

Labour Notes.

A SPECIAL committee appointed by Congress to make inquiries has brought out rather a peculiar condition of things in connection with the coal industry of the United States. It appears that the railroad companies are to a large extent owners of the coal-mines, and, in cases where they are not so, are in alliance with coal-producing companies. Output and price are regulated at monthly informal meetings of representatives of these companies—and independent owners are reduced to submission by a refusal to provide them with cars, or an exorbitant charge for freight. The ordinary rules of demand and supply are thus set aside, and the public are placed at the mercy of an interested "combine." The committee submits proposals for a much-needed remedy of the evil.

Recent official statistics show a great increase of the silk industry in the United States. Within the past ten years the production has been more than doubled, the value of the manufacture for 1890 being 69,000,000 dols, as against 34,000,000 dols in 1880. The quality of the goods is said to be quite on a par with that of those manufactured in the silk producing countries of Europe—while their cost to American buyers is much less.

A further reduction in wages is reported from the Carnegie works at Homestead. The non-union men who replaced the strikers are complaining that they have been unfairly treated.

Mr Carroll D. Wright, National Labour Commissioner, recently delivered a lecture in New York, in which he entered a plea in favour of machinery. He said that the wealth producers of the world had constantly endeavoured, and with success, to better their position. An important factor in their success had been machinery:—"The condition of the people during the hand-labour period changed but slightly. Wherever the hand-worker was found he occupied the lowest position in the social scale, and his work was done at home amid squalid surroundings. Knowledge of the truth concerning hand labour can only cause the workers of to-day to thank God that machines have superseded hand labour. The age of machinery has brought general prosperity." Professor Huxley, the lecturer went on to say, had calculated that the working men of England alone can now produce in six months, as much as, one hundred years ago, it would have taken all those of the world a year to produce. "Machinery," "means the survival of the greatest number in the greatest comfort. Wages have doubled since the day of hand work, and while prices of some necessities have increased, most have decreased. Had the hand-workers of the Pyramids built the Brooklyn Bridge they would have earned in money of the same value two cents a day against the 2 50 dols. averaged by the men who worked on the structure."

Hugh O'Donnell, the leader of the strikers at Homestead, who was charged with the murder of a Pinkerton detective killed in the fight, has been acquitted. The acquittal has been hailed by the labouring population with complete satisfaction.

The Labour Exchange, founded in Paris last May, is proving a marked success. It has done much to raise the importance of the workingman who is now looked upon by the members of all political parties as a person with whom they must reckon. The building is a very fine one, and contains a large number of offices appropriated to the use of the trade unionists of the city. It affords a convenient and comfortable place of meeting for representatives of the various labour organisations of both sexes, who assemble there every day for the transaction of business. Among the duties undertaken is that of fixing the rate of wages for the principal cities of the country. A list of the important works going on there is published weekly, with the number of men employed on them. On the whole, the institution is serving its purpose well, and already bids fair to be enlarged and extended.

The London *Spectator* quotes from a Polish statistician the working days of various nations:—The inhabitants of Central Russia labour fewest days in the year—namely, 267. Then comes Canada with 270; followed by Scotland with 275; England 275; Portugal 283; Russian Poland 288; Spain 290; Australia and the Russian Baltic provinces 295; Italy 298; Bavaria, Belgium, Brazil and Luxemburg, 300; Saxony, France, Finland, Wurtemberg, Switzerland, Denmark and Norway 302; Sweden 304; Prussia and Ireland 305; United States 306; Holland 308; and Hungary 312.

A Labour Department has been inaugurated in connection with the English Board of Trade. Mr Gifford, the well known statistician, is at its head, and its principal object will be to furnish the labouring population of the country with information tending to make it easier

for them to obtain employment. To this end the department will have correspondents in the principal towns. It will also publish a newspaper, the "Labour Gazette," to appear at first monthly. The beginning is a good one, and no doubt will lead to still better developments.

