

though it may never save souls. We like to deceive ourselves concerning our extravagance. Yet, strange as it may appear, we do not wish our neighbours to be deceived concerning them. We tell ourselves that little thing about one man's luxuries and another man's necessities when we have strawberries in January, but we throw out the boxes where the neighbours can see them and take note from them that the Weggs are going some.

Far be it from me to advocate the prohibition of January strawberries or any other form of soul-gratification. I am no apostle of the simple life. I am too well acquainted with it for that. But, as an economic fact, the existence of the hole called Extravagance in the wage-bag should not be ignored.

However, it is not the wage-earner himself that I get hot about when I think of the words of Haggai. It is thinking of the other fellow who rips and slashes the wage-bag, who did not make the bag nor help to fill it, that leads me to forget the calmness which should pervade an economic discussion and to use unparliamentary language. You know the gentleman to whom I refer—our common foe, the Middleman.

There are some who believe that the high cost of living is a dispensation of Providence or, at least, a part of unerring Destiny. To them it appears as futile to fight against soaring prices as to attempt to check the precession of the equinoxes. I have my sympathy for them, for do not I myself accept a two cent advance in the price of bread as a natural occurrence, although I know that my grandsire who drew a good bow at Hastings would have fought all the barons and bakers of the realm before he would have accepted the situation? There is a tameness in our attitude towards the price-lists which does not go with our Saxon descent, a tameness which some might call a religious resignation, from which

they argue back to the thesis of Divine Providence referred to above.

I have my sympathy for these believers in the doctrines of non-resistance and passive obedience to the high cost of living, but I know they are in error. When I consider that the railways, the telegraph companies, the postal authorities and the electric light distributors, over whom I have some authority under the law, have not been able to advance their prices on me, but have been compelled to lower them even in recent years, I know that the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker, and the landlord too, have no impregnable position from which I cannot dislodge them if I so make up my mind.

I will not let the electric light company enlarge the hole in my wage-bag. I would be in arms if the Postmaster-General tried to get another penny a letter out of the bag. The street railway would be wrecked from terminus to terminus if it asked for its share in price raising. Why am I so exacting on all these and so obsequious to the demands of the coal man and the landlord?

I will tell you why. I am afraid of being a Socialist? No, not quite that, for I am a Socialist when I mail a letter or turn on my light. I am afraid of being an objectionable socialist. I hate to interfere with the respectable forms of graft. There are so many widows renting houses, so many deacons selling coal, so many pillars of society under this and that business, that I am loth to raise my hands against their perquisites. I am speaking for myself alone. You may have your reasons for submitting to the tyranny of the crafts and guides.

But, whatever be our reasons for submission, this is certain, that the holes in the wage-bags are growing larger every day. The holes in mine are so big that the April instalment of my statutory increase slipped through without touching leather.