ADDRESS UPON THE LABOR QUESTION.
BY EDWARD ATKINSON OF BROOKLINE, MASS.

TO THE ALUMNI OF ANDOVER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
9 June, 1886

BOSTON: FRANKLIN PRESS: RAND, AVERY, & COMPANY
117 Franklin Street. 1886.

Gentlemen, —

It is not often that a layman is invited to address an audience consisting mostly of clergymen, or of those who intend to become so. I hope that you will not find that I have taken an undue advantage of the opportunity which you have given me. I have, however, often thought that if a member of the congregation could sometimes occupy the pulpit, while the minister took his place in the pew, it might be a benefit to both. The duty has been assigned to me to-day, to trace out the connection between morality and a true system of political or industrial economy. It has been said, that, next to the Bible, the book which has exerted the most beneficent influence among men may have been Adam Smith's "Wealth of Nations."

It will be remembered that this great author also wrote a treatise upon "Moral Philosophy," which is now but little read; while the lesson which he taught upon the true source of the "Wealth of Nations" is yet but half learned, especially (if I may be permitted to say so in this presence) by the reverend clergy. I wonder how many among your number ever recall the fact that it has been the richest manufacturers who have clothed the naked at the least cost to them; that it is the great bonanza farmer who now feeds the hungry at the lowest price; that Vanderbilt achieved his great fortune by reducing the cost of moving a barrel of flour a thousand miles, from three dollars and fifty cents to less than seventy cents. This was the great work assigned to him, whether he knew it or not. His fortune was but an incident, — the main object, doubtless, to himself, but a trifling incident compared to what he saved others.

When we listen to the arraignment of the so-called great monopolists who control the railway service of the United States, it may be well to recall the somewhat startling fact, that for every man, woman, and child in the United States, the railways of this country moved seven tons, or fourteen thousand pounds, of food, fuel, and materials for shelter or for clothing, a hundred and ten miles last year, for which the average charge to each person was only eight dollars and seventy-five cents. That service was
done for each one of us, and for every member of our households, — seven tons a
hundred and ten miles or more. Now, however narrow and sordid may be the
necessary conditions of life for many persons, it may be well to consider how much
narrower, harder, and more sordid they would have been, except this service had been
done for them by the railways.

For us who dwell in New England, it required even a greater quantity to be moved a
longer distance, in order that we might subsist at all, where we dwell. Think of this for
a moment. It is sometimes claimed that labor does all the work, and ought to have all
the pay. Very well. Any laborer who chooses to do so can do all the work, and take all
the pay, for moving a barrel of flour a thousand miles. He can put it on a wheelbarrow
in Chicago, and over the free highways of the land he may move it wherever he
pleases. Why does he avail himself of the railway's? Not to make the fortune of a
Vanderbilt: that is a mere incident. It is to save himself a part of the arduous toil of
life. Last year it cost sixty-eight cents on the average, often much less, to cart a barrel
of flour a thousand miles over the railway; and the profit of that service is only
fourteen cents, or less than the value of the empty barrel.

When the work of four men for one year suffices to raise the wheat, grind the flour
and barrel it, and to move it from Dakota to Massachusetts, enough to supply bread
for a thousand for twelve months, is it not the modern miracle of the loaf? If Mr.
Vanderbilt and his coadjutors accomplished this saving in carting flour over the land,
and in giving cheap bread to the multitude, wasn't he a cheap man, even if he did
make $200,000 by the job? It matters little to us whether those who guide these
great forces know what their true function in life is, or not. "The Lord maketh the
wrath of man to praise him;" and He directs the very self-interest of men, so that they
may work benefit to their neighbors.

These men might be automata endowed only with what we call "the money instinct:" yet no men ever per- 8 formed greater material service to their fellow-men than these great railway and steamship organizers, by whom distance has been eliminated, space obliterated, and by whom the whole world has been converted into a neighborhood. Through their work, the mechanic of Massachusetts who will forego a single holiday, and devote it to earning wages, may thereby earn the cost of moving a
year's supply of bread and meat from the far-distant prairies of the West, to the door
of his dwelling-place in the far East. Adam Smith kept the lines of his thought and of
his investigation, separate and distinct; but in the end he showed how the true wealth
of nations is entirely consistent with — nay, cannot be separated from — the highest
moral welfare.
I will not weary you with vain attempts to give a somewhat truer title to the science, which, for lack of a better term, has been named political economy. Suffice it, that it is the science of material things, — the science which treats of the needs of the body. It is of the earth. It pertains to the world and to the flesh. Is it therefore of the Devil? I know not.

