

The Echo

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THE MARBLE CUTTERS' STRIKE

In the beginning of this week the marble cutters in the employment of Mr. Robert Reid, St. Catherine street, to the number of eight or nine, in fact the whole of the hands employed in this branch of his business, refused to go to work unless granted an increase. According to the statements of the men they have been working under the scale paid by other firms in the trade, and this effort on their part to equalize the conditions under which they work to that of the majority of their fellow-workmen in this city has been received with a good deal of sympathy. Looking at the increased cost of living of late years their request for a minimum rate of two dollars per day cannot be called extravagant. The occupation of marble cutter requires a combination of skill and artistic taste unusual in a great many other trades, the acquirement of which necessitates a lengthened apprenticeship, so that, independent of the increased cost of living, the possession of the trade should command a higher rate of remuneration. But the moderate request of the men, preferred individually and collectively, was refused, and Mr. Reid falls back upon the old, time-worn excuse for the refusal that he does not wish to be dictated to by a body. Speaking to a reporter, Mr. Reid stated he resisted the request, or demand, if it suits better, on "principle"—there was no question of money about the matter at all; but the men say this question of more money, or better remuneration for their labor, is all that is involved in the dispute, and that he point blank refused to advance their wages either individually or when the demand was made in a body. But we will take Mr. Reid at his word and acknowledge that he may be willing to treat with his hands individually, and what does it mean? Nothing more or less than that Mr. Reid wishes to be in a position to drive the hardest bargain he possibly can, to take advantage, if need be, of the position of each individual workman he may employ, and when that bargain is concluded to his own satisfaction then, and only then, will the workman be permitted to work for him. Now, Mr. Reid may be, and no doubt is, a very honorable man and a very conscientious man to boot, but he is not an angel of mercy, and is just as subject

as another to the infirmities common to human nature, namely, to take advantage when he can, and he must see that under the arrangement he proposes all the facilities for driving a hard bargain would lay with himself. The individual, with a young family probably at his back, would not be in it at all against Mr. Reid with his capital and his control of the tools of production. Now, when the demand is made in a body, the men feel that matters are on a more equal footing. They look at it in this way: He may be willing and able to dispense with the services of one man, but can he accomplish his contracts and carry on his business without serious loss and without subjecting himself to liability for damages arising out of non-fulfilment of contract, if the whole discharge themselves? And they are right in looking at the matter in this light. They are justified in acting in a body to fix the price for their skill and labor, because by that course they are certain to gain more nearly its highest value, and when Mr. Reid frets and fumes himself into a passion and calls men "agitators" and "makers of trouble" he is acting a very silly part and making himself ridiculous in the eyes of the public. He would act a better part by taking the men into his confidence, and if there are any obstacles in the way, through unfinished contracts or obligations entered upon under the present scale, submit these and reason the matter out. A more satisfactory and lasting understanding is liable to be arrived at in treating with the body than with isolated cases, because by the latter method envy, distrust and ill-feeling are always engendered. The men have declared a minimum wage (in their opinion sufficient to maintain respectability along with some degree of comfort) which they are willing to work for, but we do not suppose they would object to Mr. Reid "discriminating" anything over that.

NOTES OF THE WEEK.

Mr. Geo. W. Stephens' bill to exempt the workman's wages from seizure has been referred to the Legislative Committee of the Legislature. The wage-earner may now look for it amongst the slaughtered innocents at the end of the session.

Mr. Morris' bill for the inspection of gear and tackle has one weak point about it, and that is referred to this week by our Quebec correspondent. He hints that the inspectors, being paid by fees charged upon stevedores and others who require his services are liable to be accommodating to their employers in the matter of defective gear. The objection has a good deal of force and Mr. Morris, whose attention is thus drawn to it, should so amend this feature that any danger of "scamping" inspection may be obviated. A Government inspector should be above suspicion, but if he is to be paid by the parties on whom he is supposed to act as a check he certainly cannot be said to be altogether a free agent. To prove a thorough protection to the laborer the inspector must be thoroughly independent of the stevedore or shipowner.

