

A Present Day Problem.

A most hopeful sign of the times, as leading ultimately to great and far-reaching results, is the increasing interest in and agitation of the child education and child labor problem. And while some of the measures suggested seem verily like "putting the cart before the horse," to make use of a homely but trite old phrase, yet any attempt towards the betterment of present conditions, however awkwardly it may be made, should receive the assistance of all right-minded people.

There may be danger of pauperizing more or less permanently many families where the children now assist in earning independent support, by requiring the school attendance of the children and the furnishing of means to meet the needs of the family from whom their wage is withdrawn, by philanthropic societies or individuals; and the idleness of the children before and after school hours is a moral danger that must be considered.

Yet, if the element denominated public opinion can be sufficiently stirred to manifest such a general interest in the condition of the poor as to seek to better it by legislation, there is hope that it may, some time be led to such deeper consideration of the problem as will lead to dealing with causes instead of effects, to endeavor to uproot the evil rather than to seek to eradicate it by culling off the surface growth, which, as all farmer folks know, so often results only in strengthening the root-hold.

Why is it that little children labor between daylight and darkness, when they should be at school or at play out in the air and sunshine?

This question suggests others, the discussion of which involves the discussion of our entire political, social and governmental fabric, powers and class conditions.

Were the parents of these little toilers paid a living wage for their work; were the price of necessities of life to return still a fair profit to producers, manufacturers and dealers, there would be no child labor problem.

There are few parents so selfish, so ignorant, so devoid of ambition for their children and interest in their future welfare as to deny them the opportunities so freely offered in this country for securing an education, unless compelled to such a course by the direst extremity.

The children labor that they may live. They work to secure the necessities of food, shelter, light and heat, all of which are produced from natural resources, but which, coming freely from the hand of the Creator through nature, are seized upon and held in fee by a few that they may extort such tribute from

the many as shall enable them to live in luxury and exult in power.

Legislation "for the protection of our infant industries," "for the development of our natural resources," immense donations of the public domain, "to encourage the extension of transportation facilities," have been carried to such an extent and so long continued as to give a favored few opportunity to so enrich themselves as to permit them to secure such control of the necessities of life that they may place such prices as they please upon them, and also upon the labor with which these necessities must be utilized, until the laborer is delivered bound and helpless into their hands, himself and his family condemned to constant toil that they may simply exist, and finally pauperized by the legislation that forbids the children to labor.

Their life toil is preferred by the majority of these small workers, to being compelled to attend school and give up their work, the pay for which is so pitifully small, yet is sadly needed. And they have been known to voluntarily hide themselves in cellars and continue their work there hoping thus to escape the officers sent to look up such helpless little slaves and compel attendance at their school, when they know they will be branded as objects of charity.

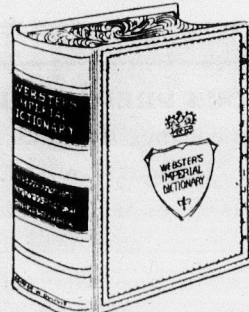
And however much we may wish that these children receive an education, we cannot but respect their desire and that of their parents to earn an independent livelihood. We should beware how we crush out this spirit of independence, for once lost the usefulness of the individual is crippled for life.

The writer has no cut-and-dried theories as to how this great problem may be best solved. The greatest wisdom of this and yet future generations will be required in its solution, but every thoughtful person should desire to assist in bettering the condition of all workers, of the poor and oppressed, particularly as bearing so heavily upon children as to make them toilers from babyhood, and each give what assistance is possible along some line of effort toward that end.

To some it may be given to see more clearly than others "man's duty to his fellow man," and the work of these is that of public agitation and the education of the masses upon this subject, until we shall each see our duty and do it fearlessly, using whatever of influence or powers we may possess, be it much or little, toward securing the reign of right and justice, and the education and elevation of the humblest of God's poor human creatures to realize and become worthy of kinship with the purest and greatest, and of sonship with the Infinite.

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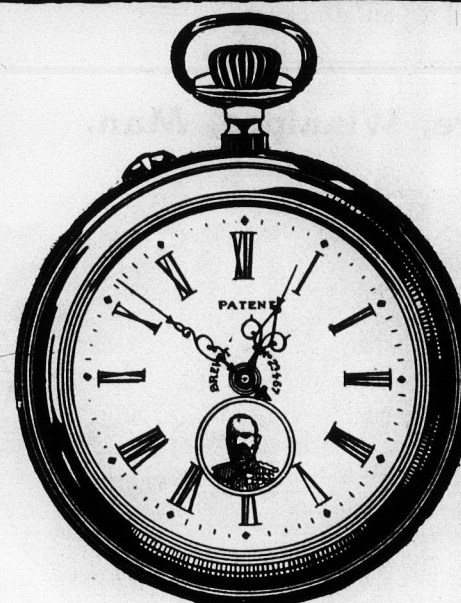
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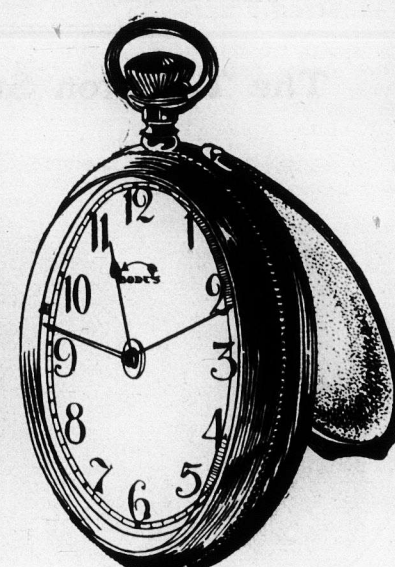
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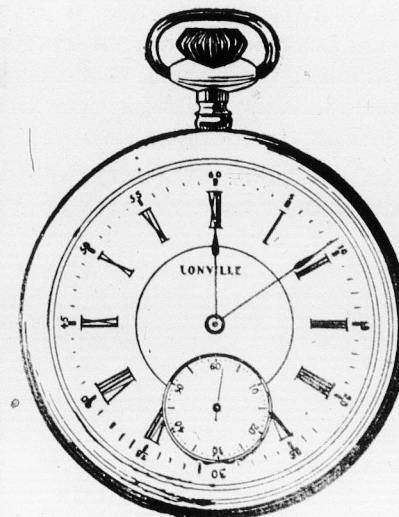
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