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Labor in Pennsylvania

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## LABOR IN PENNSYLVANIA.

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### IV.

ECONOMICALLY, Pennsylvania is a most interesting State, and would well repay a comprehensive examination of the conditions of labor in its varied industries. For this, however, I cannot now spare time. In three preceding papers, I have given some idea of the conditions of labor in the largest of the industries for which Pennsylvania is noted—that of coal mining. From this the conditions of labor generally may be inferred, and the futility of that policy of “protection to labor” for which Pennsylvania has been so clamorous may be readily seen. The condition of the coal miners in the much protected State of Pennsylvania is bad enough. Yet, bad as it is, it is evident that it would be worse, but for the miners’ associations, backed by strikes or the fear of strikes. Whomsoever the tariff may protect, it does not protect the coal miners.

As for iron mining, another petted industry of Pennsylvania, the protection of which, directly and indirectly, imposes the most enormous burden upon the industries of the whole country, wages are in that even below those of coal mining, for the reason that there is less combination among the miners. In Lehigh, in Northampton, and in Berks, according to the reports made by employers to the Bureau of Industrial Statistics, iron miners are working for 70 cents a day, and engineers for 80 and 90 cents. In other counties the rate rises to 75 cents, 80 cents, 90 cents, and \$1.00 per day for miners, and correspondingly for engineers. But these wages, it must always be remembered, do not secure steady work. Of the returns I have noted, the highest number of days worked in the year is 265—a case in which 70 cents per day was paid miners. In another case, in which miners’ wages are placed at 70 cents, the number of days worked is 190. Carnegie Brothers & Co., who have been “protected” into enormous fortunes

by the tariff, and who are really generous men, pay their miners \$1.10 to \$1.15 per day. But should "Triumphant Democracy" point to this with pride, it should add that, in the year for which these returns are given, the Carnegie miners had only 119 days work. The highest wages paid in iron mining appear to be in the Cornwall mine, in Lebanon County, where miners get \$1.40 per day. These exceptional high wages seem to be attributable to the liberality of the managing owner.

This Cornwall iron mine is worth a passing notice. It is in Lebanon County, a few miles from the city of that name, and is the richest deposit of iron ore yet known in the world, with the possible exception of one in Mexico. It is not a mine in the common understanding of the word, but rather a quarry. Three great hills of very nearly pure magnetic iron rise from the plain, and all that has to be done is to dig it out and carry it away. Since 1740, and up to the 1st of January of this year, it is estimated that something like 7,500,000 tons have been taken out; but thirty or forty million tons are estimated to yet remain above water-level, and below that borings have shown the deposit to reach to a depth of at least 300 feet.

This great store of the richest iron ore is believed by most of the people of those parts—for old ideas yet prevail about Lebanon—to have been made by God. But in some way that they do not readily explain, it seems to be held that the right to dispose of it for all future time inhered, about 1680, in one James Stuart, since dead, who was awhile King of England, and then retired into France. This James Stuart, from whom, although he is now nearly two centuries dead, all rights to the use of this part of the world are still supposed to come, made a grant of a considerable part of the planet he was so soon to leave to John, Thomas, and William Penn, their heirs or assigns, forever. Of this piece of the planet the Penns assigned some ten thousand acres of the surface, with all that lay below the surface, to one Joseph Turner, by whom it was in turn assigned, in 1732, to a William Alden. In 1737 this Alden, in consideration of £135 (probably depreciated currency), to him in hand paid, assigned the right to the exclusive and perpetual use and enjoyment of three hundred acres, containing the iron hills, to one Peter Grubb.

Between 1786 and 1789 one Robert Coleman bought various interests from the heirs of Grubb, until he had secured five-sixths,

