

## TOPICS OF THE TIME.

## The Uses and Abuses of Trades-Unions.

"TRADES-UNIONS are regarded, not unjustly, by most workmen as the most effectual agency they can use to resist unjust exactions. If there never had been unjust employers, there would be no domineering trades-unions. The political economy which teaches that cheap production is always a great good, that no man is bound to consider his workmen's needs, that every man must look after himself, is largely responsible for the growing indifference on the part of employees to the interests of their employers."

So writes an intelligent and successful manufacturer in this city. The tone of his testimony is somewhat less severe than that which we sometimes hear from those who take the side of capital in its controversy with labor. He is able to see the workman's side of the question as well as the master's. He is not alone. The number of those who stand with him is not so large as it ought to be; but there is an increasing class of employers who decline to adopt the maxims of political economy quoted by him, and who are learning to put themselves in the places of their workmen. Such employers have ceased to use the sweeping terms of condemnation which were formerly applied, almost universally, to trades-unions, and have learned to speak of them with some discrimination.

It is not necessary to argue concerning the methods frequently employed by trades-unions. Whenever they resort to violence or intimidation they put themselves beyond the pale of good neighborhood. If the police cannot cope with such banditti, let the military be summoned, with grape-shot and bayonets; if they will not yield to milder arguments, let them be relentlessly put down. No man is under compulsion to join a trades-union, and no man in this free country, who obeys the laws and provides for himself and his own, must be forced by his neighbors to work when he does not like to work, or to desist from working when it pleases him to work. If labor is not free, to this extent, in this country, it is high time that we have another revolution to set it free. Whatever points the trades-unions can carry by fair argument, or by moral forces, they are entitled to; whenever they attempt to carry their points by the use of force or fear, they are outlaws, and should be suppressed in the sternest fashion.

It is also true that these societies often behave themselves as if they had been organized for the discouragement of industry. Their apparent object is to secure the largest amount of wages for the smallest amount of work; and a society of which this is the main purpose is a doubtful factor in the commonwealth.

When the trades-unions forbid men to work beyond a certain rate of speed, as they have sometimes done, and forbid the employing of apprentices, and ordain that the least efficient labor shall be paid as much as the most efficient, they are simply setting the interests of the members of their own particular group against the interests of society in general,—and the

interests of the least worthy among themselves above the interests of the most worthy; they are attempting to grasp for themselves advantages which they have no right to monopolize, and to distribute these advantages among themselves in such a way as to discourage industry and skill; they are acting, in short, in a manner extremely unsocial and injurious, and they cannot expect the countenance of intelligent and patriotic persons. The best that can be said about these practices of the trades-unions is that the wages system, as based on unmitigated competition, is a system of warfare, and that everything is fair in war. On no other assumption can such practices be justified.

These violent and selfish methods form no necessary part, however, of the life of a trades-union; and although they are still in use, there is a decided tendency to abandon them, and to rely on peaceful measures. Attempts to coerce non-union men are made much less frequently than formerly. The trades-unions are beginning to see a little more clearly what purposes are legitimate and what methods are expedient, and in working out this problem they are entitled to the sympathy and the aid of all intelligent employers. Unqualified denunciation of such combinations of workmen indicates not only unfairness but ignorance. There are no respectable writers on political economy of the present day who do not distinctly say that such associations of workmen are, under the present system, not only permissible, but indispensable. So long as the wage-system of industry continues without modification, and the rate of wages is determined by sheer competition, it will be necessary for workmen to combine in order to protect themselves. Capitalists combine in great companies and corporations, and the companies and corporations combine in associations that represent millions of money; such combinations are authorized and protected by law. The laborers have the same right to combine for the protection of their interests, and they ought to be encouraged by public opinion and authorized by law to do so.

Professor Sumner of Yale is, perhaps, the most thorough-going Ricardian economist in this country, and his theories of the workingman's rights and claims are certainly not over-sympathetic. Yet he insists, in his latest volume, that "trades-unions are right and useful, and perhaps necessary," and he goes on to give strong reasons for this assertion. "They may do much," he says, "by way of true economic means to raise wages. They are useful to spread information, to maintain *esprit de corps*, to elevate the public opinion of the class. . . . Especially trades-unions ought to be perfected so as to undertake a great range of important duties, for which we now rely on Government inspection, which never gives us what we need. The safety of workmen from machinery, the ventilation and sanitary arrangements required by factories, the special precautions of certain processes, the hours of labor of women and children, the schooling of chil-

