

TOPICS OF THE TIME.

To our Readers — In Confidence.

THE larger magazines of our day are evidently made up with a view of presenting such a variety of contents that every intelligent reader can, in each number, find something especially adapted to his or her taste. This is the reason a modern editor so easily comforts himself upon the advent of any one of those numerous advisory or objurgatory epistles which he is sure to receive in the course of a twelvemonth. Bless you, my dear sir, or madam, he says,—at least to himself,—the essay, or story, or poem you have put yourself to the trouble of reading was never meant for you at all! Turn over a few pages and you will find your own special part of the magazine; doubtless, in fact, you actually did so five minutes after dispatching that scathing criticism to the editor of your “favorite magazine.” If you see nothing in Stockton, and want more of Cable and Harris and the rest, remember a letter has just been sent by your next-door neighbor, perhaps indeed by the member of your family who sits opposite to you at the breakfast-table, saying he or she really cannot read Cable, and does not know what Harris was made for, but will take all of Stockton that the new patent steam printing-and-folding Hoe press can supply!

Perhaps no series of articles ever published in a magazine has been followed by so large, so eager, and so persistent an audience as the War Series of THE CENTURY; and yet we are aware that there are some who have found certain of these valuable, and to very many readers intensely interesting, contributions too disconnected, or too technical, or even too warlike (!) for pleasurable reading.

But there are in every number of every magazine articles which are intended to interest, not one class of readers, but all classes. We wish, therefore, to take our friends into the editorial confidence and to say that both the readers of the War Series and those who have not been interested in them will find no difficulty in following with complete understanding the Life of Lincoln begun in the November CENTURY. Here is a connected, logical, historical story, which can be read chapter by chapter for the interest or charm of narrative contained in every separate sub-division of the work; and which can also be followed continuously from month to month for the serial interest of the narrative, which has from beginning to end the sequence and logical progress of a great drama.

In point of fact, even were this Life of Lincoln less lucidly and persuasively written than it is, there would be a sort of patriotic duty in its perusal. This is the book that Lincoln himself helped to make and would wish to be judged by. But it is more than this; for we believe that no other book yet written will be found to contain a clearer and more authentic statement, from the national point of view, of the political origin of the military struggle of 1861–1865. The American who neglects the present opportunity to make himself acquainted with this vital epoch in the history of his country will be less intelligent in his patriotism than the faithful reader of the authorized Life of the great

President. English and other distant readers of THE CENTURY, not a few of whom have found the War Series difficult to master, will be able to follow the Life without confusion, and with a surety of obtaining, as a consequence, a thorough understanding of the man and of his times, of the war itself and of the reasons for it.

But it is, of course, especially to the American reader that the Life of Lincoln has an interest. Both its letter-press and illustrations will be studied by him with something more than ordinary curiosity. Among other things, he will find that Abraham Lincoln, as President of the United States, was no accident of politics; that it was almost as a matter of course that he came to be the standard-bearer of the party of liberty in America. In *this* sense there was no accident and no miracle about Lincoln, as many have supposed. But there was indeed a miracle, and one which grows greater the more it is looked into: namely, the old miracle of individual genius! Why did the boy that fished little Abe out of Knob Creek remain the simple, worthy, but, save for this one act, unknown personage that he still is, while the boy that was fished out became a man fit for the companionship of King Solomon and of Shakspeare? Not a President merely, not a martyr merely,—accidents may create either,—and not merely a Liberator; but a man of such surpassing character and sagacity as to dominate by native right in one of the most terrific conflicts recorded in human annals!

The Eight-hour Working-day.

