

TRADE-UNIONISM AND UTOPIA.

WHAT is generally called "the social question," and now more particularly "the labor question," is in one sense no new thing. The various inequalities of men's lots in life, with which that question concerns itself, have always provided a subject for the moralist and the speculative philosopher. From the days of Plato downward, schemes have been suggesting themselves to some minds for lessening these inequalities or doing away with them. An attempt at realizing the Platonic polity was actually contemplated; while, without making too much of what is certainly ancient history—from the days of Wat Tyler, at all events—the ideas of social reformers have at intervals resulted in movements which, in one way or another, have aimed at solving practically the social or labor question. These schemes, these ideas, these theories, as allied with attempts at practice, have been growing in frequency for more than a hundred years. An increasing number of people have, during that period, been found to quarrel with existing social conditions, and seriously to believe that some fundamental change in them is producible.

Now this belief in each case has involved two things—some conception of an improved social state to be aimed at, and some conception of the means by which it might be brought about. And these conceptions, during the past hundred years, have shared with much else this common characteristic: they have not only varied, but they have also progressed; and in form, method, and intention, whatever may be their real value, they have tended to become more and more scientific. The earlier modern Utopias were vague and sentimental; they were sketches of an ideal structure, rather than architectural drawings of one. And the means by which they were to be realized were even vaguer; there was either to be some miraculous outburst of universal love, or an outburst, equally miraculous, of universal violence.

All the devils in man were either to be cast out or else to be called out; and in some unexplained way, by their absence or by their action, the world was to be turned, after a week or two, into a perfect kingdom of Heaven. Gradually, however, the reformers changed their method. Instead of merely observing the evils of the world, describing them, and declaiming at them, they began to seek for a scientific explanation of their origin. They began, in fact, to copy the frigid political economists. Thus it has come about that a school or party, whose earlier intellectual leaders were either mad dreamers or equally mad agitators, is at last presenting itself to us, on its theoretical side, as a serious and scientific school of economic thinkers, who, however bitterly opposed to the apologists of the existing order, are prepared to antagonize them on their own ground and to fight them with their own weapons.

When, however, we turn from the social reformers as theorists, and consider their ideas or counsels as men of action, we find that their progress has been far less rapid. In analyzing the evils they desire to remove, in proving that they are removable, and in advocating their removal, they have learned to talk and to think like other men of science; but their ideas as to how the result in question is to be accomplished have remained, till very lately, as unscientific as they ever were. Let any one compare the work of Karl Marx on "Capital" with the writings of the earlier Utopians, and he will realize how great, as an intellectual movement, has been the progress of the cause I speak of; but many, probably most, of the students of Karl Marx have had no clearer ideas than had the students of Cabet or of Rousseau, as to how the intellectual movement is to be made a practical one. They have had dreams of universal upheavals, of universal catastrophes, which somehow would do their business for them. They have thought to re-fashion society as Aaron maintained he had fashioned the idol for the Israelites. He cast gold and silver into the fire, "and there came out this calf." The reformers, till yesterday, thought they could do the same, though they had hardly decided whether the fire into which they would cast society should be that of hate or that of love. And hence the idea of any new solution of "the social question" has been till

quite recently, for all sensible people, either a laughing stock or a terror; a thing to be passed over or a thing to be stamped out; not a thing to be weighed dispassionately and to be dealt with on its merits.

But during the past few years, and especially during the past twelve months, the situation has changed in a very remarkable way. The growth of trade-unionism, and the international character which it has assumed, have been putting the practical side of social reform before us in an entirely new light, and have provided it suddenly, for the first time, with a policy which admits of discussion on the part of sensible people. And this policy does more than admit of discussion. Wonderful to relate, it demands discussion. Despite the failures which, in its more ambitious attempts, trade-unionism may have met with, the mere fact that such attempts have been made in the way they have been made, is enough to suggest that they may be more successful in the future. They all point to the possibility of one and the same thing—a federation of labor over the whole civilized world. This, at all events, as a practical end to aim at, is fast taking the place, among the aspirants after social change, of plots, risings, massacres, and explosions either of dynamite or of love; and whether the end will ever be realized or not, it will be at all events not idle to inquire what we may hope or fear as the result of it if it should be realized.