I am profoundly convinced that it is because of the inherited but still common error which imputed to the world and to the flesh only that which is evil, that the great separation has come between what is called religion and the life of every-day working people. It is a trite saying, that a sound mind requires a sound body. "Mens Sana in corpore sano" is, I believe, as old as Juvenal. I asked my friend Dr. William Everett to give me an equally terse Latin form to serve as the text of this lecture, and he put my thought into these words: So long as man dwells upon this earth, is it not true that "Non est animus cui non est corpus"? Has a man a soul whose body does not eat? Not here, surely. Perhaps somewhere else. The sound mind, the true spirit, and the well-nourished body are but three phases of the same life, so long as man inhabits the body which is necessary to his existence in this world.

All potential of good, all manifestations of the divine and beneficent purpose to which all the children of men may attain in the common, every-day methods of their necessary work, — is not this the phase of religion which is taught by every-day life? The science which I represent is, therefore, fundamental. The very existence of each one of you depends upon it. Unless the working people, capitalists and laborers alike, had saved a part of the material product of their labor, and had devoted the capital thus earned to building your churches, colleges, and seminaries, and in sustaining you in your own labors, how would you exist? You owe much to the workingman, whether capitalist or laborer. What service do you render to him in compensation? Could you build your own dwellings? Could you raise your own food? Could you make your own clothes? Except that the workman who either directs or uses capital had provided well for the natural wants of the body, of what avail would be all your efforts to promote the spiritual welfare of the world? Were it not that men live under a law which few yet comprehend, but which controls all their actions, whether they will or no, could you have gathered here to-day? What is that law which economic science has discovered, and which is so beneficent? It is the law of service for service; of product for product; of trade and commerce, working through or by means of the material body, to the potential of the mind and of the soul.

The highest expression of the same law in moral science is the very keynote of Christianity, which differentiates it from all other forms of religion: "Do unto others as you would be done by." What greater harm can you do to a man than to give him, in what is miscalled charity, that which he might have earned by rendering a service?
What more absolutely democratic principle could be stated? It corresponds exactly to Lowell's recent definition of democracy, when he said that democracy meant not "I am as good as you are; " but, rather, " You are as good as I am."** The very essence of Christianity is democratic and economic. There are duties, as well as rights, on the part of the laborer as well as the capitalist. Unless each renders service to the other, neither can long exist.

Have you kept pace in your theologic teaching with the progress of economic science? I sometimes think not when I read the arraignments of capital and capitalists made by some clerical gentlemen whose zeal is greater than their knowledge. What has happened in these nineteen hundred years, to render the charge which was once given to the rich man, to take all that he had, and give to the poor, a most unsafe and unsuitable rule for any practical application at the present time. I do not deny that there are many fortunes of to-day which have been gained by fraud, and of which the rich man may need to divest himself. Such fortunes may otherwise work corruption, doubtless, unto the third and fourth generation; and probably will do so, except that the spendthrift will probably come in to scatter them before that end has been reached. But suppose the exemplar of the most obnoxious of these fortunes should find his ill-gotten gains too great a burden. Should he give his fortune to the poor, would he not work more harm in the giving than he had in the getting? Is it not even now a beneficent condition, on which only can even he retain his ill-gotten gains, that he shall work his capital in the service of others?

The stocks and bonds of the railroad which he controls may be only the loaded dice with which the wolves fleece the lambs in the stock-market. But it takes two to play even that game. There could be no such knaves unless there were yet more fools. The lamb who is fleeced is caught by his own greed, and plundered by his own will. But the stocks and the bonds are not the railroad. They are but pieces of paper giving a title to a part of the railroad itself; and while they are being made use of as the tools of the gambler, the railroad itself is carrying food for workingmen and women from the distant Western prairies to their dwellings in the East. Thus is the capitalist compelled to use the capital which he possesses, in the service of his fellow-men, what- ever misuse he may make of the title thereto or of the credit of the corporation.

I think it should be remembered, that in those ancient days more than eighteen hundred years ago, the mass of men had not risen above the condition of dependents; then riches were almost all gained by force, fraud, or slavery. Modern commerce, in a true sense, had no existence. It required the invention of gunpowder to equalize the weak with the strong. It needed the long, weary centuries of war and plunder: nay, even the progress from the slaughter of prisoners, to making them slaves, was one step. It required the evolution of the Homan civil law, — the first development of
civilization, lost for a time, but found again after the dark ages, — before Adam Smith could even have conceived the idea of the true wealth of nations, or before the economist could give the assurance of science to the law, that in all commerce men serve each other. It was a very beautiful and a very useful world, into which Adam and Eve first came. It is the same world to-day, of which we have yet discovered but a fraction of the use to which it can be put. The Garden of Eden of which we are told in the story may have been in some part of Central Asia, where a sound body might be sustained without shelter and without clothing, and where the simple food called for no effort and no labor, where a mere animal existence could be enjoyed for a considerable period of time. In some of the picturesque accounts of the South Sea Islands, can we not even now find the same conditions of just the same simple life? Are not Adam and Eve there, and Cain and, Abel also? — men and women not yet risen, not yet lifted, to the necessity of labor for their material welfare, or thereby to the perception of a higher possible life than that of mere animals.