THE argument for a decrease of the daily hours of labor to eight has taken two forms. One of these asserts that there are now more workmen than are required for effective production, and that a decrease of the daily hours of labor in the case of the employed would bring about a demand for the services of those who are now unemployed, and so “make room” for the latter. This line of argument, though often used in our popular American reviews, may be dismissed as ridiculous. If there were anything in it, its object could be attained as easily by requiring each employed workman to work with one arm tied behind him. “Room” for unemployed workmen is not made by decreasing, but by legitimately increasing production. The introduction of a single new process, such as nickel-plating, is a greater “relief” to unemployed labor than all that trade-unions or statutes could offer. The other line of argument is far more respectable. It holds that the proposed reduction would not operate practically to decrease the amount of production, thus ignoring the problem of “making room” for the unemployed; but that the workman’s cheerfulness, hopefulness, and increased efficiency would make good the decrease in working-time, leaving the saved time for rest, recreation, and mental improvement. Those who advance this argument offer in evidence, as they have a fair right to do, the historical results of previous reductions of working-hours; and the evidence is well worthy of consideration, provided

we bear in mind the essential distinction between the natural and unforced decrease and the attempt to decrease working-hours by statute.

Under early conditions, there may be said to have been two classes of labor, agricultural and artisan. Whether the agricultural laborer were working for an employer or on a corvee, his daily hours of labor were practically equivalent to his waking-hours; and he is probably little better off yet on the greater part of the earth's surface. It seems to be the artisan who has gained most largely. The strongest authority to the contrary is Professor Thorold Rogers. He gives little space in his "Work and Wages" to the subject of hours of labor; but he takes several opportunities to insist that the normal working-day in England in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was one of eight hours, so that "the artisan who is demanding at this time an eight-hours' day in the building trades is simply striving to recover what his ancestor worked by four or five centuries ago." And yet, in almost the only two items directly referring to the question, his own evidence states the normal working-days of the past as fourteen and a half hours for agricultural laborers and twelve for artisans. He believes that two and a half hours are to be deducted from these figures for meals; but even then the remainder would be much short of an eight-hour day.

It is most likely that the conditions of early artisan labor, at any rate, were such as to make any comparison or estimate very difficult. The guild system was patriarchal. The master fixed his own hours of labor; his apprentices, like the children of his family, worked according to his estimate of their strength; and his journeymen, or adult employees, though paid by the day or year, evidently worked by conventional piece-estimates; the sawing of a hundred boards, for example, being taken as a day's work. Under such a system, it would not be easy to say what was the normal day's work. The guild statutes, indeed, always ordain that no one "shall work longer than from the beginning of the day until curfew"; but this limit is so generous as to be practically useless. The Statute of Apprentices (5 Eliz., c. 4) provides that daily hours of labor for apprentices should be limited to twelve; and this would seem to point to fourteen or fifteen hours as the outside limit for the stronger journeymen, who answer to our modern workmen.

The industrial change from the domestic to the factory system, toward the end of the last century, consisted in the disappearance of the old guild-master and his family inmate the apprentice, the substitution of the modern individual master or employer, emancipated from guild or other control, and the confusion of the apprentice, the journeyman, and the female employee into one class, the operative or workman. The result was the modern factory. A long struggle followed to transfer the provisions of the Statute of Apprentices to the new order of things; but the masters succeeded in wiping out this last remnant of the old system in 1814. All the new class of workmen were now thrown on self-defense, but burdened by the tyrannical acts against combinations, which gave a criminal character to attempts by workmen to unite to begin or maintain strikes. These were abolished after 1824 in England, though it is but a few years since some of our American States have repealed what had long been a dead letter.

We have now had, for half a century at least, two classes, master and workmen, settling hours of labor by treaty, instead of three, master, apprentice, and journeyman, all bound by guild rules or their survivals; and any decrease has been mainly natural.

Under the new factory system, the masters at first had every advantage over their men; and the hours were for a time increased, sometimes to an inhuman degree. In the long run, the advantage was on the side of the workmen. Collected in great establishments, they felt a new confidence in the presence of their own numbers; and their larger numbers brought public attention more directly upon their complaints and grievances. The daily hours of labor have certainly been decreasing for fifty years in England and America, until they now shift around what may be considered the normal amount of about sixty hours per week.

