

THE CHRISTIAN VIEW OF THE LABOR QUESTION

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As the two founders by the social side of the city, for the convenience of the workmen. The socialists claim to have covered one. They would abolish all private property and make the State assume control of all production. Yet even in the theories which they advance for the just solution of our labor troubles they strike at only one of the capitalist but also at the poor man for they deprive him also of his private property, the result of his hard earnings, and the disposal of it. A man has a God-given right to the fruits of his toil, to their expenditure or investment and to all future disposition regarding them. He has a right and a duty to save up his earnings for all future contingencies and to make personal provision for those with whose temporal and spiritual welfare he may be entrusted. The family is prior to the State not only in the order of nature but also in order of rights. Its temporal and spiritual well-being of its members are inalienable. No power on earth can interfere with the rights of the parents or with the duties of the children; and as it is the duty of the church to aid in the spiritual well-being of the State to assist in the temporal necessities of the family, but not to tamper with or oppress the parental rights affecting either the spiritual or material means which are necessary for the existence and development and prosperity of the family. It would therefore be a manifest injustice for any government to assume control of the workman's little property which he has saved out of his hard earnings, to take it from him to be employed all make him and his family dependent on the graded wages which it is pleased to give him. And not only would such interference be unjust, to use the words of Leo XIII. in his encyclical on the conditions of the Working Classes, "but it would be quite certain to harass and worry all classes of citizens and subject them to odious and intolerable bondage. It would throw open the door to envy, to mutual hatred and to the lowest sources of wealth themselves would run dry for no one would have any interest in exerting his talent, or his industry; and that ideal quality about which Socialists entertain pleasant dreams would be in reality the swelling down of all to the condition of misery and degradation."

Such a remedy in truth would make the last state of the wage-earner worse than the first. Moreover, its socialistic practicality. We are indeed aware that the experimental socialists have endeavored to put into practice the theories of Proudhon, Holles, and Carl Marx, which have been more or less popularized by Bellamy's novel, "Looking Backward," but we know what result they have produced. The Co-operative Association of Tennessee, founded on the absolute theories of Fournier and Bellamy, undertook to demonstrate the practical working of them. The colony had everything in abundance. Nobody paid any rent. Every resident of the community received equal compensation. The women attended merely to the household duties and received as much wages as the men. For a time all went well but the result was a complete failure. The colony was founded under such happy auspices guarantees the moral impracticability of all socialistic theories. The principles of our present social conditions are not to be reformed by the theories of socialism or communism. Let it be firmly understood that we regulate both employers and employees, capital and labor as distinct factors which we offer a solution of the labor question. The equal distribution of wealth amongst all classes does not offer a remedy which is practical, although it cannot be denied that any legislative enactment, which would tend to keep within reasonable limits the profits of the capitalist and protect the hard won fruits of industry would be eagerly welcomed by all right minded individuals. Capital and labor are equally necessary for the production of wealth. Capital is necessary, for without it one cannot readily see how land and labor may continue to be productive. Yet, in spite of the fact both capital and labor contribute towards the production of the same wealth, why any honest soul should assert that labor has at any time received a fair share of the profits. Is it not true that even in England, as well as in the United States, the condition of the worker is gradually becoming more and more precarious? Owing to the wonderful progress in the mechanical arts, in machinery and increased facilities of locomotion, it is certain that land and labor production has made great strides; new regions of wealth are opened up; there is an increased output in finished articles of commerce; riches are accumulating on all sides and yet we fall to behold any appreciable amelioration in the physical and social condition of the working classes. Why should this be unless the produced wealth which should be equitably apportioned between the employer and his workers finds only one outlet, viz., into the pocket of the employer. Within recent years, when financial depression was widespread, and the demand on the commercial market showed a decline, at least in the opinions of managing directors, the wages of the working men were promptly reduced to the starvation limit, although these same business establishments continued to pay the usual high dividends to their shareholders, and the same or even increased salaries were paid to their trusted officials. The wage-earner alone was the sufferer. These are hard times which make us wonder if the theory of socialism is only a shadowy myth, a delusion and a mockery for many of its so-called adherents. When we view the grasping gain of worldly employers on the one hand and the corresponding destitution that pervades the laboring

rank of the other hand we seem to hear again the voice of the Prophet: "All have turned aside into their own way, every one after his own gain from the first even unto the last." Let all the interests of the employer and the workman be identical, and any arrangement that will not only assist the one but also assist the other. An increase all round in the wages of the worker so far from being detrimental to the employer will be beneficial to him. We are told, on the highest authority, that in Northumberland, England, where the condition of the workman is superior to that of other wage-earners in other parts of England, where wages are highest and home life made more comfortable there are also the highest agricultural and the most flourishing condition of the land and the most capital is far in excess of those in other parts of the country.

