

THE CRITIC.

There are still people, it seems, who propagate the theories of Henry George. It is wonderful to think that perhaps his name it is that has to-day been bruited abroad in this continent further than that of any other American. Perhaps it is more wonderful to think that it is rivalled by that of Mr. Edward Bellamy. It is wonderful, for example, that such a sentence as the following—and it is a typical one—should win admirers:—

"What I, therefore, propose, as the simple yet sovereign remedy, which will raise wages, increase the earnings of capital, extirpate pauperism, abolish poverty, give remunerative employment to whoever wishes it, afford free scope to human powers, lessen crime, elevate morals and taste and intelligence, purify government, and carry civilization to yet nobler heights, is—to appropriate rent by taxation."*

Who really believes in the possibility of the extirpation of pauperism—to take only one and that perhaps the most probable of Mr. George's prophecies—leaving out of view for the present the nostrum proposed?

Poverty surely is a relative term; it signifies merely a degree of wealth, just as the term cold signifies a degree of heat. What is pauperism to an American labourer in California, is affluence to a Chinese labourer in California. When, therefore, Mr. George talks of "extirpating pauperism," where will he draw the line? It is as if one were to say he would abolish cold and not determine at what degree of temperature cold ended and heat began. Mr. George's answer to this will probably be that his system will bring about an equable distribution of affluence—a uniform degree of heat as it were: that when the State is the common land-owner everybody will be able to procure the necessities of a life of comfort. To this I answer in return: What assurance can you give us that this equable distribution of affluence will be permanent? What will prevent the thriftless from squandering their gains and lapsing again into pauperism, and the parsimonious from hoarding their gains and lapsing again into monopolists? Acts of Parliament will not rid us of spendthrifts and misers. Again, the one plane upon which this equable distribution of wealth will momentarily place all men cannot be maintained; the shiftless and the weak and the ignorant will sink below it. When all are struggling for wealth, and all are differently endowed with powers of obtaining wealth, what possible power is there that will retain all the strugglers upon the same level? We can therefore logically argue that pauperism can not be eliminated, because pauperism merely means the condition of life of those in the lower strata of society, and as in any system of political economy the differences in the physical, mental, and moral powers of men vary, and therefore also their productive and acquisitive powers, there will always exist these higher and lower strata, and, therefore, pauperism.

The problem of the existence of poverty, to me it seems, is part and parcel of that tremendous problem of the "origin of evil," as it is called—the existence of pain, suffering, sorrow. It is a species of the genus. How and why pain came into this world I suppose every single thinking man has at one time or

*HENRY GEORGE, *Progress and Poverty*, Bk. VIII., ch. ii. The italics are Mr. George's.

another in his life-time asked himself; but they are questions which no single man has as yet succeeded in answering. To imagine that we can eradicate poverty by the alteration of some one subordinate economic law is as ridiculous as to imagine that we can eradicate suffering by the alteration of some one subordinate sociological law. Poverty and pain exist wherever men exist. Wealth is unequally distributed wherever physical, intellectual, and moral capabilities are unequally distributed, and they are so distributed the wide world over. Under any and every system of land tenure it will always exist so long as men remain ignorant, feeble, and vicious. A particular land-law or a particular tax cannot conquer ignorance: cannot teach men how to find employment, or to make the most profitable use of that employment when found—men will not produce more because of that law or tax. Neither can such law or tax help the feeble; it will not ventilate factories, or drain cities, or improve kitchens, or heal the sick, or strengthen the ailing. Nor will such law or tax prevent vice: it cannot insure us against pick-pockets, or embezzlers, or burglars. And even if we could discover a law or tax that could work all these three classes of miracles, still it could not put an end to droughts, and frosts, and fires, and tornadoes, and earthquakes, and shipwrecks. And do not everyone of these things conduce to the creation, maintenance, or perpetuation of poverty? It is because man has passions, appetites, desires—call them what we will—which he cannot or will not control; and it is because nature is not always beneficent; and it is because man is ignorant of the laws of this nature that poverty exists. Were man perfect he would produce to the utmost of his powers and use his products for the relief of his less gifted fellows. But this would not insure him against poverty, for the cataclysms of nature might sweep away his wealth. And even if he could guard against these, his ignorance of the laws of nature prevent him from warding off the germs of disease. Only when all the elements of this tripartite truth are reversed, shall we be able to begin to talk about "extirpating pauperism" and "abolishing poverty."

THE HEROINE OF VERCHERES.

Two centuries of history would hardly reckon for much in the annals of a respectable middle aged European community, not to speak of the green old age of our good mother Britannia, whose stalwart sons crossed swords with the Norman William, and flew their cloth-yard shafts at Cressy and Poitiers. But in the life of a young nation (expectant), such as this Canada of ours, the retrospection of two hundred years is quite a formidable affair, and events in that period have marched so rapidly on this continent, that we may look for many and strange phases of life within comparatively brief spaces of time.

Just about that period so dear to the hearts and memories of thousands of our loyal fellow-subjects there were some notable events transpiring in the mother country, that left their mark on the pages of English history. A revolution was in progress, which was happily accomplished without much blood letting.

The second sovereign of his name was prudently running away, having regard to the dictum that

"He who fights and runs away,
Lives to fight another day."

while his naughty son-in-law, the phlegmatic Dutchman, was knocking at the gates of Whitehall, and cutting out entertainment for the Young Britons of Canada, in this year of grace, 1893, and possibly for all time to come.

The Grande Monarque, who claimed the head lordship of the "few acres of snow" yclept "Canada" was too well occupied between his attentions to Madame de Maintenon, Madame de Montespan, etc., etc., together with an occasional "point" with the enemies of la Belle France, to have much leisure to devote to trans-Atlantic concerns, or allow the curls of his wig to be disturbed by the doings of "Messieurs les Sauvages" on this side of the ocean, and was inclined to leave them very much to their own devices, which were not always of the most harmless kind. Nevertheless, things were pretty lively on both sides of the border line that divided the domain of His Most Christian Majesty from the colonies of the British Crown.

Few seasons elapsed that the chroniclers were not able to report a goodly array of atrocities. The nimble tomahawk was indeed seldom buried, or permitted to remain inactive long enough to give the hapless settler breathing time ere it was again flashing around his head, and making "clearings" in the scattered homesteads of the two nations who divided the land between them, somewhat different from the part played by its modern congener, when the sturdy forester lets the sunlight in to the recesses of the woods.

It may be concluded that while the little hatchet of the Iroquois and other gentlemen of that ilk, was busy, scalps were plenty and in good demand: indeed they shared with the peltries the staple commerce of the country. Five and ten crowns each was not considered exorbitant for a decent Frenchman's scalp, and to do him justice, the subject of the great king, in his turn, put about as fair a value on the red man's of his Puritan foe; but as the thought of the skin was not so highly thought of, the warriors earned an honest penny by pawning off on the merchants in this interesting traffic, the goods of their own countrymen for the more profitable wares.

It is with these stirring times, and with some of the actors in this border warfare that this "lower true tale" has to do.

Well, we have said that the year was a remarkable one in both hemispheres for while the little man on the white horse was riding across the classic Boyer to add a new chapter to the history of England, and hasten the departure of his foolish father-in-law for foreign parts, events of a stirring character were progressing in this Dominion. Mr. Phips, (I beg his pardon, "Sir William" to better the condition of his five-and-twenty brothers and sisters, and more especially his own, assembled a number