

THE EVENING NEWS.

Friday, October 1, 1893.

CO-OPERATION.

A Peculiar and Characteristic Article by Horace Greeley.

Whether those who work for wages are fairly and justly or meagerly and grudgingly recompensed, is a very broad question. The answer I would give is, that generally they are, but very often they are not. I am far enough from the wild assumption that the manual labor devoted to the construction of a house, factory, or railroad, is fairly entitled to receive all that is paid for such construction. I consider brain-work as essential and as justly entitled to recompense as hand-work; and, if a man who shovels earth on a road-bed fairly earns twenty-five cents per cubic yard by so doing, I hold that the inventor of a machine which would remove that earth at a cost of ten cents per cubic yard, is just as honestly entitled to the best price that anyone will pay him for his patent, though it be one million dollars—as the shoveler is to his twenty-five cents per yard. No considerable champion of hand-work will disparage the utility or grudge the market price of brain-work. Nor will he who means to earn and save somewhat next year yearn to despair him who did earn and save somewhat last year.

I have earned wages considerably, and paid wages to a still larger amount; and I do not complain that I was paid too little, or have had to pay too much. On the whole the wages system has treated me fairly, and I am bound to reciprocate. I do not suppose that system will be entirely superseded these many years, and perhaps it may never be. Yet I think co-operation an improvement on it—like the steamship on the sailing packet, the railroad on the turnpike—and I hope to see it cautiously yet very widely adopted. For among its recommendations are these:

1. It will constrain the working class (so-called) to be more thoughtful and provident than they have been. Now, the mechanic who receives \$18 to \$24, and even higher, each Saturday night, seldom deems it incumbent on him to save any part of it. He lives up to his income—often beyond it—because there seems to be no call on him to economize and save. He knows that about so much money will be coming to him each week, so he "cuts his coat according to his cloth"—buying new furniture, or clothes, or more dainty food, or hiring a better tenement—whenver he thinks he can afford it, saying nothing, because he realizes no need of saving, till sickness, or debility, or largely increased burdens overwhelm him in bankruptcy. He has no more experience than the bachelor in his prime could afford, as a fatal to the father of half a dozen minor children, who begins to feel the infirmities of age; and he sinks under embarrassments which he should have been early schooled to avoid or surmount.

Co-operation will supply the training, if it be needed. The co-operators will feel the pressing need of more capital, better implements, more efficient machinery, from the outset. They will resolve to economize and to work harder, in order to accumulate the means of compassing the desired economies. I have known young men, who never saved before, begin to lay up and to thrive from the hour in which they joined a land-buying or building association, so thousands would be impelled to thrift by finding that their labor would be rendered far more efficient and productive by the command of more capital, which they must earn before they can wield.

2. Wages may in the average be ever so fair and just, yet unequally distributed. Twenty men in a shop are paid \$18 each per week, and collectively they earn it; but the work of some of them is worth a third more than that of others, who are paid exactly the same. This fact is known, and it tends to discourage application and energy. "What's the use?" asks one inclined to greater efficiency; "I get my \$18 per week, anyhow, and I shall get no more if I do twice as much." Thus the system tends to promote incapacity and lack of skill as well as apathy.

3. That the wages system is simpler and less complex than co-operation is true. Despotism is always simpler than liberty. "I order; you obey"—nothing can well be simpler than that. But simplicity can be purchased at too high a cost; and the discussions and perplexities of a body of co-operators, seeking to award to each payment for services on a basis of justice and equity, could not fail to be found instructive and profitable. The difficulties would be such as every day's open-eyed experience would serve to modify, if not absolutely remove; and they would soon find the mountains that loomed and towered in the distance dwindling to mole hills at their approach. If a spirit be but right, it will find or make a way.

4. Co-operation is not a mere theory, a crude speculation. A Yankee Whaling business, so important and flourishing through forty years, was almost entirely superseded on this basis. The whaler was sometimes owned by several persons, while its outfit was furnished by others. Suppose the whole to have cost \$200,000; it was divided into two hundred shares, each representing \$1,000 invested in the "lay," and each entitled to share alike in the profits of the venture. So far, all is easy enough. But one hundred shares more are issued, whereof the captain is allotted ten, the first mate five, the second mate three, each experienced whaler two, and each greenhorn one each; and now the vessel sets forth on her cruise "round the Horn," to last three or four years. On her return, her oil and bone are sold to the best advantage, the proceeds realized and appropriated to each share holder according to the number of his shares. This plan was very well, though originating in a solitary experiment, it gradually became nearly or quite universal, and under it the American whalers surpassed all others in daring, efficiency, and success.

There are many other examples of successful co-operation; but they are mainly so recent that their success may be fairly deemed inconclusive, and I choose to rest on results thoroughly matured, of wide notoriety, and unimpaired by time. If any men ever understood business, and knew how to make it pay, the fleet of whalers of fifty years ago were of the number.

5. However adequate may be the wages usually paid for labor, we know that thousands are unable to obtain them. A man who falls below the average capacity of his class or craft, finds it difficult to obtain work at all. Employers decline to give full wages for partial service; journeymen refuse to work with associates who do not receive full pay. Hence the most needy class can often obtain no work whatever. Co-operation would make room for them, paying them exactly what they should earn. 6. We are often told of a dearth of employment—"nothing to do." We ask, How is this? Are these tailors, hatters, shoemakers, &c., idle because everyone has an ample supply of clothes, hats, and boots? Or are there more in need of those necessities of life than there were last year, when work was abundant. The unemployed mechanics, as they vainly pace the streets, meet thousands in need of their handicraft—nay, are themselves suffering for lack of reasonable garments; yet no call for the labor of those who, possessing the requisite skill, would gladly and cheaply make them. I think this "famine" could not occur under the sway of Co-operation.

8. Widespread the Wages system may plausibly be questioned. There are conceivable applications of Labor which, it seems, can hardly be recompensed under any other than the Wages system. For the present, Co-operation seeks to supplement rather than supplant Hiring. Let it have a fair trial; and, having succeeded or failed, let it be judged accordingly. There is not a particle of danger that it will command any greater degree of popular favor than its merits, as demonstrated by experiment, shall fairly justify.

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