

NOT WAGES BUT CHRIST

Pastor Bigelow's Experience at a Preachers' Monday Morning Meeting—Laborers Need Jesus Rather Than Better Wages

Cincinnati, June 7.—"A Morning With the Preachers." At the Vine Street Congregational church, the pastor, Herbert S. Bigelow, told of a morning which he spent with the members of a ministerial association, discussing social problems. Mr. Bigelow said in part:

It was in the city of J—. I happened to be there for a course of lectures and accepted an invitation to speak at the preachers' Monday morning meeting.

My theme was the labor problem. I attempted to show that millions of our fellow creatures, by reason of their scant wage, are compelled to work and live in conditions which stunt the mind and discourage, if not prohibit, the formation of moral character. I declared that it was the plain duty of the preachers, to encourage every wise and just plan of economic betterment, in order that the discouragements to right living may be diminished and a more wholesome environment provided for the masses.

According to the custom in this association the address of the day was followed by a general discussion. Then it was my turn to listen. That general discussion threw no light on the labor problem. But it threw a flood of light on the preachers.

Without the slightest shade of coloring I want to report the substance of their remarks on this important theme.

One preacher, with breezy optimism, brushed aside my contention as to low wages and bad conditions, with the assertion that the miners in the neighborhood of J— were getting \$34 a week.

It seems that he had heard of some miner who was said to have made that much. He could not tell how many weeks during the year he had made that. He could not tell how many, if any, helpers this miner had with whom he was compelled to divide his \$34. It is true that the special commission, appointed by the president, reported that the average wage of the contract miner is from fourteen to sixteen dollars a week. This commission ought to know. But this preacher thought the commission must have been mistaken because he had heard of a miner who got more. How trustful men are of any evidence which justifies their prejudices!

The next speaker was still more optimistic. His assertion was that laborers in and around J— were making from \$2.50 to \$10 a day. "Moreover," said he, "if there are a few who do not get enough, we can't remedy the matter. I believe Baer and Morgan and Carnegie and Rockefeller are good conscientious Christians and are doing as well as they can for the workmen. What do we know about business? How can we give them any suggestions? I tell you the preachers are all right. The trouble is with the people. They need more of Jesus in their heart. That's what's the matter. If the people will treat Jesus right, he will treat the people right." This remark elicited vigorous Amens from the brethren.

Almost every preacher who took part in the discussion voiced this sentiment that the thing needed was not economic betterment, but individual salvation. One and all they declared: "The great need of the workingman is Jesus Christ and him crucified."

What truth is there in this threadbare phrase? If a workingman were dissipated and conversion to Christianity made him sober, to that extent his economic condition would be improved. But suppose he is already a sober and hard-working man. How will his conversion raise his wages? There can be no general and permanent increase in wages save through legislation which destroys monopoly and thereby increases the opportunities for remunerative employment. But that cannot be done without a knowledge of political economy. Will conversion to Christianity teach a man political economy? Will it teach him to run an engine? Will it teach him to pilot a steamer? It requires thought to exercise intelligently the rights of citizenship. The man who does not give earnest thought to the problem of improving the social conditions of his fellowmen is a bad citizen, although he may be a good church member or even a preacher.

Another preacher referred in his remarks, to the parable of the man who, having been relieved of one devil, was possessed of seven other devils. The application he made of the parable was this: The workingmen, many of them, get a beggarly wage. That he conceded. He affirmed that they ought to get more. Indeed he went so far as to assert

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that it was the duty of the preachers to see that they got more. "But," said he, "suppose we should increase their pay, what then? There would be just that much more that they would have to squander on the saloon and theatre. If we did nothing more than to increase their wage we would make them seven times more devilish. Let us preachers demand more pay for the workmen, but let us also demand that we have some control over their wages; let us have charge of their money; let us save it and invest it for them, for we know better than they how to take care of it."

These preachers look upon themselves as the shepherds of their flock, until they get to thinking of the people as sheep. They are long on benevolence and short on liberty. They never doubt their fitness to manage the affairs of others. They would be foster-fathers rather than brothers to the multitude.

The preacher who thus delivered himself was one of the leading clergymen of the city. If the teachers are capable of such childish utterances, what can be expected of their pupils? "If the light that is in thee be darkness how great is that darkness!" If the men from whom light is supposed

to come are so hopelessly ignorant, what chance is there for the illumination of the mass?

Still another preacher deprecated the agitation of these questions since there was danger of the poor becoming discontented.

When Hager fled from her jealous and cruel mistress and took refuge in the desert it is said that she was visited by the angel of the Lord. "And the angel of the Lord said unto her, return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands." That was a bogus angel. To the workmen who are trying to escape from a condition of virtual slavery this preacher like that false angel would say, "Return to your masters and submit yourselves under their hands."

Too long that has been the cowardly advice of the clergy. And still the preachers wonder why workmen shun the church!

Jake Robey, Ben Davis, Ind.: The Independent is good—but too many good things spoil the soup. If democrats, populists, silver republicans and all other elements that mean good would unite, then we might do something. But we fight one another.

Karl Marx Edition, July 23, 1903.

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H. M. Looney, Gering, Neb.: Am sorry to have to leave the populists, but see no other course, as I believe fusion has wrecked the populists. In future shall cast my lot with the socialists.