

ON
THE RELATION
BETWEEN THE
MATERIAL WELFARE & MORAL TRAINING
OF THE
INDUSTRIOUS CLASSES :

A PAPER READ BEFORE
THE DUBLIN STATISTICAL SOCIETY;

BY
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The subscription to the society is one pound entrance, and *ten shillings* per annum.

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On the Relation between the Material Welfare and Moral Training of the Industrious Classes. By Richard Hussey Walsh, L. L. B.

GENTLEMEN—The different theories which have been formed concerning the production and distribution of wealth, may be traced to the leading phenomena of the industrial world that attracted most attention at the time when they arose.

The prosperity of a few small trading communities, at a period when feudalism prevented its general diffusion, was the principal feature in the economic condition of Europe during the middle ages; and wealth and trade having thus become associated together in the minds of men, the relation of cause and effect was inconsiderately assumed from their coexistence, and hence the mercantile system drew its origin.

After it had flourished for some time, its mischievous effects became apparent; and a hasty generalization, founded on them, contributed to give birth to the agricultural or physiocratic system.

A more careful examination of the facts which afforded the bases of each of the preceding theories, combined with a better analysis of the principles of human nature that lead to industry, resulted in the formation of the modern school of political economy—that of Adam Smith—variously termed the industrial system, from the origin it assigns to wealth; and the system of *Laissez-faire*, or that of non-interference, on account of the mode in which it teaches that production can best be promoted.

In like manner, the origin of the theories of socialism and communism may be traced to a certain apparent and most striking anomaly in the social condition of the more advanced European States. We live in an age of industrial progress; improvements and inventions in the different arts and sciences, have furnished unprecedented facilities for the production of luxuries and comforts of every kind. Yet side by side with that brilliant picture exists a mass of pauperism, and of persons verging on it, presenting a most unhappy spectacle—rendered still more remarkable by the contrast it affords to the surrounding affluence.

This prospect has naturally excited the attention of many, and various explanations of the phenomenon and remedies for the evil have been proposed.

They may, in general, be divided into two classes.

The supporters of the first maintain that the prodigious competition which is the mainspring of the unexampled growth of modern wealth, is also the cause of the coexisting misery, which is thus shown to be necessarily connected with industrial progress under the present system. The obvious result of such a doctrine is, that society must be reconstructed for the benefit of the many; and hence have arisen the different socialist and communist schemes which are at present so popular among the working classes, in the greater part of the large towns of Europe.

But others point out a more cheering conclusion, asserting that the unfortunate co-existence of wealth and misery is not in consequence of any necessary connection between the latter, and competition—the source of the former—but is occasioned by a disparity between the industrial and moral progress of mankind, which should be obviated; otherwise industrial progress, instead of being an unmixed good, will be productive of much evil, which, if left unchecked, must retard, stop, or ultimately even turn back the nation in its advancing career.

This may readily be shown.

In all the stages of society, intermediate between the highest and lowest degrees of civilization, the qualities required by an individual to adapt himself to his situation vary much. Among a tribe of hunters, for instance, personal strength and activity, powers of endurance, and a species of sagacity very much resembling the instinct of inferior animals, are the bodily and mental endowments needed; and the ordinary course of events of every-day life is found to supply adequate training.

Ascending to a higher grade in the scale of social existence, we perceive a marked distinction between the requirements of the age and the mode of meeting them; and the principal points of difference thus offered are found to increase progressively with the advancement of civilization. The powers of the mind become more severely taxed; those of the body less so; two facts to be accounted for in the extension of the division of labour or separation of employments, the striking characteristic of industrial progress. This causes the manual operations devolving upon each person to become fewer in number and simpler in kind; and the powers of the human frame, not being employed in so many capacities as before, assume a more exclusive kind of efficiency. The civilised workman can perform one or two species of industry in a very superior manner; but beyond that, he is almost utterly helpless. It is otherwise in a less advanced period of civilization. Then he is inured to the practice of a much greater number of operations, and thus, in having more trades to turn to, he is superior, in the number of his resources, to the man who takes his place in any one of those trades at a future period, or in a more advanced locality; and who, in like manner, possesses a corresponding advantage on his part, being much more efficient in his one occupation than was his predecessor, who pursued the

same trade and many more besides. The common blacksmith, as has been observed by Adam Smith, who, in addition to the other departments of his calling, is also a nailer, can seldom make more than eight hundred nails a day. But when the latter operation becomes a distinct trade, the advantages of the division of labour are apparent, one boy being able to make two thousand three hundred a day—almost three times as many as were formerly made by the blacksmith in the same time.

