

public welfare? Is it at liberty, when the government is being put to its wits' end to check this aggression, to rank itself with those who profit by it? It is not anti-trust laws that we need nearly so much as it is an anti-trust temper. If equal conditions were given to all forms of production the trust problem would shortly disappear.

The question of trusts is an economic, social and civic question, and it is the duty of every college to meet it in all these relations. A college that is thriving on the money of the Standard Oil trust is precluded by courtesy, by honor and by interest from any adequate criticism of its methods. It has foreclosed discussion on one of the most important questions which come before it for consideration. One has but to recall events which have already happened in our universities to see how this need of silence is felt. The American people have such an overwhelming admiration for the money-making process that they can hardly get on their knees quick enough in the presence of a wealthy corporation. Is this the temper most suitable to a university and a divinity school?

Mr. Rockefeller has the reputation of being a devout Baptist. One is unable to understand, therefore, how he should escape some twinge in his own consciousness when he converts the words of St. Paul: "The law is fulfilled in one word, even in this, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," into the words: "The commercial law is fulfilled in one word, even in this, drive your neighbor to the wall." Nor can one any better understand how a divinity school should be willing in any way to be a partaker in such a travesty of Christian faith. A portion of the ministry, as in the anti-slavery discussions, has always betrayed the people when a crisis has arisen. How does it happen?

Our Lord said: "If thou bring thy gift to the altar and thou rememberest that thy brother hath sought against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother and then come and offer thy gift." If Mr. Rockefeller should obey this injunction and strive to assuage the deep and justifiable hatred he has awakened in those scattered all through the land whose business he has ruined, he would not have time enough, even if his days were prolonged like those of Methuselah, to return and complete his first gift.

What all our universities need to teach is sound citizenship. The dan-

ger which most presses on the state is unscrupulous pursuit of wealth. When our universities shall cease to send forth young men intelligently and earnestly devoted to equal rights and the public welfare their function is ended.

Williamstown, Mass., Jan. 5.

THE RIGHTS OF PROPERTY.

For The Public.

The simplest and most obvious test of truth in any proposition is self-consistency—the just and proper inherence of each part thereof in the whole. When, on the contrary, the admitted factors of a thesis are found irreconcilable, the discovery reacts upon the original postulate and proves its falsity.

It not infrequently happens that this test intelligently and courageously applied, inverts what we had thought to be an axiom, changing all the plus signs of our sufficiency to minus signs of doubt. For example, we have lately heard a vast deal about the "rights of property," the "sacred rights" and the "divine rights," and most of us doubtless rest secure in the belief that we fully comprehend what this means in theory, as well as in practice. In the matter of fuel we have learned to our sorrow and our cost that the practice part of it means extortionate prices for coal in Boston and vicinity (a person in one instance paying at the rate of \$40 the ton for range anthracite), a cornered fuel market in which dealers answer inquiries with "None at any price," while nearly 200,000 tons of coal is held idle in our harbor, until we have been moved to wonder which is the worse type of highwayman, he who holds a dagger to one's heart, with the salutation: "Give me all you have, or I'll run this knife through you," or he who places an icicle to one's breast with the grim threat: "Give me as much of your money as it pleases me to demand, or I'll stick this in your heart!"

Such conditions, it would seem, are only tolerated by the public, because of utterly erroneous ideas as to this matter of the "rights of property," which, in the average mind, is as often thought of as "the rights of wealth," in contradistinction to "the rights of labor." Along similar lines of thought we hear much of the "irrepressible conflict between labor and capital" from people who never realize that there can properly be no conflict whatever between these two economic factors, and who never have

learned that the real issue is between labor and monopoly, which amounts to an assertion on the one hand and a denial on the other, of the right of man to labor with a just return to himself.

Brushing aside all confusing minutiae and coming down to fundamentals, let us make the following postulates which, it is believed, will generally be accepted as axiomatic.

1. The chronology of primary economic factors assumes the following order: The earth; man and his labor; and the product of his labor applied to the earth.

2. Man has as natural and inalienable a right to the use of the earth as he has to that part of the earth which he breathes.

3. Wealth, then, is the product of an individual possession applied to a general possession, i. e., labor applied to land.

If these premises are true, the following conclusions would seem to be inevitable:

1. An antecedent thing (labor) cannot generate in its application to an impersonal thing (land) a subsequent factor (capital) which shall have rights oppugnant to itself. A brief consideration of what is known in mathematics as a "closed system of forces" will make this apparent.

2. If the right of the earth is a common right, occupancy or "possession" can per se by no possibility generate an individual right.

3. Since an individual right cannot inhere in or flow from a common right per se, whence comes it? If wealth be the result of the application of an individual possession to a common possession, it is clear that any individual rights inhering therein must have come from the individual possession, since *ex nihilo nihil fit* is as clearly violated by getting a single clam from an ocean where clams are not, as by conjuring ponderables from sheer vacuity.

4. If the individual right in wealth is born of the individual factor concerned in its production, then, since that factor is labor, the rights of wealth are labor rights, and any real conflict between the true rights of labor and the true rights of wealth would exhibit the astonishing paradox of a conflict of the rights of labor with the same rights of labor, or, to put it mathematically, an "irrepressible conflict" of a concrete segregated homogeneity with itself—which is to say, perpetual motion.

