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LITERATURE.

THE LABOR PROBLEM

SERMON

PREACHED BY

REV. A. J. MOWATT,

At St. Paul's Church, Fredericton, on
Sabbath Morning, June 13, 1886.

TEXT.—"Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."
—Mat. XI, 28.

Just now there is a struggle; a struggle that has broken out in blood in several instances, going on all over Christendom, between labor on the one hand, and capital on the other. The laboring class of people are trying, on their part, to get for themselves better terms, and the better terms seem to be about this, so far as I can make them out, the most money for the least labor; and then the capitalists, who have the money, and need the labor, are trying, on their part, to get as much labor as possible for as little money as possible. And so the struggle goes on, and grows, until it is hard to say to what proportions it may yet grow, and where and how it may end.

Now, of course, there are two sides to this question, as there are to all questions, and the right solution is to be found somewhere between. Labor has its wrongs doubtless, but capital may have its wrongs too, and it never can be for the interests of either to be in a state of hostility, as is very generally the case at the present time. To bring these two opposing forces into harmony, therefore, is a problem that the greatest and best minds of the day are grappling with, and not always with much success. The press labors with the problem, and the pulpit is taking it up and uttering no uncertain sound. And for my part, I feel that as churches, we cannot afford to ignore a practical question of this kind, for it is a question that concerns the people's highest interests. And, moreover, it seems to me that our Lord has something to say on this question, something to the point, something that it would be for the interests of both parties to weigh well. I find here a message to the laboring class, a word in season to the world's struggling poor, and I feel convinced, that if they would give heed to His good and wise counsels, it would go far towards bettering their circumstances as a class, and ending the unhappy strikes of the day.

Now, first of all, I want to impress this upon the laboring man, that Jesus is his friend, and what He says is in his interests.

The laboring class, the masses of the poor, and especially in the great manu-

facturing towns of both the old and new world, have somehow come to think that they have no chance, that they are handicapped in the race for life, that they are wronged, that church and state are combined to hurt them, that Heaven itself even is down upon them. Believing, therefore, that the universe has come to be leagued against them, they, on their part, are leaguing themselves against the universe, and so they are waging a war that must issue disastrously for them. A cruel unbelief is taking possession of them, a bitter radicalism, a dangerous spirit of incendiarism, and now and again this spirit breaks out into utter lawlessness and even bloodshed. They organize themselves into unions and brotherhoods for the better protection of their rights and interests as a class, and in not a few instances these brotherhoods come to be controlled by men of the worst type, and are the hot-beds of atheism and anarchy. There they learn to speak evil of dignities, to sneer at governments, to make a mock of authority and law, to ridicule religion, to profane the name that is above every name. They go to the pot-house instead of the church; they read Bob Ingersoll's lectures instead of Paul's letters and David's psalms; they yield themselves to the worst influences until they are ready for all sorts of wickedness, and the end is utter ruin.

But the poor of the world are laboring under a terrible mistake when they turn their back on Christ, for He is their friend, He was one of them Himself, He was born in a stable and cradled in a manger. He was brought up among the poor, had to toil as they have to for His bread, and knew what it was to suffer hunger and endure hardships. We read today of working men's representatives, men who claim to be the friends of the toiling masses, and who stand up for their rights so called, in the councils of the nations. But they are not always wise men, nor good men. They have interests of their own to look after, and when they get yonder to London, or Ottawa, or Washington, they forget that they once toiled for bread and wore homespun; they forget that they are there to speak in behalf of the poor of the people. Unhappily, working-men's representatives are often demagogues, radicals in politics and infidels in religion, leaders that lead the world's toilers, not up, but down. But here is One, and He is high up in authority now. He sits on the highest throne and wears the brightest crown in the universe, and all the power there is in His hands to do with as He pleases, and yet, though so highly exalted, He has not forgotten that He was once poor, and so He is, as no other is, as no other can be, the poor man's friend and helper.

O humble toiler in shop or field! O poor hard-worked mechanic! A laborer struggling hard with want and wretchedness! rejoice, for the Carpenter of Nazareth, the poor man and the poor man's Friend, is King, the King of Kings, and He loves you now as He loved you then. Hear his blessed word to you. I am not putting words in His mouth to suit, but I am letting Him put the words in my mouth for you. And He says this: "All things are delivered unto me of my Father."