This, then, is one of the principal features of industrial progress—a limitation in the number of operations that each person is called on to perform, and a consequent increased efficiency in industry of every kind, or a greater command over the natural resources that surround us. But, in connection with so great a blessing, there is another circumstance to be taken into account. The qualities required by a barbarian, as has been mentioned before, are supplied to him by the teachings of everyday life. Not so with the denizen of civilization. Unless he be endued with certain qualities by artificial training, he will be unable to fulfil the conditions of his situation; and this circumstance constitutes the second remarkable feature of an age of progress.

The danger to be guarded against and the means of doing so I now proceed to point out.

The former is to be found in the increased difficulty to be encountered by a workman when attempting to obtain employment, if prevented from following his accustomed occupation, and in the greater likelihood that there is of such an event occurring. Part of this has already been adverted to; the very cause of a man's efficiency in some one line of business, his exclusive devotion to it, rendering him unfit to take part in any other; and even although he had formed a rude and imperfect acquaintance with several trades, yet he would be unable to find remunerative employment in them; owing to the competition of first-rate workmen exclusively trained to such pursuits.

The growing frequency of exposure to loss of employment in any particular line of business, at the very time when it is calculated to press hardest on the sufferers, has next to be accounted for. Now this is owing to the numerous improvements and inventions that are usually made at such a period, and which, by supplying new and more efficacious means of producing certain results, throw out of work those persons who once earned their bread by rendering similar services in an inferior manner.

A very striking example of a circumstance of this nature occurred after the invention of the power-loom; and the gigantic amount of misery thus occasioned may readily be conceived, when we call to mind that the trade of hand-loom weaving, which it interfered with, employed about 800,000 followers.

Such are the material evils incidental to a nation advancing in wealth; and unlike those which beset a member of an inferior order of society, the qualities naturally developed by the action of

ordinary events, render the individual less able to contend with the hardships he must encounter.

By further analyzing the condition of the labourer and the casualties to which he is exposed, it will appear that he requires the aid of superior mental training to fit him for an altered state of society, and if he be deficient in this, he must be unequal to his position. By mental training I do not mean the mere possession of what are usually termed scholarly attainments, but such an education as may conduce to supply the practical knowledge which each person is likely to require, and tend to the development of those qualities of forethought, observation, and self-denial which are needed in every condition. To know that Cæsar conquered Gaul, or that Crassus was slain by the Parthians, would afford a person no information as to what might be the circumstances rendering it prudent for him, or otherwise, to enter a given trade, independently of the advantages it might offer at the moment. The numbers turning to it, the facility of exercising it, might ensure a subsequent low scale of remuneration to those who might be imprudently induced to adopt it on account of a temporary high rate of wages, occasioned by some fluctuation in the course of trade.

To form a correct opinion on such a matter, the use of sound judgment and observation would be required; and even then, without the aid of self-denial, the temptation to follow a bad trade could not be resisted, provided a strong immediate inducement were offered in the shape of a high scale of remuneration; although the future effects of such conduct might be clearly perceived. This gives some idea of the qualities essential for the working man's guidance; and the education that would serve to develop them must be that which his situation demands. Not that I mean to undervalue the importance of general literature to the humbler classes; on the contrary, it is highly beneficial, by affording a cheap and harmless source of amusement, but still it should be subordinate to the species of training which the circumstances of active life imperatively require. Is it consistent with public safety and convenience that the artizan, continually employed in dealing with the most formidable powers of nature, should be left in ignorance of the laws that govern them? Must not the poor, man who contrasts his unhappy condition with the riches surrounding him, be the ready tool of those who proclaim property to be theft, and the source of that misery and poverty which oppress him, unless he possess some knowledge of the causes affecting and determining the production and distribution of the national wealth? And is it right or politic that he whose welfare essentially depends on the exercise of forethought and self-denial, should be allowed to fall a prey to wretchedness, from a deficiency in such training as would have most contributed to the formation of the qualities he needed?

