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"ON EARTH PEACE, GOOD WILL TOWARD MEN."

T. V. POWDERLY.

*Terence V. Powderly was born January 22, 1849, at Carbondale, Pennsylvania. His parents were natives of Ireland and were honest hard-working people. The boy's school days ended at the age of thirteen. At fourteen he was examiner for the Delaware and Hudson Canal company; at seventeen he was apprenticed in the Delaware, and Hudson shops to learn the trade of machinist; at twenty he was a machinist in the locomotive shops of the Lackawanna railway at Scranton, and in 1871 joined a labor organization. Two years later, in spite of the fact that he was a Conservative, he was discharged from the shops because of his activity in the labor union. He worked at his trade wherever he could find employment notwithstanding the "black list" until 1878, when he was elected Mayor of Scranton, an office he retained for six years. He has been a chief factor in organizing the Knights of Labor, whose General Master Workman he has been since 1879.*

IT is easier to point out the wrong than rectify it, less difficult to find something to condemn or find fault with than praise or endorse; and in the field of industry, while the advance toward better conditions has been more rapid during the past decade than for centuries before, the results are not so apparent to the worker in the field as to the looker-on. The great danger which presented itself to the people fifteen years ago was the law. The poor were without friends: they were the recipients of denunciation from statesman, press and pulpit. It was considered rude to even hint that the man who soiled his hands in manual toil had a right to any consideration other than a patronizing kindness at the hands of his employer, and to suggest that others should take an interest in his welfare was to incur the displeasure of society. The law made it a crime to be idle and gave to employers the privilege of turning the workman away without protest. To be out of money and on "tramp" was an offense against the law: it is today, but is not punished so rigorously as it used to be.

Fifteen years ago there were millions of men out of work who could not find anything to do; they were too poor to remain at home, and to "tramp" meant imprisonment away from home. Thousands became criminals, remained a charge on the community for a time and afterwards were sent to prison for a term of years. So many men and women were sent to prison for want of work—that being the primary cause—fifteen years ago that the products of the prisons began to regulate market values and wages. The attention of the observing workman once directed to this effect of prisons work, he began to question how long it would take to turn the country into a vast prison. With prison-made articles regulating the price of those made by honest hands, reductions in wages became inevitable; reductions in wages meant more criminals: more criminals meant more

prisons; and the end of all this would be a grated cell at night and a day of toil under the eye of the prison overseer for all who worked. From effect to cause the workman patiently trudged his way, and with the light he gained he saw that to effect a remedy the law must undergo a change—not only the law but the laws, for not alone did one law militate against the welfare of the worker, but many operated to his injury.

It is true that here and there workmen who studied out the question of right and privilege belonged to no organization, but the isolated searcher for truth realized that to overcome obstacles such as presented themselves to him he must have assistance. Organizations of working men were in existence at the time, but they were on the verge of dissolution; many of them went out of existence at that particular time. The trades unions of that day devoted every energy to the wage question: they proclaimed that 'in unity there is strength,' but their actions gave the lie to the declaration. Only the skilled workman could join a labor organization then; none but a shoemaker could become a member of a society with a membership of shoemakers; no other tradesman or workman could join or even form a passing acquaintance, isolated by division of methods they were separated on craft lines and knew absolutely nothing about the condition of labor or industry outside of their own narrow trade affiliations. When a stringency in the money market affected labor and wages in one part of the field of industry, its certain effects were dull times, lack of employment and reductions in wages elsewhere. To the trades unionist all was mystery; if the cause could not be found in his union he never sought for it elsewhere. With him the wage question was the only one with which he should deal, and in dealing with it his idea was that force alone could win. Unless an immediate strike could prove effective his cause was lost until, through some turn of the wheel, he could take advantage of his employer and strike him at a more favorable time. What appeared to the trades unionist as a favorable time was, in nine cases out of ten, a time when the employer was beset by perplexities on all sides—a time when his creditors were pushing him to the wall. At such a time he would be more likely to accede to the demands of the union than permit a strike to occur which would make known his condition to other creditors who might crowd him still farther toward bankruptcy. The conditions which affected the employer and the market in which he sold his wares never gave the trades unionist a moment's consideration at that day, and it was useless to talk to him of such things. There were thousands of trades unionists who, in dropping away from the organizations of that time, sought for some other agency through which to lift the burden that oppressed labor.

