

The Religious Press and Strikes

Why is it that religious papers are, so many of them, eager to seize upon opportunities to say spiteful, uncharitable, and often untruthful things in disparagement of organized labor? How is it that, while they can be blind to the faults of the rich and while they can throw the mantle of their charity over even the crimes of the powerful, they are quick to mark the failings and stern to rebuke the shortcomings of the poor and uninfluential? It is notorious that the Lehigh Valley managers and the management of the other New York railways affected by the switchmen's strike have defiantly broken the law of the State which fixes ten hours as the limit of daily work for railway employees, with extra pay for overtime. It is also notorious that this was the real cause of the strike. Yet no religious paper of them all, so far as we have seen, has considered it to be any part of its duty to denounce the corporate law-breakers. But when laboring people are accused of breaking the law, without waiting to see whether the charge be true or not, immediately the vials of their righteous wrath are opened and poured forth on the devoted workmen, and the abuse is made more, rather than less, nauseous and unpalatable by a mixture of hypocritical pretense of friendship and sympathy for labor. The switchmen's strike at Buffalo has afforded some of these papers an opportunity of which they have eagerly availed themselves to preach at the law-breaking workmen. Here is a specimen of the preaching taken from the Northwestern Christian Advocate, the organ, we believe, of the Methodist Episcopal Church;

No workman has a right to fix his price for work and then stand with club, gun or menace and insist that no other workman shall take his place at lower rates. It is disreputable, disgraceful and outrageous when switchmen in Buffalo burn cars, attack substitute workmen, shoot police and arrest human commerce because railway companies resist violent demands for increase of wages. If a man thinks his services is worth more than he is receiving, let him nominate his new rate, and, if it is not granted, let him depart in peace—but in peace. If he lingers in the vicinity to invade the rights of another man who consents to work at the old rates, he deserves to be sent to jail or the upper country. When the switchmen at Buffalo declined to work at former rates they ought to have left the railway premises. When they remain to stone, vilify and maltreat their successors, they richly deserve to be switched, to other climes by muskets, rifles, Gatlings and other gentle persuasives.

Here is another specimen:

Employers are often selfish, and they often find a strike a means of grace; but the violence of striking employees that blockades its old shop and refuses to admit new employees at even the old rates deserves the rifle and the lead.

Pretty bloodthirsty language this for professed and professional followers of Him who taught peace, love and goodwill. Hear this reverend editor prate of weapons and slaughter:

Forgetful or defiant

That He whose cause he shames,
Whose Gospel he dishonors,
Whose teaching he disclaims,
Was Lord of Loving-kindness,
And taught that war should cease;
That swords should turn to plowshares,
And nations live in peace.

Another religious editor demands that

Every man shall be counted a traitor who expresses a word of sympathy with violators of the law, and that every minister who preaches anything but peaceful submission to law and the use of peaceful means only shall be branded a madman.

Peaceful submission to law at all times and under all circumstances! Where would be a liberty or right which freemen now enjoy if such coward's doctrine had always been heeded? We are no advocates of force, but the right, when peaceful means fail, to use force for the remedying of wrongs is one to which only willing slaves will surrender. "Resistance to tyrants is obedience to God" is a maxim which freemen must not forget on peril of

their liberties. Here are two extracts that illustrate the kind of logic which characterizes the editorial utterances of some religious editors. The first is from the Advocate's editorial, from which we have already quoted, and is as follows:

It ought to be clear that if the railway employees nearest to the switchmen did not join the latter's revolt, the general public should be slow to insist that the switchmen are defensible strikers.

The next is from a religious paper quoted by the Advocate under the head of "Methodist Opinion."

The union of unions whereby, when one strikes others go out in support, one after another, until the whole country is paralyzed, is no more justifiable than highway robbery.

