

# THE WEEK.

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## THE LABOUR WAR.

THE strike in the Massey works, which last week disturbed and alarmed the commercial world of Toronto, having been happily brought to an end, nothing more need be said about the dispute. Considering the provision which the Massey Company is known to have made for the comfort and enjoyment of its men, it is difficult to believe that it can have done anything very illiberal, or shown any want of sympathy with Labour. There are unfortunately such things as grasping and grinding masters, whose tyranny provokes resistance; but the conduct of the great majority probably is equitable; while not a few are actuated by a still higher spirit, and are willing even to make serious commercial sacrifices for the sake of their men, little as the readers of certain Labour journals would surmise that such was the fact.

But the end of one strike is not the end of all. We cannot take up a paper without seeing that the Labour war is raging in all the industrial communities both of Europe and of this continent; though on this continent the evil is mainly an importation, since the native American workman was too independent and self-reliant to have recourse to Unionism, or take part in organized strikes, of which there were hardly any before the Civil War. If we have not now servile insurrections or revolts of the serfs, such as occurred in Antiquity or in the Middle Ages—if in England, since the date of the Luddite and the Machine riots, strikes and locks-out have taken the place of the bludgeon and the bayonet,—we have still Molly Maguire and Pittsburg disturbances, while industrial revolution shows a tendency to combine with the political and social agitations of which Chicago, as well as Paris, is now a formidable and volcanic centre. There is ground, then, for misgiving, and reason for inquiring whether it is possible that in any way the general relations of employer and employed could be improved, and a sense of co-operation for a common interest made to take the place of class jealousy and strife. It must be owned, however, that in this direction no steady light has yet been shown. Attractive schemes of qualified partnership, in place of mere payment and receipt of wages, have been devised. Instances of their success are not absolutely wanting, but they seem to require special conditions, particularly the presence of a chief remarkably gifted with powers of organization and control. The men have been picked, and the trade has probably been one of exceptional steadiness. Such examples afford us little more help in the reorganization of industry than does that of a Shaker community in the reorganization of society at large. The rock upon which co-operative partnership will generally split is the inability of the workman to bear his share of loss and depression. This, with the want of guidance and of power to wait on the market, has proved generally fatal to the attempts made in the form of co-operative works to get rid of the master altogether and divide his profits among the men. It would be difficult, too, to induce the men, in whom the love of change is often strong, to bind themselves to one service for life or a long term of years. Whatever hopes there might be in this direction, however, Unionism would

seem to bar them by precluding special arrangements with particular masters. Its tendency, indeed, is altogether to stereotype the condition of a wage-earning class, and to close any door of further advancement which the future might otherwise open. There seems to be nothing for it but a kindly bearing and sympathy with Labour on the part of the employer; and to these, we must confess, it is no great encouragement to feel that when you have at last succeeded in winning the confidence and attachment of your men, they may be compelled suddenly to leave you by the fiat of an external power. It is unlucky, too, that the habits of modern life, and the tendency of the wealthy to dwell away from their places of business, have placed a social gulf between classes wider than that which existed in former days, when high and low dwelt together within the city walls, and were brought into constant contact by city life. It must be added that there are in the world of industry, as well as in that of politics, demagogues whose trade is strife, whose object is not to bring about an amicable settlement but to prevent it, and to whom nothing is more abhorrent than peace and good-will with justice. As these men devote all their time and energies to their game, their influence, like that of professional wirepullers is pretty sure to increase. It is an ominous feature of the situation, too, that the control appears to be passing out of the hands of the Unions, which are open and local, into those of an organization which is secret and continental. Unless all experience of secret societies, to whatever class or interest belonging, is belied, the command of this formidable engine will be grasped in time by the most designing and unquiet spirits among the fraternity, and in that case evil days for commerce and for the community are at hand. In the end, society throws off, by a convulsion of some kind, any power which is preying on its life; but the convulsion may cost the world dear.

Unionism has been animated by the belief that combination could indefinitely force up wages. That wages have gone up immensely during the last half-century is a certain as well as a very happy fact; and it may safely be affirmed that the men have been enabled in some cases to make better bargains for themselves in combination than they could have done if they had been negotiating separately and without their dinners. But the rise is mainly due to the vastly increased productiveness of labour; and this again is due to improved machinery, extended facilities of distribution, and other achievements of practical science; the fruits, all of them, of an intelligence upon which, as it is not manual labour, workingmen are disposed to look with little favour, combined with the capital which they are taught to regard as their arch-enemy and oppressor. Against the gains due to combination is to be set the loss of wages by strikes, which in England amounted in ten years to nearly one hundred and thirty-five millions of dollars, while the loss of profits to the masters amounted only to twenty-one millions. That there is a vast fund of excessive profits in the hands of the masters, which the workman by strikes may transfer to himself, the keenness of competition among the masters and the number of failures apparently forbid us to believe.

The Master is not the real employer; he is rather a Middleman between the men and the community at large. The real employer is the customer who buys the goods, and whom no Unions or strikes can compel to give more for the goods than he thinks them worth. Strikes, therefore, carried beyond a certain point may ruin the Master and the trade, but they cannot raise the price of the goods, nor, consequently, the wages of those who produce them. It is also obvious that, every workman being a consumer as well as a producer, if wages could be forced up all round without increasing production, he would lose in the purchasing power of his wages all that he gained in their nominal amount. These are commonplace truths but in the heat of the battle they are apt to be practically overlooked. As to the fallacy which, endowing Capital with a Satanic personality, depicts the Capitalist as the grand adversary of Labour, it is apparently too deeply rooted to be plucked up, while it certainly is too childish to be confuted. Everything but bare muscle is capital: brain is capital if money has been spent on its education. Without capital we should all be living in caves, and grubbing with our fingers for roots, or chumping acorns. Every workingman who has saved and invested money is a flagrant capitalist; nor is there one who would not to-morrow take as much of the evil thing as he could get.

In this, as in all other departments of life, we feel the beneficent action of political Party. Its journalists, to capture the workingman's vote, are