

LABOR TROUBLES AND STRIKES.

A plentiful crop of labor troubles in the neighboring republic is springing up, and before the season is over it threatens to cover the surface of the land. The right of workmen to strike belongs to the freedom of labor. The employer offers certain terms which the workmen say are not good enough, and a refusal to accept them, if the men be already in employment, means a cessation of labor. The strike has for its object to bring the employers to terms. Machinery cannot be brought to a stand-still without causing a loss to its owners. The loss is reciprocal; and two capitals suffer diminution: the capital employed in the factory, and the fund which sustains the strikers in idleness. The right to refuse to work except on certain terms, and the right to accept labor except on certain terms are reciprocal; the right is as sacred in the employer as it is in the workmen, and as sacred in the workmen as in the employer.

Both parties find or think it necessary at times, to exercise this right. The amount of wages is not the only possible object of dispute; the length of the hours of labor, and the conditions of service or employment sometimes become subjects of contestation. Sometimes the employer refuses to employ men who belong to the labor unions; very often union men refuse to work along side non-union men. When either employer or worker takes this ground, he stands on his extreme rights, and social friction is always greatest when people stand doggedly on the ground of their extreme rights. But if the contest were carried no further, and no illegitimate or illegal element were brought in, no valid objection could be made. The battle, confined within these limits, resolves itself into a test of the relative strength of two funds: the fund which sustains the factory, and the fund from which the men draw the means of subsistence when wages cease. Neither fund is inexhaustible; a strike or a lock-out decreases and tends to exhaust both. Each is a distinct capital; the fund of the union not less than the capital employed by the manufacturer. Capital supplies the sinews of the war on both sides; and the game is mutually destructive. The injury to both is of the same kind: a waste of the capital of the workers as well as of the employer. If no other element came in, the longest purse would in the end win. But other elements do come in. The manufacturer cannot command an unlimited price for his goods; and his possible power of paying wages depends, as to amount, upon what he can induce the public to pay. He is not an industrial autocrat who commands the market and dictates prices; he is obliged to submit to the limitation of price, which the state of the market imposes upon him. He may not always pay what he could afford to pay; as a rule he will pay as little as he can help. There are no absolute means of adjusting the equities of the case. If the element of selfishness, so far as it contains any admixture of injustice could be eliminated, and absolute equity substituted in its place it would still be

very difficult to reduce to certainty the contingencies on which the ultimate result of the venture in which the employer is engaged must depend: the rate of wages is fixed long before it is possible to ascertain what the profit will be. The employer, to save himself from ruin, must have a margin of probable profit; and if demands are made upon him which, in his judgment, trench on that margin, he cannot give way without danger to himself. The great mistake is sometimes made of regarding the employer as the possessor of an unlimited fund which he is at liberty to dispose of as he likes, and assuming that his action with regard to it may, under any given circumstances, be coerced.

The worst feature of strikes is to be found in their illegal concomitants of violence and outrage. It was announced the other day that, on one American railway the employees of which had struck, every engine had been disabled. The Toronto street railway trouble, for three days, put an end to the public peace of the city. All along the streets for miles outrages were in progress; the street gamins got a lesson in violence which, for the rest of their lives, will give them false notions of the impunity with which the laws may be violated and property and life endangered. In almost all such cases, the actual strikers disclaim responsibility for the violence; but the obligation of putting down violence with a strong hand is the same whoever may be the offenders. Even when men are suffering from a real grievance, they must be taught that they cannot be allowed to redress their own wrongs by exceptional and violent methods; that they cannot be permitted to take the law into their own hands. Even when strikers have reason on their side, they bring discredit on their cause by a resort to violence. If outrage once became the invariable accompaniment of strikes, the right of striking would have to be suspended in the general interest of society. The occurrence of such an event would be a calamitous day for labor; and the workers have the strongest interest in preventing it. America is the last country in the world where society will lose the means of protecting itself; and if thoroughly aroused it would show more energy than consideration in the employment of methods necessary for attaining its ends.

There is reason to fear that intimidation and violence sometimes form part of the forces on which strikers depend for success; otherwise it would be difficult to account for the fact that they so often follow immediately on the heels of a strike. Should this tendency be largely developed in the future great injury will be done to trades unionism. Already there are indications that remedial measures may be called for. Chief Justice Cameron, at the assizes at Napanee, the other day, commented on the outrages which so often accompany strikes, and the grand jury, in its presentment, said: "We concur in your Lordship's view that stringent legislation should be provided for the prevention of labor strikes and the injury to the public interests resulting therefrom." This is the danger that strikers incur: public sentiment will, unless these outrages cease, call for strong

measures of repression. It is probable, however, that the law is strong enough already; and it is too late in the day to talk of legislation to prevent strikes. The right to strike is one that cannot be denied; but the suppression of outrages incident to them should be prompt, vigorous and decisive.

There is an impression that in the United States and Canada strikes will be exceptionally numerous this year. However this may be, it is quite clear that there can never be anything like a universal strike, for the reason that the funds of the labor societies could not bear the strain which the maintenance in idleness of all its members, at one time, would put upon them. The fact that some central authority of the unions has a veto on proposed strikes tends to lessen the number of labor suspensions. A strike means cost to the funds of the society, and contributors to the funds who live at a distance from the scene of the rupture would prefer not to be called upon for increased payments, to sustain the strikers, in whose quarrel they have only a general and perhaps a languid interest. These may be called conservative elements which make against strikes. And they are not the only ones. These societies are subject to heavy calls for benevolent purposes and to meet the assurance claims of members. Of the \$15,000,000 which forms the aggregate incomes of the trades unions of Great Britain, ninety per cent. is said to be devoted to benevolent purposes. It may be interesting to politicians to learn that trades-union votes are very far from comprising all the votes which labor has at its control. In the course of sixty years, trades-unionism, in Great Britain, has gathered to itself only one-sixth of all the working men. The other five-sixths defend their personal freedom, and their votes are not to be got by flattering trades-unionism. This fact may be of some use to any who, in this country, may be disposed to look to the future omnipotence of the labor union vote. Here wealth is much more equally distributed than in Great Britain; the farmers, the owners of the soil, form the largest class of voters, and to suppose that they should join labor organizations to any great extent is to assume that they are very ill judges of what constitutes their own interest.

BRITISH COLUMBIA'S FINANCE.

The *Victoria Times* calls attention to the financial condition of the province of British Columbia, and publishes its Balance Sheet for the half year ending 31st December last. This shows assets of \$813,034.44 and liabilities of \$942,488.67, leaving \$129,454.23 as balance of liabilities. Taking the balance sheet for the half year ended with June last, the *Times* says it showed assets, including \$8,820.28, cash in the treasury, amounting to \$850,021.02. The liabilities were \$800,257.26, leaving a surplus in favor of the province of \$49,763.76. "A glance at the assets and liabilities will at once reveal the fact that the province has rapidly run behind for the first half of the current financial year. To the sum now appearing as a deficit, has to be added