

TOPICS OF THE DAY

AGGRESSIVE PHILANTHROPY: SENTIMENTAL REFORMERS: THE
LABOUR INSURRECTION: "LIVING WAGE": E. W. THOMSON.

HOWEVER one may tolerate "reforms", or endure them, as the case may be, few of us—if the truth were known—have much liking for Reformers. There is an implication of meddlesomeness in the very word which arouses antagonism. Antagonism is not allayed by any attempt of the constitutionally meddlesome to disguise themselves as Philanthropists. Of the type, under this name, York Powell said: "He is generally a person seeking excitement in unwholesome and dangerous ways." And it is to be remarked that the "person" is more frequently of the female than of the male sex, in these days. That they might become "Reformers" was the avowedly primary motive of the suffragettes in demanding the franchise. Most political and social organizations of women are showing themselves so eager for "reform" in the abstract, that they are practically advertising for hints on the subject. They have numberless committees vigilantly "on the job" in quest of something that they can set about changing. The notion has got abroad everywhere that "Old Experience is a fool," and that crude, modern Ignorance is born to set it right. The very fact that an institution or a custom is of immemorial standing, appears to be an incitement to the born Reformer to "monkey with" or upset it. That there are desirable changes to be made and undesirable things to be corrected, no one would deny. But there is neither need nor justification for rushing at them all at once, regardless of the preparedness of society for innovation. One may be the warmest-hearted or most sincere philanthropist in the world; he may be ready to say with utter conviction, like St. Paul, that he would to God his fellow creatures were not merely almost but altogether such as he is; but that scarcely qualifies him, even with the backing of an "organization" and multitudinous advertising, to invoke and secure the aid of the Legislature in attempting to produce more or less worthless replicas of himself. When a man is ill, his friends do not approach him from behind, seize him, bind his arms, hold his nose and pour supposedly curative medicine down his resisting and gurgling throat. On the contrary, they try to convince him, in the first place, that there is something seriously the matter with him, and thereafter to induce him to take willingly the drug which, in the opinion of a competent expert, is indicated for his case. The former and not the latter is the preferred course

of the average Reformer. He decides, under the guidance of his own "inner consciousness," with regard to both the trouble and the remedy. Usually he is quite incapable of distinguishing between symptoms and disease. His invariable idea is to treat symptoms. His uniform prescription is legislation; and his favourite method of administering it, force. Is it surprising that he is neither successful nor popular? Desirable public reforms come from the people themselves, not from the theorists among them. They are effected on the pinching-shoe or the mote-in-the-eye principle. One does not cast aside one's shoe because it hurts at a certain point, or have one's eye taken out because something has got into it. One simply has the shoe stretched or the foreign substance removed. Education, not legislation, is what this age most needs; and none need it more than professional Reformers and Philanthropists. The gods help those who help themselves, not those who are "done for" by others. The process of education, which does not mean the memorizing of school books, but the acquisition of the ability and the will to think and act wisely, will be accompanied by the progress of genuine reform and the development of true philanthropy. Patience, not blind or ignorant haste, is indicated.

IT is in matters of State that the Reformer or Philanthropist makes his baleful influence most conspicuous and most pernicious. He is for ever stirring up discontent and instituting "movements." He is a promoter of talk, and talk is ever the fomentor of trouble. Tennyson, seeing through and through the political Philanthropist, once declared:—

Envy wears the mask of Love, and, laughing sober fact to scorn,
Cries to weakest as to strongest—"Ye are equals equal born."

With regard to India, then as since the stamping ground of Reformers, he asked and answered in scorn:—

Those three hundred millions, under one Imperial sceptre now,
Shall we hold them? Shall we lose them? Take the suffrage
of the plow.

He went on to express in burning words the conviction that the "suffrage of the plow" would probably be wiser than that of professional Reformers, if it were not deliberately misled. How well-founded the great seer's judgment was, is revealed by the present state to which India has been reduced in the name of Reform. Had Mr. Montague been allowed to complete his work as Secretary of State for India which he and his coadjutors and supporters were pressing forward so strenuously, Tennyson's question of whether

the "three hundred millions" should be kept under the British sceptre, would speedily have been answered in the negative. Even when arrested by his surprising dismissal, he had succeeded in reducing India to a state of discontent bordering on anarchy, which years will be required to rectify, if it can ever be done. That his intentions—from his own point of view—were excellent, and that he was perfectly sincere in trying to give effect to them, is not to be doubted. They were none the less dangerous on that account for both the Empire and the "three hundred millions." They were based on the specious, philanthropic theory that if democratic self-government is good for Great Britain, it must be equally good for India or any other country, regardless of the character of the people. So he and his friends wrought diligently and all too successfully until their goal had been almost attained, oblivious of the fact that when attained it would mean the handing over of three hundred, mostly ignorant, helpless millions to the tender mercies of the demagogic or rascally domination of a few score thousands of as unscrupulous and reckless political conspirators as are to be found on earth. It would have meant the return of India to a far worse, because far more helpless, condition than that in which the British found her, and from which they rescued her unhappy people. In view of this episode, can York Powell's above quoted generalization, that a philanthropist "is generally a person seeking excitement in unwholesome and dangerous ways," be considered much of an exaggeration?