As one may trace the whole history of cotton-spinning from the prehistoric hand-loom still used in the heart of the North-Carolina mountains and of Kentucky, in a three-days' journey from this place, may we not also trace the whole progress of man's development by means of a knowledge of what is good and of what is evil, from a mere animal existence to the highest type of the Aryan race, who directs the great forces of modern commerce, by means of which men serve each other in order that all may be nourished well? Have not the highest types of men been developed in the places where the work of the world requires most intelligence? Is not the labor which we have been accustomed to consider a penalty rather a method of progress — a process of development, leading men to the true comprehension of a true life? I have no sympathy with those who try to find a better standard of life in the past, however distant, than in the present or in the future. The Chinese custom of conferring a title of nobility upon the ancestors of him who benefits his fellow-men in the present time is more consistent with a true view of life than our common mode of thought.

When commerce first gained a strong position in modem times, its true beneficence was obscured by a false principle inherited from the previous era, during which the distribution of products had been effected mainly by force. This false principle was, that what one tribe, or one petty state or nation, gained, even in commerce, another must lose. Down to a very recent period, this false idea pervaded all thought, except in a very few instances. Holland alone, among all European states since the Middle Ages, had gained her wealth in great measure by free exchange, and had thus been enabled to wage the long contest with Spain, from which even now we derive much of our liberty. I have not much time to devote to the reading of history; but, if I am not greatly mistaken, we have derived as many of our lessons in civil liberty, as well as our conception of the need of the common school, from what the Pilgrims learned
from the Dutch when they dwelt in Holland, as we owe to their experience in resisting
the oppression of the English. England was herself, at that time, under the domination
of this fallacy in regard to commerce, and continued to be so far into the present
century.

Our present navigation acts in this country, which have almost driven our flag from
the ocean, are modelled upon the acts which were passed at the instance of Oliver
Cromwell, in a vain attempt to destroy the commerce of the Dutch, with the hope of
promoting English supremacy upon the seas. The attempt was an utter failure, and
Dutch commerce throve and grew even more rapidly after the law had been passed by
the English than before. The Dutch did not become second until the working of iron
and the application of steam gave England at last her supremacy, and even then she
did not attain it until these obnoxious acts of navigation had been wholly repealed in
very recent times. It was also the error which the English themselves made in their
attempt to restrict the traffic of the colonies of North America, lest in their freedom
England should suffer loss, which led to the separation of the colonies and to the
opening of one-half the continent of North America to unrestricted commerce.

Since the adoption of our constitution, free competition, limited only for police
purposes, has been the law throughout this great land, under a democratic rule which
only became established and completed when slavery itself was destroyed. What
have we accomplished? When our faith in the democratic principle begins to fail us,
let us remember it has borne the burden of slavery, of the active war in which the
passive war of slavery culminated and by which it destroyed itself.

It has surmounted the subtle danger of paper money, declared to be a legal tender by
the authority of the nation; and it stands first among the nations in having made its
promise a substitute for true money, and then in redeeming it dollar for dollar,
according to the promise. Its system of common schools has spread throughout the
land, without distinction of race, color, or condition. The common school is the
solvent of class, creed, and race prejudice.

Having already paid more than one-half of its debt incurred for righteous purposes, its
chief difficulty now is not how to tax its people, but how to abate the excessive
taxation which has been imposed upon them during the conduct of the war. I think,
gentlemen, if you were men of affairs, and knew the magnitude of the subtle dangers
which business men must meet, your faith in humanity would be broader and deeper
than it now is. You may spin the warp of life, but of what avail unless the man of
affairs throws in the weft by which the whole fabric is made fit for its final purpose?
When the true function of commerce shall have become known to men, it will indeed become a part of life, to the end "that the ships that pass between this land and that, shall be like the shuttle of the loom, weaving the web of concord among the nations."
All this has been accomplished in this land by means of competition. And yet this great constructive force is condemned by many right-minded persons, and we are called upon to invent some other way to work the exchange of product for product, and of service for service. We are told that competition is selfish in a malignant sense; that it is maleficent; that in a great competitive struggle a few obtain an undue share at the expense of many; that the rich grow richer, while the poor grow poorer.

It is not true. There are no facts by which such allegations can be sustained. The tendency of profits to a minimum, and of wages to a maximum, are plainly apparent to him who applies the inductive method, and studies any sufficient period in the history of trade. We are told that the broad ways of the world lead to perdition, and that the rich man shall barely enter into the kingdom of heaven, with the imputation that his sin lies mainly in the mere fact of his being rich. Now, gentlemen, every reputable business man knows better; and he may get tired of the imputation of sin, when put upon the best service which he knows how to render to his fellow-men.
Many men know very well that every dollar of their own fortunes, great or small, is but a token of service rendered in the world, consistent in every way with the highest mental and spiritual life.