The decrease has not been accompanied by any falling off in quantity or quality of production. On the contrary, the general rule has been that the working-day has decreased as the labor has become more efficient and has produced more largely. The silk factories of northern Italy are open from five A. M. until ten P. M., the operatives making ninety-four and one-half hours per week, or fifteen and three-fourths hours per day. The contrast between this and the fifty-two hours per week, or eight and two-thirds hours per day, of an operative in an English machine factory, is the extreme; but the superior efficiency of the English laborer makes the shorter hours in the comparison really the longer, measured in results. The same tendency shows itself even within a country. When we leave the localities of the more efficient labor in England, the hours of labor invariably increase. In international comparisons, the English consular reports are a most convenient authority. The following table, cited by Mr. J. S. Jeans, giving the normal hours of weekly labor in the factories of different countries, will show something of this relation of efficiency to contraction of hours of labor:

	Textile Factories.	Machine Factories.
Germany.....	72.....	60
France.....	72.....	60
Austria.....	66.....	66
Russia.....	72 to 84.....	72
Switzerland.....	66.....	66
Belgium.....	72.....	62
Italy.....	69 to 90.....	72
Holland.....	72.....	64
United States.....	60.....	60
Great Britain.....	56.....	52

If we consider the question only under the conditions which now affect labor, the general tendency to a decrease in hours of labor, together with the concentration of this tendency in countries of well-known efficiency, as shown in the table above, seems to confirm the historical argument for the eight-hour day. But it seems to show also (1) that, as things now are, this tendency has a limit somewhere between nine and ten hours a day; (2) that a decrease to this limit is not made so easily as to the limit of forty or fifty years ago, but meets a resistance more pronounced as the limit is approached; (3) that only a careful organization of labor, having an unusually intelligent consideration for the necessities of the employer, and that in a few very efficient trades and countries, such as the machine factories of

Great Britain, can carry the limit below nine hours; and (4) the statistics of special trades show that a reduction below nine hours regularly represents the imperative influence of winter weather on certain outdoor occupations, accompanied by the unpleasant result of reduction of wages, and in any event foreign to the special subject under consideration.

However strongly such conclusions may support the argument that decrease of hours of labor does not result of necessity in a decrease of production, it must be remembered that they lend no countenance to the notion that a *statutory* decrease of hours of labor can have any good effect: on the contrary, all the indications go to show that it would have a very bad effect in losing the decrease which efficiency has thus far gained, in banishing capital and business from the place where statutory decrease had been attempted, and in compelling the renewal of the decreasing process in another place and probably under more unfavorable conditions. If capital and labor, under healthy conditions, have carried efficiency of production to its highest present limit, and consequent decrease of hours of labor to its lowest present natural limit, the state of affairs has become exceptionally delicate of adjustment, and any interference can only throw it out of balance, decrease efficiency, and either decrease wages or increase hours of labor in order to make successful competition possible with more favorably situated labor and capital. The desired decrease must be natural rather than merely statutory.

Every indication points us to the belief that such a further reduction in hours of labor, even below the eight-hour limit, is not only possible, but exceedingly probable, if it is allowed to come naturally, not artificially; that the progress of art and science is constantly tending, where it is unchecked, to make less labor necessary for man's subsistence. Nothing could be so certain to check or destroy this tendency as an organized effort by labor to gain a forced, artificial, and unfair advantage over its employers. When hours of labor are far above the limit possible at the time, statutory interference can do comparatively little harm; the nearer they approach the natural limit, the more does statutory interference tend to drive them up again. Labor organizations can do very little by striving for a *legal* eight-hour day; they can do very much by striving to sweep away passion and prejudice, by upholding peace, order, and security, the conditions of efficient production, and by inculcating an intelligent consideration of facts by their members. Only in this way can they gain or approach an eight-hour working-day.

Appropriations and the Veto.

It would not be surprising if, when Congress meets again, the President's annual message should renew the request that Congress approve an amendment to the Constitution, giving to the President the power to veto particular items of appropriation bills while approving the rest of them. Every President of late years has urged this step upon the attention of Congress, and Congress has persistently ignored it, with the exception of a committee report in flat opposition to it. Yet the argument in its favor only gathers strength as the years pass.