THE determination of the United States Government to take all necessary legal measures for the protection of the public against the railway strikes, was reached not a day too soon. Arbitration, conciliation and compromise had been tried in vain. Nothing but the dictation of their own terms would satisfy the strikers, and those terms were not consonant with successful operation of the roads. The decision of the Government was not a brave one. It was too closely akin to that of President Wilson with reference to the war. Action was delayed until the public demanded it in no uncertain way. As President Wilson hung back from the war in spite of German insults and buffetings until the people were at last thoroughly aroused, so did the present Administration with regard to the railway strike, which was doubly unwarrantable by reason of its association with the coal-miners' strike that was threatening the very safety of the country. The two together were, in effect, an application of the principle of One Big Unionism, the subjugation of the State to a selfish organization of a class within

it: No people boastful of democratic institutions could tolerate that. The descendants of the men who rebelled because of trifling taxes imposed on them without their consent and set up a republic in which the free will of the people was to be supreme, could hardly be expected to submit tamely to the rule of a comparatively small organized mob among themselves. Having repudiated monarchy, such a people in such circumstances naturally put to themselves the question attributed by Macaulay to the old Roman popular orator—"Shall we, who could not brook one lord, crouch to the wicked ten?" Not that the Union dictators are conscious of being "wicked," or that they number as many even as "ten"; but they are as determined as was ever a band of Roman or other usurpers to set up an *imperium in imperio*, and impose their will on their fellow citizens. It is high time to put a definite end to such aspirations, not only in the United States but elsewhere, if free and effective government is to be maintained. The United States railways were under government control and management during the war. They incurred numerous expenses and losses. They have been returned to their private owners; and now their employees insist that the conditions which reduced them to bankruptcy shall be perpetuated, and that the public shall bear the cost. The issue is plain. The proper course to follow is not difficult to see. The Constitution guarantees the right to work as well as the right to strike or quit work. Enforcement of the provisions of the Constitution, by such proceedings as may be necessary, is all that is demanded. The duty of the Government is obvious. It might have been seen sooner but for the blinding effect of party politics.

LABOUR leaders would be deserving of compliment on the management of their propaganda if only they could restrain themselves from attaching drags to its wheels by the frequent violence of their utterances. Of course they always have local ministers of religion on their side. That is only natural. But they have apparently succeeded in enlisting the advocacy of the clergy at large, and of some of their congregations in which sentiment plays a larger part than well-informed reasoning. Like all other feelings founded originally on humanitarian movements, sentiment in favour of organized labour was for a long time of slow growth, and became popular only when the need for it had largely passed. It was so with the movement against gambling, which was a ruinous vice more than a century ago. The cause of the sentiment which it developed has been so far forgotten now, that the vice is threatening to revive. It was so with the more recent temperance movement which origin-

ated and grew in consequence of the deplorable drinking habits of a generation or two ago. The popular sentiment, which it very gradually stirred up, still persists, and has led to legislative extravagances well calculated to defeat the very ends which its originators desired to promote. An extremely chilly greeting was extended to Trades Unionism at its birth, when it was really in need and deserving of sympathy and support. Now that it has grown strong, well able to maintain itself, and most arrogant in some of its demands, the rush to its supposed assistance increases. In disregard of the fact that the Labour movement has become political rather than social or industrial in its aims, its shibboleths are on the lips of every sentimental, would-be philanthropist. By far the most catchy and misleading of these shibboleths is, "A Living Wage." It is invariably capitalized, in more ways than one, at present. Does any one know the meaning of it? Can any one define it even approximately? Not at all; but that does not interfere in the very least with its constant repetition. It was an old joke to say that something was "as large as a lump of coal." That is quite as near as can be got to the size of a living wage. Every period, every country, every community in the world has had its own standard of living, and that standard in each locality and time has constantly varied, and continues to vary. The standard of this year throughout the world is no more that of last year, much less of the war-time, than this year's fashions in ladies' hats are those of ten years ago. The standard of living anywhere has always depended, and always must depend, on temporary circumstances and conditions. It is little short of criminal to keep on promoting discontent and trouble among wage-earners by encouraging them to believe that any permanent standard of living for them, or anybody else, can be discovered, established or maintained anywhere on earth. A general or community standard of living, which constantly fluctuates, there undoubtedly is, but it is strictly dependent on production and trade. When wealth is increased there is more to divide; when it decreases, there is less. That is the sum of the matter. To lead workers of any class to believe otherwise is to injure most seriously both them and the community to which they belong. Yet this is constantly being done, and certain classes of labour are deliberately setting themselves, against their own best interests, to the impossible task of maintaining war-time wages after war-time conditions have passed, in spite of the known fact that nearly one half of the world's wealth was dissipated in the war. A living wage is just what any particular person or company can afford to pay, and still carry on his or its industry with profit.