When a conclusion reduces a proposition to an absurdity, if correctly

drawn, it reacts upon and disproves at least one of the premises. Such being the case, it is a fallacy to speak of a conflict between the "Rights of Labor" and the "Rights of Property," and equally erroneous to talk about "Property Rights," and "Labor Rights," since all property rights are labor rights. Giving the same thing two names does not even make two things of it, much less two antagonistic things.

The individual right to any wealth is merely, in the last analysis, labor's lien thereon. Any other "right" is not a right, and any arrogation thereof robs (whether intentionally or otherwise) labor of its due. By a parity of reasoning he who has not a labor right to "his" property, has no right to it, and if he use it he commits, before the tribunal of absolute ethics, a sin. Let the Wall street gambler and others of his fair ilk, whose "business" consists in catching midway the goods which the producer strives to toss to the consumer, ponder this and realize the microscopic ethical value of his parasitic self.

MELVIN L. SEVERY.

OUR POLITICAL METHODS NEED DEMOCRATIZING.

Written for The Public by Hon. William L. Stark, member of congress from Nebraska.

Responding to the many requests I have received I beg leave to respectfully suggest a thought relative to the function of the citizen in politics. Let us see if our departure from old-time methods has any probable connection with present conditions.

In the early days people met in town meetings and discussed matters pertaining to the common good. Political action was spontaneous, flowing from the collective citizenship, they being the prime movers thereof. In latter day politics the primary election system comes nearest to the attainment of the objects sought in the old-time town meeting; and the convention system is its antithesis. Is it not possible that we have blamed the existing parties for many things that they could not avoid under their form of organization and their method of operation? Cannot the boss-ridden conditions of politics in many States be directly traced to the convention system that organizes and operates from the center out instead of from the circumference in?

We have to face this question: Is the citizen the unit in political action, or is the convention the unit and the

citizen an infinitesimal fraction thereof? Another question that we should try to answer, is: Can we hope to succeed in the promulgation of pure political principles and practically work out the ideals of the founders of this government when we make use of the same methods and machinery by which those ideals have been well-nigh obliterated? Why is it that a party whose platform declares for reforms of various kinds, elects men who never give a serious thought to the performance of those duties to which they are pledged? Simply because the method of selecting candidates is in direct opposition to the accomplishment of the declared purposes. Results flow from actions, not from declarations. The best illustration of attempts to work out the accomplishment of our declarations under the convention method and system would be to seat a man on a horse backward and have him vociferously declare that he is traveling northward when the horse is going south. Our principles may be very good, but if our methods of operation are radically wrong our declaration of principles will avail nothing. If we believe that our government is by the people, and not an outward flow from some centralized power, then we should seek some method of political operation which will secure and retain the power to select men and declare measures in the hands of the individual elector. Especially is the selection of men all important, because the right stamp of man will do right and strive to preserve our liberties without any platform, if need be. Many men will not do these things, no matter how strongly bound by platforms. This can most effectually be done by the primary election system. As its name implies, the first or primary political action rests with the individual elector of the State, and is exercised and absolutely controlled in the meetings of these electors in their respective election precincts, instead of being authorized by some "boss" who holds the power of political action by virtue of his retainers and henchmen.

The People's Independent party has been a schoolmaster in politics to the Republican party. It taught the quantitative theory of money value, and President McKinley made use of the lesson. While his party was declaring that prices did not depend on the quantity of money in circulation, he was wise enough to avoid a monetary stringency by coining large amounts of silver although his party had made gold the standard.

The People's Independent party has a splendid platform, and the Chicago and Kansas City platforms of the Democratic party are both excellent. But in Nebraska we have the spectacle of reformers who declare in their platform for the election of United States Senators by direct vote of the people, and then deny their own party the privilege of selecting any nominee by direct vote. I do not say these things by way of fault finding, but simply to point out that if we expect to accomplish reforms we declare for, we must abandon the methods and expedients by which the people's rights have been withheld from them. Our teaching has been right and has done much good, but there is no valid reason why we should not profit by our own teaching and make our example correspond to our precept.

I desire to call the attention of our people to the fact that under the primary election system in vogue in Mississippi and some other southern States, the State legislatures are mere returning boards for the primary elections, the people choosing their Senators and the legislatures ratifying their choice. In Mississippi no party candidate can be certified to and placed on the official ballot unless the nominee of his party primary. This law has been upheld by the Supreme Court of the State, and the constitution under which it was enacted has been held to be valid by the United States Supreme Court.

I submit an outline of a plan for primary elections, leaving all the details to be worked out as meets the approval of those using it. The plan is as follows: Nominees to be placed on primary ticket by petition, requiring a given number of signatures. Election can be held under the primary election law of Nebraska. Both Democratic and People's Independent petitions could be filed, thus making a fusion. There should be a committee to prepare the official primary ballot, which should be in form similar to the present official ballot, and the method of voting should be secret.

I will give three plans for computing the vote of precincts. First: The votes of the precincts are counted, returned and canvassed, the candidate having the highest number being declared the nominee. Second: Apportion to each precinct the number of primary votes that it would now be allowed delegates in county convention; the candidate receiving the greatest number of primary votes would be entitled to the vote of the precinct. To illustrate: If Oak pre-