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We wish it to be distinctly understood that we do not hold ourselves responsible for the opinions of correspondents.

WILLIAMS, SLEETH & MACMILLAN.

The Ontario Workman.

TORONTO, THURSDAY, DEC. 19, 1912.

CONVICT LABOR.

The *Globe* recently published an article entitled "objections to convict labor," and, no doubt, many of its readers may admire the ingenuity of the arguments adduced, and conclude, with the manifested complacency of the writer of the article, that it furnished a sufficient reply to the "objections" which it combats, and that therefore the whole matter is now "quite settled," and there is no use saying anything more about it. Yet, after all, the "objections" which have been so ably combated and entirely annihilated are only those which have been specially "set up" for the occasion by the writer of the article, and do not represent the objections that have been taken by the working classes to the arrangements that have been entered into between the Ontario Government and the Canada Car Company—consequently, the arguments being based upon false premises, the entire article—elaborate though it may be—shoots wide, very wide, of the mark which, we presume, it was intended to hit. It certainly must be admitted that "it is always a difficult thing to determine what is to be done with the convicts of a country," but we do not think that any one, for a moment, could contend that they should be kept in enforced idleness—and yet this is the standpoint from which the writer in the *Globe* has been discussing the question. Few, we think, will object to convicts being

compelled to work, and thus, to some extent, contributing to their maintenance while undergoing sentence, but, as our correspondent put it last week, the exception taken is not to the employing of criminals, but to the manner of so employing them, as proposed by the Ontario Government.

The question of convict labor has occupied considerable attention in the United States during the past few years, and in 1871 a commission was appointed by the Legislature of New York, to examine and consider the whole question of prison labor in its relation to free labor. The commissioners visited some fourteen State Institutions, and examined orally some ninety-six witnesses. Our space forbids that we should give anything like a synopsis of the report presented by the commissioners, but from an analysis of the mass of testimony gathered, the following propositions are fairly deducible from, and sustained by, the evidence, as taken at the mouth of the witnesses, or furnished in writing:—

1. "That the contract system of prison labor is bad, and should be abolished."

The evidence taken preponderates greatly on the side of this proposition, and the names of the witnesses examined is a sufficient guaranty of the value of their testimony. The judgment of the workingmen, too, was unanimous, and very decided in opposition thereto. So far as their knowledge extended, they believed it injurious to the prisoners, but were positive, without exception, in the belief that it was an injury to them.

2. "The industries of a prison, as well as its discipline, ought, ordinarily, to be managed by its head."

The *Globe* remarks: "It is naturally thought that those who add so much to the public expense ought to be made, as far as possible, to contribute to their own maintenance;" and yet it advocates a system that operates to the special advantage of speculators. The mass of evidence adduced on the above point goes to prove that the contractors realized from 66 to 100 per cent. on the capital invested in the business, and that several contractors at the end of an administration of from five to ten years, retired with an ample fortune. In view of these facts, we ask whether, under the contract system, the prisoners contribute as far as possible to their own maintenance? But let us proceed: Another proposition is:

3. "The opposition of the workingmen of the State is to the contract system alone, and not at all to industrial labor in prisons."

Here, we think, the whole matter hinges. While the evidence in this particular went to show that the products of prison labor did not sensibly affect prices or wages, taking the whole country together, yet it was equally true that prices in some localities were affected. We quote an example: According to the testimony taken by the commissioners, fully one-half of the commercial values produced by shoemaking in New York result from prison labor, consequently it is those who follow that branch of industry who complain of the competition of prison products, as it very materially affects them. And what remedy do they propose for the evil which exists so much to their prejudice? Is it to forbid all industrial labor in the prisons, close the workshops, and lock the prisoners in their cells, to be a burden to the community, and to sink them still lower in the scale of humanity? Not at all. But the cure they suggest is simply to multiply the trades pursued in prisons—to diffuse them as it were, among the different crafts. If this were done, of course the prison products would not so materially affect the market of that particular industry, and no one trade would be overcrowded by an influx of discharged criminals. Now, in reference to the Canada Car Company, the entire available labor of the Central Prison will be utilized in one branch of industry, and consequently the creation of this "state-pampered monopoly" cannot but affect injuriously the free labor that has hitherto been employed in that branch. It is true that "our criminals are part of the population of the coun-

try, and if they had not become what they are, would just so far have increased the amount of competition among the different classes of free laborers;" but in that case the country would have reaped the benefit of their industry, whereas now, on the one hand, the benefit will go into the pockets of the contractors, and on the other, it is not at all probable that the competition would be confined to one branch of industry.

Other propositions deducible from the evidence do not bear upon the subject in hand. But like causes produce like results, and it is because the workingmen here believe the contract system to be most pernicious, and one of the very worst evils of which our social system has to complain, and also that prison labor being confined to one particular branch of industry is "evil only, and that continually," that they have raised their objections—and intend to continue to urge those objections—against convict labor being so utilized.

