

Chicago is somewhat excited over the question of supplying school children with school books free. That question was settled in New York more than a generation ago, and settled sensibly. It was there assumed that free school books and free schools go together. Under circumstances that make it right to maintain a free public school system, it must be right to furnish free school books. It is quite conceivable that in a free state of society, where every man's income was in proportion to his earnings, free schools would be abandoned. But under existing conditions we not only need free schools but we have them. In these circumstances the question of free books raises no minor issue. It raises the issue of the free school system itself. Granted that free schools should be maintained by general taxation, and free school books follow as a matter of course. They are a logical if not essential part of the system.

Mr. Bryan has been thoughtlessly criticised for saying in a labor day speech that "each decade in our history shows greater production of wealth, and the men who produce it have less to show for it." The criticisms are based upon statistics of increasing wages and diminishing cost of living. But Mr. Bryan is right. Statistics of wages are utterly misleading. The wages referred to are usually day wages or week wages. When computed into yearly wages, they are vitiated by inability, or at any rate neglect, to get at an average which fairly includes the unemployed. If, therefore, slack employment has increased, wages in general might be less though these defective statistics of wages showed a gain. But it is evident, without reference to statistics, that the condition of the working class has declined; and this, after all, is the essence of Mr. Bryan's indictment of economic conditions.

In the first place, the lowest grades of laborers are worse off than they used to be except as charity has come

in to help them. In the next place, the cost of living now is not comparable with the cost of living formerly, merely upon the basis of the prices of staples, which is the basis upon which statistics of the cost of living rest. When clothing and other necessaries were made at home, costing nothing in money except for the materials and next to nothing for them, a low rate of wages yielded a better living than higher wages would yield now, when nearly all necessaries must be bought. In the third place, there has been a great extension in the catalogue of necessaries. In the past, men could live self-respecting lives with a range of supplies which in these days would mark them as almost paupers. The single item of street car fare, caused by the necessity of living at a distance from working place and supply stores, adds not less than \$25, and probably \$50 a year to the living expenses of working class families. Living expenses, therefore, have been increased by the necessity for buying some things formerly made by the family and other things that formerly were unknown; but the statistics of living expenses take no account of these important changes. Could they be statistically measured, the relation of wages to living expenses would not look as pretty in the government reports as they do.

But the chief consideration is yet to mention. Suppose we admit, as we are far from doing, except for the argument, that Mr. Bryan was wrong if he meant that workingmen get a poorer living absolutely than they used to get. Even then he was not wrong if he meant that they get a poorer living relatively—a smaller proportion of what they produce. In half a century productive power has increased enormously. In many vocations one man can accomplish more now than 100 could then. It would be a conservative estimate to say of the aggregate of labor that it is five times as productive as it was in the middle of the last century. Yet who would dare venture the assertion

that workingmen, as such, are five times, or four times, or three times, or even twice as well off as they were 50 years ago. The point of Mr. Bryan's remark is that those who do the work of the world are plundered; and that point is proved when it appears, as to every observant man it must appear, that wages do not advance in proportion to advances in labor power.

### ANARCHISM.

The assault upon President McKinley by an assassin who avows himself an anarchist, and proclaims that his murderous act was a duty, once more directs attention to the subject of anarchism.

Of anarchists there are various schools or parties. They differ all the way from conspirators and revolutionists to men of Quaker-like principles and practices. To suspect all anarchists, therefore, of complicity in assassination because one has committed the crime, is like suspecting every Christian of believing in transubstantiation because Catholics do, or in immersive baptism because Baptists do, or in predestination because Presbyterians do, or in the non-existence of disease because Christian Scientists do.

One school of anarchists is simply what the name implies—extreme individualists. They believe that government is bad, because it interferes with equal freedom. But to abolish government by assassinating rulers is as far from their thoughts as the abolition of war by assassinating generals would be to a Quaker. They depend upon education in their philosophy, and upon the development of thought, for the triumph of their theories. The distinguishing characteristic of this school is its absolute reliance upon the efficiency, for the maintenance of order and the equitable adjustment of social relations, of the natural law of competition.

Another school is that of the communist-anarchist. All the schools except that mentioned above, might be classed as sub-groups of this one, the classification depending less upon di-