

Staunton Spectator.

STAUNTON, VA.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 27, 1863.

EXHIBITANT PRICES.

We were surprised to learn that flour had suddenly risen in Staunton to \$50 per barrel. There certainly can be no sufficient reason for this rapid increase.

In this crisis of our affairs the policy of our Government should be directed to stimulate production, and to diminish consumption.

The administration of the present law tends directly to repress production. No man knows when he sows his crop, whether he will be allowed to reap and market it.

The act regulating impressment seemed to be very fair on its face. It provides, while property might be taken at schedule prices, in the hands of speculators, it could only be taken at a fair market value in the hands of the producer.

When a farmer's grain or cattle is taken, and valued by disinterested parties, if the valuations be higher than the schedule, an appeal is taken by the Government agent to the Commissioners, and they cut down the price to the schedule rate.

But the farmer, for he gets his pay promptly, while the producer gets the same pay after a long delay, and some at a heavy expense, in trying to get his rights.

The system of mal-administration discourages the farmer, and tends directly to diminish production.

There is another matter connected with the food question which merits attention. A great parade was made two years ago, about suppressing the distillation of grain.

Grain distilleries were passed, by which most of the distilleries were stopped, and a monopoly given to the favored few. We doubt not that whiskey was necessary for the medical bureau, but we are not satisfied that the law was sufficiently guarded in reference to the quantity to be made, or the grain to be used.

We are of the opinion that the distillation of wheat should have been prohibited altogether. Wheat is the staff of life, and should be kept for the sustenance of the people. If whiskey must be made, it should be made of the coarser grains.

This is a more serious matter than may be at first supposed. We have one distillery in our suburbs which is reported to consume 100 bushels of wheat per day. If this be true, it is equivalent to abstracting from the food of the people, 20 barrels of flour per day, and about 50 bushels of oatmeal.

In a year this would be over 7,000 barrels. It is a fair estimate to say, that 10 barrels per year, will supply a family of seven persons, and consequently that amount distilled here would supply bread to about five thousand people.

There are other distilleries in the county, which, in the aggregate, probably use as much as the larger one here. Thus wheat enough to supply ten thousand people, near half the population of this county, is annually consumed in the distilleries.

If corn and rye were used, the damage would be much less, for these grains are not so important for bread, and this will serve to fatten hogs.

Should not the Legislature take this matter in hand?

But there are other measures tending to discourage production. The practice of withdrawing, every now and then, hundreds of our stoutest and most athletic negroes from farming operations, to work on the fortifications near Richmond, is a serious evil.

These negroes are very innocently, but very ignorantly, striving to aggravate the very evil which they complain. They will shut up all the workshops and stop all production of agricultural productions, and what then?

Scenes of unparalleled distress will ensue, followed by mobs, anarchy and bloodshed! People will take by force, if they cannot buy for money. They will not see their wives and children starve.

We earnestly hope the legislators will have common sense enough to reject these demagogic ideas. Let them strike at the root of the evil. Reduce the currency. Put that on a secure foundation, and prices will soon adjust themselves.

But, in spite of all warnings, they are determined to plunge the community into the vortex of anarchy and suffering, we beg our readers to remember, that we entered our earnest protest against it; and if violence follows, we hope it will be directed against the authors of the mischief—the old legislators, who from stupidity or selfish desire to gain notoriety, have brought these calamities on the country. If any are to be roughly handled, let it be the guilty, and not the innocent.

P. S.—Since the above was put in type, we are pleased to see that the Senate, upon the matter being brought to a test vote, has had the good sense to defeat the bill by a considerable majority.

FROM GEN. LEE.

Up to this time, (Monday) affairs remain perfectly quiet in Gen. Lee's army, and we think are very likely to continue so for some time to come. Cavalry skirmishes, but lately so frequent, have nearly altogether ceased. The campaign appears to have closed, and the two armies occupy now nearly the same ground that they did at this time two years ago.

Meade is safely and snugly ensconced in his holes at Manassas and Centreville, positions of such strength, that the sacrifice of life in taking them by assault, would not have been repaired by any solid advantages which would have resulted from their capture. The Yankees are too badly frightened to make any offensive demonstrations, and for Gen. Lee to do so, while they remain within their strong works, would be productive of no beneficial results. Owing to the fleetness of the enemy in their retreat the captures made by our forces were but small, amounting in the aggregate to not more than 2500 prisoners, with but immaterial amounts of stores, arms and munitions.

Gen. Foster, according to the Knoxville Register, has entertained the idea of a two months' raising an independent command, designed to operate in the Valley of the Mississippi.

LEGISLATIVE TINKERING.

We perceive that some of those members of the Legislature who are particularly wise in their own conceit, but in the estimation of nobody else, are tinkering with the question of prices. They would be better employed in seeking to regulate by law, the drift of the clouds, or the flow of the tides. In the latter case, they would, at least do no mischief. But we fear, that in the former, they may do great harm.