Let us suppose, then, the federation of labor to be carried to the utmost extent of which theoretically it is capable. Let us suppose all the working classes over the entire civilized world to be so grouped in unions, the unions to be so connected, the interests of all of them to be thought by themselves so identical, the organization and discipline of the whole to be so complete, and the influence of the whole over the various governments to be such, that all laborers form a single corporate body. How would labor, in that case, stand related to capital? How would the laborers stand related to the employers of labor? If the answer to this question is what our latest revolutionaries expect, unionism thus developed would accomplish all their dreams. By an irresistible, but bloodless, and perhaps gradual, process, capital would pass away from the hands of the capital-

ists, the employers of labor would no longer be employers, and all wealth would, in a measurable time, be redistributed. The way in which it is thought that this change would accomplish itself is obvious. If all laborers should be members of a universal union, undivided in counsel and completely organized in action, any employer who should offend that union would be instantly left without any laborers to employ. In other words, labor would be in a position to dictate terms to capital, instead of capital dictating terms to labor. Nor would the case be mended if all the employers of the world, as well as the laborers, should be organized. Indeed, to understand the hypothetical situation fully, we must suppose such to be the case; and the ultimate factors in the social struggle would thus be a universal strike opposed to a universal lock-out. Now, although in a struggle which is partial, and which lasts but a short time, capital may, in power of endurance, have the advantage over labor, it may easily be argued that if the struggle should become universal, labor would tend to have the advantage over capital. For capital without labor is not only powerless and useless, but unless it is used by labor it rapidly wastes away; whereas labor, even by itself, would at least produce something, and might in time provide itself with new capital. In addition to this, we must remember that while the capitalists would be few, the laborers would be many; and physical force, though it might never be actually appealed to, would give its weight to labor, silently supporting it in the background. Making, then, the assumption, for argument's sake, that labor can ever universalize and perfect its organization, the time must arrive when, at all events for the moment, capital and the possessors of capital will be altogether at its mercy. The capitalists will have before them only two courses—either to allow their capital to be used under such conditions and on such terms as the laborer may dictate, or not to allow it to be used at all. In this last case, it would benefit neither themselves nor others; and even though it might be handed over to nobody else, they themselves would be practically dispossessed of it. A man, for all practical purposes, is as completely expropriated if he is not allowed to use his money, as he is if his money is actually taken away from him. On the other hand, if the capital of

the world should be employed on terms dictated by labor, it is certain that such wages would be exacted as would leave to the capitalists no profit or interest. In this case, therefore, just as much as in the other, they would virtually be expropriated; their whole wealth would be withdrawn from them. And this, indeed, is the precise situation which English ship-owners have seen actually menacing them. If they should employ their capital on the terms demanded by their men, no profits would be left them; and they themselves, as they have distinctly told the public, would be no worse off if they should suspend their business altogether. Now, in an isolated case like this, such a suspension might be possible. A single body of employers might, in the last resort, be able for a time to keep their capital idle; but it is practically certain that the same thing could not be done with the whole capital of the world, in opposition to the whole of the laborers. The capital would continue to be employed, but it would be employed on the laborers' terms. The capitalists might not technically be robbed of their property, but they would have no share in its control or in its revenue; and though nominally they would have lost nothing, in reality they would have lost everything. And this brings us to two all-important questions: Could such a situation be brought about? And if it could be brought about, could it last? Or, in other words, would labor be able to keep what, in this case, for the moment, it would inevitably win? To both these questions the answer will be, No; for reasons some of which may be said to lie on the surface, while others have a tendency to be always sinking beneath it.

To begin, then, we must admit that the recent developments of trade-unionism have been surprising in the last degree, and vividly suggest the kind of result we have been considering, though they do not promise or portend it. They force on the imagination a picture of that result, but they do not offer to the judgment any indications that it is possible to realize it. On the contrary, if we consider them dispassionately, they do the precise opposite. In the first place, the following facts must become apparent to us. The wider the attempted scope of the union or federation that we speak of, the more difficult will become the task of

uniting the various sections to be comprised in it, and the greater will be the antagonism of interests between these sections. Until all the climates and soils of the world shall offer equal advantages to the laborer, there never can be a community of interest between the laborers of all countries; and as the laborers become owners of the soils that they occupy, the diversity of interests will be more and more apparent. It has often afforded matter for useless wonder to philosophers, that the various peoples should consent to supply soldiers to fight and die for the ambition and aggrandizement of their rulers. It is a fact, however, that the various peoples have done this; and if they have fought and died for the advantage of others, we can hardly doubt that they would do the same for the advantage of themselves. The laborers of different countries, in fact, are natural allies only so long as they are in the presence of what they think to be a common foe—capital; and if once that foe should be removed or crippled, they would find bitterer foes in one another than they ever found in it.

