

THE TRUST QUESTION.

The following is the speech of Hon. Edward La Rue Hamilton, delivered at the last session of congress. It is one of the strongest presentations of the trust question ever written:

As Mr. Lecky has remarked, "There is a constant tendency in the human mind to expect too much of government."

There will probably never come a time when the moral regeneration of mankind can be accomplished by legislation. Nothing short of a moral regeneration as great as that with which Nehemiah electrified the Jews at the rebuilding of Jerusalem can even approximately even things up. A Bible class and a committee of ways and means have few points of resemblance.

Industrial Transition.

In the language of Edmund Burke, "It is one of the finest problems of legislation what the state ought to take upon itself to direct by the public wisdom and what it ought to leave with as little interference as possible to individual discretion."

The trust problem is a part of our commercial life—part of our national life. It is important beyond the present and is intimately associated with the future organization of economic life.

We are in the midst of another transition period in human history. We are passing from individual to corporate enterprise necessarily. We are passing from individualism to centralization. The huge business machine, with all its machine ramifications, is driving out the small workshop. You cannot shoe a horse by machinery, so the blacksmith shop remains; but a horseshoe trust sells the horseshoes cheap, and a horse nail trust sells the horse nails cheap, and a hammer trust sells the hammers cheap that drive the horse nails home.

But let us be fair. The laborer never received higher wages for shorter days than now; never went home to a better home than the American home, and never was better fed and better clothed than now, and never had more time and opportunity for reading and mental development than now. Neither can it be denied that everything in our markets, from a pin to a locomotive, from a pair of shoes to a suit of clothes, has more of grace and is more scientifically fitted to human needs than ever before. By combination, business in most industries is being reduced to a few large units, run by a few large units.

This is an age of commercial giants, working with perfect accuracy with machines perfectly designed to do their work without deviation. If flesh and blood are caught in the cogs, the machine grinds on. However, let us be fair again. There never was a time when greater scientific consideration was given to the amelioration of the condition of all classes than now; but

charity even has its machine attributes, and there has developed such a thing as charitable brokerage. The machine and the management thereof, have become identified, and the management has become in a measure subordinate to the machine.

Sellers and Buyers.

Neither indiscriminate malediction nor spasms of political oratory will contribute to better understanding of these colossal results of modern industrial evolution. Conditions can only be understood and abuses can only be remedied after careful, unbiased, scientific investigation.

This government does not belong to a few of us; it belongs to all of us, and we are many. Every citizen is a seller as well as a buyer. He is a seller of his own labor or its product, and he is a buyer of the labor of others and its products.

As a seller, he wants to sell high; as a buyer, he wants to buy low; and he is no more entitled to arbitrary artificial aid from the law in one capacity than in the other. If the law should undertake to keep prices down for the benefit of buyers, it ought to keep them up for the benefit of sellers; and, inasmuch as every citizen is a seller as well as a buyer, he illustrates in his own proper person the impossibility of such law.

The ownership of property implies the right of free use and free sale, whether the property be labor or merchandise, and whether the owner's will be exercised separately or in combination with others.

The Right to Acquire Property.

Any scheme of correction which overlooks the right of every citizen, morally and legally, through diligence in business, to better his condition in material things, subverts the natural law of our being and must fail.

No matter how much some people may think Dives ought to be punished for setting a good table, Dives and Lazarus are equally entitled to protection under the law. The law can not obliterate the natural differences in man. God made man different here, and hereafter, we are told, the difference will be still more marked.

Dives and Lazarus left many descendants, and in the whirling years the rich have begged and beggars have become rich, and care can never be legislated out of the world nor happiness be legislated into the world. The man with forty acres wants 160, and when he gets 160 he wants more. It is more than a hundred miles between the fashionable and the unfashionable sides of a brick wall.

There is also the engineer at the throttle, the capitalist in the coach, and the tramp on the track seeking a dry culvert to sleep in. There is blazing wealth and abject poverty side by side.

There are churches and jails; homes of wealth and homes of the friendless.

There is too much to eat and too much hunger; too much clothing and too many people in rags; too much coal and too many shivering firesides; and it has been so ever since pasturage grew scarce for the joint flocks of Abraham and Lot.

Modern Industrial Methods.

The thousands of steamboats and steam engines, fleets, factories and railroads that lay dormant in the discovery of Watt under the lid of the teakettle, the electric possibilities that flashed from the clouds down Franklin's kite string, have brought evil as well as good and pushed humanity into more complex conditions. The tremendous and tireless physical and mental energy of mankind is constantly tending toward results. Labor and capital, working together in inexhaustible material, have so perfected methods and machinery that means of production have been increased beyond computation. A modern blast furnace running full blast yields 700 tons of pig iron a day, I am told. A modern cotton factory runs 2,000 spindles at the rate of 10,000 revolutions a minute under the supervision of two operatives, I am told.

Typesetting and press work were formerly done by hand. Now typesetting machines do five times the work of a single compositor, and presses are perfected to the capacity of from fifty to 100,000 copies per hour.

The twenty-six letters and ten figures with which events of the world are daily told, have become the nucleus of incorporated publishing companies, with appurtenances of electricity flashing along wires that girdle the globe like nerves, and receiving a shock at one point vibrate in every part, so that the electric flash of an event last night, somewhere along the lonely song of a telegraph wire far out upon a western plain or in the heart of Asia, is translated into type and becomes news by sunrise—appurtenances of night editors and day editors and all kinds of editors, night reporters and day reporters and all kinds of reporters, who chronicle the social round of clothes and conversation; the birth and the obituary, the pulpit and the prize fight; who sit about the speaker of the house of representatives and the president of the senate and number the hairs of their heads; who are deep in government secrets; who make and unmake political careers and reputations. So that there are graveyards of press-murdered ambitions, and there are passing shows of press-made statesmen who, editorially and reportorially swelled, strut briefly in the public glare.

Modern industrial operations are conducted upon the theory of production upon the largest scale—of many sales with small profits, large in the aggregate. So close is a large business frequently run that the difference between