The order of the Knights of Labor, which had then been in existence some seven years, offered inducements to such as these and around its standard they gathered. Their influence and knowledge of the errors of the older societies aided materially in shaping the destinies of the younger

association, and in 1878, in a general convention, the demands of the wage earner found public expression in a declaration of principles known as the "Preamble of the Knights of Labor." Through the local assembly, as the subordinate branch of the organization is known, it would not be possible to arrive at an understanding of the condition of the workman, and one of the demands of the Knights of Labor was for the establishment of labor bureaus, through the operation of which accurate information would be gained concerning the wages paid, hours worked, treatment received and injuries inflicted upon the workman. The sanitary surroundings of the workshop and home, the drain upon the earnings of the employee and the profits of the employer were to become subjects for investigation by these bureaus. The taxation of house and workshop and the mortgages on the same were to be made known and clear to all.

After struggles and contentions labor bureaus were established in twenty-four states and a Department of Labor at Washington. District of Columbia. The right to elect the chiefs of these bureaus was not vested in the working men in whose interests they were created, and in many cases time-serving politicians were placed in charge of institutions that by instinct, training and affiliation they could not possibly be in sympathy with. Notwithstanding all of this the most active in the ranks of organized labor were always on the alert and carefully scrutinized and criticized the work done by these officials. From the first reports made by the earlier bureaus dates the practical agitation for inspection of factories, ventilation of mines and workshops, prohibition of child labor, prohibition of alien labor under contract, the ownership of telegraphs, telephones and railways by the government and the restoration of lands that were unjustly taken from the people by act of Congress. Factory inspection is established by law in eleven states; child labor is prohibited in nearly all of the states, and wherever coal mines are operated the owners are required to conform to certain legal requirements as to sanitation and ventilation. Foreign labor under contract is prohibited by law and steps are being taken each day to enforce these laws and amend them where they are found wanting. Fifteen years ago the Knights of Labor demanded that "the public lands, the heritage of the people, be reserved for actual settlers; not another acre for railroads or speculators." Seven years ago the necessity for taking a step forward became apparent and these words were added, "and that all lands now held for speculative purposes be taxed to their full value." In the session of the general assembly for 1889, two years ago, the land plank underwent another and more radical change and now reads:

The land, including all the natural sources of wealth, is the heritage of all the people and should not be subject to speculative traffic. Occupancy and use should be the only title to the possession of land. The taxes upon land should be levied upon its full value for use, exclusive of improvements,

and should be sufficient to take for the community all unearned increment."

The old government road gave way to the railroad, and the canal and open thoroughfare of the people were rendered almost useless through the operations of the newer system of transportation. These agencies of distribution are owned and monopolized by a very few, and the Knights of Labor see in this a danger to the future of the republic. The railroads were chartered as public highways, but the public have no voice in their management and may be "taxed all the traffic will bear" at the will of the owners. Complaint is vain, protest is time wasted, and for the most part the shipper and consumer would rather put up with the present inconveniences than incur the wrath of the railway corporation for fear of future discriminations. Business men are made cowardly through their investments, and instead of lending hearty approval to the work of reforming the present system of transportation they publicly take sides with the railway companies while secretly urging upon working men to persevere in the agitation for government ownership. In the convention held by the Knights in 1884 the agitation on the railway problem took new strength under this demand:

"That the government shall obtain possession, by purchase, under the right of eminent domain, of all telegraphs, telephones and railroads; and that hereafter no charter or license be issued to any corporation for construction or operation of any means of transporting intelligence, passengers or freight."

Not only do the land and transportation questions take up the attention of the wage earner, but the currency question as well, for the same session of the general assembly of the Knights adopted this declaration on the financial problem:

"XIV. The establishment of a national monetary system, in which a circulating medium in necessary quantity shall issue directly to the people, without the intervention of banks: that all the national issue shall be full legal tender in payment of all debts, public and private; and that the government shall not guarantee or recognize any private banks or create any banking corporations."

