Problems of Anarchism.

LAVOR.

2.—On the Law of Labor and How to Discover It.

The abstruse nature of the conceptions of liberty and property we have already recognized, and, while noting that existing conditions do not conform to our ideal principles, we saw that the tendency of social evolution lay in that direction. In this lies the virtue of such generalizations, for, while affirming only tendencies, they serve as a guide in the investigation of the facts of social science. To find the causes that set in the way of realizing the abstract law or ideal conception in the realities of social life becomes the main object of our inquiry. The labor problem may be elucidated by a generalization which, while embodying our ideal as to the true aim of justice, will harmonize with the principles already established. At the same time we must carefully avoid the mistake made by all the classic economists, who, after setting up abstractions, drew conclusions therefrom and deemed it unnecessary to compare them with actual conditions or to seek the causes of disagreement, but, instead, put forward their unverified results as "laws" to explain phenomena on which they were not originally based and hence could not explain.

In order to simplify our conception, let us imagine that equal liberty actually prevails, society no longer displaying an ordered series of exceptions to the law; assume that each individual finds the essential benefits of his own activities, property rights conforming to the principle by which we have agreed to represent justice; we thus eliminate privilege and monopoly, and suppose freedom of exchange and competition the only basis of relations in industrial as in all other affairs between men.

What under these circumstances would be the law of labor? No one idea is involved in the answer, for but one deduction from the hypothesis logically possible. The reward of work would equal the product of labor. And the social value of the service would measure its price. Exchange would be in reality what it is now only in theory,—a return of service for service; not, however, as erroneously believed by Wieser and the early individualist reformers on the one hand, and Marx and his followers on the other, who, in measuring service against service, projected the time-measure of comparison, a standard based on the time theory of value. For services and commodities of like kinds are not exchangeable, but only those which are unlike; and though a time-measure is unobjectionable as a standard for quantities of the same service or commodity,—as, for example, a coat that takes six hours to make will be of like value to a similar garment made in the same time because the labor is of like kind,—yet for labor or commodities of different kinds, which alone constitute exchange, such a standard is inadequate, useless, and misleading. So that, while postulating the principle that labor should be remunerated with the value of its product, or that service should repay service, if it is necessary to do this against the selfish, we cannot against the social suggestion that value is measured by labor-time, or that labor is under all circumstances the measure of value, but in doing so I do not give up the idea that the cost of labor, though not measured in hours, is the chief determining factor in exchange value. Returning from this digression on value, which will turn up again in its own place, let us see what the above generalization is worth in regard to the wages question.

Did labor obtain in wages the value of the product, no theory would be required as at present to tell us how much of the product should go to the producer, and what proportion to the landlord, the capitalists, and the tax-gatherer; the only question to determine being the cause operating to raise or lower the exchange value of the product, the whole of which would constitute the wages of labor. For there is no reason to believe that we shall ever reach a stage wherein the proportions in which commodities will exchange for each other will cease to fluctuate and, while any variation is possible, exchange value must vary accordingly. With ultimate questions of such nature we need not, however, concern ourselves.

Having established a principle in harmony with our earlier generalizations, which will serve as the ideal law of labor, the theories that are concerned with temporary phases may be studied and compared. Marx's great theory of wages, the explanation of capitalism by the conception of surplus value, pocketed by the employer in the form of profits representing simply unpaid labor, is found on close scrutiny to rest on some erroneous assumptions that once formed the stock in trade of all economists. The wage fund theory, which was essential to the Marxist exposition of capital and the surplus value theory of labor, now, if Marx were scientifically sound in this train of reasoning, the condemnation of capitalism, as the individualistic system of production, which is the creative and inadequate generalizations of political economy rendered easy on the part of Socialists, would still rest on the same grounds, and no economic system embodying private ownership of capital, competition, and the wage system could offer the slightest hope to the laboring class. A social system based on individualism or the law of equal liberty would always present the evils now accompanying capitalism, and common ownership of the means of production would seem the sole and inevitable way of escape for the wage-worker.