If you oblige the working man to live on starvation wages you are not only committing an act of injustice against God and your neighbor, but you are also committing a sin against many of the moral laws which infest modern society. Moreover it will go hard with him if he does not find some way in which to compensate himself for the injury you have done him. If wages are increased so that a man can honestly maintain himself and his family in frugal comfort, all danger of speculation is removed, occult competition is minimized, and the wage-earner is replaced in a position where his services will be more beneficial even to his employer. For with an increase of wages you naturally shift on the part of the workman a more practical and painstaking interest in his work; labor production is further developed, and consequently the net earnings of a citizen are further increased because the change of circumstances consequent on higher wages applies such a powerful incentive to greater skill, greater intelligence, higher morality, trustworthiness and industry on the part of the wage-earner.

We all, however, realize how difficult it is for political economists to decide with any accuracy the precise limitations of a just wage. Wages to be general and to be paid to the workman for the direct contribution which he affords towards a given product by his work. It is the payment agreed upon by the individual at the request and to the advantage of whom he affords his labor. Political economists, however, recognize that as in prices so also in wages no fixed amount can be determined without having to make many particular qualifications which may modify it more or less.

It depends first of all on the workman's utility to his employer, on the quantity and quality of the labor and the amount of knowledge, skill and vital energy which are expended and which constitute the workman's capital. Again, before deciding in every case what are the elements of a just human wage we must certainly take cognizance of the domestic wants and needs of the wage-earner. We are not to understand it as if we are not speaking of mechanical or of animal labor, the equivalent of which might be computed mathematically, but we are discussing the wages of a human being created in the image and likeness of God, natural and supernatural energies cannot be properly sustained and developed except in a condition of life conformable with his human dignity. According to Holy Writ a man's daily wage is the means by which he subsists and supplies his daily needs: "In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread till thou return to the earth."—Gen. c. iii. 19. Again St. Paul writes us that if a man does not work he shall not eat. Labor and wages are correlative terms according to the law of God. A man is obliged to labor and to maintain himself by the profits of his toil, so also is the boomer of the employer of the individual namely, who utilizes his industry to pay him such an equivalent as will enable him not only to exist like an animal, but to live as behooves one who is created to the image and likeness of the Almighty God.

If we adopt as the basis of a fair wage the mere terms of agreement between man and master it might happen, and we believe it does happen, that the workman would often be obliged to accept a mere minimum wage, such as would only allow him to eke out a miserable existence. But let it be understood that the relations between capital and labor are not to be determined by any pagan code of ethics. The pound of flesh standard of equity should have been buried with Shylock, and yet it is but too frequently called into judgment to-day by the sweaters and sharpers who infer the ideas and maxims of our country, and who under the outward garb of the Christian too often conceal the grasping spirit of the old Venetian Hebrew. In dealing with one another we take as our measure of justice that which Christ has taught, and which we all expect to receive one day at the tribunal of the Supreme Judge. With this as our standard we assert that only a just wage which enables him to acquire that frugal comfort of body and soul without which his manhood becomes a burden and his life a mockery.

THE WALKING PURCHASE. Under the caption of "The Walking Purchase," George Wheeler narrates in the October St. Nicholas the story of an agreement between the Indians and the agent of William Penn, by which the former were shamefully swindled. In the early light of a September morning, he writes, more than one hundred and sixty years ago, a remarkable company of men had been seen gathering about a little chestnut tree at the cross roads near the Friends' meeting-house in Wrights town, Pennsylvania. It is doubtful whether any one of us could have guessed what the meeting meant. Most of the party were Quakers in wide-brimmed hats and plain dress, and if it had been First-day instead of Third-day, we might have thought they were gathering under the well-known tree for a neighborhood chat before meeting. Nor was it a war-like rendezvous for the warriors of the Leni-Lenape had never yet been heard of. The Indians of St. Nicholas, as the followers of William Penn were called, and in a little group somewhat apart were a few athletic Indians in powerful garb and friendly attitude. But it evidently was an important meeting, for here were several prominent officials, including one so notable a person as Proprietor Thomas Penn. In 1682, over fifty years before this, William Penn had bought from the Leni-Lenape, or Delaware Indians, a section of land on the east by the Delaware, on the west by the Nesquehanna, and extending to the north from his previous purchases, "as far as a man can go in a day and a half." No effort was made to fix the northern boundary of the Indians, becoming uneasy at the encroachments of the settlers, asked to have the line definitely marked. 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