

THE GRAND, OLD MAN

Ms. Gladstone's Opinions on Various Subjects.

The "Character Sketch" in this month's Review of Reviews is Mr. Gladstone. Mr. Stead essays to paint what he describes as "the heroic Mr. Gladstone, the Mr. Gladstone who for a quarter of a century has excited the almost idolatrous devotion of millions of his countrymen." When Mr. Stead began to write his sketch, he asked Mr. Gladstone if he might go and talk some points over with him. Mr. Gladstone readily consented, the interview took place, and Mr. Stead has incorporated into his sketch some of the Grand Old Man's observations on that occasion.

THE PROGRESS OF FIFTY YEARS.

Asked whether on the whole he was satisfied with the results of the reforming activity of the last fifty years, Mr. Gladstone said:

"In political affairs I think progress has been almost wholly good. But I am not an optimist, and I am convinced that the duties of government will always be more or less imperfectly performed. As society becomes more complex, the work of the government will become more and more difficult. Still, political progress has been good and almost wholly good. In free trade, for instance, it has been entirely good. I look upon that with the most perfect complacency. They speak sometimes of the greed of competition, but the greed of competition is not to be compared with the greed of the monopolist. The greedy competitor at least shares his gains with the public, but the greed of the monopolist is the greed of the robber. But, as I often tell my juniors, we older men had a comparatively easy time these last fifty years—a much easier time than they will have to go through. I am very glad sometimes to think that it will not be for me to face the problems which are coming on for solution. The explanation of this is that all the questions with which we had to deal were capable of being resolved into a very simple principle. If you look at it, you will see that, with some exceptions, such as the Factory Act and one or two other minor matters, the great work of the last half century has been that of emancipation. We have been emancipating, emancipating—that's all. To emancipate is comparatively easy. It is simple to remove restrictions, to allow natural forces free play. Now that the work has been almost completed, and we have to face the other problem of constructive legislation, we shall find it much more difficult."

DIVORCE—THE OLD POSITION.

On one point, Mr. Gladstone's convictions have not changed. The Divorce Bill was carried a quarter of a century ago in the face of his most resolute opposition, and he is "of the same opinion still."

"I hold to my position," he said, "but," he added with great emphasis, "although I admit, as we must admit, the enormous difficulties of the question, marriage seems to me a great mystery. It is one of the most wonderful things in the whole world, and when I think of it, I always feel that we must fall back on the old saying that marriages are made in heaven. Marriage is to me the most wonderful thing in the whole world. "But," he went on, becoming very grave, "I must say that of late years, in the upper circles of society, so far as I have been able to observe the facts, and so far as I have been able to check them by the opinion of competent and impartial observers, there has been a very widespread change for the worse in this matter. That is to say, the number of marriages which obviously turn out bad is greater now—much greater—than it was before. I do not say that this is entirely due to the Divorce Act. I recognize

with gratitude that there has not been that great multiplication of divorce which we at one time anticipated, but the fact seems to me indisputable and, taking the higher classes, marriages are not made on such high principles as they used to be. Take from 1832 to 1857, a quarter of a century, and you will find that the number of conspicuously unhappy marriages has very considerably increased. It is a melancholy fact which I fear cannot be denied. I speak of course only of the society with which I am personally acquainted."

THE BRAIN POWER OF THE RACE.

Mr. Gladstone remarked many years ago that he thought he saw a falling-off in the morale of the Indian Civil Service; that we did not nowadays breed such men as the Lawrences and others who had built up the fabric of our Eastern Empire and had sustained it by their single-souled devotion to the welfare of India. He did not remember this when I recalled it to him, but he said:

"Whatever may be the case with the development of morale, I do not see the necessary development of brain power to enable us to cope with the vaster problems. I sometimes say," he added, "that I do not see that progress in the development of the brain power which we ought to expect on the principles of orthodox Darwinism. Development no doubt, is a slow process, but I do not see it at all. I do not think we are stronger but weaker than the men of the middle ages. I would take it as low down as the men of the sixteenth century. The men of the sixteenth century were strong men—stronger in brain power than our men. Of course, I except Napoleon. There was a brain, the strongest and most marvellous that was ever in a human skull. His intellect was colossal—I know none more powerful or immense."

A PLEA FOR SEARCHING PREACHING.

