

**THE CHURCH AND LABOR.**

The following long article, which we here reproduce from the "American Herald," is of such great importance that we cannot too strongly recommend the study of it to all who take a lively interest in the capital and labor question:—

The most important question that occupies the attention of the human family, outside the question of religion, is that of labor. Truly, indeed, does our Holy Father Leo XIII. say of it: "Wise men discuss it; practical men propose schemes; popular meetings, legislatures and sovereign princes are all occupied with it, and there is nothing which has a deeper hold on public attention." Churchmen, statesmen, political economists are busy considering the labor question. As a rule the statesman takes his view from the light which political economy gives him, and, as political economy has only to do with the production and distribution of wealth, being a cool mathematical problem and not taking into consideration man in his entirety, he, the statesman, cannot not solve this question.

In this connection it is well to quote the words of Cardinal Manning. "If the great end of life were to simply supply yards of cloth and cotton twist, and if the glory of England consists or consisted in multiplying, without stint or limit, these articles and the like, at the lowest possible price so as to undersell all the nations of the world, well, then, let us go on. But if the domestic life of the people be vital above all; if the peace and purity of homes, the education of children, the duties of wives and mothers, and the duties of husbands and fathers be written in the natural law of mankind, and if these things are sacred far beyond anything that can be sold in the market . . . then I say the accumulation of wealth in the land like mountains in the possession of classes or individuals cannot go on, if these moral conditions of the people are not healed. No commonwealth can rest on such foundations."

Cardinal Manning recognized what all thinking men have agreed on, that is, that the labor question is at heart a great moral question. It is a question of right and wrong, of justice and injustice; and such being the case, it is in order to ask: What, if anything, does the Church say as to the wrong that exists? What remedy has she for it?

The Church has for twenty centuries been the guide, the caretaker and friend of the human family. She has ever been in a marked degree the true friend of the workingman. She it was that civilized him. She it was who taught him the arts and sciences, inducted him into knowledge of trades and handicrafts. Under her fostering care the great Trade Guilds in Europe came into existence, making labor free and giving it power and character such as it never possessed since or before.

It is in order here to note that when in England the monasteries were confiscated under Henry VIII and Edward VI., property of the Guilds was also confiscated, and in such amount as to almost equal the value of church property which was confiscated.

As the Church was ever in the past the friend of the toiler, true to her divine origin she is to-day a steadfast friend of the poor, a guide, a caretaker, a protector. Leo XIII. in his encyclical on The Condition of Labor clearly proves that he, the Common Father of the Faithful, understands present conditions; that he knows the diseases human society suffers from, and better yet prescribes a remedy. And as we are now considering the relation of Church to labor we will see what Leo, the mouthpiece of that Church has to say on this all-important question.

For the present we will consider the following phases: First, the right of labor to organize. Second, the question of wages—incidentally, freedom of contract.

It is to be hoped that the working people of our city will make themselves better acquainted with the writings of Leo on this subject. The question of the right of laborers to organize and the recognition of such organization as a part of our civilization has been disputed of time and time again right here

in our midst. A case in point being the coal operators versus the coal miners' union. Our Holy Father leaves no doubt in the minds of men as to the stand the Church takes on this matter. He clearly proves that the right of workers to organize is based on natural law. In his famous encyclical he writes as follows:—

"For to enter into 'society' of this kind is the natural right of man, and the State must protect natural rights, not destroy them, and if it forbids its citizens to form such association it contradicts the very principle of its own existence, for they both exist in virtue of the same principle, viz.—the natural propensity of man to live in society." To add one word to this statement would be simply gilding gold, painting the lily.

Since it is established that men have a natural right to organize, we must next consider the purpose of their organization, and in doing so we will keep in view the trades union principle, viz., that of obtaining a living wage and limiting the hours of labor. It is not an easy matter to determine what the living wage is unless we approach the subject with cool, dispassionate judicial mental equipment. It is not easy to define the relative rights and duties of the wealthy and the poor, of capital and labor. The danger lies in this: "that too often crafty agitators constantly make use of disputes to pervert men's judgment and stir up people to sedition." The Pope tells us that in considering the subject he approached "one of very great importance, and one of which, if extremes are to be avoided, right ideas are absolutely necessary."

"Wages, we are told, are fixed by free consent, and therefore the employer, when he pays what was agreed upon, has done his part, and is not called upon for anything further. The only way, it is said, in which injustice could happen would be if the master refused to pay the whole of the wages, or the workman would not complete the work undertaken; when this happens the State should intervene to see that each obtains his own; but not under any other circumstances." The Pope continues: "This mode of reasoning is by no means convincing to a fair-minded man, for there are important considerations which it leaves out of view altogether. To labor is to exert one's self for the sake of procuring what is necessary for the purposes of life, and most of all for self-preservation. 'In the sweat of thy brow thou shalt eat bread.' Therefore a man's labor has two notes or characters. First of all, it is personal; for the exertion of individual power belongs to the individual who puts it forth, employing this power for that personal profit for which it was given. Secondly, man's labor is necessary; for without the results of labor a man cannot live; and self-conservatism is a law of nature, which it is wrong to disobey. Now, if we were to consider labor merely so far as it is personal, doubtless it would be within the workman's right to accept any rate of wages whatever; for in the same way as he is free to work or not, so he is free to accept a small remuneration or even none at all. But this is a mere abstract supposition; the labor of the workingman is not only his personal attribute, but it is necessary; and this makes all the difference. The preservation of life is the bounden duty of each and all, and to fail therein is a crime. It follows that each one has a right to procure what is required in order to live; and the poor can procure it in no other way than by work and wages."

"Let it be granted, then, that as a rule, workman and employer should make free agreements, and in particular should freely agree as to wages. Nevertheless, there is a dictate of nature more imperious and more ancient than any bargain between man and man, that the remuneration must be enough to support the wage-earner in reasonable and frugal comfort. If through necessity or fear of a worse evil the workman accepts harder conditions because an employer or contractor will give him no better, he is the victim of coercion and injustice."

His Holiness also takes into consideration the fact that difference of localities has much to do with the question of fair wages, as such difference very often has a good





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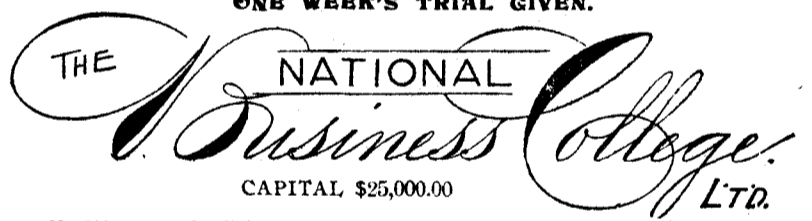


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