leaving to one of the Grubbs a one-sixth interest. These interests have descended through the Grubb and Coleman families until, at the present time, there are four Colemans, two male and two female, who own fifteen ninety-sixths each, and a Coleman or two and several Grubbs who own the rest in smaller interests. The value of the deposit may be inferred from the fact that the reservation made by one of the original Grubbs, in his sale to the first Coleman, of the perpetual right to enough ore to keep one furnace going, and which now attaches to the Robesonia furnace, sold, some years since, for \$700,000, being bought in by the Colemans. The ore is now taken out under one management, by the use of air-drills and dynamite, and the proceeds are divided between the various interests. One of the two male Colemans lives in Paris, where he prefers to enjoy the enormous income which comes to him, without work on his part, by virtue of the grant of James II. The other, Robert H. Coleman, a young man of enterprise and liberality, lives at Lebanon, and is the manager of the estate. In all but the title, he is an American nobleman of the best English type. His interest in the iron deposit, rich as it is, is only a part of his estate. He has some 20,000 acres of the finest Pennsylvania limestone land, kept in the best cultivation, under competent superintendents, and stocked with the very finest of choice cattle; a railroad or two which connect with the Pennsylvania and Reading systems, a splendid mansion, and nobody knows what else besides. On the day of his majority, besides the real and other personal property, his guardian turned over to him \$1,200,000. In the neighborhood of Lebanon, the Colemans are believed to be the richest family in the country, the Vanderbilts and Astors not excepted. Young Robert builds churches in Lebanon and Cornwall, makes good turnpikes of the slack out of his furnaces; plants them with shade trees; has given largely to the college in which he was educated; is kindly and liberal to his tenants and employés; entertains societies when they visit Lebanon, and seems to be, in short, the kind of a young prince that would delight the heart of a Tennyson—a genial, upright, and free-handed lord of land and master of men, who takes the world as he finds it, but doubtless often wonders in his heart at the superstitious reverence for James II., which renders this wonderful iron quarry, and so much of the fair land about it, as fully the private property of the Colemans and Grubbs as though *they* made it.

But all this aside, what, in the face of such a deposit of ore as this, becomes of the contention that a heavy duty on iron and iron ore is necessary to prevent the suppression of the Pennsylvania iron industry by the competition of the pauper-made iron of Europe? The Cornwall deposit was worked for years and years before we had any duty upon iron and iron ore. It could not, of course, be worked if the Colemans and Grubbs chose to shut it up, as the eccentric proprietor of an iron mine near Edinburgh chose to do with his mine some years since, answering all remonstrance as to the destruction of a considerable industry, and the starving out of a considerable population, with the laconic observation that the ore in the ground might stay there, since it would "no eat anything." But with the permission of the Colemans and Grubbs, this rich iron deposit could be worked, not only if there were no duty on iron, but if the "pauper" iron ore producers of Europe would work for nothing and pay their own board. It came out in legal proceedings, taken in about 1859, to determine whether the right reserved to as much ore as would feed one furnace, applied only to such a furnace as was in use in the last century, or to a modern furnace, that the cost of mining ore in Cornwall was only 16 cents per ton, which, to say nothing of the superior quality of the ore, is much less than the transportation of European pauper ore would cost. It is not probable that a single additional ton of iron ore has been mined at Cornwall because of our tariff. If the tariff has had any effect it has simply been to increase the profits of the Cornwall owners, and not in the slightest degree to add to the wages which they must pay their men. If, as a matter of fact, they do pay more than current wages, it is because of their own liberality. Mr. G. W. Childs also pays more than current wages, but his business is unprotected by the tariff.

So, too, it is with the duty on coal. This duty is a grievous burden upon the industries of California, the Gulf States, and some parts of New England, and gives protection to the monopolies which largely neutralize the natural advantages of Philadelphia as a manufacturing city by compelling her people to pay a considerably higher price for coal than the same coal is sold for shipment at the Philadelphia wharves. But its benefits, such as there are, certainly do not go either to the miners or to their immediate employers, the coal operators. If any one at all is benefited, it is the owners of coal land and the monopolists of

transportation. The competition which would force the wages of miners down to a point that would give them only a bare subsistence is only held in check by miners' combinations and strikes—bitter struggles of endurance, not always entirely bloodless, which entail almost as much loss and suffering as actual warfare, and which, under the pressure of necessity, are fought with such tenacity that I find in the recent number of the *Coal Trade Journal* a statement, made as a cool matter of business information, that at the conclusion of a recent strike, near Reynoldsville, the miners were in such a reduced condition, physically, for want of proper food, that they could not perform a day's work for some time. No matter what the profits of coal mining may be, it is evident that, under what we call the free competition of labor and capital, they cannot, for any length of time, go either to miners or to operators, but must at length be taken up in the royalties paid for the privilege of mining coal and in the increased values of coal lands. The royalty now paid in the anthracite district ranges from 40 to 60 cents per ton, and will probably average 50 cents, and where mines are worked by the owners, as is the case with the mines owned by the great railroad companies, the royalty, whatever it may be, goes, of course, to the credit of the capital invested in the purchase of the mines; so that the effect of the duty, whatever it may be, is not to benefit the miner or the operator, who is his immediate employer, but merely to increase the charge which the owner of coal land can make for the use of the natural agent of production—the coal imbedded in the soil by the slow processes of nature, ages and ages before men came upon the earth, and which would exist with all its usefulness unimpaired whether the owner could get any royalty or not, or whether there was any individual owner or not.