But if the generalization of the "iron law" of wages is unscientific and incapable of resuming the widest truths of economics, the foundation disappears from the conception of surplus value, and we shall still be able to accept the sociological laws traced by the Marxist dogmas. Economists of the present day discard the theories of wages accepted almost without question a generation ago. And the system of Marx, which was built upon them, is rejected in many important particulars by some of the leading men who accept as general scheme of Socialism, capital accumulation.

Walker's theory of wages, for want of a better, is currently accepted by the professors as a masterly statement of the labor question. But perhaps its only value lies in the fact that it is the first comprehensive and satisfactory treatment of the phenomena, but simply an intelligible restatement of the data which we need a scientific law to elucidate and conclude. Walker's theory does not increase our knowledge of the causes which produce and maintain the present arrangement in the division of the product. Wages, he affirms, consist of the value of what is produced, less rent and interest, with an allowance (taxes) to the governing authority. But to tell the wage-worker who growns beneath the load of landlord, capitalist, and tax-gather that he has really nothing to complain of, all he produces is given to him as wages, except the trifling slice that these sources justly and necessarily absorb, is not to console him for the hardship of his lot, but only to apologize for the plunderers.

In examining the labor problem a truth should be kept in view that has an important bearing on the further elucidation of the points at issue. Rent and interest must be recognized as economic facts naturally arising out of present economic conditions, and there is no means of lessening or eliminating their burden except by such a modification of those conditions as will naturally result in their diminution and extinction. In other words, the laborer must be prepared to pay, as he is now forced to pay, both landlord and capitalist's share out of the product of industry, which share will continue to be fixed by supply and demand, until he is ready to adopt or to obtain such a change in social and political institutions as will result in an economic state wherein this share will grow less and less, leaving more and more of the product to the producer. Now, the first thing to do is to be sure about the way in which the conditions of work are fixed, and, after separating out the wage-worker's share at present determined, to do which we must eliminate from the discussion both rent and interest by assuming them either as fixed or absent. And after separately arriving at a conclusion as to the manner in which the wages of labor are determined, the effect of competition, where it is inoperative, the meaning of value in relation to labor and price, and the wage system as a whole acts in giving the laborer more or less of his worth, then we take up the problem of capital and the factors which determine interest, leaving out rent as before, and knowing already just how wages are determined and how under conditions ideally free they would be fixed, thus investigating in each case from known and actual conditions and finally comparing the separate results obtained. Rent would next demand our study, and, whether or not any conditions can be found that would modify or reduce it, the conclusions in the other cases would be unchanged. And if it is possible to demonstrate that the laws of interest and rent are such that means may be adopted to reduce the proportion of the total product that either can demand, we shall have formulated the means of securing to the worker higher wages, a larger share of the product, and so approach our ideal law, which demands the laborer to be the value of the full product of labor.

We Label Mr. Ford an Idiot.

Another letter has been received at this office from a member of the glorious constituency of simpletons enjoyed by "Lucifer." It should be read in connection with the first letter, printed in Liberty, No. 307. This poor man is really an object of pity. If his brain is softening, it is not his fault. Lilla D. White is the responsible party.

To the Editor of Liberty:

Under the head of "Wanted" in "Lucifer" of February 3 you call for men and women who wish to be properly catalogued, etc., etc. Please inform me of your plans, and what you expect, and obtain Yours respectfully, HARRY FORD.

LYNN, KANSAS, May 8, 1889.
Two Men of Straw.

I trust that Mr. Bailie will not suspect me of a desire to harass him in his elucidation of economic problems. If my criticisms are frequent, it is because I feel the necessity of maintaining a close scrutiny upon anything offered as a systematic presentation of Anarchism in compensation for the necessarily scrappy character of Liberty's editorial demonstrations. It is important to be systematic and thorough; it is still more important to be round.