It is worth remarking, that the earnings of the well-paid work-

man generally come in such a form as to place his true interests in opposition to his immediate desires; which can only be controlled by the exercise of a degree of self-denial that is often painful. One cause that operates powerfully in raising the rate of wages in any employment is its liability to frequent interruption; since labourers cannot be induced to enter it unless they be remunerated on such a scale as may suffice to compensate, in their minds, for occasional want of employment. To which it may be added, that the period when the services of such men are required, is often one of great industrial activity, so that there is a general brisk demand for labour, causing a corresponding rise in its price. Thus the workman, during the time he is employed, receives much more than is requisite for his ordinary consumption; and on the use he makes of the surplus, his future worldly prosperity depends. Prudence tells him to think of the time when employment may fail, and to invest his earnings in such a form as to render them available for his maintenance in the time of need; whilst a thoughtless love of immediate gratification urges him to spend at once in dissipation all he earns, and trust to chance for anything beyond the present. It is a matter of no slight importance whether the former or the latter suggestion be followed; and the decision to be adopted must depend in most cases on the habitual tone of the labourer's mind, which is principally the result of early training; though of course there are sometimes natural tendencies which may neutralise the best or the worst.

Recent events have shown that a large proportion of the workmen of the United Kingdom are unfortunately deficient in those habits of forethought and self-denial so much called for by their situation. When the commercial crisis of 1847 suspended the construction of a number of English railways, many of the navvies were necessarily thrown out of employment. For some time previously, they had been earning at the rate of £40 per annum—very high wages for mere muscular exertion—yet, when the demand for their services ceased, numbers became at once reduced to destitution, because, in consequence of their moral imperfections, they had been careless of the future, and expended everything on immediate gratification. The beer-shops and ale-houses had received much of their earnings; the savings'-banks unhappily but little.

It may further be observed, that not only will the habits and qualities developed in the mind of the labourer by judicious education, direct him in making a provident use of so much of his income as he may not require for defraying his ordinary expenditure; but, besides, by placing within his reach various sources of mental gratification, they will enable him to procure amusements in his hours of relaxation, of a cheaper kind than those which a man devoid of such training could appreciate. For instance, in an establishment at Zurich there was a Scotch workman, possessed of

the advantages conferred by a good education, and receiving a salary of £3 a-week. He lived in respectable lodgings, dressed well, frequented reading-rooms, subscribed to a circulating library, and interested himself in various literary and scientific pursuits. Such was his mode of living, and such were his amusements; and to meet all the expenses thus incurred, half his salary sufficed; the remainder he saved. Among his fellow-labourers was an Englishman, paid at the same rate. Being uneducated, he was debarred from the intellectual pleasures which occupied the leisure moments of his companion, and for want of some other amusement, he passed his evenings in the wine-house; and this more expensive and less refined species of enjoyment consumed all his wages, and left him without any provision for the future. And it should be borne in mind that the English workman was a sober, well-conducted man, according to his employer's testimony; which is quite compatible with his spending his evenings in the wine-house—a place of resort not to be confounded with our public houses, where drunkenness and disorder generally prevail. The continental wine-house is an establishment where such excesses seldom occur; and the Englishman, we may conclude, merely went there in quest of a perfectly decorous though expensive amusement, being unable to appreciate the cheaper intellectual entertainment of his companion.

Not only, it should be added, does judicious mental training enable the labourer to make a better use of a given income, but it also aids in increasing it, by furnishing him with the means of rising in the world and bettering his condition; since a person possessed of that intelligence and general efficiency which are principally the results of a sound education, will naturally be promoted in preference to one devoid of such advantages. It might be objected that this good effect must disappear if all were well educated, since then the person who would otherwise have been superior to his companions, is reduced to a level with them, his mental resources being no longer uncommon. This is true to a certain extent; if education were fully diffused, one man would not be promoted on account of the ignorance of his companions, but all would rise in the social scale. Not as compared with one another, for that would be a contradiction; but with relation to their former condition; as the general productiveness of labour must be augmented with every extension of those various qualities to which so much of its efficiency is due.