Now, let us look at that word before we go any farther, for it is to be the background of what is to follow from His Divine lips. You know what it is for a son to come of age, to have certain rights and powers of his own. And so the son of God has, as it were, come of age, and because of the great interest He has taken in the poor and toiling ones of the world, and because of all He has done for them, His father has handed over to Him all power. Think of the power He has in His hands! No one ever had so much power as He has. The thrones are His, and the kings who sit on them are His vassals. The gold and silver are His. The world's broad wheat-fields, the fat farms, the great estates, the cattle on a thousand hills, are all His. And He is yours—your friend, devoted to your interests, glad to serve you any way He can, and so He says here: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Ah! where is the rich man who will stand in his palace door, and call the poor on the street to come to him for help? Where is the man who has risen to great power and estate, who sits on a high throne and wields a wide authority, who, because he has thus risen, and is thus mighty, will say to the masses of the people: "O ye poor, ye burdened ones, ye toilers, it has pleased the Lord to give me vast wealth, to lift me up to position and power, to set me where I can wield

a wide influence, and I feel that He has done this for me, so that I might be able to help you; to look after your interests, to be a friend to the friendless among you and a father to the fatherless? Hence, I invite you all to come to me with your wants, and I will do for you as you need." Where will you find, I ask, the man of means who will do that? Only Jesus is that man. "All Things are delivered unto me of my Father . . . Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Again, I remark, that coming to Christ is the hope of working-men, their Salvation in the fullest and broadest sense.

Now, I take 'coming to Christ' here to be religion, and not religion in the loose general sense in which it is often used, but real religion. There is that calls itself religion and boasts great things, but there is no coming to Christ in it. It tells us to come to church. It multiplies for us fasts and feasts. It weaves around the soul a network of ceremonials, and loads it with a load of burdensome requirements and wearisome duties, and it calls the doing and bearing of such things religion. But Jesus says simply, "Come unto me!" There is no religion where there is not that, and that is the kind of religion for the world's poor.

The masses cannot afford to go to church as it is in our great cities. They cannot afford to clothe themselves fine enough to go. They cannot afford to pay pew-rents. The privilege of worshipping God in the old orthodox fashion is too expensive for their narrow means, and so they must forgo themselves the precious privilege of going to church. And in so many of the great cities there is not church-room for one quarter of the population. The poor are thus shut out of the church. But the friend of the poor, the blessed Son of God who comes to help the laboring classes, reaches out His arms of love to them, and with tears in His eyes, and blood shed in their behalf, He says: "Come unto me, ye that labor, and are heavy laden."

Somehow the tendency is to get away from the simplicity of the gospel. We add and add one thing after another; we heap on and heap on our rubbish until we have a system of religion that has no place here: we embellish, ornament, distigure, mutilate, with our so-called culture and taste and fancy, until we have we do not know what. Now, only this simple thing is all that is necessary: "Come unto me!" and so simple is it, so cheap, so easy in every way, that the poorest of the poor, the man who has to toil sixty hours every week for bread, can be a christian, can have religion. I believe in churches. I believe in churches that are a credit to a people. I believe in good preaching, and good singing, and a worship that is beautiful as well as simple, I am not against pew-rents. I believe in asking the poor to give of their narrow means to the Lord's cause. But let us understand, that not all this is religion, but simply this. "Come unto me!" And O poor man, in your working clothes, knee deep in mud where you are toiling, you may come, and find for your soul rest, peace, salvation. We get to think we must be dressed to worship; we must have a gowned ecclesiastic to direct the service; we must have a church to worship in, and so much else, before we can worship acceptably. But it is a mistake. Our Lord on the hillside yonder, far away from the temple with its grand ritualistic service, with its clanging cymbals and pealing trumpets, with its smoking altars and sacred incense, and with its throngs of reverent worshippers, said to the poor and hard-worked as they stood before Him in their rags, and soiled all over with their labour: "Come to me!" And He meant what He said. He was not mocking them. They could come as they were, with their every-day clothes on as well as their Sunday ones, and out on the hills as well as within Sacred walls. The coming He wants is not this coming of reverent gesture, upturned gaze, the bended knee; it is the coming of the broken heart, the earnest soul, the life that is lived for Him. He may be sick at heart, nauseated, with this fine coming of the churches, for it may be only empty form; and He may go out to the hills where the poor are, down to the lanes and back streets where the toiling and wretched congregate, and there He may find the coming He wants, the worship He likes.