dren, the limits of age for employed children, Sunday-work, hours of labor,—these, and other like matters, ought to be controlled by the men themselves through their organizations. The laborers about whom we are talking are free men in a free state. If they want to be protected, they must protect themselves. They ought to protect their own women and children. Their own class opinion ought to secure the education of the children of their class. If an individual workman is not bold enough to protest against a wrong to laborers, the agent of a trades-union might with propriety do it on behalf of the body of workmen." Here is surely a clear recognition of the right of workmen to form such associations, and a broad basis for their operation. Whatever they can do, by consultation, by discussion, by united action, without resorting to force or fear, to increase the rate or prevent the reduction of wages, or to promote their own welfare in any such ways as Professor Sumner has indicated, they not only may do, but are bound to do. The same enlightened public sentiment which denounces the abuses of the trades-unions should emphasize their uses.

The late Congress of the Unions at Paris seems to have been temperate in its action. An international convention for shortening the hours of women's and children's work was proposed and agreed to, and the following minute was adopted :

"The identity of the interests of the working classes in different countries renders international legislation in labor questions necessary. This legislation will be the outcome of class organization, and, above all things, tend to abrogate laws against trade combinations. It should, in the first instance, apply to the weakest and oppressed, to those least capable of protecting themselves, as women and children. Further progress should result from the development of the working classes."

The debates at the Congress are largely the utterances of moderate and fair-minded men, who have no revolutionary propositions to make, and who are cherishing no unreasonable expectations. Undoubtedly the affairs of the local unions are often managed by men of a different temper; but the presence of a wiser element in their councils should be recognized and encouraged.

What has been said involves the rightfulness of strikes, when these are not accompanied by violence or intimidation. It is doubtful whether the rate of wages is ever materially improved by striking—whether the advance gained would not, in most cases, have come in due season without the strike, and without the serious loss which the strike occasions to workmen as well as masters. Nevertheless, this power of united action belongs to workmen, and should be frankly conceded to them; it is only to be desired that they should learn to use it intelligently and effectively, in such a manner as not to inflict undue injury upon themselves and their employers.

It should be added that this discussion all proceeds upon the basis of the wage-system. So long as this system is maintained in its strictness, the considerations here urged will be valid. But there is another system to which this reasoning would not apply—a system of federation between workmen and employers; a system in which private property would be fully recognized, and in which the captains

of industry would reap the full reward of their organizing power, but in which the workmen should have, in addition to their wages, a stipulated share in the profits of production, and thus be consciously and actually, as well as theoretically, identified with their employers in their interests. It is not likely that the labor question will ever be settled until some such method as this is in vogue. Its adoption would not render trades-unions superfluous; they would still have a legitimate work to do; but it would change their character, and correct their worst abuses.

#### Modern Catholicism.

THE recent celebrations of Luther's four-hundredth birthday have borne good fruit. They have given a distinct impulse to historical study; and the results of this study, as spread before the people in elaborate addresses and in the public prints, have contributed not a little to popular education. The people who read are largely slaves to the record of petty passing events and the novel; whatever delivers them, though it be but for a brief space, from this bondage, and leads them out into the wide realm of history, is a salutary influence. Moreover, the tendency of the present time to seek out the causes of the things that appear has led to a more careful exploration of the ages preceding the Reformation. It was the popular notion that the Reformation had its birth in the brain of Luther: the more profound and philosophical of the recent discussions have made it plain to multitudes that many political and intellectual causes had been long conspiring to bring on the crisis of which he was the hero. This fact is familiar enough, of course, to students; but the great majority of the people, even of those who have been educated in the common schools, have but dim notions of the operation of those secular causes whose results are harvested in the great epochs of history: in their hero-worship they are apt to ascribe the uprisings and overturnings of nations to the men whose names are connected with them. Thus they get the impression that great reformations can be produced at any time to order; and they are impatient of the delays which always attend the working out of important problems in church and state. Wherever the work of Luther has been adequately treated, much light must have been thrown upon this whole subject; and we may hope that a few of the more rational of the modern reformers will learn from it an important practical lesson.

But the most significant feature of these celebrations is the reasonably good temper with which, in the main, they have been conducted,—the comparative mildness of the *odium theologicum* which they must needs arouse. The old battle between Papist and Protestant has been fought over again by some of the more strenuous partisans on either side; and there have been those who have sought to make this anniversary an occasion for widening the breach between the two wings of the Western Church. But these have not been the only voices; many of the discussions have been characterized on each side by justice and moderation. It is known by most of the eulogists of Luther that the Roman Catholic Church of this day and of this country is a very different Church