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# A FAIR DAY'S WAGES FOR A FAIR DAY'S WORK.[1]

THE phrase which I have chosen as the title of this lecture was perhaps more commonly heard a few years since than it is now. I do not know why there should be any decline in its use, and I believe I am right in thinking that it is not less regarded than it was formerly.[2] Almost every one—employer as well as labourer—will accept it as an admirable expression of what should be the principle of the recompense of labour. It appears to be so just, so forcible, and so true. It contains within itself an admission that there must be something like identity of value between what is given and what is received. It expresses an equation of exchanges. If a workman is to have his fair day's wages, he must render his fair day's work. With the sense of equality thus satisfied, it may be expected that contentment will be secured on both sides. The capitalist cannot complain when he has his money's worth for his money; the labourer cannot complain when he has his labour's worth for his labour. It would appear that a simple formula would solve difficulties and contentions that have perplexed and irritated many classes, and have sometimes threatened to disturb the social equilibrium of nations. If this position can be sustained, the phrase does indeed deserve all the honour that has ever been attributed to it. Let us examine the meaning of the sentence a little more closely, that we may see whether it is entitled to the authority and respect claimed to be due to it.

A fair day's wages for a fair day's work. In the first place, what is meant by a fair day's wages? I venture to think it does not mean any definite sum of money, whether 2*s.* or 2*s.* 6*d.*, or 3*s.*, or 4*s.*, or 5*s.*, or any other sum. A little reflection will compel us to admit that it varies locally. If we cross-examined an unskilled workman here in a country town to find out from him what was his general idea of a fair day's wages, we should get at a result different from what we should obtain by a similar process in London; and that again would be different from the answer in New York, which again would be different from the answer in San Francisco, or in Melbourne. Workmen of the same race, and doing work of much the same character, would give all kinds of answers, varying from 2*s.* to 10*s.*, to the same question, "What do you consider a fair day's wages for

(1) A lecture delivered at the Mechanics' Institute, Plymouth, January, 1879.

(2) It has been advanced, since the delivery of this lecture, by Sir Charles Mills, M.P., at an agricultural dinner in Kent, as a solution of the controversy between farmers and labourers in that county and in Sussex.

your work?" If we extended our inquiries to labourers of other races, we should get a new series of replies. The fair day's wage of the French handicraftsman is not the same as that of an Englishman in the same trade; and so throughout Europe; while, if we proceed to Asia, we shall meet with much more startling varieties. A Hindoo labourer in Calcutta or Bombay will not look for more than sixpence a day; and the rate of payment expected by a Chinese is not higher. You know that one of the social difficulties of some of our Australian colonies—a difficulty that has assumed more alarming proportions in California and the Pacific States of America—is that the Chinese is willing to work for less than half the wages the man of European origin expects to receive for the same labour. Let us carry our thoughts in yet another direction. Instead of surveying the earth's surface to note the diverse rates of wages prevailing in diverse countries, we may fasten our attention upon our own, and reverse the course of time to note the diverse rates of wages prevailing in successive generations. In the course of such a review we find labourers receiving in England less than a coolie now receives in India, and yet accepting the payment as a fair day's wages.

A fair day's wages evidently means different things in different times, and in different countries; and, indeed, it means different things at the same time and in the same place, in reference to different races. But the phrase is useless unless we can find some one idea underlying it, in spite of all these variations. It does not denote a fixed sum of money, but it may perhaps indicate some fixed quantity of money's worth. How will this suggestion stand examination? Do the variations in wages correspond to variations in prices, so that, although the money received changes, the amount of goods and commodities that can be bought for the money, or—to use a wide expression—the quantity of conveniences that can be secured by it, remains unchanged? There are many circumstances that appear to support this hypothesis. We know that when the prices of commodities rise, a demand is not unfrequently made on the part of workmen that their wages should also be raised. It is argued that they cannot live at the former rate of wages, and a rise in the rate is represented as the natural, if not as the necessary, consequence of a rise in the prices of things. I do not here stop to examine into the cogency of this reasoning; we are at present engaged in an attempt to ascertain what is the meaning men have in their minds when they talk of a fair day's wages, and we are being drawn to the conclusion that fair wages somehow depend upon and vary with prices. The same inference is suggested by the historical inquiry into what has been considered fair wages. We have learnt that wages have varied in the same place in successive generations, and a little examination will show that prices have also varied in much the same

direction, and possibly in approximately the same ratio. We may not be able to trace the connection in respect of any particular article, but if we take the sum of articles that are consumed by workmen we shall find that, as a rule, wages have gone up when their prices have risen, and have gone down as their prices have fallen. We may, perhaps, think that a fair day's wages means such a sum of money as would supply the ordinary and customary wants of a workman from day to day, according to the standard of comfort prevalent among them; and hence the demand for a fair day's wages is a demand that a workman shall have enough to live upon decently —a demand which, of course, covers enough to enable him to marry in due time, to set up a household, and to bring up his children about him.