The time has long since passed when men are to be instructed that the way to salvation lies of necessity outside of their common mode of life. They will surely ignore any creed which distinctly separates religion and morality from their every-day pursuits and from their every-day purposes. Does not truth lie at the very foundation of morality? Surely it does. The very essence of commerce, as well as of economic and physical science, is truth. The tunnel through the Hoosac Mountain is more than four miles long. It was worked from both ends; and when the centre arch was pierced to make one of the great highways of commerce, the lines, both at the top and the base of the arch, varied less than a single inch. That was the truth of science, and it is the truth of commerce.

The great manufacturer who guides the operations of a factory of a hundred thousand spindles, in which fifteen hundred men, women, and children earn their daily bread, himself works on a narrow margin of one-fourth of a cent on each yard of cloth. If he shall not have applied truth to every branch of construction and of the operation of that factory, it will fail and become worthless; and then with toilsome labor a hundred and fifty thousand women might try to clothe themselves and you, who are now clothed by the service of fifteen hundred only. Such is the disparity in the use of time, brought into beneficent action by modern manufacturing processes. The banker who
deals in credit by millions upon millions must possess truth of insight, truth of judgment, truth of character. Probity and integrity constitute his capital, for the very reason that the little margin which he seeks to gain for his own service is but the smallest fraction of a per cent upon each transaction. I supervise, directly or indirectly, the insurance upon four hundred million dollars' worth of factory property. The products of these factories, machine-shops, and other works, must be worth six hundred million dollars a year. It isn't worth fifty cents on each hundred dollars to guarantee their notes or obligations, while ninety-nine and one-half per cent of all the sales they make will be promptly paid when due.

The great railway magnate, whatever his own character may be, must have a true measure of the wages which he can pay to every engineer, conductor, brakeman, or laborer on the whole line. He must give only the true price for every pound of material which is used in moving a barrel of flour one thousand miles at a charge of seventy cents, on which his profit is but fourteen cents. Other-wise, we might all be forced back upon the true Puritan diet of brown bread, baked beans, and codfish-balls, upon which our ancestors lived; but we should have to work harder to get even such a subsistence to-day, because there are so many of us. Why, gentlemen, integrity is the most necessary factor in business life; truth is the most necessary law; morality must absolutely control the great tide of traffic in order that the fraud of the few may have a fulcrum by which it can work its nefarious purposes.

The general protection of property is absolutely necessary to the few thieves who infest the land. I have often had occasion to recall a saying of Dr. Holmes, which I once heard him give at one of our club meetings, when speaking of disease in the human body. He said, "The law of Nature is to cure, and not to kill." And he then defined the function of the wise physician in aiding Nature by giving her opportunity, removing the obstructions which might have fallen in her way, many of them through ignorance and vice. And so I may say to you, that, in all commerce among men, wide are the gates, broad are the ways, and sure are the methods, of progress leading to prosperity of rich and poor alike, if you can only place your thought in harmony with the conception that in all true commerce men serve each other's needs. But if you attempt to separate their morality or their religion from their daily work; if you attempt to persuade them that they must look to some far-distant future for a reward, and that they must devote their present life to a more selfish care for their own souls,—you may get left outside the grand current of men's work, which is carried on by men who know from their own spiritual instincts that their souls will be cared for by a higher power if they live an honest and true life with respect to their own bodies.

I would not, however, have you think that I am only an optimist, and that I believe the progress of humanity will be assured under the working of mere economic forces. It
has often been remarked, that "if you scratch a Russian, you may catch a Tartar." It is also true that if you scratch many a rich man, who is rich in power and wealth, you may catch a pagan. There are too many men whose creed is of the old pagan sort, to be rich without regard to others' welfare; whose first idea is "to get on, next to get honor — and last to get honest." The Lord may make use of the very riches of such men to work out beneficent results; but they themselves are moral only from expediency, and honest only from policy. But, under the great forces which control events, even such morality and honesty become necessary to the conduct of any large enterprise, sooner or later. Others, as I have said, are mere automata, who do their work in the best way, but yet are wholly unaware of the nature of their own functions.

If I might project myself into the pulpit, and assume the functions of the preacher, it is to such men as these that I would show the way of salvation; not by denouncing the work which they do, but by putting myself into the daily current of their thought and of their very work itself, and then attempting to lead them out of the sordid conditions of life to which they are now bound, and to prove to them that in the very work which they are unwittingly doing in a right manner they may find their own higher welfare. It is not by setting back the current of their thoughts, or by attempting to change their lives, that you can reach such men as these. It is only by deepening and broadening the very channels of their lives, so that they may ask themselves at last, not "What does the world owe me? but, "What do I owe the world in compensation for the wealth it has given me?" Such men may then find, for the first time in their lives, that the life is really worth living which had before been so barren, because they knew not the quality of the very work which they had been doing.