But the thought that I want to get at here specially is this, that religion in its simple every-day character, the religion that brings the soul close up to the living Christ Himself, is the religion for the working-man, and indeed for any man. Let the poor toiling ones of the world know that Jesus is their friend, that He

wants them to be His, and that they can be His where they are, and how it will help them, how it will dignify their toil, how it will give them to know and feel that they are not tools, chattles, drudges, slaves, but men, redeemed men, sons of God, kings among men. Let the religion of Jesus come into a poor man's home, and what a real home it makes of it! It does not, of course, fill it with costly furniture and cover his table with luxuries; but it does something that is far better for him—it surrounds him with comforts, the luxuries of peace and joy, the wealth of grace, the riches of the Divine favor. You do not find the workingman who has come to Jesus heading a riot, trampling upon law and order, shooting down landlords, boycotting his fellow-citizens because they are not in league with him, and resorting to all sorts of doubtful methods to gain his ends and secure his rights, so-called. No.

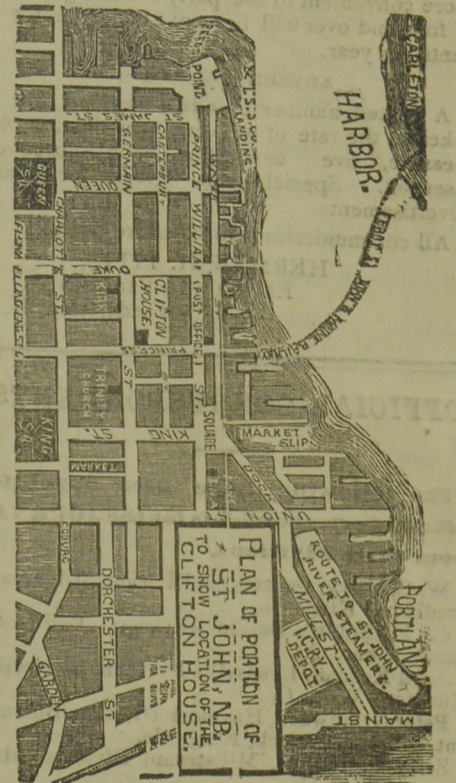
Thus, it seems to me, that the hope of the laboring class to-day, as well as long ago, is to come to Jesus. If more was done for their education, their moral and spiritual training, by the world's governments, they would not need to do so much in the shape of coercion, the keeping up of constabulary forces, and the quelling of riots. Let the church go to the poor and the crushed in the name of Jesus, and tell them of His love, and invite them as He did to the good and rest He can give them, and labor-troubles and strikes will be things of the past.

Again, I learn here, that it is not by any futile attempts to do away with labor altogether, that Christ would help and benefit the poor and working-classes, but by inspiring them with higher ideas of what it is to labor. "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me."

The ragged poor, the working-classes of the great cities, have come to feel that they are being wronged, oppressed, by the rich. They claim that they have made by their hard work whatever of wealth the rich enjoy, and whatever of power the mighty possess. It is out of their sweat the rich man's millions have been gathered, and out of their blood the world's thrones have been built up. The fine estates, the towering castles, the great industries, the vast resources, the wealth of nations, are the products of their labor. If the world is what it is, it is because they have made it what it is. If kings reign, it is by them. They go out and fight their battles for them. They hew down the forests, convert the wilderness into a fruitful field, build the cities, develop the mines, make the industries, construct the railroads, build the ships and then sail them, in a word, do all, or almost all, that is being done for the working out of the world's destiny. And if so, the poor man has a right to a share in the results. If nine-tenths of the work is his, nine-tenths of the wealth should be his. And so there is loud clamoring to-day among the working-classes in many of the large cities for a division of the results. They want to have the rich man's millions handed over to them in equal shares, the great estates divided up among them, the thrones and positions thrown open to their revolutionary leaders, and so on. I do not say that I am putting it just as they would put it, but that is about it.

Now, it is not for me here and now to go into all the ins and outs of this great labor problem. It is for the political economist to solve it, not for the preacher. But there are aspects of the question that we cannot but look at, for they obtrude themselves into the holy of holies of men's duty and life. The laborer is worthy of his hire, I find taught here, but it is a new doctrine, a doctrine not here, that he should have his share of the indirect results of his labor. He may claim, in a very important sense, that his labor made his neighbor's wealth, but ten thousand other things combined to make it as well. If it were possible to unravel the whole process by which certain results were reached, it might be found that the laborer had a good deal less to do in it than he imagines he has; in other words, that the wages he received for his work were a fair compensation for the work he did. There is thought-work as well as hand-work, and it is possible for one by his thought to do what a thousand hands could not do. So an army of half a million to the battle-field to fight, but give them no master-mind to guide their movements, and the results would be disastrous in the extreme. So in everything else. One man may be worth ten thousand ordinary men. Of course, you cannot get ordinary men to think so; but it is so, whether they think so or not.

(Concluded on fourth page.)



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