These difficulties, however, I only mention in passing. I not only do not purpose to dwell on them, but for argument's sake I will suppose that they do not exist, and will proceed to others, which, though less apparent, are far deeper and far better worth discussing. Let us suppose, then, that the first great step has been accomplished, and that, despite the difficulty of organizing vast masses and of harmonizing discordant interests, all the laborers of the world are united in one corporate body and are actually, in the way already described, confronting the capitalists and the employers. Now, would the fact that the laborers had advanced thus far afford any proof that they would be able to advance so much farther as to make any permanent use of the partial advantage they had gained? It would certainly, at first sight, seem that the answer to this question must be, Yes. "Here," it would be argued, "is labor led by its own leaders. With no instruction, with no dictation from above, it has shown itself capable of organizing and directing itself. What doubt can there be that the leaders who have brought it thus far will be competent to bring it one step farther, and teach it how to appropriate the fruit that is already in its hands? If labor can

organize itself in this marvelous way to resist capital, who can doubt that it can organize itself to employ capital?" There we have in a few words the argument which presents itself to our latest prophets of labor, and which they present, with not unnatural triumph, to alarmed or sanguine hearers. It is an argument, however, vitiated by a fallacy which seems commonly to escape not only those who use it, but those who would give anything to refute it. What we are asked to consider is how certain men have succeeded in organizing labor, and what a formidable thing they have made of it. But in reality what these leaders have done has been something quite different. They have organized laboring men, but they have not organized labor. On the contrary, they have organized idleness—abstention from labor. It is impossible to over-estimate the importance of this distinction. The whole ostensible object of the leaders of the labor movement is to secure for labor the wealth which, according to these leaders, labor produces. But the amount of wealth which labor produces, or, in other words, the amount of the prize for the possession of which labor is contending, depends on the skill with which the labor of the laborers is organized, not on the skill with which the idleness of the laborers is organized. Their organized idleness is no doubt a valuable weapon, but it is valuable for militant purposes only, not for productive purposes. It may assist them to seize on the instruments of production, but it does not tend to give them any skill in using these, any more than the ability to rob a man of a fiddle tends of itself to turn a burglar into a musician. Thus the ability of the laborers to organize a universal strike might show that they are able to take all the wealth of the employers from them, but it would not indicate any ability whatever to transfer any fraction of this wealth to themselves. Thus far the productivity of labor has depended on the skill of the employers in commanding it and directing it. If the employers are to be ousted, and if labor is to maintain its present productivity and not to sink into a hopeless and helpless chaos, men with similar powers of command and similar skill must be found to take their place; and the question is, Would such men be forthcoming?

Let us consider exactly what this question involves. It is

not a question of whether or not the laborers have, among their millions, men of sufficient natural capacity. No doubt they have; and if all the present employers of labor should die childless during the course of the next few years, we may be certain enough that, under the present condition of things, laborers would be found who would gradually take their places and supply us with a new generation of employers, capitalists, and millionaires. The question is not whether such men would be forthcoming under present conditions, but whether they could be induced to come forward under entirely changed conditions. Hitherto the only inducements worth taking account of, that have ever incited men to direct and to organize labor for productive purposes, have been the hope and the possibility of securing for themselves whatever special product their ability has been instrumental in producing. But the essential idea of all the leaders of the labor movement has been to take away these inducements, or to make them as small as possible. It is obvious, therefore, that the ultimate success of this movement must depend on whether society could, under such conditions, still secure the kind of ability spoken of.

Now, one of the most important morals that have been drawn from the growing successes of unionism, has been that this kind of ability could be so secured. We are urged to look at the characters and careers of the men by whom labor is now being organized. It is pointed out to us that the motives which actuate these men are not personal gain and the accumulation of capital. They give to the common cause exceptional ability, and yet they neither claim nor expect any exceptional reward. The ability required to organize a great strike is not less than the ability required to organize a great industry; and if facts prove that, without any interested expectations, men can be got to do the one, what doubt, it is asked, can there be that we shall get men, on the same condition, to do the other? The fallacy of this argument is what I am here endeavoring to emphasize. On the surface it is eminently plausible; but the more it is examined, the more clearly we shall see not only that it does not prove what it is supposed to prove, but that its entire tendency is to prove the exact opposite.