"One thing," he said, suddenly becoming grave, "I have against the clergy, both in country and in town—I do not know whether the reproach applies to ministers of other congregations—I think they are not severe enough on their congregations. They do not sufficiently lay upon the souls and consciences of their hearers their moral obligations, and probe their hearts and bring up their whole lives and action to the bar of conscience. The class of sermons which, I think, are most needed, are of the class one of which so offended Lord Melbourne long ago. Lord Melbourne was one day seen coming from church in the country in a mighty fume. Finding a friend, he exclaimed: 'It is too bad. I have always been a supporter of the church, and I have always upheld the clergy. But it is really too bad to have to listen to a sermon like that we have had this morning. Why! the preacher actually insisted upon applying religion to a man's private life!' But that is the kind of preaching which I like best—the kind of preaching which men need most, but it is also the kind of which they get least. The clergy are afraid of dealing faithfully with their hearers. "And," he added, "I fear, although I have not the same data for forming an opinion, that this is equally true of the Nonconformist ministers. Mr. Spurgeon, I admit, was not so. He was a good and brave man, and my remark does not apply to him. But there is not enough of such searching preaching in any of our pulpits."

THE GREAT HOPE FOR THE FUTURE.

Before Mr. Stead rose to go, he asked what Mr. Gladstone regarded as the greatest hope for the future?

Mr. Gladstone paused for a time, not rightly understanding the question. Then he said gravely: "I should say we must look for that to the maintenance of faith in the invisible. That is the great hope of the future; it is the mainstay of civilization. And by that I mean a living faith in a personal God. I do not hold with 'streams of ten-

dency.' After sixty years of public life, I hold more strongly than ever this conviction, deepened and strengthened by long experience, of the reality and nearness and the personality of God."

The Truck System.

The workmen in the mining regions of the country have been for years endeavoring to free themselves from the extortion and intimidation practiced upon them by employing corporations through the truck system and the "pluck-me" stores. In Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, and other States they have organized at times quite formidable public agitations against the grave abuses of the system, and have been sustained by public opinion in their protest. Laws have been enacted in spite of the opposition of the corporations seeking to remedy the evil, but there have been so many ways of evasion that such laws have accomplished but little. The recent law enacted by the Illinois Legislature forbidding employers to be interested in those stores has been declared unconstitutional, as it was an infringement upon personal rights not in spirit with the fundamental law.

The question for the workmen to consider under the circumstances is, What is the next best thing to do? It would be idle to be content with mere complaints against the Constitution or its interpretation by the courts, nor are they called upon to accept the situation as hopeless and submit to continued extortion. Continued agitation is capable of accomplishing large results if directed on practical lines, and in this case we believe that a united and persistent demand for cash payment of wages without deduction for debts would be sustained by public sympathy, and could be made effective against the worst abuses of the truck system. The English law on that subject has done good service in that direction, and it would doubtless prove beneficial here also.

An interesting case is now being tried in London in which the question of a workman's right to his full wages without deduction is to be passed upon by the courts. The case was brought up in connection with a strike. A member of the Gas-workers and General Laborers' Union has sued his employer for money deducted out of his wages for rent. There was no special agreement allowing the employer to deduct for rent, but he did so, nevertheless. The matter was brought up in the House of Commons, and the Attorney-General was asked if it was not a violation of the Truck Act. The Attorney-General at the moment expressed the opinion that it was not, but on the next day he wrote a letter to his questioner, stating upon a more careful reading of the law he was of the opinion that unless there was a written agreement to that effect the withholding of wages for rent was illegal, as it was in the case of any other debt owed by the workman to the employer. This shows the strictness with which the English law guards the right of the workman to his full earnings, which in that country are small enough, indeed, and there is no reason why a similar strictness should not prevail in this country.

Unfortunately for the improvident workman especially, the arbitrary and avaricious employer always has the advantage, and the power of the wealthy corporation is practically absolute when the store account accumulates and the employee is a tenant at will. That advantage would be still on the side of the employers under the strict cash payment system so long as the company's stores are run and the workmen allow themselves to run in debt, for their employment depends upon their being prompt in payment.

Those only are really free who manage to "pay as they go," and this principle should be cultivated by organized efforts. To get credit is invariably to pay a higher price and be less prudent in purchasing. It makes the cost of living vastly more expensive and the means of paying much more difficult and unsatisfactory. It places the workman at the mercy of the corporation employing him and makes any attempt at an organized agitation against unjust exactions almost impossible of success. The workmen's unions should do all in their power to induce the membership to keep out of the clutches of the pluck-me stores and the habit of buying on credit, for the credit system is in itself a snare and a hotbed of poverty.—Irish World.

Some Russian "Conveniences."

A person living in Russia cannot justly complain of ennui, for there a child 10 years of age may only go from home to school with a passport. Servants and peasants cannot go away from where they live without a passport. A gentleman residing at St. Petersburg or Moscow cannot receive the visit of a friend who remains many hours without notifying the police of his arrival. The porters of all houses are compelled to make returns of the arrival and departure of strangers. And for every one of the above passports a charge is made of some kind. As for foreigners, the solicitude of the authorities for their "comfort" is really touching. They are scarcely allowed to breathe without passports, for which fees are asked.

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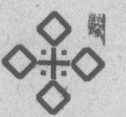
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