These principles, clear enough in regard to the mining industries of Pennsylvania, apply to all her other industries. The plausible pretension that the somewhat higher rate of wages in this country than in Europe necessitates the building of a tariff wall around our coasts, and along the imaginary line which separates us from Canada and Mexico, is utterly negatived by the difference of wages which exists in Pennsylvania. The Cambria Iron Company at Johnstown—great sticklers, by the bye, in Washington lobbies and before Congressional Committees for the “protection of American labor”—having crushed out the Labor Associations,

pay wages some 20 per cent. less than are paid in Pittsburgh. There is quite as great a difference between the wages paid in glassmaking in the Eastern and in the Western part of the State. Cigarmakers in Reading get two or three dollars less per thousand than cigarmakers in Philadelphia and New York, and so it is with other industries. If a difference in wages necessitates the putting up of a tariff, then, instead of being in common with the rest of the country shut in by one tariff line along our National boundary, Pennsylvania ought to be intersected by tariff lines, in all directions, with their attending collectors, searchers, and seizers.

There is, of course, in Pennsylvania what may be called a general level of wages, just as there is a general level of water in the ocean, even when its billows heave in storm—a line, theoretical it may be, toward which both depression and elevation tend to return; but this fact of itself proves the futility of the tariff in raising wages. Even in Pennsylvania the largest single industry is the agricultural, and the industries for which any pretense of protection by the tariff can be made, amount to only a small part of the total industries, since manifestly not only the agricultural industry, but all such industries as building, railroading, etc., cannot be protected by any tariff. The level of wages in any particular occupation, can, therefore, no matter how high the tariff, only be raised above the general level by conditions, natural or artificial, which in them check the competition for employment. And the same law must apply to the profits of capital, so that it is impossible for any amount of protection either to permanently increase wages, or to augment the profits of the manufacturer or operator, except as the element of monopoly enters in and fences off from home competition those whom the tariff may fence off from foreign competition. As a matter of fact, where no monopoly exists, wages and profits in the protected industries of Pennsylvania are not higher, but, I am inclined to think, rather lower than in the unprotected industries.

Protection has been for years a superstition in Pennsylvania, taught to the rising generation as an article of faith, and propagated by all the organs of public opinion and education. I think, however, its real and permanent strength lies in the fact, perceived by the working classes, that the competition of men whose only hope of gaining a livelihood is in getting the wages of some employer, does tend to cut down their earnings; and in the habit

of thought that arises from this state of things, of regarding work as something that must be furnished or provided for the laborer, instead of something which has its natural origin in human wants. At the present time, at least, I think the working men of Pennsylvania realize pretty generally that the tariff which excludes the productions of foreign pauper labor gives free egress to the foreign pauper labor itself, and that they are anything but satisfied with their share of "protection." But, as railroads that may make half a dozen twentyfold millionaires, at the expense of the general public, will command the vote of the needy laborer whose only hope is to get the poor pay of a few days hard work, so, in spite of all its manifest absurdities and iniquities, does the idea of tariff protection commend itself to the masses of workingmen, because to them it seems to have at least the merit of "keeping work in the country"—or "preventing foreigners from doing our work."

For my part, I do not think it makes more than a temporary difference to the workingmen of Pennsylvania, or any other State, whether there is a protective tariff, a revenue tariff, or no tariff at all. A tariff only operates upon the movement of goods, not upon the movement of labor, and its effect is similar to that of a range of mountains, a sandy desert, or a pirate infested sea, in making more difficult the transportation of commodities. And with or without any of these things to affect the transportation of goods from other countries, the conditions of labor in Pennsylvania are such as must beget a tendency of wages towards the minimum which gives the mere laborer only a bare existence—a tendency which can only here and there be held somewhat in check by custom, labor combinations, boycotts, and strikes. The existence of the tramp, the pauper, the needy workman vainly seeking the opportunity to sell the only thing he has to sell, his power of labor, is proof of the existence and force of this tendency, against which the strongest labor combinations struggle like swimmers against a current. But the belief in protection, by drawing the attention of men away from the real cause of this tendency, and hounding them upon a false scent, diverts them from the only road by which the rights of labor can be secured.

