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## THE WEEK:

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All articles, contributions, and letters on matters pertaining to the editorial department should be addressed to the Editor, and not to any other person who may be supposed to be connected with the paper.

IT is scarcely necessary, we hope, to explain to the reader of THE WEEK that the aim of these editorial paragraphs is to summarize current events, and state broadly certain general conclusions, rather than to discuss special topics exhaustively. When, therefore, *The Canadian Manufacturer*, of Jan. 4th, represents us as having settled the question of Convict Labour in a few sentences, its sarcasm exaggerates not only our effort but our ambition. The gist of our remarks which the *Manufacturer* quotes and criticises, was that no one is more benefited than the workingman by whatever helps to prevent crime, to lessen taxation, to increase productive industry and to promote the moral well-being of the community; that a judicious system of prison-labour unquestionably does all these things; and that, therefore, the workingmen, by their attitude of hostility to productive prison-labour, are standing in their own light, as well as opposing the true interests of society and the State. It is no refutation of these propositions to point out, as the *Manufacturer* does, that the question is a very difficult one; that the humanitarians of the day are far from being agreed upon a satisfactory solution, and that "the workingmen are not alone in their opposition to having the labour of convicts brought into competition with theirs." THE WEEK certainly did not allege that the benefit of a proper system of convict-labour "accrues especially or in larger proportion to workingmen than any other class." Still less did we, as our contemporary surprisingly asserts, ask the workingman to submit "to all the weight of the burden himself." What we did and do deprecate on the part of workingmen is that, instead of helping, as they might effectually do, other classes of the community to solve the difficult problem on a basis of justice and humanity, they seem to put themselves into an attitude of uncompromising hostility to prison-labour itself, thereby antagonizing the well-being of the whole community, themselves included, and, of course, "standing in their own light" by so doing.

THE *Canadian Manufacturer* enters into statistics at some length to show that the merchantable products of the penal institutions of the United States, according to the figures of the last census, amounted to fifty-four one hundredths of one per cent. of the total products of the industries of the country, instead of one fifth of one per cent., given as the maximum by Mr. Brockway in the *Forum*, as quoted by us. We have not the means at hand, nor have we space to enter into a full investigation of this aspect of the question, though we admit it is a very important aspect. But even accepting the *Manufacturer's* figures, we should not hesitate still to say that in comparison with the great material, social and moral interests at stake, the injury done to the workingmen by the competition of one additional man in two hundred is a bagatelle, so far as its weight as an argument against productive labour and in favour of enforced idleness for convicts is concerned. This is the more apparent when a fact that is too often lost sight of or quietly ignored in the discussion is fairly taken into the account, namely, that the workingman, on the one hand, has to bear his share in the expense of supporting the idle convicts and detecting and punishing their multiplying crimes, and, on the other hand, is equally with others a sufferer from all the resultant social and moral contamination. The larger part of the *Manufacturer's* article is directed against the admitted evils of destructive competition with honest labour in special lines of industry, evils which reach their maximum under the contract-labour system. On both these points THE WEEK heartily agrees with its critic. How to minimize or do away with such competition is one of the hard problems which both workingmen and manufacturers should help to solve. The contract-labour system is an iniquity which should not be tolerated in any Christian State. The very existence of such a system is a reproach to our civilization. We should be sorry indeed to be suspected of favouring it.

THIS question of convict-labour is so vitally related to the best interests of society and of the State that we may be excused for drawing attention still more closely to the danger that must inevitably result should the thousands of criminals in the jails and penitentiaries of the Dominion be doomed to enforced and perpetual idleness. A recent number of *Harper's Weekly* calls attention to the situation which is now threatened in the State prisons of New York:—"There are about thirty-five hundred convicts, in the full vigour of manhood, supported in complete idleness, at an annual expense of about four hundred thousand dollars to the people of the State. The necessary work for the care of a prison itself can be done by a very few men. Thirty out of the sixteen hundred at Sing Sing would do the work of the prison. What is the result of this situation? It is an enormous cost for the State, and an immense increase of suffering, insanity, crime and wretchedness." And this state of things is due to "the labour vote," that is to say, as the *Weekly* puts it, it is brought about because "the Legislature believes that the great mass of those who live by daily wages in this State prefer that the prisons shall become festering masses of disease, idiocy, and every form of physical and moral decay, rather than that the thirty five hundred prisoners shall be put at honest labour." It seems impossible that the intelligent workingmen of the State can really mean this, but this is the outcome of their views as interpreted by the party politicians. Surely there are fundamental considerations which no party exigency can alter and no people can afford to disregard. The first of these is, we should say, that the prisoner is still a human being. Though he has forfeited the privileges of citizenship, he has not forfeited the inalienable rights of humanity. One of the most precious of these rights is that no human being shall be condemned by his fellow beings to a position that must result in the destruction of whatever of good, or of possibility of good, may be left in his character. Other of such considerations are thus given by the writer before quoted: "One is that convicts must be employed, unless the State is to suffer in every way by making the prisons, at an enormous expense, nurseries of imbecility and crime. Another is that they cannot be properly employed without competing in some degree with labour out of prison. The present New York scheme is a desperate endeavour to disregard both of these facts. It is unworthy of a civilized community."