In the first place, to repeat what I have said already, the leaders of the labor movement have not, in that capacity, been leaders of labor. That, however, is by no means the whole of the case. A more important feature of it is that no man who has been successful as a leader of labor has ever been found among the leaders of the labor movement. To put the matter in a plainer and more brutal way, no man who has been successful in increasing production has ever been found among those who are working to redistribute the product; and conversely, not one of the men who are working to redistribute the product has ever shown himself capable of assisting in increasing production. To this broad rule there may perhaps be some isolated exceptions, but as a broad rule it is indubitably true. Outside of a circle of foolish and half-sincere sentimentalists, where do we find any of the opponents of capital among men who have inherited it? Or—and this is a yet more pertinent question—where do we find any of the opponents of capital among men who have the ability to make it? And by the ability to make it we mean a very simple thing—we mean the ability to direct labor to advantage. The leaders of the labor movement have, as a class, been men absolutely without that quality; and without wishing to call in question the sincerity of their philanthropy, the fact remains that their desire to divide the wealth of the world among their fellows has had for its basis an utter incapacity to add anything to that wealth themselves.

And now let us deal with the fact, which I have no wish to question, that these men have been so far disinterested that they have, in spite of their exceptional efforts, not aimed at securing any exceptional pecuniary reward. That may be perfectly true; but though there may have been no pecuniary reward to stimulate them, there have been rewards of a kind equally selfish. There has been in many cases the satisfaction of a grudge, owed to society because they have not been able to succeed in it; and, above all, there has been the intoxication of power and notoriety suddenly placed within the reach of men who would otherwise live and fret in uneventful, helpless obscurity. There is no greater mistake than to imagine that men whose sole road to success lies in attacking wealth, are for that reason less disinterested,

less greedy of personal distinction, than the men whose road to success lies in acquiring or creating wealth. Indeed, a study of human nature in general, and of modern industrial history in particular, proves that in a society where there are no special rewards, there will be no exercise of any special ability. It proves, further, that between the ability and the reward there is always some connection in kind, and that, while anger or ambition or enthusiasm may lead a man to secure many things for his fellow-men, one reward only will lead him to produce wealth for them, and that is the possession of a large proportion of the wealth produced. The recent progress of industrial events, therefore, has no tendency to throw any doubt on the belief that the possession of private property, the enjoyment of interest, and the dictatorship—however limited—exercised over labor by the men to whom the profits will go, or by their representatives, form essential conditions not only of the production of wealth, but of the prosperity of labor itself.

We must not, however, blind ourselves to the other side. History is teaching us that laborers may be organized in two ways: first, as a producing body; secondly, as a resisting or self-protecting body. In the latter capacity they may be able to govern themselves, but in the first they must be always governed by others. The conclusion is that in the very nature of things it is impossible for either party to gain a complete victory. It is obvious that the capitalist cannot exist without the laborer. A deeper and more dispassionate study of human nature will in time convince even our most ardent social reformers that the laborer will never progress except with the progress of the capitalist. The names of things and the forms of things may change; but the essential facts of the case, being facts of human nature, will always remain the same, till human nature is metamorphosed.

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RAILWAY PASSENGER RATES.

THE average amount received by railroads in the United States for carrying a passenger one mile, is two and one sixth cents. In England it is a little less; probably about two cents. In France it is not quite a cent and a half; in Belgium and in Germany about a cent and a quarter. In Austria, before the recent changes in the tariff, it was a little more than a cent and a half; at present it is probably only about a cent. In British India it is less than six tenths of a cent. These are the actual amounts received. The results have been obtained, wherever possible, by dividing the total passenger earnings by the number of miles traveled by passengers. In England, where statistics of passenger mileage are not given, we are compelled to rely on estimates. The nominal rates of fare are almost always higher than the average of actual receipts, owing to excursion and commutation business. The difference between actual and nominal rates is usually from 10 to 20 per cent. Why are passenger rates so much lower in continental Europe than in England or in America? Can we hope for a change in this respect, and for a reduction in the cost of passenger travel to the standard of France and Germany? What conditions must be fulfilled to make such a reduction possible? These are questions which are being asked everywhere, especially since the recent reductions in Austria and Hungary have attracted more wide-spread attention to the subject. Let us try to answer them in order.

The first obvious reason for the difference in fares is a difference in the kind of service rendered. Continental Europe pays two thirds as much as America or England and gets an inferior article. India pays still less and gets still less. The difference is seen both in quality and in quantity of service. In India express trains rarely run at a greater speed than 25 miles an hour. In Germany and France their speed ranges from 25 to 35 miles