Whatever we may think in other respects of this explanation of the phrase, we must admit that it helps to dispose of an anomaly we have had to notice. We saw that in the same place, *e.g.* in San Francisco or in Bombay, a fair day's wages meant widely different sums for the Chinese or Indian labourer and the labourer of European origin; but if we are to understand by these words, enough to satisfy the ordinary and customary wants of a workman, we light upon an explanation of the discrepancy. An Englishman's wants differ from those of a Chinese, and if wages are to correspond to wants, his wages must differ from those of a Chinese. At the same time it must occur to some of you that the meaning we have thus been led to attach to the phrase under discussion, refers rather to an ideal of what we might like the order of society to be, than to any conception of justice as regulating the recompense of labour. Can it be that an Englishman is entitled to look for more because he wants more, irrespective of the work he gives in exchange for his wages?

This difficulty may, perhaps, disappear when we come to examine the significance of the other part of the proverb, a fair day's work; but it presses itself on our attention in a way not to be overlooked. We are using a very vague standard of reference when we think of a fair day's wages as enough to content a man. It may be true that no single individual, no particular person, is under contemplation, so that we may dismiss the infinite varieties of wants of separate men, and dwell only on what the conscience and reason of a class recognise as the proper and sufficient satisfaction of their necessities or desires; but wants vary from class to class, from locality to locality, and from nation to nation. Can wages be regulated by wishes, however careful we are to ascertain what are the average wishes of a group of workmen? The suggestion is almost whimsical. Something more rigid must surely determine the law of payment of labourers. We may, indeed, expect that the pretension to make

wages correspond to traditional or customary wants, will be repudiated as soon as it is put before any one in a clear and definite shape. It will be at once protested that the conception of what may be called the legitimate wants of a class of workmen is indissolubly connected with the thought of the kind of work on which they are engaged. Thus a fair day's wages for a carter differs from that of an unskilled agricultural labourer, and the wages of an artisan differ from the wages of both. Those who use the phrase on which we are animadverting, and who cling to it, will say that, in their own minds, they always associate wages with work, and though they may mean by a fair day's wages for any particular kind of workman such an amount of money as shall satisfy his reasonable wants, yet his wants and demands must be regulated by the character of the work he performs. We have thus got hold of a new notion, that different classes of work deserve different rates of wages; or, at least, that men are justified in looking for different wages according to the kind of work that occupies them. We must, therefore, turn to the other branch of our text, to see what lies hidden under the words "fair day's work."

What do we understand by that fair day's work, the performance of which entitles the workman to look for sufficient wages to keep him according to some traditional or customary standard of satisfaction? The first answer to be given to this question is that the work must at least involve the idea of labour and toil. Unless a man spends himself in some way in doing something, the common sense of the world will not recognise in him any title to recompense. I need scarcely refer you to the text approved by the conscience of all, that "If any would not work, neither should he eat." There must be labour in the day's work; but is the presence of labour all that is necessary? Certainly not. A man may spend his day in carrying a heap of stones, one by one, from one side of a road to another; but unless he did this at the desire of some person, or could at least show that the transfer of the heap was of some advantage to some one, it would be in vain to seek any wages for the labour. The work must have an element of utility or convenience in it; it must afford some kind of satisfaction, there must be a *quid pro quo*, or the demand for a recompense will be peremptorily rejected. Suppose we incorporate the notion of utility in the work that is done, what follows? Can we say that if a man honestly spends his time and toil in doing something that is wanted, in satisfying some desire that exists, in performing a service that is commanded—all of which are periphrases to describe a fair day's work—he is entitled to look for an amount of wage that shall be adequate to satisfy his wants according to the standard of desire of the workmen of his class, which is understood to be the meaning of a fair day's wages? Is the quality of utility in the work performed sufficient to sustain this demand?

The theory is that when the result of the labour expended is useful, and the labour itself honestly occupies a day, the workman is entitled to look for the means of sustenance for a day. Let me suggest an example, to put this theory to the test. I wish to send a message from Plymouth to Tavistock, and I meet with a man willing to take it. He sets out in the morning, walks the whole way, delivers my message, obtains an answer, and brings it back again. It has been a day's work, and there has been a certain consumption of boot leather, in addition to the consumption of the animal tissues involved in a day's work. Having expressly engaged the messenger to do this job, I must of course pay him in full; and if three hundred years ago some gentleman of Plymouth had wished to send to a kinsman at Tavistock some story about the doings of Spain, there would have been no regular way of communicating it save by special messenger. At that time a day's wages—whatever they may then have been—would have been asked and given, with perhaps some special additional reward of trust and confidence. Carrying two or three or even a dozen messages would, however, have involved no appreciable addition of labour, and as in the process of years a man undertook the regular business of a carrier between Plymouth and Tavistock, the recompense of the service of carrying a single message would decline. Suppose just after the carrier began his business, some one who had before employed a special messenger had again occasion to send a letter to Tavistock, and the man he had employed asked for the job. We can easily imagine the conversation that would have ensued. "You can have the job, but you must not expect me to pay more than the carrier charges." "Well, sir, I don't see why you won't pay me as you used to do. It is a good day's work, and you want to have the letter carried. Live and let live, master. 'A fair day's wages for a fair day's work' is an honest old proverb." This reasoning would scarcely have prevailed; and if the employer was desirous of pursuing the conversation he might have replied, "It is a day's work, if you carry it alone; but Thomas carries a dozen to and fro, and has thus contrived to make the carrying of one only the twelfth part of a day's work, and he gets his fair day's wages according to your proverb." The labour of doing the work in the old way would be the same as ever, but a more economical way of doing it has been discovered, and the recompense is reduced so as to correspond with the labour of the new way. We know as a matter of fact that the machinery for carrying messages has become so developed among us, that the Postmaster-General will now carry a letter from Plymouth to John O'Groat's House for a penny, and a newspaper for a halfpenny, and that he makes a very large profit on the business. To use a common expression, when very cheap goods are offered us, you may not know how it is done, but that it is done is beyond all controversy.

