

in the words of Henry of Navarre: "To follow his White Plume and there they would find honor." Again when speaking of the Grand Trunk Pacific project he announced that "It would roll back the map of Canada and add depth to the country."

There are those who differed sharply with Laurier and many were disappointed at the attitude he took regarding conscription. In this, however, he was as conscientious as he had always been and took the step because he felt it to be the proper one to take. But at a time like this when controversies are stilled by the hand of the Grim Reaper the tendency will be to forget party strife and petty jealousies, and think only of the great good accomplished by the dead statesman. For nearly half a century he devoted himself without stint to the furtherance of his country's welfare. During the period in which he was premier the country became a nation. It was under his guiding star that she passed from the colonial stage to the status of a free people within the Empire. Under his fostering care her trade expanded, her population increased, her railway mileage multiplied, her racial and religious bickerings were stilled, and her relations to the Empire made closer and more harmonious. "If you would seek his monument you have but to look around."

## Wages and Prices

HERE is no quality in our poor human nature more easily brought out than that which tempts all, when trouble arises, to blame the other fellow. In quarters where slang is not condemned, the process is known as "passing the buck." That things are wrong is readily admitted, especially when the evidence is irresistible; but that it is somebody else's duty to put them right is firmly asserted. Illustrations of this may be found in the current discussions respecting the rate of wages and the cost of living. Wages in many lines of employment were largely increased during the war. Now that the war is over — for it is assumed that the temporary suspension of hostilities will be confirmed by the work of the Peace Conference — some people contend, with some logical ground, that wages should be reduced. But labor hastens to say that wages cannot be reduced, because the cost of living has not shown much sign of coming down. Indeed, the latest statistical reports indicate that the cost has increased rather than diminished since the signing of the armistice. Now comes the food producer, who says that he cannot afford to sell at lower prices, because the cost of labor—both of the labor directly employed by him and the labor employed in the manufacture of the things he uses—has kept his cost of production at high figures. So the merry war goes on, each party insisting that on the

other rests the responsibility of the uncomfortable situation, and that if there is to be any reduction the other fellow should begin it.

Wages will not for a long time—perhaps they never will—return to the figures of pre-war days. There has been a decided advance in the standard of living of those who are commonly spoken of as the working classes. To a considerable extent that standard will remain—a situation not to be regretted in the general interests of society. But, making due allowance for this, it would be a mistake to suppose that wages can in peace time be long continued on a war-time scale. Many of our labor leaders insist that there can be no reduction. Even so level-headed a man as Mr. Samuel Gompers has spoken on that line. No doubt every attempt at reduction will be resisted, and grave troubles will in this way arise. But economic law seems to say that some reduction is inevitable. Already the labor market in some quarters is beginning to exhibit signs of supply exceeding the demand. With the return of many thousands of soldiers this over-supply will increase. Either wages will fall or there will be such a curtailment of operations as will prejudice the interests of labor. A leading employer said lately: "I see grave trouble ahead. Now that war orders are stopped and we are thrown upon our ordinary channels of business we cannot afford to pay these high wages. The business that we can get will not warrant them. But I am not going to fight my men on this wage question. I will gradually reduce my staff, and curtail my operations. I may even have to stop business entirely until more normal conditions arise."

There is one advantage that will accompany the reduction of wages when it comes. High wages certainly make for high prices, and when things are costly men are often obliged to deny themselves the enjoyment of these things. High wages and high cost of materials operate, for example, as a check on the building trade. Only building operations of an urgent character will be undertaken. In the case of a proposed construction, desirable but not urgent, the owner says, "I cannot afford to build at such a cost; I will wait."

A reasonable reduction of labor's wages, with a corresponding reduction in the cost of living, would do much to restore power to the wheels of industry that will slow down or stop under present conditions. And the working man, reluctant though he will be to accept the lower wage, will in reality be better off than he would be under the conditions that would accompany a continuance of the present cost of labor and food. There are situations that under economic laws must arise in the not distant future. But the road to them will not be smooth.

## A One-Way Rule

A VERY old saying tells us that it is a poor rule that will not work both ways. Such rules, however, are frequently met in these days. The aims of organized labor and organized capital are in one respect alike. Each usually feels under an obligation to look out for the interests of Number One, largely, if not wholly. Each may be expected to do its best to make a bargain profitable to itself. But there is one difference between the two that has to be noted. Capital can, in nearly all cases, be held to its bargain. It could not, if it desired to, treat its guarantees as mere scraps of paper. If moral force failed to induce it to observe its agreements, machinery could in most cases be employed to compel it. It is not so with labor. Organized labor seldom puts itself in a position in which it can be called to account in the courts for breach of contract. There is only the moral law to support the agreement, and that authority is not always respected. Too often it has happened that while the leaders of organized labor have desired to respect engagements the mass of the workmen have repudiated them. This has been the case in several instances in recent strikes in Great Britain, where the authority of the leaders has been defied by the members.

A very notable illustration of the one way rule is found in the labor troubles in the copper mines of Butte, Montana. The war made large and urgent demands on the copper supply; naturally the prices of the metal advanced. No less natural was the demand of the miners for increased wages. The managers of the mines met the demand in a good spirit. "It is true," they said in effect, "that we are getting high prices for our copper, and that we can therefore afford to pay you more for your labor. We are willing to do so. But these high prices will not last. We are willing to make a wage scale that will correspond with the price of copper. We will give you the advance now. We ask you to agree that if and when the price falls there shall be a corresponding reduction of wages." This seemed so fair and reasonable that the workmen readily agreed to it.

Since the signing of the armistice and the cessation of the manufacture of munitions there has been quite a fall in the selling price of copper. The metal, which for a considerable period sold at nearly 27 cents per pound, and in recent months sold at a fraction below 24 cents, is now selling below 19 cents. The mine managers, in accordance with the understanding, have reduced the wages of the workmen. The men, ignoring their agreement, have gone out on strike.

Evidently Kaiser William was not the only person who needed education concerning the value of a scrap of paper when it took the form of an agreement.