The growth of the country in wealth and resources

brings with it an unavoidable change in the nature of its system. A large part of its government tends to take on the character of a machine, and of a machine with which it is dangerous to meddle. Experience, if it has been properly utilized, comes to show about the amount necessary for the annual support of great departments of the Government, and the arrangement of the items of the appropriation bills for them becomes largely a perfunctory office. The annual amount of the great appropriation bills can be guessed in advance within comparatively small limits. To give the State Department, for example, less than a certain amount would only cripple its efficiency for the year, and the normal amount is not difficult to get at. The result is that a percentage of the annual appropriations tends steadily to become a matter of routine.

Such a tendency, if judiciously guarded, would not be at all bad in its nature. It ought, on the contrary, to act in the direction of economy of effort by the appropriating body, by making it certain of part of its work in advance, and by enabling it to give more of its time and effort to the rest of its work. When it does not so act, the fault is regularly in the appropriating body, through its determination to make use of these routine appropriations for the purpose of grasping an illegitimate increase of power over the other departments of government. The knowledge that some of the appropriations have become fixed only moves the legislative body to make these fixed appropriations the vehicle to carry new appropriations by means never designed in the foundation of the political system. The new items are presented to the possessor of the veto power as a part of the routine appropriations, and he must approve all or veto all. The message sent by the Legislature to the Executive runs in reality thus: "We are aware that you have a constitutional voice in the adoption of new appropriations through your possession of the veto power. But we know, also, that some of these appropriations have become fixed through process of time, and that their delay would throw the Government into temporary confusion. We intend to make use of that knowledge to make you approve appropriations of which you really disapprove, and thus to balk a part of your constitutional functions. We send you the routine appropriations, with just as many new appropriations as we dare introduce without absolutely forcing a veto. You must approve or veto the whole mass. If we have calculated correctly, the percentage of new matter is not large enough for you to go to the country with a *primâ facie* case for a general veto. In any event, the people will be apt to hold you, rather than us, to be the responsible party for any confusion in the Government, so that you had better quietly sign the whole." If such a message were really sent *ipsis simis verbis*, what self-respecting Executive could do anything else than accept the challenge and impose the veto? And yet, how else can the action of the legislative body be interpreted?

The political organization of the States is so closely similar to that of the Federal Government, that the pressure of this evil has naturally been felt in the States as well. As constitutional change is easier in their case, the remedy has been applied by some of them in the form of a modification of the veto power, allowing the Governor to veto detached items of an

strenuous opponents. This helped forward the movement, but a far more vigorous impulse was given to it by the revelations which were made after the presidential election concerning the unprecedented use of money for the purchase of votes by both political parties. These awoke the public conscience in all parts of the country, and caused a general demand for some ballot system which would secure a secret and untrammelled vote. When the State legislatures came together in January last, there was scarcely one of them which did not have before it in some form a measure for a change in existing ballot systems. The Australian method was the favorite everywhere, partly because it had stood the test of experience in Australia for 30 years, in England for 18 years, and in Canada for 16 years, and partly because discussion of it had made the public to some extent familiar with its principles.

The result of the legislative year's work was the seven laws which we have enumerated. In Maine, Michigan, Ohio, Illinois, and several other States similar laws were considered but were not passed. The seed sown by the discussions of them is certain, however, to bear fruit in the near future. The leading principles of the eight laws which we now have are the same in all. They are:

1. An exclusively official ballot, printed and distributed at the public expense. The names of all candidates for all offices are to be placed upon these ballots, and none others are to be received or counted.

