

5301

## THE "FIGHT IN THE DARK".

The Herald say:

"Mr. George is quite right in asserting that the strike is a "a fight in the dark," and that is the very reason why we have deplored it. We don't believe that a lasting good can be accomplished for any cause by "a fight in the dark." When a laborer doesn't know whom to hit he had better wait until he can pick out his man. Don't you think so yourself, Mr. George?"

Not always. When to wait is to be crushed, any action may sometimes be better than inaction, and even "a fight in the dark," if it leads to the striking of a light, may be better than stagnation.

But, to drop metaphor, I have neglected no opportunity of telling workingmen that what they had to fight, in order to accomplish anything real and lasting, was not their immediate employers, but the false and wrongful system, which, by depriving the masses of men of their natural opportunities for the employment of their labor compelled them to struggle with one another for the chance to work. I have constantly endeavored in every way I could to throw light into the darkness; to induce men to revert to first principles, and think of these questions in a large way; to convince them that the evils which they feel are not due to the greed or wickedness of individuals, but are the result of social maladjustments, for which the whole community is responsible, and which can only be righted by general action.

Now what is the Herald doing?

For a generation the Herald has occupied the position of the leading newspaper of America. It has an enormous circulation, commands the services of men of the very first ability, and its repute for journalistic enterprise is world-wide. The Herald is, moreover, the fairest of all the great American dailies. It is above the temptation of participation in jobs, and, more than all, its policy is beyond the control of its advertisers. But what is it doing to prevent "the fight in the dark" by enlightening the multitude who daily read it? Merely giving place to a few communications, mostly inconsequential; merely telling workingmen that they ought not to strike until they clearly see the real party to hit. This is futile. When men are hard pressed by bitter evils they must push in some direction, and the only way to prevent them from pushing in the wrong direction is to show them the right.

The Herald does not contend that the condition of American workingmen is such as they ought to be contented with, or can be contented with. What, then, let me ask the Herald, is the cause of this wide-spread discontent, and what is its cure?

To both these questions there must be specific answers. I assert that the cause is the shutting out of labor from those natural materials and opportunities without which labor is helpless, and that the remedy is in the restoration to labor of access to these materials and opportunities, by breaking up the monopolization of land and securing to all equal rights in the bounty of their Creator.

If I am right let the Herald say so. If I am wrong let it point out how and why. Or, if it can make a better diagnosis of the disease and prescribe a better remedy, let it do so. At any rate, let it no longer ignore the fact there are many of us - and our num-

bers are rapidly increasing - who see clearly that the monopoly of land is the true cause of the evils which it acknowledges to exist, and that in the concentration of taxes on land values lies the adequate and peaceful remedy.

-----

For this the Herald does quietly ignore. In another of its breezy articles it says:

"Show the community how the laboring class can be helped, Mr. George, and every man in New York, from the bank president to the car driver, will load you with thanks. But for heaven's sake don't talk in this nineteenth century about "a fight in the dark." It is unworthy of an honest or an earnest or a clear headed thinker.

"Hold your mass meetings, workingmen, and tell us, article by article, what will permanently benefit you, and the whole press of the country will back you up."

This is refreshing. I have told the community how the laboring class can be helped, and the car drivers have loaded me with thanks. But as for the bank presidents - I am sure that the Herald will agree that their treatment of me has been marked by what must seem to it ingratitude of the deepest dye!

So, the workingmen of New York have held their mass meetings, and did in the Clarendon hall platform of September last declare what would permanently benefit them. Since then their brethren of Boston, Philadelphia, Cincinnati and other cities have adopted the same platform. Will the Herald tell them that the whole press of the country is backing them up?

-----

It is folly to tell workmen that they ought not to strike because strikes can only injure them. Not only are there many workmen who have nothing to lose, but it is a matter of fact that strikes and the fear of strikes have secured to large bodies of them considerable increase of wages, considerable reduction in working hours, much mitigation of the petty tyrannies that can be practised with impunity where one man holds in his hands control of the livelihood of another, and have largely promoted the growth of fraternal feeling in the various trades. The greater number of strikes fail; but even the strike that fails, though its immediate object is lost, generally leaves employers indisposed for another such contest, and makes them more cautious of provoking fresh difficulties. The whole power of the trades union for good or for evil rests on the strike; without that as a last resort it could neither hold its own members together, nor treat with employers.

-----

Nor is it so strange as some pretend that one body of workmen without any special grievance of their own should strike to help another. The immediate purpose of a strike is to inflict damage upon opposing employers, and there are many cases in which employers who could defy their own workmen can be seriously hurt by pressure exerted upon them through the medium of other employers with whom they have business relations. To be sure, third parties, who have no direct interest in the quarrel, suffer, and frequently the great-

est sufferers are the men who thus go out to help their fellows. But if the strike be thus made more costly, its results, in causing employers to hesitate before engaging in another such contest, are likely to be more decisive and more effective. And men may strike, as men fight, in a quarrel not originally their own, either as a matter of sentiment or from the more selfish consideration that they thus make alliances that will render them stronger in any quarrels of their own; or, as is generally the case, from the mingling of both motives.

