

THE Representative

An advocate of Jeffersonian Democracy and Lincoln Republicanism.

"And the Lord said unto Moses, 'Wherefore criest thou unto Me? Speak unto the Children of Israel that they may go forward.'"—Exod. c. xiv, v. 15.

"First Freedom, and then Glory. When that falls, Wealth, vice, corruption—despotism at last. And History, with all her volumes vast, Hails but one page."—Byron.



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IMPRUDENT MARRIAGES

A Powerful Argument for Such Industrial and Economic Conditions as Shall Insure Equal Opportunities for All and Special Privileges to None.

An Article That Should Be Studied by Every American.

(By Robert Blatchford.)

Now, here's a letter which I am going to answer. It could be answered in a few lines, but then it would crop up again in another form; I shall, therefore, give it all the space it needs if it takes me a year, and I shall keep on digging until I have dug up every shred of root, no matter how far the roots may spread:

"Sir: Being interested in your letters to workmen, I should like to ask you why, in 'Merrie England,' and your other writings, you say nothing about imprudent marriages, the evils of which you must be fully aware of?"

It is not quite clear what the writer means by that question. But I take it that he means to imply that a great deal of the poverty and misery of the poor is caused by "imprudent marriages."

At any rate there are many who think that if all the workers were to give up drink, to work hard, to live sparsely, to save their earnings, and to avoid early marriages and large families, they would all be happy and prosperous without Socialism.

And, of course, these same persons believe that the bulk of the sufferings and poverty of the poor is due to drink, to thriftlessness, and to imprudent marriages.

I know that many, very many, do believe these things, because I used to meet such persons when I went out lecturing.

Now, I know that belief to be wrong. I know that if every working man and woman in England turned teetotal tomorrow, if they all remained single, if they all worked like niggers, if they all worked for 12 hours a day, if they lived on oatmeal and water, and if they saved every farthing they could spare, they would, at the end of 20 years, be a great deal worse off than they are today.

Sobriety, thrift, industry, skill, self-denial, honesty, are all good things; but they would, if adopted by all the workers, simply enrich the idle and wicked and reduce the industrious and righteous to slavery.

Teetotalism will not do, saving will not do, increased skill will not do. I mean to make these things plain to you if it takes me till Christmas.

I will begin by answering a statement made by Sir J. W. McClure, M. P. As reported in the press, Sir John said: "There is nothing to prevent the son of a crossing sweeper from rising to be lord chancellor of England."

At first sight this would seem to have nothing to do with our friend's letter about "imprudent marriages." But we shall find that it is just part of the same great error. For this error has two faces. On one face it says that any man may do well if he will try, and on the other face it says that those who do not do well have no one but themselves to blame.

The error rises from slight confusion of thought. Men know that a man may rise from the lowest place in life to almost the highest, and they suppose that because one man can do it, all men can do it; they know that if one man works hard, saves, keeps sober and remains single, he will get more money than other men who drink and spend and take life easily; and they suppose because thrift, single life, industry and temperance spell success to one man they would spell success to all.

I will show you that this is a mistake and I will show you why it is a mistake. Let us begin with Sir John's crossing sweeper.

Sir John tells us that "there is nothing to prevent the son of a crossing sweeper from becoming lord chancellor of England." But Sir John does not mean to say that there is nothing to prevent the son of some one particular crossing sweeper from becoming chancellor; he means that there is nothing to prevent any son of any crossing sweeper, or the son of any very poor man from becoming rich and famous.

Now, let me show you what nonsense this is.

There are in all England, let us say, some two millions of poor and friendless and untaught boys.

And there is one lord chancellor. Now, it is just possible for one boy out of the two millions to become lord chancellor; but it is quite impossible for all the boys, or even for one boy in a thousand, or for one boy in ten thousand, to become lord chancellor.

Sir John means that if a boy is clever

and industrious he may become lord chancellor.

But suppose all boys are as clever and industrious as he is, they cannot all become chancellors.

The one boy can only succeed because he is stronger, cleverer, more pushing, more persistent, or more lucky than any other boy.

The poor cannot all be chancellors or millionaires, because they are too many of them and not enough high places.

