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Prices and Public Opinion.

Though the Election is over a Discussion like the Following has a Perennial Interest for salaried Employees.

By A. C. Campbell.

The editors of *The Civilian* have been good enough to print several preachments of mine on the subject of prices. I never got to the application of it all, for the subject was so big, the popular mind so divided, and my own view so different from that of the ordinary arguer on the subject, that I could not make up my mind to ask you for the space necessary to set forth what I take to be the lesson of the present situation.

But, fortunately, I find the case stated in few words in the cable despatches. In France they have a new school of political economy, with a spokesman—she is a woman—for the same. The housewives of the Nord department in France, have come to the conclusion that prices are too high and have united their efforts to bring about reductions. True, they have unwisely resorted to force and vituperation. But this is not the first good movement that has been exposed to danger of misunderstanding and ridicule by the ill-judged zeal of those engaged in it. The basic principle of the movement is that public opinion, properly expressed, acts as a check upon the tendency toward unjustly high prices. I do not say that the lady I am about to quote has stated this as the basic principle; that does not matter; stated or unstated, the principle is there. Ruskin tells us how wise is Woman. A true

Ruskinian heroine is Mme. Gallois. According to the despatches this is her statement with regard to the price of meat:

"At the butcher's," she continued, "it is still worse. Meat is too dear and we have none now for our meals. The butchers tell us they have to pay too dear for the animals; That may be true or not; anyway they have only to pay less."

The ordinary thinker on this subject, and all the people who unthinkingly accept any ideas, if they be but boldly expressed, will say that Mme. Gallois is wrong. I hold that madame is exactly right, and that until we take her view of the matter we shall never improve our position.

One of the strangest facts in history is that, while working our way out from old superstitions we have been enmeshed in new ones. In olden times, for instance, people thought that plague and famine were the work of an inscrutable fate. Now we know that with proper farming and proper sanitation, plague and famine are impossible. But on the other hand these people knew that prices could be controlled by public opinion properly expressed, and so they made laws against forestallers and regraters, fixed the price of broadcloth and hanged or robbed money lenders who charged more than a proper rate of interest. Their remedy, of course, was the