

lives, moves, and has its being chiefly for Melbourne. To Melbourne ninety-eight hundredths of its sea-borne traffic come. To Melbourne all its railway lines converge. They spread out like the rays of a geometrical spider's web for 3228 miles over the State. They are the feeding-tubes through which Mallee wheat, Western District sheep and cattle, Kororo potatoes, Goulburn Valley wine, Portland and Lakes Entrance fish, and butter, milk, eggs, fruit, and vegetables from a hundred various places, are poured into the mouth of the metropolis. And they carry back many of the necessities and comforts and luxuries of life to the inland population. The reader can thus see how much Victoria and its metropolis depend alike for the means of subsistence on a fairly efficient railway service.

Thus far the Victorian Government has been unable to carry out even the greatly reduced and straggling railway service which it proposed, and is still hoping and striving, to establish. In the inland towns and the country districts the position is one of much alarm, and in many places famine prices already rule. As for Melbourne: it is partially cut off from its customary supplies. Meat has soared to double prices. Fish is not procurable. The price of other food stuffs and the cost of living have gone up with a bound. People 'cannot live, like woodcocks, upon suction.' And unless a way out of the difficulty soon comes—either by a cessation of the strike or by the organisation of an effective railway service—Melbourne may find itself in a position which would recall the early weeks of the siege of Paris. The stoppage of railway traffic in Victoria has already resulted in serious reduction of the work done in warehouses, shops, and factories, and the consequent dismissal of great numbers of hands goes to swell the troubles and increase the dangers of a situation that is as distressful as it is unique. A suspension of labor that affects so wide an area, such pressing needs, and such an all-embracing circle of interests cannot, however, endure for long. Even at this early stage of the strike the situation is intolerable. The outlook is a little more hopeful as we write, and we trust that an amicable solution of the difficulty will be arrived at without needless bitterness or delay.

Victoria's difficulty throws into strong relief the security which our Conciliation and Arbitration laws have given to the trade and industry in New Zealand. The price we pay for immunity from strikes is no more than a State insurance against the calamities that have befallen our Australian neighbors from time to time, and which are in varying degrees chronic in the United States. There is a growing disposition to avoid strikes by the sane and common-sense resort of conciliation. In this respect New Zealand easily leads the way. France, Belgium, and Germany have legal Conciliation Boards (known in the two first-mentioned countries as 'Conseils de Prud' hommes.') They are courts composed of employers and workers, and they effect cheap, prompt, and amicable settlements of disputes respecting past contracts. But they have not the power that our Conciliation Boards and Arbitration Courts legally possess of determining contentions regarding future wages and terms of employment. England and America have not advanced even this little way on the road to industrial peace. Both have, here and there, Boards of Conciliation and Arbitration. In England these have been able to arrange wages disputes in various manufactures, and even to draw up 'sliding scales' for the complicated details of the Nottingham hosiery trade and for the fluctuating iron industries of the North. They are valuable, as showing to an incredulous age how conciliation and arbitration can allay social antagonism between capital and labor. But without the power of legal compulsion at their back they are precarious in their operation and likely to be abandoned at any moment.

Belgium was once aptly described as the cock-pit of Europe. And England and America are, and long have been, the cock-pits of the forms of industrial war known as strikes and lock-outs. In England, from 1890 to 1895, these averaged 878 a year and the hands involved counted 392,000. In the one year 1897 there were 864 strikes. They affected 230,300 operatives, and involved a loss of labor amounting to 10,000,000 days—being an average of 43

days for each person on strike. The great dispute in the British engineering trades in 1897-1898 directly affected 47,500 men for an average of 144 days each, thus causing a loss of some 6,850,000 days' labor. Some idea of the dislocation of industry and distress indirectly caused by this memorable strike may be gained from the fact that (according to the Board of Trade Report) 'the percentage of unemployed members in trade unions of the ship-building group rose from 4.4 per cent. in July to 14.1 per cent. in December, 1897. In the matter of strikes, as in many other big things, America can easily claim the world's record. 'In 14 years, ending 1894,' says MULHALL, 'there were 14, 390 strikes [in the United States], involving 3,714,000 operatives, and causing a loss of £59,300,000 sterling. In 44 per cent. of strikes the operatives succeeded, at a loss of £39,500,000; the masters' loss was £19,800,000. The loss to each workman on strike averaged £10 5s; each strike cost £1400 to masters.' For seven and a half years—from January 1, 1887 to the end of June, 1894—the four cities of New York, Chicago, Pittsburg, and Philadelphia had an annual average of 104,000 workers on strike, and the yearly loss amounted to £1,840,000. The great coal-miners' strike of 1897 involved about 157,000 men. The New England cotton strike of the following year affected 125,000 operatives. One hundred and twelve thousand men laid down their tools three years ago when the anthracite coal miners went out on strike in Pennsylvania. And last year's great coal war in the United States threw over 300,000 men out of employment and created keen distress and embarrassment in every part of the Union. The poet has described the war of lethal weapons as 'toil and trouble.' But non-toil is a weapon capable of producing trouble as widespread as that of war, and not many degrees less intense. The remarkable struggle in Victoria will, we trust, have the result of giving a fresh and practical impetus to conciliatory methods in labor disputes and lead to the speedy adoption of those legal enactments which have made New Zealand a land without strikes.

Notes

The Stoke Orphanage

We beg to direct attention to the appeal for the Stoke Orphanage which appears elsewhere in this issue. The institute has during the past few years passed through two trying experiences: the persecution which shortened the days of its founder, and the recent fire which destroyed the buildings wherein, for almost a generation, such arduous and meritorious work was done to advance the temporal and eternal interests of the many Catholic orphans and waifs and strays from every part of New Zealand that were entrusted to its care. The needs of the homeless boys are urgent, and this is especially a case in which he that gives promptly gives twice.

Wanted, an 'Organiser.'

When Alice cried because of the sheer loneliness of Looking-glass Land, the Queen wrung her own hands in despair. 'Oh, don't go on like that!' she cried. 'Consider what a great girl you are. Consider what a long way you've come to-day. Consider what o'clock it is. Consider anything, only don't cry!' The Fraternity of the Saffron Sash are very busy just now patching their grief with proverbs and 'considerations.' They have lost their prop, their staff, their chief organiser—the poor, hapless Margaret L. Shepherd. Her campaign of 'organising work' on behalf of the lodges was to have opened in New South Wales during the present month. It has now to be abandoned, greatly to the regret of the brethren. But they need not despair. There are, perhaps, in his Majesty's prisons in these countries a few non-Catholic criminals of as deep a dye as the unhappy adventuress who, we hope, repented in time and went to the Better Land. They—or some of them—would, no doubt, when released, be willing to turn a dishonest penny by 'exposing Rome' at so much per 'expose.' And it seems undemocratic, unpatriotic, and unfair to import English and American criminals to do this work, while there are, among our prison population and 'soiled doves' of the goal-bird order, imposters sufficiently versatile and foul-mouthed to pose as 'ex-nuns' for a share in the profits at 'front seats one shilling, back seats sixpence.'