But they can all be asses, and they will be asses, if they listen to such perky and stupid men as Sir J. W. McClure.

You have 20 men starting for a race. You may say, "there is nothing to prevent any man from winning the race," but you mean any one man who is luckier or swifter than the rest. You would never be foolish enough to believe that all the men could win. You know that 19 of the men must lose.

So we know that in a race for the chancellorship, only one boy can win, and the other 1,999,999 must lose.

It is the same with temperance, industry and cleverness. Of 10,000 mechanics one is steeper, more industrious and more skillful than the others. Therefore he will get work where the others cannot. But why? Because he is worth more as a workman. Don't you see that if all the others were as good as he, he would not be worth more?

Then you see that to tell a million men that they will get more work or more wages if they are cleverer, or soberer, or more industrious is as foolish as to tell 20 men starting for a race that they can all win if they will all try.

If all the men were just as fast as the winner, the race would end in a dead heat.

There is a fire panic in a big hall. The hall is full of people and there is only one door. A rush is made for that door. Some of the crowd get out, some are trampled to death, some are injured, some are burned.

Now, of that crowd of people, who are most likely to escape?

Those nearest the door have a better chance than those fartherest, have they not?

Then the strong have a better chance than the weak, have they not?

And the men have a better chance than the women, and the children the worst chance of all, is it not so?

Then again, which is most likely to be saved—the selfish man who fights and drags others down, who stands upon the fallen bodies of women and children, and wins his way by force; or the brave and gentle man who tries to help the women and children and will not trample upon the wounded?

Don't you know that the noble and brave man stands a poor chance of escape, and that the selfish and brutal man stands a good chance of escape?

Well, now, suppose a man to have got out, perhaps because he was near the door, or perhaps because he was very strong, or perhaps because he was very lucky, or perhaps because he did not stop to help the women and children, and suppose him to stand outside the door and cry out to the struggling and dying creatures in the burning hall: "Serve you jolly well right if you do suffer. Why don't you get out? I got out. You can get out if you try. There is nothing to prevent any one of you from getting out."

Suppose a man talked like that, what would you say of him? Would you call him a sensible man; would you call him a Christian; would you call him a gentleman? No, you would say, and you would say truly, that he was as stupid, as conceited, and as unfeeling as Sir J. W. McClure, M. P.

You will say I am severe upon Sir John. I am. I intend to be. Every time a successful man talks as Sir John talks he inflicts a brutal insult upon the unsuccessful, many thousands of whom, both men and women, are worthier and better than himself.

But let us go back to our subject. That fire panic in the big hall is a picture of life as it is today.

It is a scramble of a big crowd to get through a small door. Those who get through are cheered and rewarded, and few questions are asked as to how they got through.

Now, Socialists say there should be more doors and no scramble.

I compared the race for the chancellorship to a footrace of 20 men; and I showed you that if all the runners were as fleet as grayhounds only one could win, and 19 must lose.

But Sir John's crossing sweeper's son has to enter a race where there are millions of starters, and where the race is a handicap in which he is on the scratch, with thousands of men more than half the course in front of him.

For don't you see that this race which the Sir John McClure tells us we can all win is not a fair race? The son of a crossing sweeper has terrible odds against him. The son of a gentleman has a long start, and carries less weight.

What are the qualities needed in a race for the chancellorship? The boy who means to win must be marvellously

strong, clever, brave and persevering.

Now, will he be likely to be strong? He may be, but the odds are against him. His father may not be strong, nor his mother, for they may have worked hard and they may not have been well fed, nor well nursed nor well doctored. They probably live in a slum, and they cannot train, nor teach, nor feed their son in a healthy and proper way, because they are ignorant and poor. And the boy gets a few years at a board school and then goes to work.

But the gentleman's son is well bred, well fed, well nursed, and lives in a healthy place. He goes to good schools and from school to college.

And when he leaves college he has money to pay fees, and he has a name, and he has education; and, I ask you, what are the odds against the son of a crossing sweeper in a race like that?