The idea of regulating prices by act of Legislature, is not only absurd, but is positively mischievous. These quack legislators, ignore the teachings of history, as well as the deductions of reason. This same experiment has been tried, over and over again, in other countries, and always failed. Our fathers attempted it in the revolutionary struggle, and Washington admonished them, if they did not stop it, they would starve the army.

We say that the whole thing is simply absurd. Prices depend on the condition of the currency, and the rates of supply and demand.

What is the price of anything? It depends on its relation to the currency for the time being. When gold and silver are the circulating medium, it means the amount of gold and silver for which the whole can be exchanged. So when gold and silver are abandoned, and paper substituted as a currency, it means the amount of paper for which it can be exchanged. If you render more plenty, prices will be high—if you render it scarce, they will be low. Here is the whole matter in a nutshell. Before the war, gold was the standard of value, and what would bring one dollar, and you half a dollar per bushel.

Since the war, we have adopted paper as the currency, and we have ten times as much paper as we had gold. As a matter of course, prices have risen to ten times their old rates, and what now brings near ten dollars and corn five—

the only practical way of bringing down prices, is by reducing the amount of currency. Retire half the currency, and you will reduce prices one-half.

Double the currency, and you will double the prices.

But to talk of leaving the currency as it is, and then, arbitrarily requiring certain classes of people to sell their commodities for one-half the present rates, is so preposterous, that we wonder how sane men can entertain the proposition for an instant.

Let us look at it for a moment. Shoes are now worth \$5. Suppose Legislature provides that no man shall sell shoes for more than \$12.50, under a heavy penalty; what will be the result? Will it cheapen shoes? Unquestionably not, for no man can afford to make and sell them for that price. He will therefore not sell at a loss, but close up his shop. So with the blacksmith, the tailor, and the weaver. The moment that they find they are required to sell at a loss they will stop work. Instead of high priced goods, we will have none.

How will it be with the farmer? If he formerly sold a bushel of wheat for \$1.00, and now he is required to sell it for \$0.50, he will not sell it at all. He will keep it for his own use, and in future, it will raise no more than is necessary for his family consumption.

What will be the effect? Production will stop, and starvation will follow. Instead of high priced grain, we will have none!

These silly legislators are very innocently, but very ignorantly, striving to aggravate the very evil which they complain. They will shut up all the workshops and stop all production of agricultural productions, and what then?

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GEN. IMBODEN'S RECENT CAPTURES.

We have received from a correspondent, the following graphic account of the recent brilliant exploit of Gen. Imboden in the capture of a Yankee regiment at Charlestown, with their arms, ammunition, train, &c. The prisoners arrived here Saturday, and have been sent to Richmond:

CAMP OF N. W. VA. BRIGADE, Oct. 24th, 1863. Mr. Editor:—Our command has just returned from a short but sharp campaign to the lower Valley, and knowing your readers feel an interest in the occurrences in this department, I will give you a brief summary of our operations.

When Gen. Lee's late advance commenced, our command moved down the West base of the Blue Ridge, arriving at Berryville on the evening of the 17th, where a slight cavalry action occurred. At 2 o'clock at night, an advance on Charlestown commenced, where we arrived at daylight, finding the garrison to consist of the 9th Infantry, and a battalion of cavalry.

The General placed his troops in position, and demanded a surrender, which being refused by the Yankee Colonel commanding, he ordered McNeill's command to open fire with his battery on the 18th. At 10 o'clock at night, an advance on Charlestown commenced, where we arrived at daylight, finding the garrison to consist of the 9th Infantry, and a battalion of cavalry.

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LABOR AND CAPITAL.

The relation existing between Labor and Capital is one less reflected upon by men of strong practical sense generally than its paramount importance in our social economy demands. There are few who give to it the consideration it deserves, and fewer still who in times like the present, can calmly view the necessary and just relations between these two sources of man's welfare, without suffering personal considerations to bias the decisions that would otherwise be arrived at.

There is a very strong tendency in human nature to complain of what is called bad luck or bad fortune, which keeps some poor wretches increase their worldly goods to an amount which enables them in their old age to live in affluence and plenty. The rich are envied, and Providence in the secret thoughts, if not openly, is accused of partiality and injustice.

Two of the worst principles which can contaminate the human heart, that is to say, envy, and a feeling of revolt and accusation against God himself, are nurtured in the thoughts of men by indulging such feelings as are founded in narrow views of the justice and natural order of things as established in divine and immutable laws. There is a co-relation between labor and capital, that contrary to the opinions of those who have never investigated the subject, manifests as complete a dependence of labor upon capital as capital upon labor. Labor may be both the logical and chronological condition to the employment of labor. The Malthusian doctrine, that there is a natural tendency to an increase of population in every country which the productions of the earth cannot support, is true. Yet it does not follow that other causes and other laws may not check and postpone the results that would inevitably follow from this tendency were it not checked.

