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THE COMFORTS OF LIFE.

LEON GAMBETTA is reported to have said, "There are no questions but social questions," by which he meant, no doubt, that the only propositions worthy of prolonged argument are those concerning the welfare of mankind at large. In all ages and in all countries there has been contention between those who possessed a full share of this world's goods and those who had little. The demands of modern Socialists for a more equal distribution of the comforts of life are the same in principle as were made in the earliest ages; the machinery proposed for enforcing them alone differs from their predecessors. Requests for higher wages are still met with indignation by men—and women also—once wage earners themselves or the children of wage earners. Asiatic despots or feudal barons could hardly display more entire contempt for the *bienatree* of their serfs than do many employers in Democratic America. They refuse to take into consideration the poor food, the insufficient clothing, the wretched shelter of the labourer, his dread of starvation, or its alternative, alms seeking. They treat these evils as allotted by Providence to a particular class. Even the benevolent who spend their days and nights in efforts to relieve distress will not tolerate the idea that workingmen or women have a right to improve their condition by bringing pressure upon their employers. They regard the "lower classes" to have been appointed by Providence as media for displaying their own beneficence, and look with alarm at the growth of trades societies, which seek higher wages by means of strikes. Few indeed of the influential classes undertake an enquiry into the justice of the demands of the workingmen or the cost of satisfying them. Employers pay what they cannot help, and workingmen and their families live from hand to mouth, anxiously looking for a time when they will enjoy a greater measure of mental and physical comfort.

A man child is born; he grows to be a lad, exhibits a fondness for accumulation, saves his pennies, puts by dollar after dollar, shows business faculty, becomes a master builder, employs many workmen, undertakes large contracts, and grows rich. His brother is a good workman, a thinker and reader, a good husband, father, and citizen, but is without high ambition, business talents, or taste for accumulating money; he lives sparely, and if he suffers mishaps from sickness or has a large family, must eat the bread of carefulness all his life, and may nevertheless die dependent on charity. It is true that the qualities of the first of these individuals are rare and therefore bring a higher reward; but they are not in themselves more praiseworthy than the other's, nor necessarily more useful to the community. The population would be housed as well and cheaply if the millionaire had not possessed so eminent a faculty for making gain. If some of his great profits had been distributed among his workmen they would have lived better, they and their families would not have been a burden to the community and the sum of human happiness would have been greater.

It is much easier to prove the accuracy of these statements than to show how a remedy is to be provided. The employer acts after the manner of his kind. He has to compete with his rivals; he buys his

labour in the cheapest market and thinks he has discharged his duty if he pays what he promises; the workman, on the other hand, is forced to find work day by day to provide for his family, the civilized world is fast becoming over-populated, and if there are any lands where day's labour is amply paid they are far away and travelling expenses heavy. Rarely is he able to impose terms on his employer; as a rule he must take what is offered, in general not more than the bare cost of living.

Seeking a remedy, the wage earner has hitherto adopted only two remedies for his condition, the most effective of which is combination to raise wages, by means of unions bound to refuse work at lower wages than agreed upon by the majority. These societies are very numerous and powerful in Britain, and have undoubtedly achieved success in improving the condition of workingmen and their families. All authorities agree that the English wage earner is now better lodged, fed, and clothed than he was thirty years ago, in spite of increasing competition in the foreign and home markets, and to the trades unions the improvement is largely owing. In North America also these societies are very influential, and they are increasing in number and power throughout continental Europe. It is easy to raise an outcry against these associations, to denounce strikes which fail to secure an increase in wages as injurious to trade and to the strikers themselves, to describe the officers of the societies as agitators making a living out of the weakness of their followers. But experience shows that wherever trades unions exist wages are higher and strikes fewer, and that workingmen are shrewd enough to guard against the self seeking of their leaders. A strike may not accomplish its immediate purpose. The object aimed at may be unreasonable and impossible of attainment; yet it may show the strength of the union, and give irresistible emphasis to a more reasonable demand at another time. Certain it is that the great employers of labour in Britain have learned to respect strikers and to dread strikes, and readily submit to arbitration differences between themselves and their workmen. They do not now say, "Take what we offer, or starve." They pay due consideration to the cost of living, as well as the condition of trade and the profits which they are making, and the results are beneficial both to employer and employé. In America also employers will learn in time to adopt this wise expedient, and find profit in it.

Co-operative societies are by no means of recent origin, and their progress has been slow; but they have secured a firm foothold in Britain, and the prospect of development is good. They are, in brief, combinations of workingmen, who unite their money and labour to carry on manufacturing enterprises. It is no doubt a gain that the workman should have an interest in profits, but the single proprietor, with his faculties sharpened by the prospect of large gains, is apt to excel in trade the head of an association, who has only a small share, and is controlled by men probably less intelligent and enterprising than himself. Nevertheless co-operation exists, and may fructify to the benefit of workingmen who have patience to pursue an object during a course of years amidst trials and losses.

As to the other remedies for the inequality of condition of mankind, it is only necessary to mention briefly the Socialism of France and Germany and the land theories of Mr. Henry George. The idea of regulating by law the amount of money or food which each individual or family shall expend in a given time has not yet commended itself to the good sense of mankind at large. It would withdraw the stimulus to exertion which men believe to be beneficial to the world. Within bounds, competition, rivalry, and even strife, are eminently beneficial. The civilized world pities the feeble who fall out by the way, and provides for them; but it does not encourage them to be feeble. All the great blessings of life come from exertion, and those who work hardest are, as a rule, the happiest. The desire to acquire wealth is not to be numbered among the higher emotions, and is often the motive of very bad actions. But how many of the great inventions which have benefited mankind have proceeded from the desire of accumulation? Great fortunes should not be allowed to descend to single individuals, but the man who labours hard with skill and energy should have his reward in his own life, and be able to provide a moderate portion for his descendants.

Mr. Henry George's proposition to tax land heavily in order to compel the proprietors to sell at a low price, and so benefit the poor, has recently been submitted to the people of the great State of New York, and while