I have dwelt upon this illustration, which may appear to some of you so trivial and ridiculous as almost to require an apology, because it brings out with great clearness many considerations that deserve attention. In it we see the process by which the price of a particular service has been cheapened; under ordinary circumstances we may know that a particular commodity is offered to us at a lower price than we have been accustomed to pay, but we do not know how the reduction in price has been brought about, and we are sometimes inclined to suspect that it has been effected at the cost of much suffering to the producer, because we are assured with perfect honesty, by the producer we do know, that he could not furnish the commodity at the reduced price and live. Our suspicion would have been unfounded in the particular case, and I submit that the presumption is that it is generally unfounded. As a rule men intend to go on living, and if any particular article is offered to us, and continuously offered at a given price, the fair conclusion is that all who have been engaged in its production have managed to live, and do manage to live out of what has been got for it. If others complain that to them the price is not remunerative, the inference is that their processes are wasteful, or that the natural circumstances amid which they labour are comparatively unfriendly, and the moral of their experience is that unless they can reform their modes of manufacture, they should transfer their energies into some other channel.

But it may be urged that they, at all events, may, or even must, be exposed to trials or privations in consequence of being thus underbid. Our simple example furnishes the answer to this argument. The man who got an occasional job as a private carrier will lose his opportunities of employment, but those who gave him work will be left with a large proportion of what they were accustomed to give him, and they will be able to disburse this in exchange for the satisfaction of new wants, which will arise as soon as the old are satisfied. The destruction of one chance occupation must be the means of the creation of others. Let me, however, put the matter before you in this broad and simple way: the fact which has caused the change under contemplation, and causes similar changes, is an instance of a diminution of the labour necessary to supply our wants. Such a process can never be other than a benefit to the whole human family. Reducing the labour of living makes it easier for men to live, and it follows that either the number of persons alive will be increased, or the comfort and ease of the existing race will be augmented. It may be that both results will be partially produced; but, one way or other, the well-being of the people must be improved by a diminution in the cost of producing the articles which contribute to their well-being.

This leads us to another thought. One of the commonest of popular opinions, especially among workmen, is that it is a bene-

ficial thing to make work—beneficial at least to workmen, if not to the whole of the community. But investigation compels us to condemn this as an error. We benefit the mass of workmen by reducing the amount of work necessary for the accomplishment of any result. All our daily labour is devoted to the end of satisfying our wants—not merely the wants of the rich, but the wants of all; and if we discover the means of satisfying these wants without labour or with less labour the benefit extends to all. If any remain unconvinced, let me submit for their consideration an application of the mode of argument which logicians call *Reductio ad absurdum*. Suppose Heaven rained upon us daily twopenny loaves in sufficient quantity to meet our daily consumption. Should we welcome this shower as a blessing or reject it as an injury? The bakers would be ruined by it. The millers would find their wheels stopped. The growers of wheat would have no sale for their harvest. Landowners would be forced to abate their rents. Yet it is plain that the nation would be the better for it; and that we should be again better, and always better, if one by one our wants were supplied without labour, and every industry in turn destroyed. Think out this. If you once master it, you will never be in danger of being led away by the miserable nonsense to which we are now condemned to listen on many sides. What if twopenny loaves were rained upon us? The mass of commodities—eatables, drinkables, house-accommodation, clothing, literature, &c. &c.—which we now give to bakers, millers, farmers, landowners, for the loaves their associated industries and sacrifices produce, would still be forthcoming, and at the disposition of those who at present exchange them for twopenny loaves. For the moment there would be a disorganization of industry; but bakers and their allies would, at once, get their own bread without labour, and there would be the means open to them and to their children to obtain all the other commodities they have been in the habit of receiving, if they could offer to the rest of the community the gratification of some desire not before evoked, still less satisfied. There is no difference in principle between this imaginary and miraculous dispensation of the labour required to produce a desired result, and that diminution of labour which is continually brought about by industrial improvements. It is not work we want, but the results of work. Producers are not producers for the sake of production: they produce that they may consume; the means exist for the end, and are not in themselves any object of affection or desire.