Let me now come down from these abstract conditions, to the facts by which they may be sustained, and to the actual problems with which you are called upon to deal in daily life. If you will examine the conditions of modern traffic closely, you will find that most of the great capitalists of modern days are not obnoxious persons, they have not made their fortunes and secured their profits out of what the laboring people have paid them, but by securing to themselves a small part of what they have saved labor in the necessary work of life. I have investigated many arts, especially those to which machinery has been applied under skilful direction; and I find, without exception, that the following propositions are fully sustained by facts: — In all the arts, including agriculture, to which modern machinery and improved tools have been applied, a less number of persons compass a constantly increasing product in ratio to the time which they devote to the work.

2. In proportion to the increase of the product and to the efficiency of the capital applied thereto, this lessening number of persons have received, decade by decade,
higher rates of wages in money, or in what money will buy. They earn for themselves a constantly increasing share of an increasing product, or its equivalent in money.

3. As a necessary result of this increasing efficiency both in capital and labor, the joint product is served to the consumers at constantly lessening prices, or at less cost to them.

4. As capital itself increases in its efficiency, its value in ratio to the product of capital and labor becomes less. Capital is therefore forced to be satisfied with a lessening share of an increasing product.

There never was a time in the history of this country when the general rate of wages was as high in money as it is to-day, or when the specific dollar of the wages would buy as much shelter, food, or clothing. The difficulties of recent years have not been inadequacy in the earnings of those whose employment was continuous. They have been rather such changes in occupation open to workmen, as to have caused a considerable proportion to be unable to get work at any price, for a short period. It must be remembered, that we now number nearly sixty million people, of whom twenty million are occupied for gain; and if even five per cent for a time find difficulty in obtaining occupation, even that small proportion of the whole working force numbers one million persons.

Time will not suffice me to submit the proofs of these propositions; but I ask you to examine them before you condemn either the capitalist or the laborer, or before you attempt to invent new methods which shall be a substitute for the present methods evolved during all the previous ages. I by no means ignore the gravity of the problem which must be solved. As it is with individuals, so it is with nations. There is a tide in the affairs of men which leads on to welfare as well as to fortune; while, if that flood be resisted or obstructed, the end may be disaster and want. These ebbs and flows, these good times and hard times, these periods of alternate prosperity and adversity, are what we need to study and to analyze, in order to wrest from them their true meaning. If we rush to the legislature, and attempt to control the tide by ill-advised laws, we shall only aggravate the difficulties. Such meddlesome statutes will only make sinners a great deal faster than you preachers can make saints. We have harder work to do than to enact statutes. Great as our progress has been, and vast as our advantages now are over the debt and army ridden nations of Europe, life to a vast majority of our people is yet a mere struggle for existence. One-half or more of all the work of nine-tenths of the people in this prosperous country is spent in the mere effort to secure daily bread. In my previous studies I have placed the average product of this country at not over two hundred dollars worth of all the commodities which are required for subsistence, when measured at the price for which they are finally sold
for consumption. This problem has been investigated by myself and by many other statisticians; and we are well satisfied that this standard is too high, rather than too low, — two hundred dollars per person. The annual product will not go round at a higher average, even if we count two children of ten years or under as one adult. Yet, when I lately attempted to show how a young man or young woman could live a well-conditioned life in Boston at the price of two hundred dollars a year, my statement was received among reading and thinking people with a mixture of incredulity, derision, or of positive objection. The advocates of what is called labor reform held me up as an objectionable person, upon the ground, that, if working people could subsist on two hundred dollars a year, their wages would be squeezed down to that point, and they would be compelled to do so. This fallacy is based upon the very common conception that the capitalist can control the rate of wages, wilfully or optionally. Nothing could be more false. The intelligent capitalist, especially in all the arts which can be carried on in factories, will always willingly pay the highest wages which the condition of the market for his goods will allow, because he knows perfectly well that the men or women who are capable of earning the highest wages make the goods at the lowest cost to himself. This seems like a paradox; but if you ask any manager of a mill whom he will discharge when forced upon short time, he will tell you at once that he will discharge the lowest-paid and least efficient people, and will keep the best and highest-paid as long as he can, in order to start again under the most advantageous conditions, because they are the cheapest work-men to him.

