

THE PROBLEM INVOLVED IN THE COAL STRIKE.

For The Public.

The situation in Pennsylvania consequent upon the miners' strike is in no way exceptional or peculiar. The strike is one more evidence of widespread and deep-seated discontent with industrial conditions, that is all.

What are the industrial conditions?

To get a clear idea we must recede from the immediate question for a moment, and consider certain facts which affect and may even determine the situation.

Who owns the earth, and what will be the effect of the ownership of the earth by some, upon the fortunes of the others?

Let the situation in Pennsylvania answer.

These six men (named by the President) own the coal fields of Pennsylvania, do they not? "An infeasible estate in fee simple." What are the rights of the owner of such an estate? The legal rights, I mean—those conferred by society. His taxes being paid, he may do with it as he will, may he not? Sell it? Yes. Refuse to sell it? Yes. Employ labor on it? Yes. Refuse to employ labor on it? Yes. Whose business is it, and what are we going to do about it, so long as we recognize in him an infeasible estate in fee simple?

Condemn the mines under the law of eminent domain, and buy them back from the owners? Has the state of Pennsylvania money enough, or can it get money enough to consummate such a purchase, involving as it would, the purchase of the mining machinery and all the coal roads and their equipment? Admit for a moment the practicability of what I believe a wholly impracticable measure, and what is then the situation? The state of Pennsylvania, in exchange for an enormous bonded debt, would be in possession of her coal mines. What would she do with them? Is there political wisdom enough, integrity of character enough, sagacity, fidelity and experience enough among the rulers of Pennsylvania to discharge the trust involved? Who believes it for a moment? Who would not be appalled at such an undertaking by men, whose unscrupulous character, whose cupidity and venality are the by-word and hissing of the nation.

Appoint receivers to take over the property and administer the trust? Under what pretext? What right has society to interfere with the present management? All the rights the operators have in, to and over the coal

deposits have been conferred directly or mediately by society, have they not?

What's the matter with society? It has got just what it bargained for, hasn't it? And yet society doesn't seem entirely satisfied; society has wanted coal, and couldn't get it; society does not like to see its members suffer, and yet 104,000 miners and their families were for five long months in want, and a situation of chronic unrest and dissatisfaction suddenly (as such situations are apt to do) became painfully and pressingly acute, and still the question recurred: What are we going to do about it?

There is no use in skirmishing about this matter, or paltering with it. Whether we know it or not, or like it or not, we are squarely "up against" the institution of private property in land—not private property in some land, not private property in the coal fields of Pennsylvania simply, but private property in land in its widest, fullest, most comprehensive sense. Property in land is property in man, and the question now forced upon us by the logic of events is: Shall this species of slavery continue or not?—a question for every man and woman in this country. It will not down, it is here to stay—to stay until it is settled—and it will be settled only when the natural rights of men in the earth are secured—the equal, eternal and inalienable right of every human being to the bounty of the Almighty, put forever beyond the reach of ignorant or corrupt legislation.

Without a clear conception of the cause of industrial disorder—in other words, a clear conception of the fact that the men who own the earth will control the destiny of those who live on the earth, no measure will be of any avail. We can do nothing that will not add to the difficulties of the situation. The power of land monopoly—or land ownership, if you please—must be broken, or men must make up their minds to submit to whatever terms land owners find it to their interest to impose.

So far as regards the case in point, I do not see that Congress has properly anything to do with it. No interstate question or constitutional question appears to be involved. There has been no interference with the functions of the general government. It is an instance pure and simple of the power which land ownership gives over the lives of men and the welfare of society.

This trouble has arisen in Pennsylvania. Let the legislature and execu-

tive of Pennsylvania deal with it. The commonwealth has made merchandise of the inheritance of the race, and has consequently deprived tens of thousands of her citizens of any means of livelihood except as they may extort it from the beneficiaries of the state. Let her undo the wrong.

She still possesses the power of taxation. It is enough. The power to tax is the power to destroy. She can tax land values, can appropriate ground rent, can take for the public good what belongs to the public, and can thereby compel those who would mine coal to pay labor whatever may be necessary to secure efficient and constant supply, to be satisfied with interest on capital and wages of superintendence, and to turn over the proceeds in excess thereof in taxes to the state. All this she can do and must do if she would promote good order and establish justice.

Let us renounce temporary expedients. Let us espouse that truth which is now struggling for expression, and which will yet—it may easily be in our own time—bring about changes so beneficent and glorious that we shall count it our highest joy to have been its advocates and champions. Make men see that this so-called contest of Capital and Labor is in reality wholly different in character; that Capital and Labor are natural allies, and that their common enemy is Land Monopoly. Challenge the justice of any law or custom by which the heritage of the race has become the possession of a few. The ownership of the Pennsylvania coal mines is just now the matter of public concern. The future of land tenure, not only in this case, but of every square foot of land in this country, is the real question at issue. On the determination of this question hangs, as I believe, the welfare of our people and the perpetuity of our institutions.

Chicago. J. B. JOHNSTON.

LESSONS FROM THE COAL STRIKE, AND WHAT IS STILL TO BE DONE.

A lecture delivered in the Church of the Christian Union, Rockford, Ill., by the pastor, Robert C. Bryant, Sunday evening, Oct. 19, 1902.

What is the cause of the coal strike?

We are told that the companies have imported into the coal regions more men than are needed to work the mines. And this is true, but beneath this as a prior cause is the fact that the conditions of men in different parts of the world are so bad that they can be persuaded to