Before we dismiss this illustration let me carry it on another stage. I have supposed the case of a man offering to carry letters or messages between Plymouth and Tavistock, but there is a limit to the number of letters any one man can carry. We can conceive the possibility of two or three men being thus engaged as letter-carriers between the two towns. If one of them being of a careful, and fore-

looking disposition, put by a little of what he got daily, and employed his off-time until he had provided some poor place of shelter and some small store of provender for a pony from the moor, he might largely multiply his carrying power by using such a beast of burden, and thus open up another way of reducing the remuneration required to recompense the carrier. We need not retrace the reasoning we have pursued, to be assured that this new revolution is beneficial to the whole community. The labour of producing a particular result has been again diminished, and this time by the introduction into use of what in technical language we call capital. The charge of carrying a letter will be reduced. What will it be? The man must receive for all the letters and packages he may carry (1) enough to keep himself—"a fair day's wages;" (2) enough to keep his pony; (3) enough to lay by to enable him to get another pony when the present is past work—"wear and tear;" and (4) something to reward him for his past prudence and forethought, and to tempt him to maintain it. This last item is obviously quite indeterminate. At first he might secure for himself nearly all the advantage of the new economy of work he had introduced, *i.e.* he might charge some rate only just below what had been charged before by hand carriers; but the advantage of the use of a pony being demonstrated, others would imitate him, and the competition between these pony-owning capitalists would bring down this item of remuneration to some tolerably recognised standard. In this way some normal rate of remuneration for carrying a letter would be reached, and it would certainly be much less than the day's wages any man would look for. If the primitive carrier still urged that carrying a single letter was a fair day's work, and deserved a fair day's wages, he would receive no attention; and, indeed, have we not found that the popular phrase with which we started is perfectly worthless as a principle for the apportionment of wages? It is clear that neither in the quantity of work spent, nor in the result attained, can we find any constant measure of the wages the workman will command. We may even begin to suspect that the wages actually received and paid do constitute the "fair wages" of the labourer, although we may be confronted with numberless instances of special workmen being unable to live on such wages, while doing their work in the way known to them and their fathers before them. It may be suggested as a hypothesis, to be sustained by further proof, that the working of the social machine, although we cannot trace its operations from beginning to end, does automatically bring about this result, that the market wages for any piece of work correspond to the labour necessary to produce it in the shortest way and under the best circumstances accessible to general use.

We have found our rule worthless as a means of determining wages, but the inquiry is raised whether wages may not naturally

conform to it in an open market. We cannot assign any unalterable limits to a fair day's wages or a fair day's work; but there is reason to suspect that, as a rule, fair work is fairly paid for, even when wages appear to be starvation wages. It is worth while to take a new departure to test this proposition. Let me ask you to exert your imagination to suppose that Devonshire is an island, and we will assume at first that it is isolated from the rest of the world. The area thus presented to our thoughts is big enough to sustain a fair population, even under such conditions, and yet small enough for us to disembarrass ourselves of much of the complexity that prevents our appreciating the working of the machinery of modern life. The inhabitants of the county must, of course, be fed, clothed, and housed, but all the materials of food, of clothing, and of housing must be got within the county. Fix your attention on those who would be engaged in producing the materials of food. Some would raise corn, others would rear cattle; out of what they got a certain portion would be consumed as the means of sustenance of their own lives, but all the rest would be distributed through many channels among the rest of the people, and would be the sustenance of their lives. Would it be given to them gratuitously? Certainly not. It would all pass in exchange for services rendered or commodities transferred to these food-producers, and we must conclude that equality is the governing principle of the exchanges thus accomplished. If the food-producer succeeded for a time in getting for what he gave, something which required more labour to produce than what he was giving, so that he had the better of the bargain, there would be generated a movement from that more arduous to his more facile labours redressing the balance; and if he had the worse of the bargain, the movement would be in the contrary direction. Underlying all the oscillations of exchanges would be found this fundamental principle—the equivalence of the results of the expenditure of equal quantities of raw labour; and by this phrase "raw labour," is meant labour that has in it no special element of natural dexterity or acquired craft. Our first rough conception of our island-county is that of a community of farmers, millers, bakers, butchers, spinners, weavers, tailors, masons, miners, metal-workers, woodmen, craftsmen of all kinds, to which may be at least added, medicine men and ministers of religion, giving and receiving in endless exchanges and cross-exchanges of services, so that all that each class produces gets distributed among all the rest; and in this distribution we seem to detect one guiding principle, viz. the equivalence of the results of equal quantities of raw labour. I think we may catch some other principles at work. We had a glimpse just now of the notion of capital. A man works with the assistance of some machine—in the case we had under consideration it was that animate machine, a pony—greatly increasing the efficiency of his

work, and this machine is the investment of something he saved, when he might have spent it. We saw that he must get, in addition to the direct remuneration of his own labour, sufficient to replace the wear and tear of the machine he employs, and something that shall reward his saving and induce him to maintain it. The rate of this something must depend, we saw, on competition, *i.e.* on the force of the propensity in the community to save and invest savings in production; and we can tell experimentally what is the measure of this in any generation, though it may vary from generation to generation.