I have said that I have been rebuked for even intimating that a well-conditioned life could be had at the price of two hundred dollars a year; but you will observe, that, if this is the average of the whole product, by so much as the few consume more than this, must the many consume less. The very surprise with which this measure of the price of life has been received is a proof, not of the old adage that one-half of the world knows not how the other half lives, but that one-tenth knows very little of the other nine-tenths. Yet out of this average, if such is the measure of all there is, must the profits of capital be set apart, and the taxes paid for the support of the government. If nothing is saved, the product will be less next year, less in the subsequent year, and in a very short time all will have come to want together. Then who shall save it, and to whom shall savings belong?

It is the necessity of the poor, that there shall be well-directed capital, even if it be saved out of barely sufficient earnings. If the government is not sustained by means of taxes, what will happen? Each one who takes part in production must therefore either save for himself at least ten per cent to be added to the capital of the nation, or some one else must save ten per cent, or twenty dollars a year, out of the two hundred dollars' worth of the product, which is the average. The average tax, national, state, and municipal, is at least six per cent, or twelve dollars per head, more. There
remains, then, only one hundred and sixty-eight dollars' worth of product to be consumed by that proportion of the population who are neither capitalists nor government employees, and who are not occupied in the higher and better-paid work of administration. They constitute at least nine out of ten of all who are occupied in gainful occupation in this whole country. This remainder, after capital and taxation have been provided, gives each man, woman, and child what forty-six cents a day will buy. It is a little more in New England and the Middle States; it is less in the West and South. Suppose it is fifty cents each day for each average man, woman, and child hereabout, from which sum shelter, food, fuel, and clothing must be provided. Each person occupied for gain sustains, on the average, two others. Therefore it is $1.50 a day for every day in the year, or $1.82 for each working day. Do we not all know of more persons who earn less than $1.82 per day than who gain more? The working group is a group of three. The family group is a little under five. We have not yet surmounted the necessity for some woman or child in almost every family to work for gain, in order that the family may subsist. At fifty cents a day, each worker must earn, free of profits and taxes, a little under five hundred and fifty dollars a year, on which three may subsist. This is almost identically the average of the force of about fifteen thousand people who do the work of the New York Central Railroad, — a class of persons rather above the average than below in their intelligence and aptitude. How can this great proportion of the population have any more, if such is the measure of all that is produced? Enough must be set aside for the support of the government, and for the maintenance and increase of capital, so that the capital shall be sufficient for the future need of an increasing population.

Now, I have said that one-half the struggle for life is the struggle for daily bread. The statistics show conclusively, that, in every New-England group of three persons who subsist on this average of about fifty cents a day, one-half, or twenty-five cents a day, is expended for food only. What shall we do about it? This statement brings us face to face with the true labor question. We must either produce more, and find a market for it, or else we must find out how to use what we do produce so as to get a better life out of it.

It seems almost an anti-climax to come down to so simple a suggestion as this, — that improvement in the art of cooking is the first step toward a higher plane of morality: yet you would find it difficult to resist the argument on which this proposition might be sustained. It is not worth while to discuss this question on the basis of incomprehensible millions, or on the alleged wrongs committed by millionnaires. We must bring each great problem down to the unit of the individual, and measure the right and the wrong of it there; because it is only by the material, mental, and spiritual progress combined, of each person, that any general welfare can be obtained.
In order that one may comprehend the grave difficulties underlying this problem, and the absolute necessity, especially for a clergyman, to study the great laws of economic science, we may assume a problem which at first would appear to be one of very simple solution. We will assume that some of you minister to the spiritual wants of families numbering five hundred and fifty souls and as many bodies. These bodies must be well nourished, in order that your ministrations may serve a good purpose. "Non est animus cui non est corpus? "It matters not what you preach: your words will have little effect upon hungry men.

The case is somewhat analogous to a discussion which lately occurred in the Board of Overseers of Harvard College. Rev. Phillips Brooks intimated that it was even possible for a Unitarian to be a sectarian; to which Col. Harry Lee replied, that, "while that might be true, it was not possible for Phillips Brooks to be a sectarian, any more than it would be for an angel to have the sciatica." A few ascetics may perhaps become saints; but, as a rule, men must be well fed in order to be well led. In such a parish as I have assumed, the disparity in the condition of the members will correspond very much to that of the great outside world. There will be some who, by comparison, are rich and prosperous; many whose income from their daily work, what- ever it may be, will suffice for their wants, with a little margin left over for the savings-bank; and a greater number whose daily work barely suffices for their daily bread and whose lives are narrow and difficult in the extreme.

If such a parish be divided in the customary proportion, about fifty will be the full number who can be classed as prosperous persons, while the five hundred will constitute the real working body in the workingman's comprehension of that term, many of them working under the hardest conditions. About a hundred and eighty will be actually at work earning money for the support of all, — one in three of the whole number. Now, it is perfectly certain that either one of you might so appeal to the feelings of the heads of the fifty prosperous families, as to induce them to make to you some such proposal as this: — " We desire to make the lives of the fellow-members of our parish less narrow, sordid, and penurious; and we are prepared to contribute through you five cents a day to the welfare of each person, or what that sum will buy, upon the single condition that you give us an absolute assurance that we may not increase the disparity in the welfare of the members of the parish, and that such a contribution may not tend to do more harm than good."