In this matter of a labour department, as also in others, the United States had taken the lead. Their chief department was established in 1885. There are now in all, in the States, twenty-seven bureaux of labour statistics. Their function, according to Mr E. B. L. Gould, statistical expert of the department, is mainly educative. "It is, therefore, a difficult matter to estimate exactly the amount of influence they have exercised," he says. "A good deal of useful legislation," he adds, "stands as the direct result of their efforts. In Massachusetts the establishment of a board of arbitration and conciliation, and laws relating to factory inspection, the length of the working day, the employment of children, employers' liability, and accidents to labour; in Rhode Island the weekly payment of wages and fire-escape laws; in Maine the ballot reform and 'labour day' enactments; in New York the creation of a board of arbitration for industrial disputes; in New Jersey the encouragement given to building associations; in Michigan the ten-hour law, the prohibition of child labour, adequate provision against accidents, and a Factory Inspection Act; in Kansas the establishment of industrial arbitration tribunals, payment of wages in cash, increased protection to miners, modification of the mechanics' lien law, and an enactment favouring the creation of co-operative societies; in Connecticut and other States many useful measures in which labour is more or less directly interested owe, if not their initiative, at least their passage, to the active endorsement of their respective bureaux."

In Switzerland (writes a correspondent of the *Times*), owing to a movement set on foot by the Grütli (a labour association representing over 300 local sections and 15,000 members in all parts of Switzerland), there was brought into existence in 1886 the office of Swiss Workmen's Secretary, who was to work under the supreme control of a federation representing all Swiss workmen's associations in proportion to their numerical strength, the Federal Council also being represented at the sittings. The Federal Council gave a subvention of £200 for the first year towards the Secretary's expenses; but since then a second secretary has been appointed, and the subvention increased to £800 a year. The principal duties which the secretary has to perform are to make inquiries respecting the condition of the Swiss working class, to study questions of social economy, and draw up reports on these subjects and to report annually on the administration of his office. Among the subjects dealt with in the reports already issued are a general and obligatory insurance against accidents and illnesses, supplemented by statistics of labour accidents, and the working of institutions at Paris for the protection of the working classes.

The people (says the Rev J. Conway in the *Catholic World*) want justice rather than charity. It is not in accordance with the laws of Divine or of human honesty to rob men of their wages and deal it out in charity. Godliness and greed do not go well together. Piety and penuriousness, even when the latter does not reach the aggravated form of being unjust, are looked upon as a contemptible combination. Establishing art galleries, founding public libraries, building colleges, or even churches, cannot be accepted as compensations for injustice done to our workmen. Wealth must recognise its obligations. Its owners are stewards in a certain sense and not irresponsible masters. No matter how wealthy men may be, they have no right to claim a monopoly of the earth so as to frustrate the Divine intention, which is that the earth is for all men. If they own the possessions of the human family, they must look to its needs, just as a father is bound to provide for the members of his household.

Mr David Dudley Field, in the *North American Review* for January, condemns the late disorders as not only an evil in themselves but also as injurious to the working classes. He goes on to consider means for the reconciliation of capital and labour. Compulsory arbitration he rejects. The agreement, he says, is of the nature of a sale. The employer buys the labour and the labourer sells it. For the State to fix the price would be despotism. Mr Field proposes that the workman be admitted to an interest in the product. The State cannot compel the employer to take the workman into partnership, but it may impose conditions on the franchises granted to corporations. "Suppose a factory to be chartered with a capital of a million of dollars, divided into two hundred thousand shares of five dollars each, three-fifths of them to be payable in cash or property, as at present, and two-fifths in prospective labour; the former to be invested in land, buildings, machinery, and whatever else may be necessary for such an undertaking and the latter to be reserved for such workmen as may be taken into the concern; the skilled workmen to be allowed wages, say, for illustration, at the highest rates of the market, four dollars a day or more, and the unskilled two dollars a day, and each one to be registered

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