We may thus realise a second principle underlying exchanges. There must be reckoned the raw labour expended, the wear and tear of the capital used, the reward of the capitalist for having saved the capital used. Some of you may wish to raise at once the question, What will happen when the workman is not also the capitalist? Suppose one man lends the machine and the other uses it, how will it be ascertained what is due to the raw labour and what to the use of capital in the joint product? We have already seen reason to believe that the measure of the reward of the capitalist depends upon the competition between capitalists; a single capitalist might engross for himself nearly all the advantage that labour *plus* capital has over unassisted labour, but this is a prize that tempts many competitors until the rate is brought down to what satisfies the saving propensity of the time. A little reflection will, moreover, lead us to think that the recompense of raw labour and the reward of the capitalist are, except during brief periods of transition, independent of one another.[1] At any moment a controversy might arise between a labourer and a capitalist, and one or the other might win; but the permanent reward of each must satisfy each, and the conditions of exchange of the commodity they have joined in producing will be modified until the labourer gets the current reward of raw labour, and the capitalist the current reward of capital. We have seen how the latter is determined. We know, too, that according to our first principle, the reward of raw labour tends to be the same for all applications of it. Can we find any measure of what it will be? By taking up again the train of previous thoughts we may perhaps hit upon it. The tendency towards an equalisation of the reward of raw labour is secured by the shifting of its application from one occupation to another; but in our island-

(1) It may be said that the proposition in the text ought to be qualified. The reward of the capitalist (interest) is a function of the prudence shown in saving capital. The recompense of raw labour (wages) is a function of the prudence that restrains the increase of population. The prudential ideas of members of the same society cannot be absolutely disconnected, even in different spheres of prudential action and among different social classes. This is theoretically true, but practically the statement in the text is accurate. The morality of forethought in the way of saving is universally approved, if not universally observed. The morality of forethought in restraint of population is rarely admitted and often condemned.

county there will be one occupation possessing a peculiarity not to be overlooked—I mean the occupation of farming. All lands are not equally good for farming; the produce of the same labour is very different when applied to particular plots, and if, as must be supposed, a man lives on what he gets out of the very worst, he must have a surplus over in cultivating the better qualities. Outside the worst that is cultivated will be a breadth of waste land, not turned to agricultural purposes, and the oscillation of employment in respect of land will alternately trench upon and increase this waste breadth. The measure then of the reward of what I have called raw labour, is to be found in the ratio of produce to labour in the very worst land at any moment under cultivation; other equivalent measures might indeed be suggested, *e.g.* the result of labour on the poorest form of stream, or other elementary fashion of mining, that supports a man; but the best and simplest measure is that I have suggested. One most important truth can be at once deduced from it. The whole population of the county must live on the food got out of the land, and the breadth of land under cultivation must depend upon the magnitude of the population to be sustained. But the reward of labour depends on the breadth under cultivation, and it follows that the reward of labour depends upon the multiplication of the population. We have some warrant, then, for saying that the mass of the community determine for themselves the standard of the existence they lead. Individuals are not indeed always conscious of the laws illustrated by their action; and even when they are conscious of them they may feel that they are personally incapable of modifying their course; but the moral sense of the community grows out of the moral sense of individuals, and the excuse of ignorance disappears when ignorance itself is removed. Another deduction must be pressed home. If it be true that the reward of raw labour—that is to say, the wages of the unskilled workman—is measured by its produce when applied to the worst lands under cultivation, we are brought around to a proposition tentatively advanced before, that the market wages of any piece of work correspond to the labour producing it in the shortest way under the best circumstances accessible to general use, or, in other words, that in a free society the labourer gets what he earns and earns what he gets. The measuring base of a day's wages is what a day's work brings on the roughest land that will yield support to a man; and work is paid for according to the fraction of a day occupied in producing its result in the best (most economical) way it can generally be produced.