At the present moment my complaint against Mr. Bailie is that his remarks upon the iron law of wages and the wage-fund theory are too vague to be intelligently weighed. It would have been well if, before attacking these two economic theories, he had accurately formulated them. Then we should have been able to judge of the validity of his objections. As he has failed to do so, I shall attempt to supply the deficiency.

What is the iron law of wages? I state it thus: Given the causes that operate to keep the supply of labor in excess of the demand, that is, the causes that sustain interest and rent, the tendency of wages is toward a level with the cost of bare subsistence. This proposition is purely iron. It cannot be successfully disputed. If Mr. Bailie thinks it can be, I hope to see him try it. It is not possible to deny the iron law of wages except by eliminating the qualifying clause and treating the law as an absolute statement that the tendency of wages is toward a level with the cost of bare subsistence. Now, neither Marx nor any one else ever looked upon this as the law, as becomes obvious, so far as Marx is concerned, when we remember that he expected that under State Socialism the laborer's wages—or, in the same thing, the amount which the laborer would receive from the State for his labor—would equal his product. If Mr. Bailie assumes the iron law of wages to be the unqualified proposition above referred to, then he is assailing a man of straw.

Again, what is the wage-fund theory?

Simply the iron law of wages stated in another form, which is as follows: Wages, being usually paid out of accumulated capital, are dependent upon the available amount thereof. This is equivalent to the iron law of wages, because the influences which keep the supply of labor in excess of the demand work through a restriction of the amount of available capital. The attempt is made to overthrow the wage-fund theory by assuming it to be a denial of the manifest truth that labor is paid out of the products of labor. Another man of straw. Nobody was ever insane enough to suppose that labor could be paid otherwise. But, true as this is, it is equally true that the laborer is rarely paid out of the products of his own labor. He is generally paid out of the products of the labor of other men, who labored before him. In other words, it is generally paid out of accumulated capital. This capital is usually in the shape of monetary titles, owned by the employer, to merchandise and services offered in the market for sale, and the amount paid to employees depends upon the ratio of their own number to the amount of these exchangeable titles in the hands of would-be employers bidding for their services. Francis A. Walker has never shaken this truth a hair. In fact, there is nothing in the literature of political economy that has been more over-
Not Comforting to Gary.

There is a good deal of significant admission and cautious but clear criticism in the following two pages of the article on the "Anarchist Trial" contributed by Judge Gary to the "Century" for April. It is taken from the columns of the New York Evening Post. It is very gratifying to those who know how to read between the lines. With the aid of italics, it can be easily shown that the "Post" practically sustains every point that was ever made by the friends of the Chicago revolutionists against the trial and the verdict.

The story, he thinks, is not sufficiently understood by the people at large, nor the fundamental reason why the Anarchists were found guilty sufficiently appreciated. He has no difficulty in showing that the leaders preached revolutionary violence, and had entered into an organization with such violence: in view as the ultimate means of bringing about their ends. His citations are voluminous to this effect: but the weight of his argument, so far as the sentence is concerned, rests on the phrases of the law of conspiracy which rendered these men technically and morally guilty for the act of the un-identified bombing, whatever the death of the policeman was caused. It is, perhaps, unfortunate that Judge Gary does not unfold more clearly the cumulative and narrowing trend of the facts favoring special responsibility under the law, independently of any question of their degree of nearness to the crime charged. But he has performed a public service by setting forth the facts and the law, as these lie in his mind, and submitting to the judgment of that "common sense" which he invokes in the defense, instead of dwelling on the general responsibility of "the whole body of conspirators" to such an extent as to imply that Judge Gary holds that all the Anarchists were equally responsible under the law, independently of any question of their degree of nearness to the crime charged.