2. Absolute secrecy in voting. Every voter is required to take his ballots and retire alone with them to a compartment where, free from observation or espionage of any kind, he must mark them to indicate the candidates for whom he wishes to vote. There is slight variation in the methods prescribed by the different laws for this marking. In Indiana the voter is to make the mark with an official stamp, furnished for the purpose; in Missouri he must erase from the ballot all names except those for which he wishes to vote; and in Massachusetts, Montana, Rhode Island, Wisconsin, Tennessee, and Minnesota he must indicate his choice by an X opposite the name of each candidate for whom he wishes to vote. In three of the laws, those of Indiana, Missouri, and Tennessee, the names of candidates are grouped under party titles, but in the others they follow the order in which the nominations are received by the officer in charge of the printing, with the politics indicated after each name.

3. Ample provision for independent nominations. All the laws contain careful provision whereby a specified number of voters can, by agreeing upon an independent candidate, and by making his nomination in writing to the official printer of the ballots, have his name placed upon the ballots on equal terms with those of the regular candidates.

It is easy to see at a glance what a momentous gain for honest elections has been secured by the engrafting of these three principles upon our electoral system. The printing and distributing of ballots at the public expense, and the prohibition of all others, takes away all excuse for assessments upon candidates, and drives from the polls all the ticket-peddlers, watchers, and political workers of all kinds. There will be nothing for them to do outside and about the polls, they are forbidden to congregate near the polls, and they are

not allowed inside. Thus we are rid at once of the chief excuse for raising money for corrupt purposes at the polls, and of the ability to use it, even if raised, with any certainty that the receivers of it will carry out their part of the corrupt bargain at the ballot-boxes. By having an absolutely secret ballot we are rid of espionage and intimidation of all kinds. The ward "boss" cannot follow his henchmen to the polls to see if they vote according to orders, or according to the terms of a "deal." The bulldozing employer cannot intimidate his employees to vote in accordance with his interests, but must leave them to vote in accordance with their own free will.

Possibly the greatest gain of all will be found in time to be that secured through independent nominations. This is the straightest and deadliest blow which has been struck at the dictatorial caucus system. Henceforth in eight States, any body of men, though a mere handful, can get their candidates' names upon the ballots and can have them distributed at the polls on equal terms with those of the regular parties. Every caucus will thus have hanging over its deliberations the threat of a formidable and easily organized independent movement in case its own nominations are not satisfactory. Heretofore the most effective obstacle to an independent ticket has been the difficulty and expense of getting it distributed at the polls.

Eight Hours a Day.

AGITATION is by no means a thing to be condemned off-hand. The justification of it rests on the same basis as that of any other advocacy: its ground of defense is that no other agency will take pains to defend its client; that opposing forces have their advocates who will bring out the best points on their behalf; and that this particular client should also have its advocate, to bring out the strong points of its case, leaving the balance of justice to be ascertained by those to whom that duty properly belongs. It will certainly not be asserted that any of our "trusts," or pools, or associations of manufacturers, or other employers, will make as hearty and persistent efforts as a labor organization would make to state and make clear the reasons or provocations for a troublesome and expensive strike. Nor, on the other hand, is it the primary business of the labor organization to maintain the cause of any but its own members. The case will be best understood and decided by the general public and by the parties interested when each side has been presented fully by those who feel its justice most keenly and know most about it, provided the presentation has been made in a spirit of fairness and of willingness to compromise. Even then some points will be imperfectly understood, but substantial justice can in no other way be so closely reached.

Every man, then, who is interested in industrial discussion has a right to protest against the spirit in which some industrial disputes are settled. A settlement into which either side brings personal rancor, or in which either side yields only perforce after a mismanaged struggle, with the reservation of an intention to try it again at the earliest opportunity or to gain the wished-for end by treachery and indirection, is no settlement at all. The employer who abandons a lock-out, but takes every subsequent opportunity to discharge "agi-

tators," whom he regards as troublesome, will find, when he next has need of public sympathy, that he has alienated it. And there is no more real excuse for the labor agitator who, after a complete exposure of his failure to understand the circumstances through which he has undertaken to be the guide of his fellows, refuses to admit his mistake, but seeks some new ground upon which to prepare a second failure.