The prejudice against the diffusion of mental training, which formerly was so common amongst employers, is now fast disappearing before the conclusive teachings of experience, which show that the man who is best aware of how his own interests may be advanced, is also most fit to be trusted with those of his master.

M. Escher, a Swiss engineer and manufacturer, when asked if he agreed with the opinion that any refinement produced by education would be injurious to labourers as such, replied, "My

own experience and my conversation with eminent mechanics in different parts of Europe lead me to an entirely opposite conclusion. In the present state of manufactures, when so much is done by machinery and tools, and so little by mere manual labour, (and that little is diminishing,) mental superiority, order, punctuality, and good conduct—qualities all developed and promoted by education—are becoming of the highest importance. There are now, I consider, few enlightened manufacturers who will dissent from the opinion, that the workshops peopled with the greatest number of educated and well-informed workmen will turn out the greatest quantity of the best work in the best manner.”*

In the same report of the poor-law commissioners, from which I have extracted M. Escher's testimony as to the good effects of intellectual training, there is some further evidence of a similar nature, bearing directly upon the matter now under consideration.

Mr. Kempson of Philadelphia, a cotton manufacturer, stated that, as a general rule, there was an objection in America against taking English workmen into employment, on account of their intemperate habits—excesses from which the native labourers were comparatively exempt—on account of their superior morality and intelligence, the results of good education. He added that the English exhibited their bad qualities in strikes and ill-considered demands for higher wages, which grievously interfered with commercial operations, and tended to generate much ill-will between the masters and those they employed. The non-existence of combinations for keeping up the rate of wages, amongst the American cotton manufacturers, he believed to be solely due to their superior education, moral instruction, and temperate habits. So much indeed are the American employers impressed with a sense of the advantages conferred on labourers by early instruction, that the manufacturers, though at some immediate inconvenience to themselves, endeavour to make the parents of the factory children remove them during some months each year, in order to give them leisure to attend at school. It would appear that the French manufacturers do not always regulate their conduct in so praiseworthy a manner. In a report by M. Lorain, a professor at the College of Louis-le-Grand, on the primary schools of France, it is shown that education is losing ground, in consequence of the ill-regulated advance of industry; and the moral and physical welfare of the children is sacrificed to the short-sighted thirst for immediate gain. In the words of the reporter, “Wherever a factory or cotton mill is opened, the school may be shut up.”

Those who are intrusted with the care of governing a country are particularly interested in the diffusion of useful knowledge, provided they are actuated with that zeal for the public welfare which ought to animate them. The bloodshed and anarchy that

* Report of the Poor Law Commissioners on the Training of Pauper Children, 1841.

reigned so often during the last few years in most of the principal towns of Europe would hardly have occurred, had the general body of the working classes been possessed of sufficient knowledge to enable them to detect the hollowness and fallaciousness of the schemes in whose realisation they were promised so much comfort and prosperity ; for though the various revolutions originated in demands for political reform, yet it was the hope of social amelioration that chiefly induced the people to enter the bloody arena of civil war.

The difficulties that would present themselves in opposition to any comprehensive plan of national education are numerous, owing to the various sectarian and political interests, each of which would seek to obtain exclusive deference to its particular views and principles. But, in general, among the middle classes of the United Kingdom, very sound notions on social interests are gradually growing up, combined with an accurate perception of the necessity of communicating the same to the humbler classes. One of the main obstacles to carrying out so desirable a measure is to be found in the excessive dearness of paper—an impediment which it is fortunately in the power of government easily to remove, by abolishing the duty now forming so important an item in its cost of production. Thus simply could be conferred a boon on the public, which would tend so much to obviate the dangers threatening advancing civilization, and, by lessening the evils incidental to progress, contribute to render it productive of prosperity to every portion of the community.

END.