At certain times it may be no more than, or hardly equal to, the sustenance of the worker's life. There have been and may again be such times if we are not careful. At other times it is amply sufficient for comfort and even for luxuries. It is always uncertain. There is even risk of its becoming doubtful, if reason is not exercised.

AN indefinite number of aphorisms, from "What fools we mortals be," down to "What queer things you see when you haven't got a gun", might be adduced to indicate that men are more or less conscious of their own limitations. In no respect are they more limited than in ability to perceive and reward contemporary excellence of other than a physical or spectacular sort. Canada has long furnished an outstanding illustration of the fact. While making loud professions of pride in our "native literature," and of a desire to encourage and promote its development, we have been content without protest to allow one of its most brilliant and best-known exponents to pass without special recognition from any of the public institutions supposed to be charged with the responsibility of awarding literary honours. No living Canadian writer has won wider acceptance for his work, is better known abroad or more appreciated and respected by competent home critics, than Mr. E. W. Thomson. Yet not a single University in the Dominion has done credit to itself or its duty to the public by offering him an honorary degree. Mr. Thomson has now through painful ill-health, induced by an accident, been forced to give up his beloved work, and is living in retirement at Boston, to be near the family of his only son, but his heart is as true as ever to Canada, and he is still able to do a little towards completing work left not quite finished. A few years ago, until the time of his nearly fatal motor-car accident, he was generally recognized as one of the very leading publicists of the Dominion. He has always been broad-mindedly Liberal, but never a mere partisan. With him it has constantly been Country First. When for a second time chief editorial writer of the *Toronto Globe*, he sacrificed both position and party feelings to take his stand by the side of Edward Blake in opposition to "Unrestricted Reciprocity," in which he thought he saw a menace of Annexation. The fairness of Mr. Thomson's discussion of public questions is attested by the fact that his writings, as many will remember, were constantly quoted or re-printed by the newspaper organs of each of the opposing political parties. In this way, he came to be as well known and as much admired throughout the whole Dominion as in his native province of Ontario. Nowhere was he more highly regarded than in Nova Scotia. While still a young man Mr. Thom-

son won the first one thousand-dollar prize for a short story offered by the *Youth's Companion* of Boston, in a competition open to all, and participated in by the leading literary men of the whole English-speaking world. The seven impartial judges of that competition made public announcement that their award, reached separately, had been unanimous. Shortly afterwards Mr. Thomson was offered a high editorial position on the *Companion*, which he accepted and occupied for a number of years, but which he voluntarily resigned that he might resume distinctively Canadian work. He was long acknowledged and acclaimed as indisputably the leading Canadian short-story writer. His books were as well known and as eagerly sought in the United States as in the Dominion. From story and political writing, Mr. Thomson turned at times to poetry in which he won as great acceptance and distinction as in other branches of literature. One of the shorter poems, "Aspiration," from his volume, *The Many Mansioned House*, was selected by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, Professor of Poetry at Cambridge, for inclusion in the *Oxford Book of Victorian Verse*. So warm was the reception of that book in England that Mr. Thomson was promptly elected a member of the Royal Society of Literature. The reception of his poetry in the United States was equally cordial. While Canadians of sound literary judgment freely recognized and proclaimed his merits, no public acknowledgment was made, as in England, of what Mr. Thomson had done for Canadian literature. From that day to this, from first to last, there has been no formal recognition in the Dominion of his outstanding achievements, no expression of gratitude for the fame which through him has come to Canada. To him Mr. W. E. Marshall, Nova Scotia's most indubitable poet, addressed in his volume, *Brookfield*, the following beautiful but too little known sonnet:—

Though I have never seen thee face to face,
Nor heard thy voice, nor grasped thine outstretched hand;
And may not ever, on this earthly strand,
Enjoy thy presence as a day of grace;
Yet thy unbounded heart enlargeth space
Within my heart. Thy books are of the land
Of Truth and Beauty ever in demand,
And I'm their usurer in my treasure place;
Thy honoured portrait shines above my hearth
Delighting me with friendship at each gaze;
And my life groweth rich in aftermath
With all thy letters fragrant of sweet praise
And kind regard for me,—one of a throng
Thy love hath lifted up and cheered along.

W. E. M.