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## SOCIAL REFORMS.

When Mr. Laurier was out here, we suppose for want of an active policy to which he dared not commit himself, even had such a thing been in any way considered by the party, he confined himself to a barren programme of negative criticism. The result was that he lost the opportunity which really existed to have done important service for his friends. He cannot now say, as was the reply of one of the former leaders of his party, "Wait till we come into power; it is not for the Opposition to block out the policy of the country." Headmilted that he had nothing to suggest. The gentleman in question had reason to remember that prior to the elections of 1872, his friends had had too much policy, and that was brought into judgment against them to their condemnation in 1878. Mr. Laurier did well to be careful; his finance minister, Sir Richard Cartwright, has well been termed the Knight of the Rueful Countenance and the Prophet of Blue Ruin, although, as was the case with his budget on one occasion, in 1874, it is not impossible for him to turn a corner quite as sharply as the next man, and therefore silence—or at least a measure of reticence—is a golden virtue. Mr. Laurier, however, could not be altogether silent; he admittedly looks forward to free trade, which, he says, is not as yet possible, still he worships that fetiche, and as one of its most devoted worshippers, is ready to make sacrifices to it in which the vast majority of the people of Canada cannot join him. For this reason, he is not a safe leader. He says in effect that we are governed by King Log; but he would bring King Stork to reign over us, only he is afraid to come out boldly with the truth. Then, as for that burning question, the Manitoba and North West schools, he is so much afraid of it and of the parties directly and indirectly interested that he has hesitated to decide upon a plan of action; and it is with him a case of *laissez faire* till something shall turn up. Mr. Laurier is developing into a first-class political "to-morrow," although he has everything to gain and but little,

if anything, to lose by coming down flat-footedly.

In contrast with Mr. Laurier, though he is cast in a much more massive political mould, we notice that Right Hon. Joseph Chamberlain, leader of the Liberal Unionist party of Great Britain, has not hesitated to come down with a definite policy. No one can charge him with having played fast and loose with that burning question—Home Rule; but in default of its settlement, he has boldly come out with a demand for social reforms, which he and many others have made up their minds must no longer be deferred, pending the passage of what appears for the present to be impassable legislation on the Irish question. His social reform measure looks to the furnishing of state aid to artisans for the purchase of homes of their own, and for the granting of old age pensions. When we look outside of the criminal and thriftless class to the large number of honest men and women, not alone in the Mother Country, but even among ourselves who, in the ordinary course of things, and through no fault of their own, are unable to live upon what they earn and in the event of whose death their families are plunged into dependence upon their neighbors and friends, if not as in England upon the rates, we shall see the wisdom of the two provisions in Mr. Chamberlain's programme which we have named. Better, far better, we say, to assist people to secure homes of their own while they are able to work and pay for them by the exercise of industry and frugality, than leave them when old and helpless to become the dependents of the Old Country Boards of Guardians or the occupants of the jails and refuges wherever they may happen to be. Better, too, to organize a pension fund to which they can contribute, however small an amount, when in their full health and strength, than have them standing at the street corners appealing for aid or the objects of the attentions of those charities whose mission is to relieve the poor whom under present conditions we have always with us. We say that in our opinion there would at an early day be effected a considerable saving in the public expenditures in this direction, while another effect would be to put an end to what in that event might be eventually called the crime of pauperism, for the sturdy independence of the people would come to regard, save under exceptional circumstances, those who were not self-supporting or provided for by their friends, as offenders against the laws and institutions of the country. This is a kind of politics that is far more beneficent than the wranglings among partizans and the disputations into which the discussions of

the most vitally important topics have the tendency to degenerate.

Then, Mr. Chamberlain's bill proposes to limit the hours of labor in shops and factories, to restrict pauper alien immigration and provide a new Employers' Liability Act. These are all objects of the most desirable description. The limitation of the hours of labor which has to be provided is not, however, the subject about which we hear so much among the blatant demagogues in these days. No man need give more than a fair day's labor for a fair day's pay, and no honest employer will expect more, the remedy, should a grievance exist, being in the hands of the men themselves, while few disputes, after recent experiences, will be allowed to go the length of extreme controversies without the assistance of some outside instrumentalities being invoked. But what is wanted is to put a stop to the system of white slavery that is known to exist in many cities under which certain descriptions of cheap clothing are put together, and cigars are manufactured, etc. Pauper alien labor must be restricted, and we question if our American neighbors are at all astray in the steps which they are so vigorously taking against alien—not to mention pauper—labor. We know in Victoria how much its introduction has disadvantaged our own fellow citizens. As for the liabilities of employers, let them be defined to the strict limit of justice and then let them be enforced without the slightest wavering.

Referring to Mr. Chamberlain's proposed reforms, there are two of them which occur to us as of singular appropriateness to the conditions of this Province. One is that of assisting people to establish themselves in their own homes, the other is that of making provision for old age pensions. It may be said that we are a young community and cannot possibly embark in such enterprises. Besides, there are some who will say that it is none of the business of the Province to deal with such matters; moreover, they will allege that our conditions are such that there is no necessity for making this departure. We have, it may be said, no pauperism among us, and there is no use in meeting the devil halfway. But there is a good old maxim that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, and the depression that has everywhere prevailed has been sufficient to show to Victorians and to British Columbians that there are people among us whose distance from want is only so great as a few days lack of work may determine. At present most of these are householders who pay rent to some one, and in one way or another contribute to the municipal, provincial and Dominion revenues. Some of them