These problems were discussed for years in the local assemblies of the Knights of Labor, and when understood, brought the workman face to face with the question of politics. The discussion of political questions was and is prohibited in the trades union; it is compulsory in the Knights of Labor, and when the questions of transportation, finance and land were undergoing the ordeal of debate in the meetings, the fact became apparent to the most bitter opponent of political discussion that until politics in their purest and noblest sense were understood by the workman, until he cast his ballot wisely and intelligently for the welfare of his family and country, and not at the behest of the ward heeler, the man

of influence or the corporation boss, he would continue to stagger under the weight of injustice heaped upon him by unjust laws on the one hand and the absence of just ones on the other. It was at this stage that the fact became glaringly apparent to the workman that elections in the various states were manipulated by machine politicians. The citizen could make up his ticket as he pleased, but it would be counted for those against whom he voted if a venal election board was given its price. The employee who voted under the eye of his employer or agent knew that his ballot was known to those around him. If he procured his ticket from one of the regulation ticket peddlers at the polls, all who saw him take it knew its contents; if he came with his ballot prepared and was offered another by his "boss," he had to accept it or run the risk of dismissal from his place of employment. The necessity for a secret method of voting became very apparent, and with the dawning of this fact on the mind of the labor organization, steps were taken to establish what is known as the Australian system of voting. In the annual convention of the Knights of Labor in 1885 the matter was urged, the initial step to the future agitation was taken there, and after an agitation and discussion of three years, in which the masses were educated on the principle of a proper disposition of the "little piece of white paper," the session of 1888 directed the officers of the order to prepare a draft of a law and submit it to the legislatures of the several states for adoption. The instruction of the convention was carried out. A law was drawn up and presented to every legislature that met the following winter. Many states adopted the measure then; to all others the bill has been presented and it will be persistently placed before such legislatures as have not yet adopted it until all of the states carry on elections under the secret-voting law. Sixteen states have already adopted the Australian system of voting either in whole or in a modified form, and the beneficial effects are made apparent at each election. It is contended by opponents of the system that it has not materially changed elections. That is not the intent of the law, or those who urged its adoption; the desire is for a secret-voting law, and when men vote free from intimidation from bosses and rings, the parties who nominate must exercise more care, more vigilance, and be more scrupulous in the choice of candidates to seek the suffrages of the people. If the establishment of the Australian law in so many states is not directly due to the Knights of labor, the agitation which opened up the way for the inauguration of this reform is their act and deed.

In the field of temperance no factor has been more potent than the Knights of Labor. In labor organizations of early days it was no uncommon thing to find a member who had been disabled, engaged in the selling of liquor. Several such gained admittance to the Knights of Labor, but they were required to withdraw from the order. No liquor seller can legally gain admittance, and if such a person does by any chance become a member, he is debarred from further connection with the association when his

occupation becomes known. The constitution, in referring to that question, reads:

"No local or other assembly or member shall, directly or indirectly, give, sell or have any ale, beer or intoxicating liquors of any kind at any meeting, party, sociable, ball, picnic or entertainment whatever appertaining to the order. Any member found violating this law shall be suspended not less than six months, or expelled. No fine shall be imposed for this offense. Any local or other assembly so offending shall be suspended during the pleasure of the general executive board, or shall have its charter revoked by said board."

Members are not pledged to abstain from the use of intoxicants, but the fact that the liquor seller is proscribed has a most telling effect. The demonstrations held throughout the country on Labor Day under the auspices of the Knights of Labor were of a far different character from those of ten years ago, when it was held to be an impossibility to make a picnic or excursion a success without selling beer.

Attempts were made some years ago to establish cooperative institutions, productive and distributive, but very few of them were successful. Wherever the effort was made to distribute the product of cooperative concerns it was found that the cost of distribution exceeded the value of the article produced, owing to the fact that the avenues of distribution, the railways, were in the hands of those who were not friendly to any action of the workpeople which aimed at placing them on an independent plane. It has been successfully demonstrated that until the agencies through which the product of labor is transported are brought under the control of the people, the concern that does not find favor with the managers and directors of the railway will be discriminated against. These lessons had the effect of strengthening the determination of the members of the organization to place the railways, telegraphs and telephones under the control of the government, and until government ownership is an established fact the owners of railways will stand arrayed against the interests of all save those who make money through the operation of the great trunk lines that have interlaced the cities and towns of the country.

It has been demonstrated that the strike as a weapon of defense is a failure. When hand labor was required to develop an industry the employer had more respect for and paid more deference to the wishes of the employee. Today machinery is the chief factor in production and man comes next; in fact, he is required only to direct a machine or a number of them, and is held in less esteem by the money-loving employer than the belt that propels the machinery of the factory. With one machine doing the work of from five to 100 men, with from two to ten men seeking the one

position, it is an easy task for the employer to laugh at threats of a strike, and the workman realizes that to strike under such conditions is suicidal. Only when driven to it will workmen engage in a strike of any magnitude today.

