

crocus and hyacinths in their perfection during the self-same time. As for the fruit garden, the orchard alone will keep us busy enough in October, while in the kitchen garden we choose dry days in which to earth up our celery and remove all those

of the heads which seem disposed to run away to seed; and towards the end of the month a good large planting of cabbages should be made, that will come in early in spring, having your ground first well dug and manured.

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### WHAT FIXES MY WAGES.



OW often does one hear of the hardness of masters in beating down to the lowest possible point the wages of their *employés*! There are many large capitalists and extensive employers of labour noted in their various districts for their great goodness to their fellow-men. These capitalists give away thousands of pounds yearly for the advancement of such objects as seem likely to promote the welfare of their poorer brethren: their motives are of the very purest, and cannot be misconstrued. Notwithstanding all this, how often does one hear it said of such men that they would do far more good, and that it would be much more in keeping with their public character, if they paid their men better wages! It is not easy to understand how a man who seems to all appearance to be prompted by the very kindest of feelings in nearly all the relations of life, can make his men work for him day after day for wages that just keep them decently and respectably. It would almost appear that a man when he went down to his office changed his disposition with his coat.

This censure that is passed on employers of labour is not deserved. It is not my employer at all that fixes my wages. If he were perfectly free in the matter, I have no doubt whatever that the same liberality that distinguishes him as a citizen would be found to distinguish him as a master. Masters are not any harder-hearted than other men; they are just as much—ay, more—concerned about the condition of their work-people than the latter themselves are in many cases. We shall now proceed to explain these statements.

Suppose you are travelling, and as you issue from the railway station two boys rush up and volunteer to carry your portmanteau. One boy will do it for sixpence, another for a penny. One can carry it as well as another. Which of the boys are you to engage? Strict business would at once make you close with the offer of the second boy; so, however, would considerations of a purely humane kind. Why does the second boy offer to do the work for one-sixth of the amount required by the first boy? Because he is poorer; he is, perhaps, verging on starvation, and your penny may save him from very acute distress. A penny is worth six times as much to him as to the first boy, as is evidenced by the fact that he is willing to do six times as much work for it. By engaging this boy, then, you benefit him as much, perhaps more, with a penny, as you would have benefited

the other boy with sixpence; this is surely neither wrong nor mean.

Let us suppose the contrary case now—two travellers, each with a portmanteau. These travellers want a boy to carry their portmanteaus; they are going in different directions, and they can command the services of only one boy. This boy will, of course, have no hesitation in closing with the best offer. Who will make the best offer? If the travellers are equally well off, it will be the one to whom it is most important that his bag should be carried, and this will be as it should be. If, however, they are not equally well off, if one is very much richer than the other, then, even though it should be a matter of life and death for this other to have his portmanteau carried, he will not get the boy to carry it for him unless he offers at least as great a reward as his richer competitor. No one can blame the boy for acting in this way; perhaps he has a mother to provide for; perhaps he has no shoes to wear—at any rate he must be very poor, otherwise he would not pursue so humble a calling.

These cases, though not exactly parallel to cases of masters and workmen, at least illustrate the principle that determines the wages that my master pays me. In the first case the boys compete with one another and fix the remuneration; in the second case the travellers compete with one another. Hence the name given to this principle—the principle of competition. Let us now examine this principle at work in the wider field of every-day life.

The condition of match-box makers, and of those engaged in kindred occupations, is considered to be very hard. See how cheaply these boxes sell! So insignificant is the value of the box, that as soon as it is empty—no matter though it be quite uninjured—you esteem it as worthless and throw it away. Our match-makers are wealthy firms, and in no respect less honourable than other firms, yet you are often told that they amass fortunes out of the flesh and bone of their operatives. This is a very cruel and unjust statement. The remuneration of the operatives is low—perhaps merely enables them to keep body and soul together—because these operatives compete with one another for the work just as in the case of the boys competing for the traveller's portmanteau. In that case we saw nothing wrong in the action of the traveller when he decided to engage the boy that offered his services at the lowest figure; on the contrary, there was something that might be considered commendable in it. The same reasoning

applies to the case of our match-makers, and with a good deal more force, as we shall now proceed to show.

Perhaps a match-box firm, composed of men deeply impressed with the hard lot of their people, may some day resolve to ignore the principle of competition and accordingly raise the wages of their *employés*. This course would be sure to meet with public approval, and would show these men to be of very high character. It would, however, lead to their ruin. Other firms would continue to employ labour at wages determined by competition, and would undersell the first firm in the market. The consequence would be that these good men would have to give up business. A process like this would ultimately make all the good masters disappear, and there would be left only the hard masters. This shows how it is that generous, philanthropic men have to follow the market rate of wages; also how unwise and unjust it is for the public to say of such men that they would do far more good if they paid their workmen better, insinuating at the same time that their charity is done for the sake of being "seen of men." We said that the case of the two boys and the traveller was not exactly parallel to cases of masters and workmen; the difference consists in this, that whereas the traveller might very well give the boy more than he bargained for out of pity or good feeling of some sort, the master, as we have just shown, cannot raise his men's wages.

It seldom happens in this country at the present day that ordinary labour is competed for as in the case of the one boy and the two travellers. It has happened, however, in former days, and most unfair laws were enacted through the influence of masters forbidding workmen to demand wages above a certain rate. These laws are all repealed now, and no man need work upon terms that he does not consider fair—at any rate so far as the law is concerned; of course if he refuse to work he may starve. In the colonies labour is sometimes scarce, then there arises competition between employers, and consequently wages become high.

This competition of labour with labour, and of capital with capital, ranges throughout our whole social system. A skilled mechanic gets higher wages than an ordinary labourer because there are fewer mechanics than ordinary labourers compared with the work there is for each class to do; and the reason that the former are comparatively fewer is because it is more difficult to become one of the former than of

the latter. Moreover, the less skilled classes of workmen are always being recruited from those that fail in other classes. It is well known how swollen are the ranks of clerks. Let any one put an advertisement in a London paper, offering a clerkship worth from seventy-five to a hundred and fifty pounds a year, and he will receive more replies than he can read. This is because all those that have failed in the professions and in carrying out a career in some special line fall back into this miscellaneous class. Many people think that we have so many clerks because the labouring population is getting too proud for manual work; it is very much otherwise. The great army of clerks draws the most of its recruits from above, not from below. It is the border-land between the intellectual working classes and the classes that work by their hands, and there are a great many people who, rather than lapse amongst the latter classes, prefer to work harder, and for less remuneration perhaps, so long as they retain an employment of a genteel character. This may or may not be right—it is natural—and it is a good thing for people to keep themselves up, as it were; this aspect of the question does not concern us here, however, we have to deal only with its effect upon wages, which every one will easily see is to lower them. This is why the wages of clerks are so low—lower in many cases than the wages of working men.

There is no use for us to speak of the other classes of the community; their wages are all fixed by the principle of competition. The reason that the man that writes a book gets better paid than the man that binds it or sets it up in type is because fewer men can write books than can bind them. The reason that the newspaper boy is not so well paid as the newspaper editor is because there are more boys to sell the paper if this or that one refuse: there is, perhaps, not another man within the proprietor's reach to edit the paper.

We have not by any means exhausted all the aspects of our subject. Enough, however, has, we trust, been said to enable the reader to appreciate the grounds of the statement already made in this article, that "it is not my employer at all that fixes my wages." He is as much in the hands of circumstances as I am, and instead of standing in my way and wanting to get out of me as much as he can for as little as he can, he would probably be only too glad if he could double my salary and enable me to live as comfortably as himself.

W. B. R.

