

SIXTH CENTURY POLITICAL ECONOMY.

"Nothing could Unseat their Strange Beliefs."

BY MARK TWAIN.

At a first glance, things appeared to be exceedingly prosperous in this little tributary kingdom—whose lord was King Bagdemagus—as compared with the state of things in my own region. They had the "protection" system in full force here, whereas we were working along down towards free trade by easy stages, and were now about half way. Before long Dowley and I were doing all the talking, the others hungrily listening. Dowley warmed to his work, snuffed an advantage in the air, and began to put questions which he considered pretty awkward ones for me, and they did have something of that look:

"In your country, brother, what is the wage of a master bailiff, master hind, carter, shepherd, swineherd?"

"Twenty-five milrays a day; that is to say, a quarter of a cent."

The smith's face beamed with joy. He said:

"With us they are allowed the double of it! And what may a mechanic get—carpenter, dauber, mason, painter, blacksmith, wheelwright and the like?"

"On the average, fifty milrays, half a cent a day."

"Ho-ho! With us they are allowed a hundred! With us any good mechanic is allowed a cent a day! I count out the tailor, but not the others—they are allowed a cent a day, and in driving times they get more, yes, up to a hundred and ten and even fifteen milrays a day. I have paid a hundred and fifteen myself within the week. 'Rah for Protection, to Sheol with Free Trade.'"

And his face shone upon the company like a sunburst. But I didn't scare at all. I rigged up my pile driver, and allowed myself fifteen minutes to drive him into the earth—drive him *all in*—drive him till not even the curve of his skull should show above ground. I asked:

"What do you pay a pound for salt?"

"A hundred milrays."

"We pay forty. What do you pay for beef and mutton—when you buy it?" That was a neat hit; it made the colour come.

"It varieth somewhat, but not much; one may say 75 milrays the pound."

"We pay 33. What do you pay for eggs?"

"Fifty milrays the dozen."

"We pay twenty. What do you pay for beer?"

"It costeth us 8½ milrays the pint."

"We get it for 4; 25 bottles for a cent. What do you pay for wheat?"

"At the rate of 900 milrays the bushel."

"We pay 400. What do you pay for a man's tow-linen suit?"

"Thirteen cents."

"We pay 6. What do you pay for a stuff gown for the wife of the labourer or the mechanic?"

"We pay 8.40."

"Well, observe the difference. You pay eight cents and four mills, we pay only four cents." I prepared now to sock it to him. I said: "Look here, dear friend, *what is become of your high wages you were bragging so about a few minutes ago?*" and I looked round on the company with placid satisfaction, for I had slipped up on him gradually and tied him hand and foot, you see, without his ever noticing that he was being tied at all. "What's become of those noble high wages of yours? I seem to have knocked the stuffing out of them, it appears to me."

But, if you will believe me, he merely looked surprised, that is all; he didn't grasp the situation at all, didn't know that he had walked into a trap, didn't discover that he was in a trap. I could have shot him from sheer vexation. With a cloudy eye and a struggling intellect, he fetched this out:

"Marry, I seem not to understand. It is *proved* that our wages be double thine; how then may it be that thou'st knocked therefrom the stuffing?—an' I miscall not the wonderly word, this being the first time under grace and providence of God it hath been granted to me to hear it."

Well I was stunned; partly with this unlooked-for stupidity on his part, and partly because his fellows so manifestly sided with him and were of his mind—if you might call it mind. My position was simple enough, plain enough; how could it ever be simplified more? However I must try:

"Why, look here, brother Dowley, don't you see? Your wages are merely higher than ours in *name*, not in *fact*."

"Hear him. They are the *double*—ye have confessed it yourself."

"Yes—yes, I don't deny that at all. But that's got nothing to do with it; the *amount* of the wages in mere coins, with meaningless names attached to them to know them by, has got nothing to do with it. The thing is, how much can you *buy* with your wages?—that's the idea. While it is true that with you a good mechanic is allowed about three dollars and a half a year, with us only about a dollar and seventy-five—"

"There—ye're confessing it again, ye're confessing it again!"

"Confound it, I've never denied it, I tell you! What I say is this. With us *half* a dollar buys more than a *dollar* buys with you—and *therefore* it stands to reason and the commonest kind of common sense, that our wages are *higher* than yours."

He looked dazed and said, despairingly:

"Verily, I cannot make it out. Ye've just *said* ours are the higher, and with the same breath ye take it back."

"Oh, great Scott, isn't it possible to get such a simple thing through your head? Now, look here—let me illustrate. We pay four cents for a woman's stuff gown, you pay 8.40, which is four mills more than *double*. What do you allow a labouring woman who works on a farm?"

"Two mills a day."

"Very good; we allow but half as much; we pay her only a tenth of a cent a day; and—"

"Again ye are conf—"

"Wait! Now you see the thing is very simple; this time you'll understand it. For instance, it takes your woman 42 days to earn her gown, at 2 mills a day—seven weeks work; but ours earns hers in forty days—two days short of seven weeks. Your woman has a gown, and her whole seven weeks' wages are gone; ours has a gown, and two days' wages left to buy something else with. There—*now* do you understand it!"

He looked—well, he merely looked dubious, it's the most I can say; so did the others. I waited—to let the thing work. Dowley spoke at last—and betrayed the fact that he actually hadn't gotten away from his rooted and grounded superstitions yet. He said with a trifle of hesitancy:

"But—but—ye cannot fail to grant that two mills a day is better than one."

Shucks! Well, of course, I hated to give it up. So I chanced another flier:

"Let us suppose a case. Suppose one of your journey-men goes out and buys the following articles:

"1 pound of salt;
1 dozen eggs;
1 dozen pints of beer;
1 bushel of wheat;
1 tow-linen suit;
5 pounds of beef;
5 pounds of mutton."

