

### STRIKES. THEIR CAUSES. CONSEQUENCES AND CURE.

Ever since human labour was a valuable commodity, purchasable by some equivalent, there have been disputes as to the basis on which the exchange should be made, when such social conditions existed as gave the labourer absolute control over his services. Slavery, which prevailed so generally in the ancient world, prevented such disputes, though movements amongst slaves are on record analogous to the strikes of this age. That is, the bondsmen in olden days arose in a body to secure better terms. The terrific destruction of life by the Plague centuries ago made labour so scarce as to break up the serf system by bringing the law of demand and supply into play, which gave the labourer freedom to offer his services to the highest bidder regardless of locality. For centuries this right was very jealously restricted by law and by custom. It is quite a modern idea that every man is free to sell his services in any market at whatever price he chooses to accept. The strikes now prevailing in the United States are evidence that this fundamental right, which is the very core and heart of social liberty, is not universally recognized as a right by those classes whom it redeemed from the degradation of serfdom, of practical slavery.

It is obvious that if a labourer has a clear right to sell his labour free from any restrictions not imposed by himself, the buyer of labour must be equally free to purchase labour wherever and by whoever it is offered or procurable. The strikers in the States are endeavouring to bring all labor of a certain class under the arbitrary control of an organized body precisely in the same way that the labourers in feudal times were arbitrarily controlled by the organized body of land owners who constituted the State. In those days no labourer could offer his services to other masters, he was bound to the soil, or locality. The artisan of to-day, exactly in the same way, is sought to be bound to a Union which is to dictate not only what wages he must demand, but where he must work, that is, the labourer must be under the absolute control of an organization in the government of which he has practically no voice. If he stands upon his freedom, upon his rights as the sole proprietor of himself and all his powers, he is punished by being compelled to abandon his employment, and, if his employer persists in respecting the individual rights of each one in his service, such employer is punished by the workmen being compelled to withdraw from his establishment. Such a combination to destroy, or ignore, the individual liberty of those who have labor to sell is a form of tyranny which is a recrudescence of that which prevailed in the days when the maximum of wages was fixed by

law; when no man dare enter the service of a new master, or in any way claim to enjoy any measure of social freedom.

The consequences of such arbitrary proceedings cannot but be damaging to all manufacturing enterprises. Capital will take alarm; buyers will be afraid to give orders lest their execution be disastrously delayed; manufacturers will lose all confidence in their ability to execute contracts and orders at a profit. What strikers universally overlook is of vital interest in considering the strike question, which is that, if wages are advanced so as to leave no profits, the industry will be abandoned, or, when dull times come the masters will take their turn at a strike, and will reduce wages so low as to recoup them what they lost by their being forced up by a strike. The history of iron trade strikes in South Staffordshire proves this to have worked as economic laws do work, with resistless regularity. The ups and downs of wages, caused, first, by strikes, then by dull times, are on the record showing that strikes invariably reacted on wages by reducing them and by damaging the industry affected. This was shown at a very large public meeting held near Wolverhampton in 1865 when a conference was held between the masters and men, the result of which ended a painful strike. After that all questions in dispute were referred to an official arbitrator, Rupert Kettle, Q. C., whose decision's usually gave satisfaction to both parties. Is there not intelligence and good spirit enough in those engaged in the steel trade, masters and men, to bring about a conference which might bring the strike to an end. Are not strikes a barbarous, mode of settling economic questions? Could not some system be invented for adjusting the relations of labour to capital on an amicable basis so as to avoid such dangerous combinations as are now threatening the peaceful progress and development of American industries?

THE CANADA LIFE ASSURANCE COMPANY has issued a strikingly attractive booklet with heavily embossed covers of bronze, bearing the title of "Five Per Cent. Yearly, Guaranteed," which sets forth clearly the features of the Company's Gold Bonds. It seems well adapted for its object of interesting the public in this growingly popular form of investment.

AT THE NATIONAL ASSURANCE COMPANY OF IRELAND'S annual meeting the chairman said: "It will be noticed in the report that special attention has been drawn to the adverse results in Canada and Russia in 1900, but that the directors felt justified in anticipating a favourable change. I have pleasure in being able to state that these anticipations have been fully borne out by the business so far this year. In Canada the general increase in rates has had a very favourable effect on the returns, and I am glad to say that, with the exception of a large fire in Montreal in January, fires have been quite within the average."