You will have observed that I have spoken of raw or unskilled labour, but you will expect to hear something of the wages of skilled labour. Also, when searching out the measuring base of wages, we had to recognise the fact that land is of all degrees of fertility; and that those who had got hold of the best obtained an excess from it

over the cultivator of inferior lands; an excess which often goes to a separate proprietor under the name of rent. Does this appropriation affect the quantity of wages of the poorest? Let us recall our speculations on the origin of capital. We were led to believe that the inventor of capital was a benefactor to those about him, for he reduced the labour necessary to produce desired results, and he thus opened a way to diminish the toil of common life or to increase its quantity, or both these consequences might be partially produced. The facility of obtaining sustenance may be followed by an increase in the community until the old conditions of toil are reproduced, but these conditions cannot be charged against the capitalist: he is not to blame for them; all that he has done is to enable more people to come into existence under them. Now, suppose a man, or a set of men, to be born with exceptional faculties for producing certain results. Their introduction into the community will have the same kind of effect as the introduction of capital; they are a species of labour-saving machines; but here, again, we may suppose an increase of population to follow, so as to bring into occupation below this set of specially gifted workers other workers not so endowed. Competition for the labour of the best will give them exceptional wages; and, indeed, when their labour is directed to the production of commodities, it will be seen materially that they earn exceptional wages, for as they make more things or better things they will get more or better things. But their wages are not got at the expense of their poorer brethren; they have helped to make the existence of these poorer brethren possible, and the *status* of the latter is determined, as we have seen, by the relation of their numbers to the means of existence.

Having thus traced the operation of capital and of special natural gifts, I need not say much of specially educated workmen. It is probable that they have some natural aptitude for the occupations they follow, and they are certainly examples of the investment of capital in the improvement of labour-saving machines. It will follow in their case also that their differentiated wages have grown out of the progress of society, which follows upon the multiplication of capital and the development of skill in the work of life. They are not better paid at the expense of others, whose position is determined on the principles we have already explained. And so also with regard to rent. We have conceived of cultivation extending over a certain breadth of our island-county, and reaching a certain margin where it ceases to support existence; but we can carry back our thoughts, stage by stage, until the cultivated breadth dwindles into a nucleus of what we suppose it to have become. We can indeed see this progress of extended cultivation in activity in the United States and our own colonies, but the distinguishing feature of the phenomenon thus presented to us is that the best knowledge of a highly developed agriculture is brought into immediate contact with virgin

continents. In picturing the extension of cultivation in an isolated Devonshire, we must conceive of a slow development of agriculture accompanying a slow extension of the breadth of cultivated land; and we may imagine each extension as immediately preceding or immediately succeeding a stage of agricultural improvement. I believe that as a matter of history the order has been in England sometimes one way and sometimes the other, but that on the whole the extension of the area of cultivation has oftener followed than preceded agricultural improvements. For my present purpose it is unnecessary to solve this question. Suppose an agricultural improvement to have been made, so that a larger produce is obtained from the same land with the same labour. The toil of the community will be lessened, and the facility of existence improved, but it will now be possible to obtain from the next quality of land hitherto uncultivated, as good an existence as before was obtained from the lowest quality under cultivation; and the result realised may be a larger number of people in the same condition as before, instead of the same number in better condition. If an extension of cultivation preceded agricultural development, the result would be a temporary degradation of condition to be followed by recovery. Whatever the order, the result obtained by those cultivating the newly annexed breadth, —which measures the wages of raw labour,—will not be less because better lands have been previously under cultivation, and a surplus could be obtained from them as compared with the new lands. Rent, in fact, does not diminish the wages of agricultural labour. The existence of rent does not make these wages low; but it may be said that rent exists because these wages are low, the rate of wages being determined, as we have seen, by the relation of the numbers of the people to the land out of which its food is got. Even if the rent which thus arises in the progress of a community were reserved for the separate use of the community, and applied in aid of common wants, this could not of itself arrest the development of population —indeed, it might tend to stimulate it until a still lower margin was reached, the cultivation of which yielded just enough to satisfy the wants which still pressed upon the individual labourer. We return again to the hypothesis, or, as we may now call it, the theorem, that in a free society what a man gets he earns, and what he earns he gets. The wages he receives are—speaking generally—the exact equivalent of the work he performs.

These conclusions have been deduced from an analysis of the development of an imaginary isolated Devon. Can we claim them to be true of the larger social organization of which we are a part? It will be observed that my reasoning has been independent of the limitation of the area we have had under our contemplation. It is plainly convenient to fasten our attention upon a small district. We relieve ourselves from much needless embarrassment occasioned by