"The lot will cost him 32 cents. It takes him 32 working days to earn the money—5 weeks and 2 days. Let him come to us and work 32 days at half the wages; he can buy all those things for a shade over 14½ cents; they will cost him a shade under 29 days' work, and he will have about half a week's wages over. Carry it through the year; he

would save nearly a week's wages every two months, *your* man nothing; thus saving five or six weeks' wages in a year, *your* man not a cent. *Now* I reckon you understand that 'high wages' and 'low wages' are phrases that don't mean anything in the world until you find out which of them will *buy* the most!"

It was a crusher.

But, alas, it didn't crush. No I had to give it up. What those people valued was *high wages*; it didn't seem to be a matter of any consequence to them whether the high wages would buy anything or not. They stood for "protection," and swore by it, which was reasonable enough, because interested parties had gulled them into the notion that it was protection which had created their high wages. I proved to them that in a quarter of a century their wages had advanced but 30 per cent., while the cost of living had gone up 100; and that with us, in a shorter time, wages had advanced 40 per cent., while the cost of living had gone steadily down. But it didn't do any good. Nothing could unseat their strange beliefs.

—*The Yankee at the Court of King Arthur.*

ENGLISH NEWS AND NOTES.

[All communications respecting this column should be sent to the General Secretary, English League for the Taxation of Land Values, 376 and 377 Strand, London, W.C.]

The Report of the Executive for the year ended, June 30th, appears in another column. Next month we shall give a report of the Annual Meeting.

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Though the Executive have reason to look back with satisfaction at an active and useful year's work, the financial position of the League still gives them cause for much anxiety. The publication of the special edition of "Protection or Free Trade," though it will ultimately leave no loss, has been a great strain on the very limited resources at their disposal, as, apart from the heavy advertising expenses, it has involved an outlay of nearly one hundred pounds more than it has yet brought in. To help the league to start the new year on a sound footing a member of the executive has offered a *special donation of ten pounds*, provided that at least ten other members or friends of the league will each find a similar amount. The hon. treasurer, Mr. L. H. Berens, will gratefully hear from any member willing to help the League in this way.

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Arrangements are being made for the Annual Dinner in commemoration of the birthday of Henry George, to be held in London sometime in September. Particulars will be gladly sent by the General Secretary on receipt of post-card.

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On Tuesday evening, June 21st, under the auspices of the English League for the Taxation of Land Values, an open-air meeting was held in Myrtle Place, and was well attended. The chair was occupied by Mr. B. Foulds, and the speaker was Mr. F. Skirrow, Yorkshire agent to the League. The chairman urged that in addition to what Mr. Skirrow might advance, the waste of the national wealth in drink and in gambling was also a source of poverty, and said that if £10,000,000 only per annum was saved from the huge sum thus wasted and were spent in the textile trade of the country, it would give plenty of work and good wages to all engaged in that trade. If we had first a sober people in the land they would soon seize upon Mr. Skirrow's plan if there was anything in it good and right. Mr. Skirrow, who spoke very effectively, and made good use of illustrations to enforce his points, said their was poverty besides that caused by drink, resulting from the denial, under present conditions, of the right to work to men, and the low wages

they were paid when they did work. Quite recently, he said, it had been suggested that a duty of 2s. per ton should be imposed on imported steel, in order that the home producer could better compete with the foreign steel producer. On a ton of steel produced in England a royalty of 10s. was paid to the landowner, and a far better way would be to tax that royalty than to resort to protection. The rate of wages, he contended, was not determined by the price of commodities, but by the demand for labour in the labour market, and the cheaper the commodities of life the better it was for the working classes. A tax on food in this country would really mean a decline in wages, and it was an utter fallacy, he contended, to advocate protection as being in the interests of the working man. He gave as an illustration of the manner in which a landlord gained at the expense of the community through the industry of the community the example of Bootle, from which Lord Derby drew an annual ground rent of £100,000, but which not very many years ago was barren land producing nothing. All men should in justice enjoy equal freedom, and there could be none in the true sense of the word when the land necessary to life and indispensable to labour was under the control of a comparatively few men. The land question was really the labour question. The reason for low wages was the monopoly in land, because it closed the opportunities of production to men. The raising of wages and the securing to every man a full wage would not be done until they appropriated for the common use of society the value of land which came from the presence and the industry of the whole community, and in taking for the use of the people these values they would simply be preventing the landlords doing injustice to the people. After the address a number of questions were put to Mr. Skirrow and answered.—*Keighley News.*

FRED. VERINDER, *Gen. Sec., E.L.T.L.V.*

Verses read at the Pic-nic of a Busy Bee Society, Liverpool, 9/7/04.

Mary had a swarm of bees,
To help her on life's way,
Honest toil found fit reward,
And the bees began to pay.

"How's bees?" the landlord asked,
And Mary was imprudent;
She never guessed the landlord was
An economic student.

But Mary's landlord's eagle eye
Was watching how things went;
So when the quarter-day came round
He doubled Mary's rent.

The imposition staggered her,
But what could Mary do?
Subsistence bare is the tenant's share,
All above is the landlord's due.

Mary's bees kept on as before
Making honey as time went;
And step by step with increased trade,
The landlord raised the rent.

And thus the merry game went on
Till Mary's life was spent;
As fast as the bees could prosper her
The landlord raised the rent.

Errata in "Land Reform in Sweden."

June Number, 1904.

In Stockholm not 180,019 houses were inspected, but 18,019.

The town of Gefle has not 3000, but 30,000 inhabitants.