted to the improvement and culture of the citizens, and not to conquest and destruction. We have no powerful neighbor to rival or overthrow. Our comparative exemption from war has made possible

the rapid development of our country. The love of peace, which is a characteristic of the American people, manifests itself also in religious good-will and toleration. As dynastic wars are for us out of the question, so are religious wars. The spirit of forbearance and helpfulness manifests itself in our customs and habits as in our legislation. In no other country is property more secure; in no other country is it so generally diffused. Nowhere else is opportunity for woman as for man so universal; nowhere is there such faith in the national destiny; nowhere has the fusion of peoples differing in many and important respects been brought about so rapidly or so satisfactorily; nowhere are the multitudes so eager to learn or

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In his Roman letter, o 6th, to the New York now universally know ent "Innominate" has t one of the most import of the day. He deals w serences between Fran