Mr. Auge, who bids fair to redeem his promise to promote legislation in the interests of the working classes, has also a very important measure before the legislature, which gives to the laborer a preferential claim to the extent of his wages upon a building or work he may be engaged upon. The order of preference shall be: First (after the bailleur de fonds) the laborer; second, the workman; third, the person supplying the material; fifth, the contractor; sixth, the architect, the privileges of the first three to exist without registration. The bill also provides that no amount may be drawn from the owner of the property by the contractor until he has furnished a list

of all his laborers, workmen and sub-contractors, and the owner to have the right to retain 15 per cent on all payments during the progress of the work and 10 per cent on the balance for two months after its delivery to meet all privileged claims; failing to do this, the laborer has recourse against the owner for any arrear of wages owing to him. The measure is a just and equitable one, entailing no hardship on either the contractor or owner, and should at once find a place on the statute book of the province.

At the regular meeting of the Trades and Labor Council, held on Thursday evening last, a communication was read from Dominion Assembly asking that the Council take the initiative in calling a Convention of representatives from all labor organizations in the city to discuss shorter hours of labor. The communication was well received, and after a short discussion generally approving of the suggestion made, it was carried unanimously that the Council take immediate action in the matter. It is needless to urge upon working-men the importance of this question and the effect it will have upon the future industrial life of the country, but it is very important that each organization should take the question up, discuss it thoroughly, so that when the time comes for Convention to meet, the delegates chosen to represent them may be able to speak and vote with the full approval and authority of their respective organizations. The conditions under which different trades work are so varied, and their relationship to others so close, that a great deal of caution will necessarily have to be exercised as to any steps that may be taken. Some branches of trade are far ahead of others in respect of hours of labor, but it will generally be found that those working the longest day receive the shortest pay and are unorganized.

Another building in this city has come to grief, and the Building Inspector was promptly on hand after it was laying in a heap on the sidewalk. Fortunately no one was injured by the falling wall, but it was simply because nobody happened to be in the way at the time. There are a great many more walls of a like description to the one just collapsed, and the official whose duty it is to see that they are pulled down and rebuilt apparently does not notice them; at all events they are allowed to remain a standing danger to the lives of citizens. What is he paid for, anyway? Is it to see that the by-laws regarding buildings are enforced or to stand by and protest after the thing has been done? On some of our principal streets a number of unsightly wooden shanties have been run up under his very nose, but as yet nothing appears to have been done to have them removed, as they have now been standing for some time in all their hideousness. The erection of wooden buildings is clearly against the by-law, and it is the Building Inspector's duty to see that they are not permitted to remain and the parties responsible for their erection punished for non-compliance with the law.

We regret to learn from a Toronto despatch that the brickmakers of that city have at last had to succumb to the terms offered by their employers. They have held out bravely for nearly two months, but starvation staring themselves and families in the face has had its effect. The utter stagnation of the building trade in Toronto has also had its effect in bringing about their submission, as there is absolutely no demand for building material. The men are reported as feeling very bitter over their defeat, and say the most they will be able to earn under the new scale is from \$6 to \$8 per week, their former wages running from \$10 to \$12. They intend, however, to stick

by their organization, and express their intention of making another determined stand next spring for a return to the old scale.

The long strike of the Durham miners is over at last, having been declared off on Thursday. They will resume work at the reduction which they were called out to prevent. The strike has caused a great deal of misery among the families of the miners themselves, besides extending to other branches of industry, while the coal owners have suffered immense losses.

Joseph Barondess will, by the decision of the Court of Appeals, serve out his full sentence of one year and nine months for extortion in exacting from a firm in New York \$100 as the price of a peaceful settlement with its striking employees. Mr. Barondess turned in the money to the treasury of the union, but two courts have held that his offence was as much extortion as if it had been blackmail for his own benefit, though the Supreme Court, to which the first appeal was made, held that the action did not constitute extortion in that the money was not obtained through threats to do injury to specific persons or property. In recording the decision of the Supreme Court in this case the Standard says: "Meanwhile, it must be noted that the courts mete out severe penalties to such offenders as Barondess, however lenient they may be to crimes of violence or the large-handed robberies of them that enrich themselves at the expense of their fellows."

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(PLUG)

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