Well, there is not a single case where men are striving for wealth or for place where the sons of the workers are not

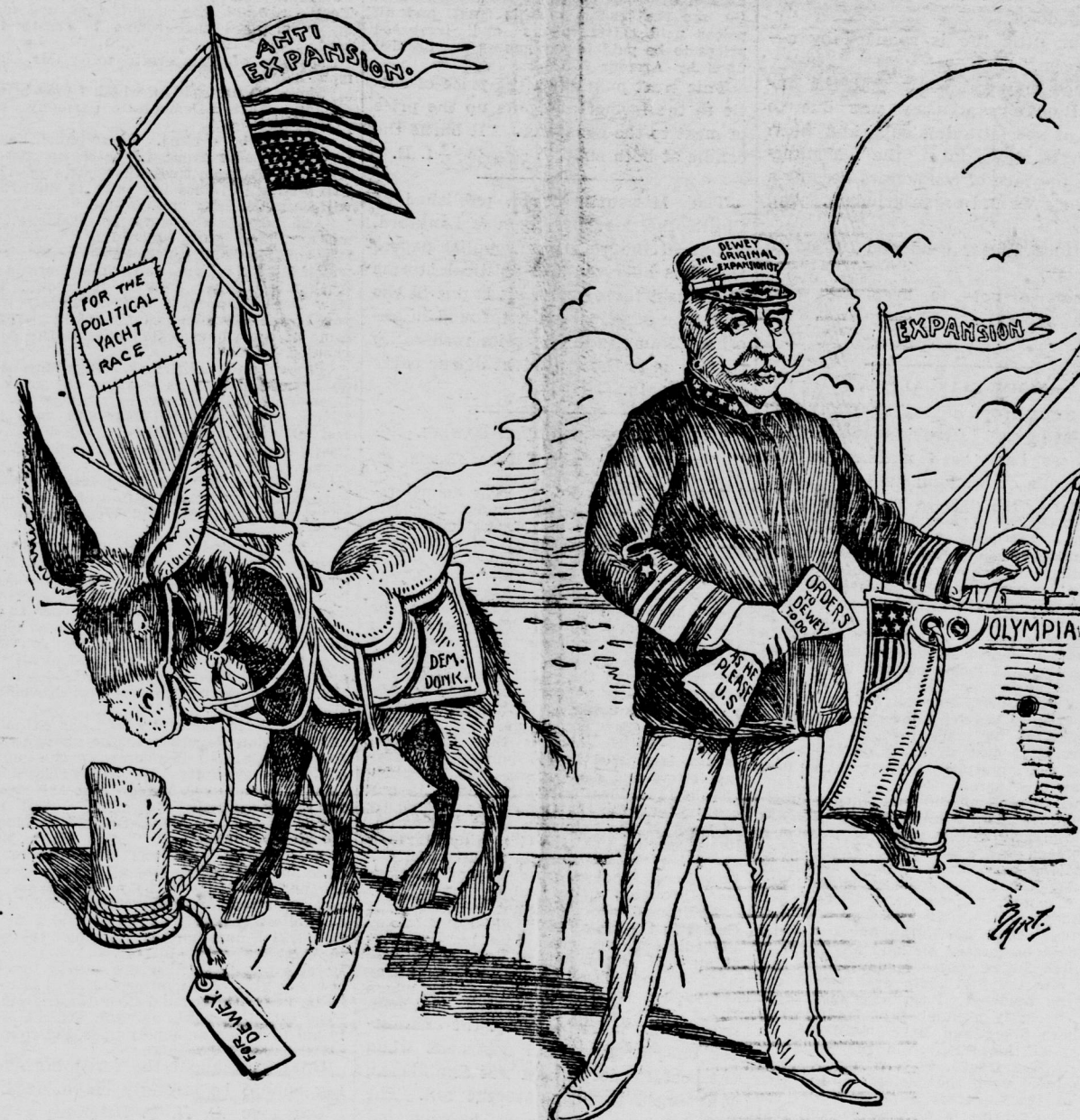
handicapped in the same way. Now and again a worker's son wins. He may win because he is a genius like Stephenson or Sir William Kierstiel; or he may win because he is cruel and unscrupulous, like Jay Gould, or he may win because he is lucky.