Can you give this absolute assurance? Will you not be compelled to answer, that such a gift of the richer to the poorer members of the parish will only be likely to make the idle more lazy, the shiftless more incapable, the penurious more avaricious, while the self-respect of those whom you would most desire to aid would forbid them to accept the gift? Must not alms be limited absolutely to the incapable or the unfortunate? If,
then, you cannot invent a method of distributing only five cents* worth a day more product, even among the working people of your own parish, how can the great problem be solved, of distributing five cents' worth a day more material welfare to the whole working population of the United States, using the term " working people " in its narrowest sense, numbering not five hundred, but over fifty-three million people out of our fifty-eight million population? Five cents a day, added to the welfare of each of the five hundred and fifty members of your parish, would call for only a fraction over ten thousand dollars a year. But five cents a day added to the welfare of even the working people of this country, in the strictest sense and classed separately, would require an addition of one billion dollars' worth of goods and wares, and of every kind of product, coupled with an equal distribution of this increased product. If it were not equally distributed, it would increase the disparity instead of diminishing it.

Must we not, then, seek to find out what are the great laws governing the relations of men to each other, in the same way that we attempt to comprehend the laws of the physical universe, and with the expectation of finding the same harmony and the same beneficent purpose? We can invent no better world. Can we invent a better humanity? Is there not a close analogy between the forces of fire, wind, and water, coupled with this strange new force which we have named electricity, and the very passions of men? — each destructive when uncontrolled, each beneficent when guided and directed to useful purpose.

The scientist must wrest the hidden meaning of nature from the cloud which obscures it. Must not the true preacher study the facts of the daily work of the world, if he expects to unite the religion of which he is the representative with the actual lives which men must of necessity lead, in order to subsist so long as they dwell in the bodies which they now occupy?

Having thus far attempted to justify the vocation of the man of affairs, and to present to you the true function of capital and of the capitalist, I may now devote what remains of my time, already so much extended, to the condition of the laborer. What is the aspect of life to the men and women who toil in the strictest sense for their daily bread, honestly and unflinchingly, doing their work as well as they know how, and asking only jus-tice and right treatment from their fellow-men? The very manner in which this great seething, toiling, crowded mass of laboring men and women bear the hardships of life, leads one to faith in humanity, and itself gives confidence in the future. If it were not that there is a Divine order even in the hardships which seem so severe, and that even the least religious, in the technical sense, have faith in each other, the anarchist and nihilist might be a cause of dread.
As I walk through the great factories which are insured in the company of which I am president, trying to find out what more can be done to save them from destruction by fire, I wonder if I myself should not strike, just for the sake of variety, if I were a mule-spinner, obliged to bend over the machine, mending the ends of the thread, while I walked ten or fifteen miles a day without raising my eyes to the great light above. I wonder how men and women bear the monotony of the workshop and of the factory, in which the division of labor is carried to its utmost, and in which they must work year in and year out, only on some small part of a fabric or of an implement, never becoming capable of making the whole fabric or of constructing the whole machine.

I wonder if some of you would not find in the brilliant saloon the only place for a workman's club, after toiling all day long in the depths of a mine, or in sorting coal from slate in a coal-bunker. There were interest and variety in the homespun spinning and weaving of the old time, arduous as it may have been. The work of the handicraftsman who possessed gumption developed also variety and versatility, mental as well as manual dexterity. The penalty which we pay for the greater productive power of modern machinery, compassed by the division of labor and the application of steam for the productive work of the great factories of modern times, is a dreary monotony which permits no change of function.

First, the spinning-jenny displaced the spinning-wheel, then the hand-mule displaced the jenny; but each and all required thought, judgment, gumption. But now the automatic working of the mule dispenses with all thought except to mend the broken thread. The machine almost does the thinking: the man becomes almost a machine. What shall we do about it? It is all necessary to the very subsistence of the greater number who now possess this land. Our problem is, how to guide all these new forces. On the whole, the conditions of the factory are very much better than the former conditions of the hand-weaver and of the hand-spinner. Life is broader in the Northern factory-town than in the home-spun sections of North Carolina and Kentucky. The attempt of the factory operatives to shorten the hours of their special work is, and always has been, a true one. To win leisure, or to save time, is about all that we can do in this world. The only question is. How shall this leisure be attained? The one who works in the factory must find, in the greater leisure which his more productive power gives, warrant for an opportunity for a change of function which will make the leisure desirable. It cannot be brought about by statute. The conduct of leisure is like the conduct of life, — a part of the individual capacity of each man and woman.