the inevitable difficulty of tracing out far-reaching operations, but the principles of the organization of industry and commerce are the same whether the area of its development is large or small. If we reconsider the arguments I have pursued, we shall see that there is only one condition presupposed in them which is affected by an extension of the area of our thoughts. I do not wish to underrate the importance of that condition. It will be seen that it is of very great importance, and yet the modification of it that we may be compelled to recognise does not appear to me to detract from the practical accuracy and value of our conclusions. I have assumed the possibility of the free movement of labour from field to field and from market to market, if not on the part of the labourers actually at work at any moment, yet at least on the part of the generation always coming on to succeed them. This is not strictly true anywhere, and it is very far from being true between labourers of different countries and different races. Differences of language, of law, of religion, of morality, and of manners are very effectual hindrances to the free migration of workmen from one field of labour to another, and they do to some extent, though to a much less extent, impede the interchange of commodities. Even in the same country differences of manners are found to be a great bar to the free competition of labourers. What must be the effect of these admissions on our previous conclusions? They do not invalidate them at all as explanations of the industrial phenomena found within any area where that degree of free movement prevails which we have presupposed. The diversity of condition of the lowest labouring class in districts which are so far isolated that migration from one to the other is practically impeded, is a confirmation of my conclusions. I have said that the economic circumstances of the unskilled labourer depend upon the force of prudence among the labouring classes in keeping down the ratio of population to the means of existence; and if we find districts with comparatively little migration of labour between them, and with different standards of prudence prevailing among their inhabitants, we must infer that there will be corresponding differences of circumstances among their labourers. Conversely, different circumstances among labourers suggest different standards of prudence. Within each circle, the arguments I have used are illustrated in their simplest form, and to those within each circle the moral deduced from those arguments may be addressed. Hence a main explanation of the differences of condition of labourers in different nations. Hence the sufficient and ultimate explanation of the differences of condition of labourers in divisions of the same nation imperfectly fused together. If we pass from Ireland to South-western England, from the South-west to the Midlands, from the Midlands to Northumbria and the Lowlands, we shift from standard to standard of prudence, and from standard to standard of

material circumstances.[1] There is of course movement between all these districts, but the movement of raw labour is relatively small. The miner who can emigrate from Cornwall to Australia or to Nevada, enters with difficulty into the mining population of Durham or Cumberland. The agricultural labourer whom Canon Girdlestone has drafted from Holberton, does not find it easy to adapt himself to the ways of a similar class in the North. And through all the movement that prevails, however much it is, we discern the same principles at work that we have traced; and we are led to the same conclusions—that the conditions of labourers are determined by themselves, that the wages of the workman are the exact equivalent of the work he performs.

If the obstacles which practically permit or retard the free movement of labour do not detract from the value and importance of the principles we have explained, neither does the existence of foreign trade, which we excluded from our conception of an isolated Devon. I hope it is not necessary to enter into any detailed proof of this, though I am strongly tempted to do so, especially when I have in view the strange revival, under the name of a cry for reciprocity, of the foolish theories that once prevailed among us supporting a protectionist policy. But I can only indicate an argument which I have, in principle, already used more than once. Suppose the industrial equilibrium of Devon is disturbed by the arrival of a stranger offering corn at a cheaper rate than it formerly commanded, in exchange for other commodities. The stranger offering corn would wish to take away some other commodity, a metal, work, or what not produced in Devon. He would give more corn for the same weight of metal. The wants of the community in respect of corn would be relieved by less labour, and though the area devoted to the production of corn would be diminished, the production of metal would be increased. The facility of living being increased, the same amount of life could be maintained with more ease, or a greater amount with the same ease. The argument is precisely the same as that which approves the introduction of capital and the invention of labour-saving machines. What is proved of one trade is true of two, three, or any number of successive importations, and in what we eat, what we drink, what we wear, and in the thousand articles of daily use, we must observe the displacement of some rude native commodity by some more convenient and more cheaply produced foreign commodity. We need never be afraid of the quantity of goods coming to us from

(1) The defensible side of the repugnance of the English labourer to the Irish immigrant is that it is a resistance to the introduction of a lower standard of prudence, threatening to debase the condition of all labourers. The same view may be advanced in defence of the opposition to the Chinese immigration in California and Australia, though it is, at the least, doubtful whether the cheaper sustenance of the Chinese labourer should not be attributed to higher progress in the prudential virtues, instead of to a cynical disregard of them.

abroad. They do not come for nothing. Their presence proves the existence of a trade profitable on both sides. Our anxiety must be excited when the quantities of imports and exports both fail, when foreigners are slack to offer us goods because they can get larger exchanges for them elsewhere, and we are forced to accept a dwindling return for what we produce. When that time comes, and I gave you last year reasons for believing that it may, we should only aggravate our trials if we attempted to restrict still further a commerce that was naturally drooping. If we are wise we shall accept with submission the painful experience, we shall recognise the fact that the physical conditions of our manufacturing supremacy are waning, and we shall look, with better sense than ever Canning had, to the new world to redress the balance of the old. Are we not agreed that the quantity of human life any portion of the earth's surface can bear is at all times definite, if not defined, and that the distinction of man from the brutes that perish is that his conduct is overruled by the knowledge of this truth?