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The enforcement of contracts is a matter of expediency. Certainly it is not incumbent upon any voluntary association for defense to enforce any and all contracts that may be made. Such an association will very properly decide in advance what classes of contracts it is worth its while to enforce. It may decide to collect rents, and at the same time make an agreement not to collect the money in any other way, and it may decide to protect the gambler, but to leave the landlord take care of himself. In either case its decision is legitimate; it is within its right. But having decided to enforce a certain class of contracts, its business is then to enforce the actual contract when called upon to do so in a given case; it has no business to decide that the contract ought to have been something else and then to enforce what it ought to have been instead of what it is. If such a course were to be followed, it would take all the virtue out of contract. The chief benefit of freedom of contract resides in the fact that it enables the contracting parties to behaving for themselves what is equitable. If anybody else may determine this for them, then freedom of contract is a sham. It is precisely that kind of liberty which allows a man to do just as he pleases as long as he pleases to do what others think is right. In other words, it is not liberty at all, but authority.

It may be remembered that I recently quoted my respects to William Holmes and J. W. St. John on account of a false and miserable innuendo which the former wrote for the "Lucifer" and the latter copied therefrom. Mr. Sullivan disclaimed any knowledge of the retraction of this sentence which he reprinted in the "Twentieth Century," but I declined to accept his disclaimer. It was difficult, very difficult, for me to believe that a man of Mr. Sullivan's careful habits as an editor could have failed to perceive the insult which the passage in question contained and which was so evident to every one at all familiar with Lucifer, that one or two futile efforts have come to my knowledge which seem to show that his share in the offence was the result of pure carelessness. Therefore, without retracing any other adverse criticism than I may have passed upon Mr. Sullivan, I now withdraw all that I have said against him regarding the matter in question, and tender him my sincere apology. If he does not accept it, I shall not blame him for an apology but poor compensation for such an error. But then — what else have I to give?

I am sorry to see Mr. Bailie, in a treatise not only as pretentious but as generally excellent as that which is running through these columns, write of things with which he has not familiarized himself, and, as a result, misstate them. He certainly cannot have read the writings of Josiah Warren. Else he never would have committed the egregious error of attributing to that economist the doctrine that at time is properly the sole element to be considered in the estimation of value. No man ever held more strenuously than Josiah Warren that the reward of labor should be determined largely by the kind of labor performed. Equitable exchange, in his view, meant an assumption of equal burdens, thereby excluding an hour-for-hour exchange of tasks equally arduous. Mr. Bailie has obtained his information at second hand and from an unreliable source.

Two Object Lessons in Equity.

In the one Mr. Barros "thinks not the court," in the other he deems "the decision queer, indeed." The general grounds upon which he forms his conclusions seem in both instances unsatisfactory.

In the former case it was clearly the intent of the lecturer to trade upon the reputation of the author. He had a legal right to use the same name, if he honestly believed it to his own advantage, to avoid the possibility of a suit for damages. But no such right exists when he speaks for a mass without credit or integrity who had no right to have his name identified. The use of this name, in justice should be enjoined into, or arbitration refused. All contracts under our iniquitous social and economic relations are to a greater or less extent under duress. The earliest form of contract was the agreement to share with all power over the person and property of the other. Such contract was enforced by the jurisprudence of those times, and continued to be down to the last half of this century, in civilized courts, when at last the exigencies of our civil war, and the development of our public sense of equity, refused it longer recognition. Contract figures in all forms of gaming, so that Anarchists deem it an attempt at improvement an attempt to introduce an element of equal freedom. But no court of equity would grant a collection of a debt made under such contract. We told Anarchists do not! Will they align themselves with their collective than with their individual freedoms?

The Modern Jonah.

I judge the word! I judge it! By the light that burns wil him, by my judgment — it is merciless! And like an earthquake, / skis the pillars of conservatism. I tear the mask from virtue. Revenge can call the leathen form / virile religion, Baring, with the scaled keen, Supersition's garrang'd faith; Commerce unfolds extort, And capital — mincemeat of men — (Wealth that is born of labor) Is labor's highwayman. While true capital, the fruitful earth, Man's bondman, has after-lamented. And then, my coward soul, Affrighted at the judgment, Like Jonah, turns from Nineveh, For truth resisting battle. Resolves I wander land and sea, Until the whole of conscience Swallows, then ejects me Dutywards. Still hesitates our soul, And Nineveh, that might be saved, Rushes to petition.
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