THE PAST AND THE PRESENT;  
OR, WHAT WE OWE TO THE  
MECHANIC.

To nothing are we so much indebted for the improved condition, increased comforts, and elevation of mind and intellect among all civilized people, as to the discoveries, inventions, and improvements in the mechanical arts.

Since the days of Watt, Bolton, and Arkwright, all the great movements affecting the condition of the different orders and ranks in society owe their origin, or have been made practicable, only by the introduction and use of machinery as aids to human industry.

In the "good old times" those who, by hereditary rights, or by superior prowess, assumed or usurped the right to rule over the great laboring masses, were content to have their wants supplied, whether of courtly display and extravagance, or of predatory warfare upon their rivals, without a thought or care as to the amount or kind of labor required for gratifying the demands of their pride and ambition.

The tillers of the soil, the artisan, and the manufacturer, all upon a common level, were regarded as mere serfs, useful only as producers of what was required by the higher order.

Labor-saving machinery has changed all this. It has been the great elevating and equalizing agency of modern times, and made it possible for the mechanic and the laborer to supply his wants and to surround himself with comforts, conveniences, and luxuries unknown in former times to even the very highest order. He is no longer the serf or dependent of other ranks, compelled to devote his life, subject to their will, in ministering to the wants of others, for the mere right of existence for himself.

All this we owe to the mechanic and mechanical arts. The great movement in this direction is still going on at constantly accelerated ratio. One improvement only stimulates to another; a comfort or luxury for to-day is a necessity for to-morrow; one improvement or advance secures the means and opportunity for still further triumphs.

The mechanic of to-day is not defined, as he once was by a literary lion of the old aristocratic court circles, as "a low, mean fellow." He may, if he improves his opportunities, be the peer of men in any rank or profession.—*Iron Moulders' Journal.*

THE POSITION IN ENGLAND.

The labor crisis in England is more important than most Englishmen imagine. The alienation that has been year after year and decade after decade fostered by the indifference of the clergy and the pride of the wealthy laity is now bringing forth its fruits. Our advices from the old country by each mail inform us of a deeply seated and wide spreading disaffection in the minds of every class of wage-earning people from the Tweed to Land's End, and from London to Dublin.

The well-drilled London police have been in open revolt, and far-sighted men see in this a sign of insecurity, when the inevitable collision shall occur

in the wealthy metropolis. The servile telegraph messengers of Dublin have rebelled. The gas men in London placed the metropolis in darkness. The abject agricultural laborers of the rural districts have been on strike and have formed an immense union. The potters of Staffordshire have been locked out, and 25,000 persons have been out of employment. We cannot give space to enumerate Barnsley, Congleton, and a hundred other towns where capital and labor are in disagreement, and inferior and superior officials are at loggerheads. The labor crisis is, we say, most serious for the capitalist and the statesman.

If legislation had been by the people, for the people; if capital had viewed the laborer as the possessor of a human soul—then this crisis had never happened.—*Trade Journal.*

MECHANICS' LIEN LAW.

We have spoken of the advisability of workingmen agitating the question of a mechanics' lien law. We are pleased to know that the subject is receiving attention, and gladly reproduce from the *Ottawa Free Press* of the 9th inst., an article bearing upon the question. We commend this matter to the earnest attention of Mr. Witton, M. P. for Hamilton, and hope that through his efforts legislation may be had upon it during the coming session. In the meantime, we invite further correspondence in relation to it.

CHAMPION FIRE KINDLERS.

Mr. C. H. Annis of this city, is manufacturing a new fire kindler. It is a highly inflammable compound, and of such power, that one small cake will, without shaving or paper, kindle any wood fit to burn. The introduction of this article supplies a want that has been long felt, as it is without doubt the cheapest, cleanest, and best fire kindler we have seen. We are sure, from our experience of the article, that those housewives who give them a fair trial, will not any longer be without them. They can be had of Messrs. Wm. Sparrow, 87 Yonge st., A. McFaren, 186 Queen st. east, and many other stores in the city. The wholesale manufacturer is 77 Oak St. Mr. A. is a practical workingman, and we hope his enterprise will be successful.

THE FORESTALLER.

There is no evil with which the honest toiling masses have to contend, more intolerable to be borne than the forestalling of the necessities of life. We know of no wretch in society more thoroughly contemptible and infamous, withal, than the forestaller.

No language of condemnation is too strong to be applied to the trader, who deliberately buys up the food and fuel that are absolutely essential to the sustenance of human life, for the purpose of extorting the highest possible prices. He is infamous all over. He is worse than the highway robber; because, in the case of the foot-pad there are some chances of his being arrested and punished. Your money, to the full amount, may be returned. But the forestaller robs you without detection and without redress. He takes your money from your pocket, under the plea of the laws of trade, and he never returns it. His head is lifted above yours in society at the very moment that he picks your purse of your hard earnings. He is called a gentleman—and you—are only a poor mechanic!