If Pennsylvania could be cut off from all the rest of mankind by an impassable ditch or an unscalable wall—an isolation which the philosophy of Pennsylvania protectionists might lead them



devoutly to wish—the natural growth of population and the progress of material development must constantly tend to force the wages of the mere laborer towards the point of bare existence. For though labor is the appointed means by which all our material needs must be satisfied—the active factor in the production of all wealth—labor is of itself absolutely helpless. To make labor of any use it must have something to impress itself upon—must, in short, be able to avail itself of land. In any community, therefore, in which the land is the private property of some of the people, the other people, who have nothing but the ordinary power to labor, provided they get food, clothing, and shelter, become helpless, and must compete with each other for permission from the first class to live and to work. The influence of competition with each other among these mere laborers must tend to force them to give up to the owners of land all that their labor can produce upon it, save just enough to keep them in life.

The whole philosophy of the labor question may be seen as clearly upon a Pennsylvania coal estate as amid the primitive industrial conditions which obtain in Connemara or Skye. From zenith to nadir, that part of the globe embraced in one of these coal estates is the exclusive property of one man, or corporation. Other men can only live there on his sufferance, and can only go to work at his pleasure and on terms agreed to with him. Having an absolute power over the natural means of livelihood, he has thus a power over the laborers, which is only modified by their power of moving away and of making combinations among themselves by which he can be compelled to treat with them in the aggregate, and can be put to loss or inconvenience by their refusal to work.

In the complex industries of the great city which lies at the other extreme of the industrial scale, where much labor is devoted to exchanging, to the rendering of services, and to the working up of materials that have been taken from their original natural reservoirs, the relation between land and labor is not so obvious, especially as there are many other monopolies of various kinds that share with the monopoly of land the earnings which the helplessness of labor compels it to yield up. But the same relation still obtains. No matter where he exists, man is a land animal, who can only live on and from land, and all of whose production is but the changing in place or form of what he finds

already in existence on the superficies of the globe. The mere laborer, unless he has such special skill or ability as make a peculiar demand for his services, is as helpless in the one place as the other, and every avenue of employment is crowded with applicants who, disinherited of their natural right to employ themselves, must compete with each other for the wages of an employer.

The treatment of land as the private property of individuals—the attaching to the element from which all must live of the same exclusive rights of ownership which justly attach to the things which man produces—is so opposed to reason, so repugnant to all moral perceptions, that it has only come to be accepted through a long course of fraud and usurpation, in which habit has dulled the sense of natural right. Secure possession by the individual user, is, of course, necessary to the use of land, since it is requisite to secure the right of property in improvements. The manifest way to combine the individual right to improvements and products with the common right to the land itself, is that the holder of valuable land—*i. e.*, land which is worth a premium—should pay a fair rent to the community in return for the special privilege granted him. This, in a rude way, was accomplished by the feudal system, and the road by which private property in land was instituted among English-speaking people was, by the shaking off their rents on the part of the feudal tenants, and the resort to general taxation for the public revenues, originally obtained from land. Conversely, the best and easiest way to secure the equal rights of all in the land of their country, is to abolish all other taxation, and by a tax on land values to take for public use that value which attaches to land by reason of the growth of the community, and to make it unprofitable for any one to hold land he is not putting to use.

It is instructive to observe how, in Pennsylvania as in England, the interests of the wealthy classes who have been most influential in directing public opinion and making laws, have led to the taxing of everything rather than land values. The State of Pennsylvania not only attempts to tax mortgages, money at interest and notes, but also capital loaned or invested in any other State. Great tracts of mineral land are taxed at such nominal rates that they can be easily withheld from use, while the miner, taxed indirectly in all other ways, must also pay a tax upon his occupation, which

is rated according to the county at from \$150 to \$300, the millionaire coal owner being rated on his occupation at from \$200 to \$350.

How monopoly begets monopoly, and special privilege leads to general corruption, might nowhere be better illustrated than in ring-ridden Pennsylvania, with its railroad octopus, its coal combination, its Standard Oil Company, and its pig-iron "statesmen." And Pennsylvania may well feel hopeless of cutting away the monopolistic creepers which have enmeshed the Keystone State. "Take a pass!" said a Pennsylvanian to me, as I manifested some mild surprise at the statement that, although railroad passes are prohibited by the Constitution, Governor Pattison was the only man in the State who would not take a pass—"Take a pass! What is the use of fighting a corporation that rules the State. I would take a whole freight train, if they would give it to me." But though it may be useless to hack away at the branches, the tree of monopoly will fall if the ax be laid at its root. And private property in land, it will be found on examination, is the root of lesser monopolies.

HENRY GEORGE.