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EDITORIAL

The benefits of invention.

It is reported that Mr. Edison, in a recent interview, stated that it is only a matter of time when an express train can be run from New York to Buffalo with two bushels of coal. If this ever comes about it will only increase the power of Mr. Baer over the rest of us, and will, doubtless, be regarded by that personage as a fresh vote of confidence on the part of the Almighty in himself.

American progress in the Philippines.

The kernel of the report of the

Philippine Commission, summarized in our news columns, is deposited by the Commission inconspicuously at the end. It is a recommendation that the land owning limit in the islands be raised from 2,500 acres to 25,000 acres. In this way the innocent Commission expects to attract American capital! The real effect of such a change would be to put upon the Philippines the blight of absentee landlordism.

A Cardinal on the distribution of riches.

In a sermon at Baltimore on the 4th as published in Eastern papers, Cardinal Gibbons observes that "as long as the world lasts, some men will be rich and others will be poor." He might have added with equal probability that some will be robbers and others will be robbed. And shall we not try to suppress robbery? The phase of the industrial question to which the Cardinal's quotation alludes, and which ought most to impress a genuine man of his profession, is not whether there will always be wealth and poverty, but whether the industrial conditions that produce such a result are just.

The Statehood bills.

Exactly why the Republicans in Congress insist upon making of Arizona and New Mexico one State, against the wishes of both Territories and regardless of the radical difference in the character and traditions of their respective populations, is not obvious, and the reasons the leaders give are absurd. But that they have "good" reasons of their kind, and that these reasons are imperative but will not bear the light, is evident from the fact that the measure was railroaded through the House without opportunity for debate or amendment. This treatment of the subject is alone sufficient to condemn the measure.

A squirming organ of privilege.

By his stirring book on "The

Menace of Privilege," Henry George, Jr., has made the New York Times squirm. Shameless defender of privilege though it is, it shrinks from George's stinging indictment of the press as a tool of the privileged, and in the issue of February 5 it devotes nearly two columns of editorial to a ludicrous attempt to put George in the wrong by trying to prove the fairness of the plutocratic press. We say ludicrous, because to anyone who reads such papers as the Times with enough regularity to see their systematic distortion of news relating to economic and labor matters, and their ignorant and mean attacks upon radical movements and men, its editorial response to George's criticism is nothing if not funny.

Labor union labels.

The editor of the Lincoln (Neb.) Wagerworker, Will M. Maupin, who is also assistant editor of Bryan's Commoner, has investigated the effect among workingmen of the union label. As might have been expected the result was disappointing. Workingmen themselves as a mass were found to have paid little or no attention to the label, but bought the goods they wanted, label or no label. So long as the union label is an invitation to buy with reference only to the union origin of goods and without reference to quality, the label is not likely to prove of much value to labor organizations. When the label comes to mean that the goods to which it is attached, being union-made goods, are therefore superior goods, the trade union label fight will have been won.

The impending coal strike.

While the general public are facing the possibilities of a coal famine, and thousands of coal miners are contemplating a long period of involuntary idleness, it would harm neither to do a little thinking on the absurdity of the

cause of the dilemma and the ease with which it could be removed.

The general public are as usual thoughtless enough to be easily led into railing at the coal miners for going on strike. It is more direct and therefore easier to blame the strikers than the mine owners, for is it not plain that if the strikers didn't strike there would be no coal famine? But this way of looking at the matter ignores the question of the relative rights of the miners and the mine owners.

When the miners strike, they are merely withholding their labor. And haven't they a right to withhold their labor? Isn't their labor their own? Suppose their withholding it does result in a coal famine, have the general public any right to be supplied with coal by coal miners who object to doing it? Let the miners' reasons be what they may, good or bad, no honest man will thoughtfully say that they are under any obligation whatever, in the absence of contract, to mine coal when they don't want to.

Very different, however, is the relation of the mine-owners, both to the general public and to the miners. For the coal mines do not belong to the mine-owners in the same absolute sense in which the miners' labor belongs to the miners. Coal mines are natural deposits. They are primarily as truly common property as are the waters of the ocean or the air we breathe. But to make them useful to the general public, dominion over them must be exercised by some one. For this reason—at least this is the only valid reason—they have been placed under the dominion of mine owners. But this is in trust for the common good. The mine owners have not the same right to close the mines that the miners have to stop work. Hence, it is to the mine owners, these trustees of a common bounty of nature, and not to the miners whose labor is their own to

use or not to use as they will, that the general public should first turn with a demand to know why a coal famine impends.

If the general public do turn to the mine owners with that demand, there will be a revelation. Not a revelation of the facts, for the facts are already revealed; but a revelation as to the significance of the facts. We have allowed these trustees of a common bounty to assert absolute ownership, as if they had created the bounty or bought a title running back to its Creator. And we have favored them by virtually exempting such holdings from taxation. The taxes on the value of rich coal-mining opportunities are trifling. Consequently, the coal-mine owners can wage war with coal miners, over petty questions of wages, to the extent of producing coal famines, and do so with profit.

Let us reverse our attitude toward this question. Let us no longer rail at coal-miners who stop working, as they have a right to do whether it causes coal famines or not, and turn our attention to the coal-mine owners, who are mere trustees of a common bounty and have no right to prevent its utilization. There would be no difficulty in producing beneficent results if we made up our minds to do it. Nothing is necessary but to tax to the full the value of mining opportunities, whether they are utilized or not. Were we to do that, they would be utilized. The mine owners could not afford to shut down if they had to pay a good round tax on the actual market value of their natural coal deposits. Neither could they afford to provoke or permit a strike, for that would be equivalent to a shut down. Under this policy, there would be no coal strikes, no shut-downs in coal mines, no coal famines, but a demand for coal miners that would raise wages as strikes never can.

Besides allowing coal-mine owners to ignore their trusteeship, and strengthening their

power by taxing the value of coal deposits lightly, we have further played into their hands by imposing a protective tariff on bituminous coal. This tariff keeps foreign coal out of the country so long as the price of domestic coal is less than the tariff rate plus cost of production and freight. It consequently operates to that extent as a shut-down on foreign coal mines, and makes a coal famine all the more possible whenever our coal-mine owners engage in a labor war with their miners. Foreign coal would relieve the famine but for the tariff, and this advantage could be taken away from the coal barons in a week. Nothing more is necessary than an act of Congress repealing the tariff on bituminous coal. If that can not be enacted immediately, in the face of the threatened coal famine, whose fault is it? It is certainly not the fault of the coal miners, for it is to their interest to weaken the power of the coal monopolists, and this would do it. The fault for the neglect or refusal of Congress to repeal that obstructive tariff duty lies at the door of the coal mine owners. Upon them, therefore, should rest the odium of causing a coal famine, if one comes. It should not rest upon the miners, who have a right to refuse to mine, and whose demand is for an increase in wages which is trifling in comparison with the increased cost of living that distinguishes this era of booming "prosperity."

The White House wedding.

As an example of obtrusiveness the movement in the Women's Christian Temperance Union to urge Miss Roosevelt, who is not a member, to exclude wine from her wedding banquet deserves to rank high. It may be the better estimated by imagining the vegetarians, whose excuse would be greater for they have humanitarian ideals on their side, to have protested against the use of meat, or the raw-fruit-and-nut cult to have objected to cooked foods. For this wedding is a private event, though it does occur at the