But it is folly to say that there is "nothing to prevent him" from winning. There is almost everything to prevent him. To begin with, his chance of dying before he is five years old are ten times as numerous as the chances of a rich man's son.

Look at Lord Salisbury. He is prime minister of England. Had he been born the son of a crossing sweeper do you think he would have been prime minister?

I would undertake to find a hundred better minds than Lord Salisbury's in any English town of 10,000 inhabitants. But will any one of the boys I should select become prime minister of England? You know they will not. But

NO JACKASS FOR DEWEY.



Dewey—What! Think I'm going to board a rig like that after sailing the Olympia!

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yet they ought to, if "there is nothing to prevent them." But there is something to prevent them. There is poverty to prevent them, there is privilege to prevent them, there is snobbery to prevent them, there is class feeling to prevent them, there are hundreds of other things to prevent them, and among those hundreds of other things to prevent them from becoming prime ministers I hope that their own honesty and goodness and true wisdom may be counted; for honesty and goodness and true wisdom are things which will certainly prevent any poor boy who is lucky enough to possess them from ever becoming what the dirty world of politics and commerce considers a "successful man." I told you at the beginning that if all the workers were sober and thrifty they would be worse off, and not better. This, at first sight, seems strange, because we know that the sober and

POOR OLD AUNTY DEMOCRAT.



Chairman Jones—There is no doubt that Bryan will receive the Democratic nomination for president. Miss Democracy—No; I'm afraid not, papa. Bryan seems to be the only man who can command both the money of Wall street and the Western votes.

thrifty workman is generally better off than the workman who drinks or wastes his money.

But why is he better off? He is better off because, being a steady man, he can often get work when an unsteady man cannot. He is better off because he buys things that add to his comfort, or he saves money, and so grows more independent. And he is able to save money and make his home more cosy because, while he is more regularly employed than the unsteady men, his wages remain the same, or, perhaps, are something higher than theirs.

That is to say, he benefits by his own steadiness and thrift because his steadiness makes him more reliable, and therefore a more valuable, workman than one who is not steady.

But, you see, he is only more valuable because other men are less steady. If all the other workmen were as steady as he is he would be no more valuable than they are. Not being more valuable than they are, he would not be more certain of getting work.

That is to say, if all the workers were sober and thrifty, they would all be of equal value to the employer.

But you say they would still be better off than if they drank and wasted their wages. They would have better health and they would have happier lives and more comfortable homes.

Yes, so long as their wages were as high as before. But their wages would not be as high as before.

You must know that as things now are, where all the work is in the gift of private employers, and where wages and prices are ruled by competition and where new inventions of machinery are continually throwing men out of work, and where farm laborers are always drifting to the towns, there are more men in need of work than work can be found for.

Therefore, there is always a large number of workers out of work.

Now under competition, where two men offer themselves for one place, you know that the place will be given to the man who will take the lower wage.

And you know that the thrifty and sober man can live on less than the thriftless man.

And you know that where two or more employers are offering their goods against each other for sale in the open market, the one who sells his goods the cheapest will get the trade. And you know that in order to sell their goods at a cheaper rate than other dealers, the employers will try to get their goods at the cheapest rate possible.

And you know that with most goods the chief cost is the cost of the labor used in the making—that is to say, the wages of the workers.

Very well, you have more workers than are needed, so that there is competition amongst those workers as to who shall be employed.

And those who will be employed who are the cheapest.

And those who can live upon least can afford to work for least.

And all the workers being sober and thrifty, they can all live on less than when many of them were wasteful and fond of drink.

Then, on the other hand, all the employers are competing for the trade, and so are all wanting cheap labor; and so are eager to lower wages.

Therefore, wages will come down, and the general thrift and steadiness of the workers will make them poorer.

Take now as an example the case of the cotton trade. The masters tell you that they find it hard to compete against Indian factories, and they say if Lancashire workers keep the trade the Lancashire workers must accept the conditions of the Indian workers.

The Indian workers live chiefly on rice and water and work longer hours than do the English workers.

And don't you see that if the Lancashire workers were to live upon rice and water, the masters would soon have their wages down to the rice and water point?

And then the Indians would have to live on less or work still longer hours, and so the game would go on.