The factory in the true sense, of whatever kind, whether engaged in making cloth or clothing, working iron or leather, has yet given employment to only one in ten of the
working force of this country. Nine-tenths of the work still remains what we may call individual work, in distinction from the collective work of the factory. Hence the problem is limited in its measure to but a small part of the population, much greater here in New England than anywhere else. The hours of labor in the factory and in the workshop are becoming shorter. "When the farmers' daughters of New England first entered the factories, they worked twelve or fourteen hours for half the wages which are now paid for ten to eleven hours' work to the Irish, Germans, and French Canadians who have succeeded them.

How this change has come about, time will not permit me to consider. It has come in almost all the arts of life; in States where statutes regulating the hours of labor have been passed, and have been measurably enforced; in States where such acts have been inoperative; and in States where no such laws have ever been enacted. The shortening of the hours of labor has come sometimes with a strike of more or less effect; oftener without or in spite of strikes. It is the force of public opinion, more than strikes or laws, which is potential in the matter. Public opinion, the other day, I think, justified the efforts of the horse-car drivers in New York to shorten the hours of their toilsome work, while it utterly condemned the methods which they adopted.

I am profoundly convinced that it will be by force of public opinion and of enlightened self-interest combined, that the hardships of factory life will be alleviated slowly and surely. 20 As I have watched the changes of society since I began to observe them closely about thirty years ago, the evolution of the social order, the shortening of the hours of work, and the change in the causes of want from a possible scarcity to an excess or so-called over-production, has somewhat resembled the evolution of machinery.

The first machine in a given art is apt to be very simple and not very effective. From time to time, changes occur which are mostly empirical; a new adjustment is made here, another there, until the whole machine has become exceedingly complex, yet more effective than it has been before. At last comes the man of genius who studies the fundamental principles of the art to which that machine had been applied. He removes all the extraneous parts; he adjusts one part to another; he reduces it again to simplicity, while accomplishing a continually increasing product.

The average factory operative of to-day would have been incapable of working the more complex and imperfect machinery of the textile factories as it existed thirty or forty years ago. Yet the factory of to-day seems to be more complex; it really is not. There is no end to the progress and improvement in any machine. We can see the imperfections now, but the final simplicity is a slow growth. I scarcely know of one machine, except the turbine water-wheel, in which the art is exhausted. With every
improvement, after a given time, comes simplicity and easier work. Now, it seems to me as if our modern society, especially in this part of the United States, were just in the intervening state be-tween the simplicity of life of the old time and the simplicity which may ensue a few years hence, when the true function of life is more fully comprehended. Are we not at the maximum of complexity? Never in the history of nations has the machinery of life been subjected to so many new adjustments, new methods, and new modes of working, as in the last twenty-five years, resulting in so-called depression and want, growing out of the very abundance or excess of our products.

Are we incompetent to work a just distribution of this abundance? Are we incapable of removing the obnoxious complexity of modern life, bringing it back to a state of simplicity and common comfort, accompanied by a leisure which was wanting in the old arduous life of former days? All that we can do is to move something: we can make nothing. What we now have to do is to remove obstructions, many of them legislative, by which a true and equitable distribution of products is prevented.

Many of our laws of to-day are like the sumptuary laws of old time. There is a lesson to be learned in the history of the English-speaking people. There was a time when upon the statute-books of Great Britain there were two thousand acts unrepealed for the regulation of trade, commerce, and the affairs of daily life. When Romilly began to attempt to remedy the wrongs of the criminal statutes of Great Britain, there were three hundred capital offences upon their statute-books.

To what conditions these obstructive statutes brought the people of our mother-land, one only needs to read the history of the fifty-years' peace subsequent to the end of the Napoleonic wars, and compare them with the present condition even of Great Britain, and yet more with the present conditions of the larger branch of the English-speaking family, the people of these United States. When we learn to apply the principle which Dr. Holmes presented as the law of physical life, — namely, that Nature cures rather than kills, — to the social life of this nation, we may take courage, and may perhaps assume that the remedy for most of the present wrongs of society will consist of faith in humanity, and in a profound belief that there has been a higher law of material progress established by the power which makes for righteousness, with which we must put ourselves into line in order to attain our ends. May I, therefore, venture to say that in political economy there is also a word of God, which every student of theology must comprehend, so far as its truth has yet been evolved, before he can be a true guide, even in mental and spiritual sciences.

I beg you to think of this. There are many facts of life well known to men of affairs, which may not be dreamed of in your philosophy. In these recent days we have
known much mischief done, much fuel added to an already dangerous flame, from an ill-advised sympathy, by words spoken without knowledge, both by laymen and clergymen alike.