

THE EIGHT-HOUR MOVEMENT.

The recent conflicts that have occurred between Capital and Labor, in the United States and Canada, have suddenly awakened the public that the great army of mechanics is fast and deservedly becoming a power in the land. Taught by the experience of former years, that labor had no earthly chance of success when pitted against capital under ordinary conditions, the leaders of the working men have with considerable difficulty and commendable foresight organized them into one solid compact body, commonly known as the Knights of Labor. The master workman or head centre of this organization, Mr. T. V. Powderley, appears to be a level-headed gentleman, admirably fitted for the position. He fully recognizes the fact that Capital and Labor should never be antagonized, but that their proper sphere is to walk hand in hand, each being absolutely necessary for the other's welfare. If the organization over which he presides, will listen to Mr. Powderley's advice, we think that they may effect much in the way of improving the condition of many of the worst paid and most precarious trades. Appearances at present seem to indicate, however, that the local organizations of the Knights of Labor are inclined to take the bit in their teeth and act on their own responsibility. In order to check this feeling, Mr. Powderley has recently issued a manifesto, pointing out the danger and folly of strikes, and asking the members to refrain from striking in all cases except as a last resort. He also points out that the proposed eight hour movement is premature and likely to be productive of more harm than good to the working classes. With both of these contentions we thoroughly agree, and trust that he may be able to impress them upon his followers so thoroughly that they may act as he requests.

The eight-hour a day platform in the eyes of a great many working men seems to have a charm which makes it appear more practical than it really is. Of course if the hours of labor were reduced to eight, instead of ten as they are at present, it would no doubt give employment to more men than are now employed. This would however of necessity be at the expense of those at present having steady employment, a thing which we hardly think the workmen of our acquaintance are quixotic enough to accede to. While it might benefit the workman who is disposed to utilize the time thus gained for the improvement of his mind or the benefit of his health, there is a large number to whom shorter hours of labor would simply mean more hours for loafing and spending money in idle amusement, and who would be damaged instead of being improved thereby.

A workman's labor, like the capitalist's money or the merchant's goods, is his capital, and every unbiased person must admit that he is fairly entitled to get the highest price for it that he possibly can, provided that he does so lawfully. If workmen are scarce and work plentiful its value is enhanced; if on the contrary work is scarce and workmen plentiful its value is depreciated. The inevitable law of supply and demand governs the price of labor exactly the same as it does the price of groceries, wearing apparel or any of the thousand and one articles of daily consumption.

Subordinate to the law of supply and demand, the true test of the value of any workman is the amount of work he can turn out in a given time. If all kinds of manufacturing could be conducted on the piece work system, it would be very much to the advantage of the manufacturer and the skilled workman. A man would thus get paid exactly what he earned, and the

harder he worked the more he would have to show for it. By the day or week system where trades unions force employers to pay the same rate of wages to all, an injustice is often perpetrated upon the honest and capable mechanic, who receives no more pay than the man next him who perhaps does twenty five per cent. less work. If the piece-work system were generally employed the pay rolls would very quickly show the relative value of the different workmen.

If it be admitted that the true way to pay any mechanic is to do so in proportion to the work he accomplishes, then he can easily see that if the hours of daily labor are shortened from ten to eight hours, that their wages will show a similar shrinkage. If as they propose, they shorten the day's work two hours or one-fifth, then one fifth of their pay must be deducted to correspond. If the total amount of their wages were not reduced but continued on at the old figure, it would practically mean that they were receiving twenty per cent. advance on old prices, a thing that they would hardly venture to propose in these times of keen competition.

The leaders of the Knights of Labor are wide enough awake to see that such a proposition is absurd when applied to day and week workmen, and they therefore argue, "of course if the day's work was shortened two hours we would expect and be willing to take less pay for awhile, but would trust by agitation and strike eventually to get it up to the former ten hours a day rate." At the first blush from the workman's standpoint there seems to be some reason in this argument, but a little thought will reveal the fact that it is the veriest nonsense. If the eight-hour system were to prevail amongst all branches of manufactures and if they even succeeded in getting the wages back to ten hour a day rates, the effect would simply be to raise the value of all kinds of manufactured goods twenty per cent. on former prices. The workmen would then find that although they were getting the old rate of wages, the purchasing power of their wages had declined exactly in proportion to the rise, and that they were no better off than before they made the change. In other words they would be simply taking two hours play every day and paying for it themselves out of their own pockets.

There are natural and commercial laws which may be said to be immutable, and either workmen or capitalists might as well expect the sun to stand still at their bidding, as to be able to overthrow them by any effort of their own however well directed. Thus by applying the law of supply and demand and the principle of piece-work prices to labor, any person can quickly see that the result of such efforts as discussed above must be very disappointing. We think that the correct solution of the labor question is, where practicable to do everything by piece-work and let a man work just as fast or as slow, or as many or as few hours a day as he pleases and pay him in proportion to what he does. Every man would then be practically his own master and could suit himself as to how many hours a day he was willing to work. If this system were to come in vogue we think we would hear little or nothing about ten hours' pay for eight hours' work, which is the true way the principle of the eight-hour labor movement ought to be stated.

Even the clocks must have their little joke. On April Fool's Day the old reliable clock in the spire of Trinity Church, New York, stopped suddenly at half-past six in the morning, and later in the day many unwary passers-by who forgot the occasion really congratulated themselves at reaching business at an hour so unusually early.—*Jewelers Weekly.*