The failure of the cooperative institution and the strike has turned the eyes of the workman toward other measures of relief from the thrall of the wealth-getter, and instead of striking at the topmost limb, as he formerly did when attempting to better his condition, he now strikes at the root of the tree, at the base of the evil itself. The labor bureaus have shown that the homes of the United States are fast gathering under the shadow of the mortgage holder, that the bulk of the earnings of the workman go to swell the profits of the employer. He knows that the railway is fast assuming greater power than the government, that the land is being absorbed by bonanza farmers and syndicates, who make use of it to throttle the producer he knows that with silver demonetized and gold as the single standard the nation is at the mercy of the few who have monopolized that metal. and while he is told that our system of finance is the best in the world, he doubts the truth of the statement and is seeking for the evidence himself.

Those who today own the coal fields have it in their power to impose great hardship upon those who use the coal if they feel so disposed, or if the outlook indicates that higher prices can be obtained later on. This unlimited power in the bands of the coal operators makes it possible for them to curtail production at will, and the consequence is that the mines are kept on less than halftime the year round. The miner knows that there is no divine law which authorizes the wealthy to monopolize the coal deposits of the earth, and he also realizes that the human law which sanctions such transactions is wicked and oppressive and should be repealed.

All labor organizations agree that the hours of labor should be reduced, and that places of business should close early in order that more time for rest and recreation shall be afforded the worker. An agitation looking to the shortening of the work day has been going on for years and has educated workman and employer to the necessity for reform in that direction. Not the end but the means to an end is what the workman has in view in agitating for the short-hour work day. In the Knights of Labor each assembly sets apart a time for the discussion of the topics set forth in the declaration of principles of the order. Every assembly meets once in each week, and at these meetings the education is progressing that will one day bring through evolution that which revolution could not establish. What has

been privately discussed in the meetings of the year is publicly disseminated on Labor Day.

Women are admitted to membership in the Knights of Labor; such has been the effect of their admission that workmen who previously held to the opinion that they were not entitled to the same compensation as men now publicly advocate equal pay for equal work by both sexes. At the last session of the general assembly of the Knights of Labor the preamble was changed to read "equal rights for both sexes," and though it met with slight opposition when introduced, all are now agreed upon the advisability of securing for women the same rights and privileges that men claim for themselves.

One aim of the Knights of Labor has been and is to "create a healthy public opinion on the subject of labor, the creator of all values, and capital." Those who scan the field today and then look back for fifteen years to review the tendencies of the times at that day will be astonished at the marvelous change in sentiment on the subject of labor. What many a minister of Christ denounced at that day is now known to be just and righteous. In those days only the workman clamored for justice; he was denied a hearing and was told from pulpit and rostrum that other and wiser heads were thinking for him. He awaited the result of this profound thought and saw no good results. He pushed to the front, and in his organization has so educated himself that he now takes the stand in his own defense. This independence on his part is owing to the existence of the Knights of Labor, which has been a vast educational institution in which the rights of man have been taught to all who attended. The education which has been imparted to the workman during the last fifteen years upon economic, social and political questions has opened up to his vision old fields that are new to him. The vista now spread out before his gaze would never have been pointed out to him had he not swept aside the cobwebs of ignorance and superstition in his effort to reach a higher plane than he formerly occupied, and the result is that he has arrayed alongside him many of those who formerly denounced his utterances as rank heresy or communism. Houses of the Good Shepherd and Mercy Homes flourish because of our heartless competitive system, and few disciples of Christ will dare to tell their wealthy hearers to pay fair wages to women whom they employ; few will tell them from the altar of God that the best means of keeping women from the street and eventually from the outcast home, is to pay for labor what it is worth and allow clerk or worker to go home early. It was not by heeding but by disobeying the precept "Servants, obey your masters" that the worker compelled those outside of his own class to heed his demand for justice.



In a knowledge of what he owes to society, in the education he has received in the labor organization, in his independence of party, in his desire to educate his children, in securing better homes and in his intimacy with the questions that were such mysteries to him but a few years ago. the workman of today stands on a higher plane and a surer footing than his brother of past generations. In press and from pulpit the question of labor is discussed, and to all of this the workman lends an attentive ear, capable of discerning the difference between the true, earnest advocate of right and the self-seeking demagogue or the artful apologist of monopoly. Knowledge is power, and in his knowledge the workman of 1891 is progressing toward real independence.