And when men are willing to stop work and submit to loss and suffering in the effort to aid their fellows, does it not show heroism of the same kind as that which prompts men to risk their lives in battle for those weaker than themselves? Those who condemn the strike of the freight-handlers in aid of coal-trimmers must, if they be logical and assume the standpoint of workingmen, condemn the aid which the French gave to the struggling American republic.

-----

As for the morality of strikes it is precisely that of any other application of coercive force. They who really hold that "whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also;" and "if any man will take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also;" they who hold that the command, "Thou shalt not kill," applies as well to the man in uniform as to the man in plain clothes, might with some consistency condemn strikes; but they alone. If there are any such people, they are not to be found in the editorial rooms of our great dailies or the pulpits of our fashionable churches.

On the contrary, the loudest denouncers of strikes - those who declare, that they ought to be put down by force if necessary - are to be found among the class who have grown rich by extortion backed by force.

-----

A favorite platitude, now finding wide expression in the American press, is that although men have an unquestioned right to stop work themselves they have no right to coerce others into stopping work, and the disposition of workmen to do this when they are on strike is denounced as not merely wicked in the highest degree, but as un-American.

This is nonsense. When our forefathers struck against England, they not merely struck themselves, but compelled every one else they could to join them, first by "moral suasion," which amounted to ostracism, and then by such measures as tarring and feathering; harrying and shooting; and when they boycotted the East India company's tea they were not content with simply refusing to drink it themselves, but threw it into the sea, so that nobody else could drink it.

A strike can only amount to anything in so far as it is coercive, and whatever workmen may say they must of necessity feel that is only by exerting some form of pressure upon those disposed to go to work that a strike can accomplish anything. For the most part, so far, this pressure has been a moral one, and the penalty of being held in contempt as "scabs" has been sufficient to induce men to undergo actual suffering rather than assert what the denouncers of strikes declare to be the unalienable right of every American citizen. But admonitions are not wanting that in these

industrial wars - for they are nothing else - there is a growing disposition to resort to more violent measures. And whether right or wrong the growth of this disposition is natural.

-----

"Every one has a right to work or not as he please, but no one has a right to prevent any one else from going to." That is true. But is it a truth that applies only to strikers?

The fact is, that it is because we ignore this truth that trades unions are made necessary and strikes come. The fact is, that the very men who are now calling so loudly for the maintenance, by the bayonet if necessary, of the liberty to work are the most strenuous supporters of a system which denies the liberty to work.

How is it that a land, like ours, abounding in unused natural resources, is filled with unemployed men? Is it not because of the power which our laws give to some men to prevent other men from going to work?

Let the striking laborers of New York city accept the dictum that no man has a right to prevent another from going to work. Let them turn from attempts to compel their former employers to employ them, and where shall they go to employ themselves? Where can they go that they will not find some one, backed by law and force, who forbids them to work? There is plenty of unused land in the upper part of the city. Let them go upon this land and attempt to employ their labor in building houses. How long will it be before they are warned off? Let them cross the East river, the North river or the Harlem. They will find everywhere unused fields on which, without interference with any man, they might employ their

labor in making a living for themselves and all dependent on them. But they will not find a field, though they tramp for a thousand miles, on which some one has not the legal right to prevent their going to work. What is left them to do but beg for the wages of some employer? And if, to prevent being crushed by competition of others like themselves, they strive, even by force, to keep others from going to work, is theirs the blame?

The very worst the strikers do or think of doing is to prevent others from going to work, in order that they themselves may work - may earn a scanty living by hard toil. But what are the dogs-in-the-manger doing who are holding unused city lots, farm lands, mines and forests- the natural opportunities, in short, that nature offers to labor?

They are preventing other people from working, not that they may work themselves, but that they may live in idleness on what those who want to work are compelled to pay them for the privilege of going to work. If the freight handlers and coal trimmers and other laborers were to form societies which should by force prevent any one from going to work without their permission; were to charge the highest price for the privilege of going to work which the necessities of others could compel them to pay, and were then to sit down and live in idleness on this blackmail, they would only be doing what organized society permits others to do to them.

-----

It seems hopeless to expect the classes who imagine they profit by this primary wrong to open their eyes to the real cause of these labor troubles, but when the workingmen do so, the day of their



emancipation is at hand. Every one of these strikes ought to show them where the real trouble lies. In the great strikes that have been going on in New York, as in all great strikes, the real difficulty the strikers have had to contend with is the influx of unemployed labor. The men with whom the coal companies and the steamship companies have supplied the places of the strikers in New York and vicinity are men drawn from the country by the prospect of work, or men who, after vainly tramping the country have crowded into the city. If there was a brisk demand for labor in the country there would be no such surplus of labor, anxious for work on any terms, on which employers could draw; and that there is not such a demand for labor is due simply to the fact that laborers are prevented by the monopoly of natural opportunities from employing themselves.

Here is the point on which the efforts of labor should be concentrated. The platform of the united labor party of New York strikes the key note. In the ballot the workingmen have in their hands the power of so adjusting the taxes as to make the dogs-in-the-manger let go their hold. When this is done there will be no necessity for strikes, and competition, instead of crushing the laborer, will secure to him the fair reward of his toil.

Signed: Henry George.  
Feb. 12, 1887