Its effects are only observed, where the population has already become so dense that the poorer classes are deprived of many of the actual necessities of life, when emigration alone, prevents the full development of the tendency alluded to, in the actual deprivation of the food requisite to the sustenance of life. In a new country, where new regions are being continually opened up to the profitable employment of labor in the cultivation of the soil, the production of the earth will at first outstrip the rapid increase of the population due to both the natural prolificacy of the race and to emigration.

An age of invention of labor-saving machines, whereby under such circumstances as we have supposed the products of well directed labor may be vastly increased, constitutes likewise a counteracting cause to the effects of the principle to which we have alluded. The population of a country will also at times undergo a decrease from the action of such extraordinary causes as pestilence, pestilence and famine. If a given area of land can be thoroughly cultivated by twenty laborers, the addition of twenty more laborers to the same soil will increase its production to a very limited extent. This is easily seen that under such circumstances the production of the earth with an increase of labor may not keep pace with the increase of population. Now the demand for labor will be in proportion to the surplus capital which exists in the hands of some portion of the community. This surplus capital, generally speaking, is the result of persevering labor, industry, and self-denial, is the very fund which supports labor and prevents the laboring classes from starving. A man frequently starts very poor, even as a common laborer, and by a system of diligent labor combined with a rigid economy and self-denial, which prevents him from spending in eating and drinking and theatre going and other worse than needful expenditures, his whole wages, he becomes rich, he becomes the owner of a surplus capital which now commands labor, it is the reward of his virtue and industry—the reward which is established in the laws of Nature.

In a densely populated country, yes, in any country, the improvident and self-indulgent are supported by the industry and self-denial of others. If the laborers of England should receive that portion of the proceeds of combined labor and capital that they often think they are justly entitled to, it would be almost entirely spent in self-indulgence, whilst the increase of the laboring population would be accelerated, and the surplus accumulation of capital which represents self-denial, economy and enterprise, and a consequent increase of production, would finally become too small to support the laboring classes at work.

Poverty is sometimes the result of the dissipation of Providence, or of causes which lie beyond the power of the individual to loose or to control, but generally speaking, as all men who agree who will look around them, and who are not afraid to face facts, however disagreeable, extreme poverty is the result of a criminal indulgence of the animal propensities of our nature, of idleness, of intemperance, of immorality. Such being the case, what right have those who are poor by their own self-indulgence and improvidence, to envy the peculiarly independent, our industrial farmers, mechanics and professional men, to demand in spirit, and perhaps in acts, before the consideration of that property which is their own, that they should be allowed to continue to indulge in criminal and improvident habits. The man who earns his wealth by fair and honorable means, by industry and self-denial, as a great majority of those who become independent by their own exertions do, has already returned to society a "quid pro quo," has already extended his good influence to the poorer classes in accumulating a surplus capital which goes to the employment of labor and thus far to an increase of the wages of labor.

All capital represents labor and self-denial somewhere. An individual may inherit the proceeds of the economy and labor of his ancestor, or he may acquire it by the industry and self-denial of his own hands. We have nothing to say in detraction of the comparatively few, whose fortunes are the representatives of hard and oppression, rather than of labor and self-denial.

Providence in its laws never takes away the means of doing wrong, else man would cease to be a free moral agent. Many of the inequalities arising in the present life may be traced to a human origin, when they appear to be the consequences of laws of divine origin. The laws of the moral government afflict certain penalties and rewards to human action, sometimes to be dealt out in the present, sometimes in the future. The possessor of ill-gotten wealth will one day receive his reward. Nor can we say a word against christian charity. It is one of the most ennobling principles existing in human nature, but the impudent portions of our race can never be wholly supported by the charity of others, without a consequent increase of demoralization requiring a still further expenditure, and if persevered in to its utmost limit the final ruin of any country.

The supposition that there is any opposition between capital and labor, and that the laboring classes are not benefited in exact proportion to the amount of surplus capital in the hands of the capitalists of a country, in whatever form this surplus may exist, is founded in anything but truth. It is this surplus capital which not only goes to the employment of labor, but to the education of our youth, the spread of Gospel truths, the progress of the arts and sciences, the advance of civilization and refinement, the establishment of governments for the preservation of the individual order, the elevation to a higher status of the human race, and to the full development of the moral and spiritual nature of man.

But in times like the present, a discriminating charity should extend itself to the poor, and a liberality to all those who suffer by the existing order of the war, with a free hand. In such

times, when people are enduring many hardships from any or all of their own, but from causes which lie wholly beyond their control, it becomes the moral duty of every good citizen who possesses the means, to show the full measure of his philanthropy and patriotism. On the other hand no hardships that can be endured constitute a sufficient guarantee for disturbing social order, or for violating the rights of property. Every act of the kind will produce incalculable mischief, and whilst bad men might for a time profit by such disturbances, all classes must eventually suffer the penalty of the infraction of a law founded in strict and absolute justice.

Let all reflecting, law-abiding citizens, therefore, especially in our towns and cities, beware lest their mere sentiment of benevolence may lead them to give countenance to that which is neither founded in justice, in a charity based upon right reason, nor in expediency, even for the accomplishment of that which they desire.

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