

# COMMENT ON TIMELY TOPICS

It would seem that Mr. L. C. Burr is not satisfied with the outcome of some cases he has tried in Judge Frost's court.

Having read the epistolary dispute between Mike Harrington and Clarence Harman, we decide that to date Mr. Harman has rather the best of it. As in the case of a big strike, when the public, usually the innocent bystander, gets the worst of it, so in this matter between Harrington and Harman, the democracy of Nebraska accumulates all the bumps and bruises and darkened optics.

The Emporia Gazette would have us believe that Mr. Bryan was very much peeved because the farmers in a Kansas town passed him by and took in a "seed wheat special" in preference. We don't believe it. On the contrary we believe that Mr. Bryan hurried through his Chautauqua talk in order to get down to that "wheat special" himself.

"From present indications," says the Louisiana, Mo., News, "the farmers will have very little with which to reciprocate." There speaks the man who is a high protectionist and does not know why. So far as the farmer is concerned, he secures more advantages from reciprocity than any other man. He gives up a tariff on agricultural products that never benefitted him a dollar's worth, and in return gets a reduction in the tariff on practically everything he has to buy and in the purchase of which he has been systematically robbed and jobbed for years on end.

"Reciprocity in competing products is free trade!" shouts the "American Economist," subsidized organ of the tariff barons. And a tariff on non-competing products is highway robbery.

"Why not throw down the tariff bars and let this country be flooded with foreign goods of all kinds?" petulantly inquires the Pueblo, Colo., Opinion. Tut, tut, brother! Guess if we can undersell the foreigner in his own market, as we have been doing for several years, there's almighty little danger of the foreigner flooding our market. There's something queer about the logic of the average advocate of a prohibitive tariff. First he tells us that we must have it to prevent the country from being flooded with the pauper-made goods of Europe; then he boasts that we have captured the markets of the world.

The strike of street railway men in Des Moines has been productive of some queer

results. We are not wholly satisfied with the order of the court compelling the men to return to work and the street railway company to arbitrate. To get adequate knowledge of the situation over there it is necessary to grasp a few points. First, the street railway men of that city are well organized. Second, the street railway men's union had a contract as to hours and wages, and for arbitration of differences, with the street railway company. The contract also called for a grievance committee. A conductor was discharged on the word of a "spotter" that he had knocked down a couple of fares. The discharged man demanded a hearing through the union's grievance committee. The superintendent of the company, in disregard of the contract refused. The union appealed for arbitration under the contract, and this was refused. Then the men struck. The effort to run cars with strikebreakers proved futile. The city was seriously handicapped, whereupon the public at large, through a chosen official, appealed for protection. The court order to that effect was a victory for the union. So far so good. But if a court may compel men to return to work does it not follow that a court may also compel men to remain at work? And if men may be compelled by court order to work, what becomes of the freedom of contract, and freedom of action?

We cheerfully admit that we are not skilled in the technicalities of the law, but we have no hesitancy in denouncing such court holdings to be abhorrent, unjust, and a virtual return to chattel slavery. But surely no judge, in a sober moment, will hold that he is empowered to compel men to work, or prevent them from quitting their jobs.

There is a fine point about this matter of job holding that few people fully grasp. Under certain conditions, fast coming into general practice, the employe secures a certain interest in the job he holds—an interest that he is entitled to retain. For instance, take the case of the Lincoln Traction Co. This company pays a graduated wage to its car men—so much for the first year's service, more for the second, still more for the third, and so on. Does not the man who works two or three years earn a certain equity in the way of a right to have the wage increase promised for three, four or five years' service? At least, does he not earn the right to have that claim fully protected by some right of action before an impartial tribunal? A corporation promises a pension to employes who serve a certain specified number of years. An

employe works, say, to within a couple of years of the date when he may go upon the pension list. Has he not through all those years acquired a certain equity in that pension—enough, at any rate, to entitle him to something more in the way of protection than the whim of an under superintendent or a choleric foreman? This is a point that a great many people overlook in their consideration of the labor problem.

Of course Mr. Roosevelt declares that his action in approving the absorption of the Tennessee Coal and Iron Co. was right and proper. There are only two infallible ones—Roosevelt and God. The sequence is not sacrilege. It would be the other way round. The fact that allowing the steel trust to gobble its only competitor cinched the stranglehold the steel trust has upon the people, and without costing the steel magnates a penny, although profiting them millions, does not change the Roosevelt mind. And why should it change that mind? Being the infallible one he couldn't change it if he would.

"This company is a lawabiding citizen," declares the attorneys for the Des Moines Street Railway Co. Of course that is not true, for the simple reason that a corporation is not a citizen.

It may be that Mr. Bryan made a tactical blunder in attacking the Underwood. It may be, too, that Mr. Bryan was unjust to Mr. Underwood. With these two phases of the question we do not care to deal. But let it not be forgotten that to Mr. Bryan's leadership, to Mr. Bryan's wonderful personality, and to Mr. Bryan's unfailing energy in behalf of democratic principles is due the fact that democracy is today in a position of commanding importance in the affairs of this republic. If democracy had continued under the dominating influence of the Whitneys, the Belmonts and "democrats" of that ilk, does anyone suppose for a moment that Mr. Underwood would now be the floor leader of a democratic majority in the house? True Mr. Bryan is a private citizen, and no better than any other democrat in the ranks who is making an honest fight for democratic principles, but even at that Mr. Bryan has come nearer than all the Underwoods that ever claimed to be democrats to earning the right to speak with authority on all matter pertaining to democratic faith and action. We are not particularly concerned with any little dispute between Mr. Bryan and Mr. Underwood. We are interested only in seeing the people of