It is not quite a misnomer to give the name of "discussion" to a strike. The essence of the strike is that it is a clumsy means of testing truth. With some philosophical differences as to the source from which wages are paid, there is a pretty general agreement as to the manner in which the rate of wages is fixed. One distinguished writer on the subject has even gone for his text to the summing up of an intelligent workman, who said: "When I see two bosses running after one man, I know that wages are going to be high; when I see two men running after one boss, I know that wages are going to be low." All this means that supply and demand have the same influence on the price of labor as on the price of corn. But man has found no means of ascertaining the "visible supply" of labor in any trade as he has in the case of corn: corn remains corn and cannot become wheat or oats, but the man who is a shoemaker to-day may be a farmer or a horse-car driver to-morrow. How then is the possible labor supply to be ascertained? The workman says: "The supply of labor in our trade is sufficiently short to justify a ten per cent. increase of wages." The employer denies it. In the dearth of statistics, how is the controversy to be decided? The strike furnishes a clumsy mode of decision. The men suspend their work, and the employer attempts, by engaging new men, to justify his contention that the supply of labor was not "short."

It must be evident that it is unskilled labor which is at the greatest disadvantage in such a mode of coming to conclusions. This is the class of labor, therefore, which is most interested in finding some reasonable substitute for the strike and lockout rather than in contriving new pretexts or methods for either. The strike of the car-drivers in Brooklyn and New York last winter, for example, was successful only in showing that, for every hundred men who had struck, at least five times the number, of equal or superior capacity, were waiting to take their places. Having demonstrated this unwelcome state of affairs, what were rational men to do next? The circumstances could be changed only by sheer violence; and the city government was not to be counted as a passive but as an active neutral; it was not to leave the struggle to the arbitrament of violence, but intended to protect property as well as life. The men were wisest, then, in yielding to circumstances and again seeking their old work.

What are we to think, then, of the wisdom of guides who condemn circumstances and seek only for new

reasons or methods for strikes? Yet the "lesson" which a leading labor journal drew from the failure of the street-car strike was as follows:

The state should appoint boards of arbitration to which all grievances could be referred, and enact laws to enforce the decisions of the arbitrators. Reduce the hours of labor to eight per day, and establish a minimum rate of wages. Attach a penalty for working overtime, and give an opportunity to labor to the vast army of industrious idle men who flood the larger American cities at the present time. This would render strikes unnecessary, as an employer would think twice before allowing his work to stop when he did not know where to look for men. The employer reaps all the benefit of the competition in labor under present methods.

The two branches of this proposal are apt to seem plausible, even to men presumed to be educated. And yet the first, that of compulsory arbitration, really amounts to either a stoppage of production or the re-introduction of slavery. If the arbitration is made compulsory on the employer alone, production must stop, for the scheme would be merely a legal confiscation of the property of the employer, who, if he is sane, will go out of business. In the second place, the decision of the arbitrators can be enforced on the employer through his property: if he refuses to obey, his property can be sold by the sheriff. The workman has, roughly speaking, no property on which to levy, unless his labor be accounted his property. Compulsory arbitration for workmen, then, means compulsory labor, and that always has in it something of the principle of slavery. The state could not afford even to permit workmen to consent to its admission.

The second part of the proposal, the struggle for "eight hours a day," is founded on the notion that if less work is done in eight than in ten hours there will be just so much work left for those now unemployed; while the consequent employment of previously idle men will prevent an employer from filling the places of strikers, and will guard against a decrease of wages. If the proposal were that every man should work with one hand tied behind him, for the same purpose, the naked folly of it would need no demonstration. Any man could estimate for himself the effects on the industry and prosperity of the community or nation, and could see that, instead of providing work for the unemployed, the practical result would be the decrease of work, through the ruin of industries which have now but the narrowest margin of profit to rely upon. And yet where is the essential difference between the two proposals, except that this reason for an eight-hour day is solemnly put out as an "economic" proposition?

There are more respectable reasons for the eight-hour day, which are entitled to argument. But the reason above assigned is rather the dense obstinacy which attempts to retain or regain a discredited leadership by cozening the victims into treading again the same old road to ruin.