There you have it. If the other railway organizations fail to strike in support of one already out, it is proof positive that the strike is wrong and indefensible. If they do strike, then they are guilty of a crime morally equal to highway robbery. As the switchmen's strike is the one which has afforded these pious editors the greatest pretext for their homilies upon workingmen and lawlessness, let us examine into the history of the violence and defiance of law. It is true that so far there is no evidence that any of the strikers had anything to do with the burning of the cars. It is also true that the stories about burning cars and destroying property were greatly exaggerated. There is only presumptive evidence that the cars were set on fire by sympathizers with the strikers. The burning of the cars was an advantage to the company, not to the strikers; first, because the burned cars were worn out ones, unfit for further service, which the company could well afford to sell to Erie County by means of a bonfire; and, second, because the burning of the cars and the opportunity which it gave to circulate exaggerated tales of violence and danger to property, afforded the wished-for opportunity to demand military protection. Had the troops not been sent to Buffalo and the men kept from the vicinity of the yards by cordons of military, even without any resort to violence or to anything but moral suasion and appeals to their sense of justice, the great majority of the men who took the places of the strikers could have been induced to quit work; for, though our pious censors may not admit it, it is less hopeless to urge the law of love—the Golden rule—upon the average "scab" than upon the average religious editor. It was bad policy then for the strikers to afford an excuse for calling out the troops, while it was good tactics for the companies to seek or manufacture such an excuse. However, let us suppose that all the violence and destruction of property was the work of the strikers, and let us suppose that all the condemnation our religious contemporary heaps upon them is deserved, how comes it that the Advocate has no word of censure or condemnation for the original law-breakers—for the companies—whose defiance of the law was the cause of the strike? Assuming now that the strikers were guilty of all the lawlessness laid at their doors, but not forgetting either that the strike was caused by the refusal of the company to obey a law passed for the protection of the men, let us glance at the Advocate's notions of the ethics of strikes as they apply to the case of the switchmen. The men had a right, our contemporary admits, to fix the price of their labor and to lay down the terms upon which they were willing to work; but, their terms being refused, they should have departed in peace, left the premises, and allowed the company to fill their places. Now, be it remembered that their demand was that a law, which through the efforts of organized labor—of the Knights of Labor, in fact—had been passed for their protection and for the protection of the traveling public, should be obeyed by the company. The position of the Advocate, then, is practically

this: If the employees of the company were unwilling to work long hours to their own detriment and the danger of the public, and to assist the company in setting the law at defiance, the company should have been left at liberty to go into the overcrowded labor market and find men whose necessities would compel them to accept its unjust terms. Dropping now the special case of the Buffalo switchmen, let us examine the ethics of strikes as the Advocate appears to understand them. Men may rightly refuse to work except on their own terms—to strike, in fact—but if their employer can fill their places, that should end it. Evidently our religious contemporary looks upon human labor just as he does upon any other marketable commodity. "Let the seller beware" if he sells too cheap. "Let the buyer beware" if he buys too dear. The law of doing to others as we would have them do to us is not to enter into the business of buying and selling human labor. Now there is a vast army of unemployed and partially employed, as our contemporary is probably aware, and to these wages which are down to the lowest point where decent living is possible would be a vast improvement over present conditions. Consequently whenever workingmen strike for higher wages or against a reduction, the employers can draw from this great reserve army. Then the former employees, being reduced to the ranks of the unemployed, become in time compelled by their necessities to stand ready to take the places of any who venture to strike against starvation wages. This being the position, it is evident that in all strikes the employers must win, and every ineffectual effort to raise their wages will only sink the working classes deeper and deeper in the quicksand of despair. Is this what the Advocate would have?—K. of L. Journal.

LYNCH LAW AMONG RATS.

In the neighborhood of Burley the other day a gentleman looking over the wall saw a dead hen in the field. Presently a rat came up, snuffed at the defunct fowl with much satisfaction and went away in some haste. The onlooker, who is a student of natural history, knew what that meant, and removed the hen from the spot. In a minute or two the rat came back with half a dozen friends, with the evident intention of removing the carcass for future use. Arriving at the spot where the hen had lain, the rat raised a loud squeak of astonishment at its absence. In a trice the other rats fell upon him so savagely that they left him dead on the field as a warning not to play practical jokes with his friends.—Leeds Post.

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