

principles which underlie all novel experiments in legislation. Nothing would be easier than for popular leaders, guided by nothing more stable than present expediency, or seeming expediency, to seek, perhaps to win, popular applause by abandoning sound principles and adopting catchy expedients which, however plausible at the moment, in so far as they diverge by ever so slight an angle from the straight lines of justice and impartiality, are certain to be productive in the end of evils far greater than those which they seek to remove.

There is something undeniably attractive and seemingly incontrovertible about the old ideas in regard to individualistic freedom and unrestricted competition, which seemed but a little ago to be too firmly established as the foundation stones of the whole science of Political Economy to be in any danger of ever being shaken. Yet it cannot be denied that the results to which those ideas, freely worked out through all the inequalities of condition and circumstance which are the result of the ever-varying differences in the energy, strength and conscientiousness of individuals, have led to monstrous inequalities and other most deplorable results in modern society, such as nothing short of stoical hardness can contemplate without dismay. The pendulum is now swinging in the other direction, with what results it is for the future to disclose. Why, for instance, if the principles which underlie the graduated income tax are sound and right, should not the tax on the properties of the multimillionaires, who abound in all the older countries, be raised to such a rate as would make the income from this source alone suffice to cover all the expenses of government?

One remark we may venture in closing these tentative observations on a question which, we are persuaded, is closely related to one of the most important revolutions going on in modern economic thought. One of the practical objections urged with much force against all forms of direct taxation is that they necessarily lead to inquisitorial methods, which are out of keeping with the spirit of the age, if not an outrage upon the domain of personal rights. The same objection lies against the income tax in every form. Why should it be regarded as any more objectionable to require a millionaire to disclose the amount of his property or of his annual income than to demand of a clerk or journalist the amount of his salary? And why, if his methods and intentions are honourable, should the one object to having the facts known more than the other? May we not go even farther and affirm that the same objection lies with almost equal force against all import and export duties, or other forms of indirect taxation? Which of us is not often conscious of a like sense of annoyance, and infringement of personal liberty, when he finds himself compelled to disclose to the clerk in the Custom House the invoice of every trifling parcel which may come to his address from a foreign country or even from England, or else submit to the indignity of seeing it opened and overhauled by a stranger before he himself can have an opportunity of ascertaining its contents? What can be more inquisitorial than this?

* * *

The Great Fires.

"WHAT is done can't be helped," is the familiar and vernacular statement of the obvious fact that there is no possibility of bringing back the past, or undoing anything which has been done in it. An ancient poet-philosopher recorded the same solemn conclusion in his day by affirming that not even omnipotent Jove himself could undo what had once been done. The three great conflagrations which will make the winter of A.D. 1895 long memorable in the annals of Toronto are now matters of history, which it is impossible to change or prevent. But two things may yet be done. It is not too late to make rigid investigation into the causes of the great disasters which have wrought so much loss and misery. It is not too late to take thorough and energetic measures to prevent, so far as it may be in the power of prevision and vigilance to do so, the recurrence of such disasters.

One thing fills us with surprise and demands explanation at the outset. We venture to say that nine-tenths of those of the citizens who do not follow up so closely as they, perhaps, ought to do the movements of the City Council, from day to day, were utterly astounded to learn, by the startling object-lesson set before their eyes on Sunday morning, that the city had been caught again without a single steam fire-engine within reach. They had read in the papers, immediately after the last conflagration, that two or three such engines had been brought promptly to the city, and though they may have known that no arrangements for the purchase of either of these had been completed, and that the Council was very properly taking steps to procure the very best, they naturally took it for granted that at whatever cost the Council would see to it that in the meanwhile the city should not again be left for a single hour without some arrangement by which at least one or two efficient engines would be available in case of danger. Was not such an arrangement the very least precaution which wise and vigilant guardians could have been expected to take? What were even a few thousand dollars in comparison with the danger of such a loss as that now inflicted? We wonder that so little has been said by the city press about this singular, this deplorable oversight. To us, we confess, the neglect to retain at any cost, even that of purchase if necessary, one or two of the engines which were in the city, until others were here and ready for action, seems little short of infatuation. It required but the simplest reasoning to lead to the conclusion that the same causes which had produced the two conflagrations would be likely to produce a third. If the mysterious origin of those fires was to be sought in some unknown electrical or other conditions or combinations, the same causes would almost surely continue to produce the same effects. If, as we suppose almost every thoughtful citizen really feared in his heart, they were of incendiary origin, it was morally certain that the culprit, be he human fiend or irresponsible lunatic, would seize upon the temporary absence of the means of protection to repeat his dastardly deeds.

The allusion to possible incendiarism reminds us that steps are now being taken to hold such an inquest as ought, perhaps, to have been held at an earlier date. The difficulties in the way of making such an investigation successful are, however, obvious, and it may be that it would have been unwise to make the attempt earlier. We may assume that the detective department has not been asleep, though we do not know whether any clues, or the shadows of any, have yet been found. It would be the height of injustice and cruelty to say a word reflecting in the slightest degree upon men who are, presumably, honest and vigilant in the discharge of duty. But it is in the interests of the employer to suggest that the night-watchmen should be specially anxious to throw all possible light upon the matter. It would be unfortunate should the impression go abroad that the presence of the most argus-eyed watchman in a warehouse at night is not a pretty good guarantee against fire, under ordinary circumstances. The progress of the investigation will be watched with keen interest by many.

* * *

Pew and Pulpit in Toronto—III.

A PURPOSED VISIT THAT WAS STOPPED BY FIRE.

I HAD intended, on the first Sunday in Lent, to visit a certain Anglican Church and write about it. I had already done something toward preparing a sketch of its exterior, for I had observed it closely on more than one occasion recently when I had passed it in the pursuit of my avocations. In addition to noting its architectural characteristics I had obtained some information about its history, and had respectfully listened to its choir practice on more than one occasion. I had even, on the previous Saturday afternoon, as I came home from the office, gone into the church and sat there quietly, trying to absorb the spirit of the place and find out its note. I sometimes think every building has