WHETHER Mr. Wiman has done a service or an injury to Canada by his telling article in the *North American Review* may be matter for question. It seems, at first thought, as if we really ought to be grateful to him for his terse yet graphic and comprehensive paper. The extraordinary picture he has drawn of the extent of our territory, the excellence of its climate, and the richness and variety of its resources, will be to many Canadians almost as much a revelation as to the people of the United States themselves. His description prompts one to parody the words of the old Roman poet, and cry out, "Happy beyond measure the Canadians, did they but know their own blessings!" To Canadians, indeed, the article should bring not only gratification, but inspiration, ambition and high resolution. The old Saxon and Celtic stock must have degenerated sadly in them, if with such a climate and such a country they can fail to build up a nation worthy of the Empire from which it springs, and fit to stand erect beside the Great Republic on its borders. But what will be the effect upon the people for whom Mr. Wiman writes and by whom his article will be chiefly read? If, before, the Jingoism of the Blair variety were casting envious eyes upon the land which they deemed a strip of frost-bound soil bordering on an illimitable waste of snow and ice, how will they feel now that they are told by one of themselves, and one who knows, that it is a bigger country than their own, with vaster sources of wealth in soil and forest and mine, and with climate and conditions better adapted "for the development of the combined physical and mental energies of men"? Is it really kindness which prompts Mr. Wiman to dangle such a prize before the eyes of his avaricious and aggressive fellow countrymen, or has he some dark and sinister design?

THE most optimistic Canadian can scarcely deny that a net debt of two hundred and thirty and a half millions of dollars, involving an annual unproductive expenditure of over ten millions, is a pretty serious burden for a population of less than five millions. There is force, it is true, in the consideration urged by Hon. Charles Tupper, that the greater part of this debt has been incurred in the execution of public works which are beneficial to the whole country, and many of which were absolutely necessary to its well-being and progress. It is certainly consoling to reflect that the proportion of the sum expended in gunpowder is comparatively small; that by far the greater part is represented to-day by a system of railroads, canals, lighthouses, docks, harbours, etc., which, even though they fail to pay interest upon the capital expended, are main arteries and accessories by means of which the life-blood of commerce is carried from end to end of the Dominion. Giving due weight to this consideration, it is still evident that the public debt has attained such proportions that nothing but rashness, unworthy of a clear-sighted and cool-headed people, could make us shut our eyes to the danger attending further increase. It is certainly time to halt. Neither population nor commerce is increasing with sufficient rapidity to warrant us in dismissing anxiety. The limit of revenue-producing taxation has, evidently, been pretty nearly reached. Any considerable reduction in the tariff rate of our neighbours, or a succession of bad seasons, both possible contingencies, would threaten financial straits of a severe kind. In view of these facts it is clearly the duty of the Government to retrench as far as possible without reducing efficiency of administration, and no less the duty of Parliament to insist on rigid economy, and to veto any new enterprises involving heavy expenditures unless upon the clearest demonstration of their necessity or general utility. Young nations, like individuals, need occasional periods of rest after great exertion, to recover strength and collect their energies for fresh efforts.

IS the war of tariffs between Canada and the United States entering upon an acute stage? The increase of the export duty on saw-logs by the Canadian Government has been followed by the resolution of the Ways and Means Committee of the United States' Senate to impose a duty of half a cent per pound upon fresh fish, which have hitherto been admitted free. We do not suppose there is any immediate connection between the two things, but as indications of a feeling or