Before I finish let me say a few words on the motives which have impelled me in writing this lecture. In the first place, I believe that the views it expresses are true. I do not claim that there is much novelty in them; I do not know that there is any. The form in which the thoughts are clothed may be mine, but the thoughts themselves belong to all the world. Lately, however, men have been heard to declare that these old theories are not true, and their declarations have been received with something like pleasure by not a few. It has not appeared to me that those who have thus come forward to repudiate the ascertained principles of economic science have exercised their patience so far as to study the proofs of the propositions they reject, nor have I found among them many traces of the genius that can dispense with labour. As for those who have caught up and echoed their sayings, I am afraid we must recognise the fact that many persons who are ignorant of many things are easily gratified by the suggestion that the teaching of authority does not deserve the authority it carries with it. The cynicism of superficial knowledge is one of the commonest of every-day facts. It must be admitted also that there is a widespread and almost instinctive repugnance to the reception of economic doctrine. It seems a simple matter to say that a boat cannot be overcrowded without danger of sinking, but is it not cruel to proclaim this truth when so many are desirous of getting on board? We must not be surprised if the self-evident proposition is branded as impious. Truth, however, is truth, and the only plausible argument I have seen advanced against the principles for which I have been contending is that economic relations do not exhaust the relations between man and man. This statement is perfectly sound, but it does not support the purpose for which it is adduced. We know that the health of the human body

is governed by fixed laws. We cannot always trace their operation, but some of them are well ascertained, and it is known that certain causes produce certain results of debility and disease. Benevolence steps in to try to mitigate the pain, to assuage the sufferings, and to arrest the progress of disease; but does this action of benevolence in any way invalidate the truth and authority of the laws of health which had been outraged? Human kindness will try to soften the lot of the unfortunate even when their ill-fortunes are the result of their own recklessness; the prudent will give of the fruit of their labour they have put by to the imprudent who spent all they received even before they received it; but the benevolence that comes to the assistance of an overcrowded population does not weaken the force of the fact that a population in becoming necessarily overcrowded ceases to be self-supporting. This kind of benevolence does no more at its best than try to mitigate evils that have been well developed; there is another and a better kind which would prevent them. I pass to a second motive for calling your attention to what I hold to be true doctrines. Last year I gave you reasons for apprehending a large migration of industrial energy from our own to other lands. I said then, and I repeat now, that I do not look upon the present depression as the beginning of a continuous alienation of trade. Commerce and manufactures will revive, and we may for a season be more prosperous than ever; but the revival will be checked again, and we must look for recurrent periods of depression. If this apprehension is sound, it is above all things necessary that all classes should be prepared for its realisation. There should be a widespread knowledge of the nature of the economic organization of the community, as well as of the causes producing industrial contraction and decline. If our manufacturing supremacy is to be taken from us; if industry after industry may be drawn within narrower limits until they disappear, what is to be the future of the children of the men who now find occupation and the means of existence in pursuing these industries? The only hope of escaping the conflict of classes lies in familiarising the minds of the people with true views of the conditions of social well-being—of the conditions that determine wages and regulate the development of the population. An early conviction that the population that can be sustained in a country at any time lies within a definite limit—a clear recognition of the truth that an able-bodied pauper, a workman in the wrong place, is an indication of an overgrowth—would save us from social conflicts that must otherwise be inevitable and fierce. We may see in Germany attempts to destroy by force the propagation of false views on social relations; but instead of a method always unsatisfactory, if not always unsuccessful, we should try to anticipate error by truth, and thus prevent false views from ever finding acceptance. And if the propositions I have endeavoured to elucidate are truths, and truths

very necessary to be insisted upon at the present time, there is yet another reason why I should try to put them prominently forwards. The doctrines they express are not popular: they cannot easily become popular. It is simpler and pleasanter to believe that our ill-fortunes are due to others, or to circumstances which we cannot modify and choose to call fate, than to be told that our condition is what we and our fellows make it. To preach personal or class responsibility is not a passport to favours; and there is, unfortunately, some reason to suspect that the natural indisposition of men to suggest disagreeable truths is increasing among us. When I look back forty years or thereabouts I seem to detect a contrast not to our advantage as compared with our fathers. In that generation, when mechanics' institutes like yours were first founded, and the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge was in the full energy of its early existence, men pursued their inquiries to the end, however ungrateful was the goal they reached. It may be true that there are more things in heaven and earth than were dreamt of in the philosophy of those days, but we shall not cure their incompleteness by attempting to forget what they taught. This is no place for entering upon party politics, and I shall rigidly avoid them, but I may point out to you a consequence of a very popular franchise, that it exposes public men to increasing temptations to give the go-by to unpopular truths. Liberal or Conservative, we cannot afford to say anything that may displease a large section of those whose support we court. We who are Liberals are perhaps under a greater temptation than our opponents to make things soft and pleasant so as to be agreeable to the popular taste. I speak of what I have felt myself, and this feeling has been a motive for choosing the subject on which I have addressed you. Soft words are worse than useless when they disguise facts they cannot change. We are deceived by them into entering upon courses of conduct that can only end in misery. The moral government of the world is as rigorous as its physical government. You might as well hope to build a house in disregard of the law of gravitation, as to secure social well-being in a community where the principle of population is treated as of no account. Without entering upon any argument that could raise a controversy, I may avow my own belief that much yet remains to be done to facilitate the improvement of the condition of the people by the reform of our laws, especially of the laws relating to land; but if all that could be suggested were accomplished, it would still remain with the people themselves to determine their own condition. The changes to which I refer would enable the quantity of existence in the kingdom to be increased, but its quality might be found unimproved after they had been made, just as it might be improved without their being made.

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