To return to the question of temperance and thrift. You see, I hope, that if all the people were sober and thrifty they would be really worse off than they now are. This is because the workers must have work, must ask employers to give them work, and must ask employers who, being in competition with each other, are always trying to get the work done at the lowest price.

And the lowest price is always the price which the bulk of the workers are content to live upon.

In my second letter to the bishop of Manchester I explained this to his lordship. I have also dealt with the same question in "Merrie England," and I think if you read the two chapters xx and xxi. on "Industry" and "Environment" in "Merrie England" you will find this question grow still clearer.

In the bishop's letter I took the shirt-makers as an example. I will quote from the pamphlet here:

"The folly of preaching unselfishness to the patient and unselfish poor, my lord, arises from your lordship's ignor-

ance of the economic fact that wages are regulated by the standard of subsistence; so that the more abstemious the poor become, the smaller the share of the wealth will be left to them by the rapacity of the rich.

"A Certain Agitator," my lord, and Frank Fairman, reminds us that whereas the Hindoos are the most thrifty and abstemious race on earth, their wages are lower than those of any other people; and your lordship may observe that the immigrant Jews, whose industry, thrift and sobriety are frequently pointed out as models to our workers, are paid miserable wages for long hours of labor.

"In all foreign nations where the standard of living is lower than in England, your lordship will find that the wages are lower also.

"Has not your lordship often heard our manufacturers tell the English workers that if they would emulate the thrift and sobriety of the foreigner they might successfully compete against foreign competition in the foreign market? My lord, what does that mean but that thrift would enable our people to live on less, and so to accept less wages?"

"Your lordship knows that our shirt-makers of Manchester are miserably paid.

"This is because capitalism always keeps the wages down to the lowest standard of subsistence which the people will accept.

"So long as our Englishwomen will consent to work long hours, and live on tea and bread, the 'law of supply and demand' will maintain the present condition of sweating in the shirt trade.

"If all our women became firmly convinced that they could not exist without chops and bottled stout, the wages must go up to a price to pay for those things.

"Because there would be no women offering to live on tea and bread, and shirts must be had.

"But what, my lord, is the result of the abstinence of these poor sisters of ours? Low wages for themselves and, for others—

"A young merchant wants a dozen shirts. He pays 10s. each for them. He meets a friend who only gave 8s. for his. He goes to the 8s. shop and saves 2s. This is clear profit and he spends it in cigars, or champagne, or in some other luxury; and the poor seamstress lives on toast and tea."

But although I say that sobriety and thrift, if adopted by all the workers, would result in lower wages, you are not to suppose that I advise you all to be drunkards and spendthrifts.

No. The proper thing is to do away with competition. At present, the employers in the scramble to undersell each other, actually fine you for your virtue and self-denial by lowering your wages, just as the landlords fine a tenant for improving his land or enlarging his house or extending his business—fine him by raising his rent.

And now we may, I think, come to the question of imprudent marriages. The idea seems to be that a man should not marry until he is "in a position to keep a wife." And it is a very common thing for employers and parsons, and other well-to-do persons, to tell the working men that they have no right "to bring children into the world 'till they are able to provide for them."

Now, let us clear the ground a little before we begin to deal with this question on its economic side—that is as it affects wages.

It is bad for men and women to marry too young. It is bad for two reasons. Firstly, because the body is not mature, and, secondly, because the mind is not settled. That is to say an over early marriage has a bad effect on the health, and since young people must, in the nature of things, change very much as they grow older, an over early marriage is often unhappy.

I think a woman would be wise not to marry before she is four-and-twenty; and I think it is better that the husband should be from five to ten years older than the wife.

Then it is very bad for a woman to have many children, and not only is it bad for her health, but it destroys nearly all the pleasure of her life, so that she is an enfeebled and weary drudge through her best years, and is old before her time.

These points being done with, we come face to face with the main question. It is very like the question of sobriety and thrift. Of two poor workers the one who is single is better off than the one who is married and has a large family. That is to say, the married man with many children is poorer and has more anxiety and trouble than the single man. Again, the man with the wife and the children is in a more dependent state than the single man. He is less able to change homes or to

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