How long shall this outrageous abuse continue? How long? Why it will continue until labor, everywhere, takes its redress into its own hands. Not by violence. Not in putting down the wrong-doer by doing wrong. But by the organization of labor for self protection—by purchasing direct of the producer, and letting the forestaller go—to Halifax! By establishing co-operative stores among ourselves, where we can buy our own food, clothing, groceries and fuel. By employing trusty agents, of our own choosing, who will secure for us everything we want for cash, at prime cost.

That's the way to do it. That's the way it can be done. Down with the forestaller!—*Shopmate.*

[CONTRIBUTED.]  
ONLY A MECHANIC!

SIR,—In my ramble through the world, I have frequently come in contact with individuals who, often speaking of a mechanic, generally express their feelings in words something like: "Oh! a poor workman; is that all!" and expressed in such a contemptuous tone as would lead people to believe that the speaker must be somewhat of a superior being when compared with the "poor tradesman." The individuals who delight most in thus giving vent to their feelings are generally to be found in the class known as "counter-hoppers," "quill-drivers," &c. Mark the swagger of that dry goods clerk as, arrayed in his best suit, for which he has not yet paid the tailor, he sallies forth in the evening to take a stroll in the "pawk" or sponge on his more affluent acquaintance. Do you not mark his lordly mien, how like a true noble he daintily steps aside to let pass the sturdy blacksmith whom he encounters on his way, afraid that he may be contaminated by the vile touch of that "poor tradesman." Often has my blood boiled with indignation when by chance I had been brought in conflict with such individuals, and I have frequently attributed their opinions to ignorance or prejudice; but on calmer reflection I am grieved to say that they have some grounds for their conduct. The truth is, workingmen, as a rule do not respect themselves sufficiently. They do not, when they should, look upon their respective trades with the same feeling of pride and honor as the doctor or lawyer regards his profession. They do not, by their conversation and conduct, seek to elevate labor to the same dignity as the professions, and prove to their fellow-men that in all things labor is honorable. True, in this "Canada of ours," we have in the ranks of the workingmen many who will yet take their places in society as judges, senators, merchants, &c., but, alas! how few are they when compared with the number who consider it more genteel to stand behind a counter and deal out pins and tape than to swing the sledge, plane a board, or cut stone. Is not the money made at blacksmithing as good as the money made by your two-penny clerk, and does not the blacksmith always get more pay? Look down the broad roll of fame, and you will find that the majority of the men whose names are inscribed on it, worked their way up from the ranks, and obtained their first lessons from the book purchased by the money earned by the sweat of their brow. Are not the workingmen the mainstay of a country, and were it not for their labors could society exist? Must not the artist lay down his brush and the poet his pen, must not the philosopher suspend his operations and the voice of the orator be dumb, would not the jewelled crown become a worthless bauble, and the most stately palace a region of desolation were it not for the labor of the agriculturist and craftsman? Then, why should not workingmen feel proud at being able to stand forth and say, "We are tradesmen!" Let workingmen ever remember that labor has been ennobled by the chosen ones of the earth, nay, even the Saviour of the world, having worked at a trade. Let them ever keep this in mind; let them be as jealous of the reputation of their fellow-workmen as they are of their own good name; and in time, instead of the sneer of "tradesman" being thrown at them, they will yet hear those individuals exclaim, "Oh, that I were a tradesman!"

PETLEY AND DINEEN'S CHRISTMAS PRESENTS IN CASE.—Our lady readers will please remember that a special discount of ten per cent. will be allowed on all cash purchases during the remainder of this month, at Petley and Dineen's silk and clothing house.

THE "GOLDEN BONNET"—This establishment, No. 115 King Street East, are offering great bargains in dry goods and ready-made clothing. J. & J. W. Cox deserve the thanks of the laboring classes for their liberality in selling goods to them at very low prices.

MR. JOHN CLEMENTS A CANDIDATE FOR ST. GEORGE'S WARD.—This gentleman's card will be found in another column. His friends are confident that he will be elected, as he is very popular in the Ward, and made a good representative when he served the city as Alderman on a former occasion.

A. S. Irving, King Street West, has just published one of Josh Billings' side-splitting works—the "Spice Box." No lover of quaint humor can afford to be without this work, and a perusal of one of its chapters will save in medicine treble the amount of the price of the book. "Laugh and grow fat," is a well known maxim.

"The Bazaar," 164 Yonge Street, is literally crammed with goods suitable for presents at this season. Our readers would do well to visit this place at once and make their purchases, as the prices of the articles offered are very low, which will be a boon to the working classes. The proprietor (Mr. Crawford) of "The Bazaar," deserves to be encouraged in his laudable efforts to gratify his customers in the matter of variety of goods for these holiday times at low prices.

G. M. LYNN'S CHEAP BOOT AND SHOE STORE.—This favorite establishment for the sale of boots and shoes is at 133 Yonge street, opposite Temperance street. The goods sold are equal in quality to any in the market, and yet the prices are exceedingly low. Mechanics are especially invited to visit Mr. Lynn's