

COMMONWEALTH NOTES

NEW SOUTH WALES.

Addressing a large gathering recently on the occasion of blessing the foundation stone of the new Church of St. Patrick at Lithgow, his Grace Archbishop Kelly, in a stirring discourse on co-operation and profit-sharing as a means of securing industrial progress, pointed out that economics were very material. Capitalism was a mere material soul; the capitalist was an idolator because he adored his wealth. But capital was a powerful instrument in the material world, and if used wisely could be a source of much blessing. Just as the sun drew up in the clouds water from the sea and from the surface of the earth, and distributed it in fertilising rains, so should capital be distributed to enable man by means of the strength of his arm or the power of his brain to earn the wherewithal to support himself and his family in reasonable comfort. Every man had the right to live, but he had, in ordinary circumstances, to get that living by his work. Had he the right to work against a fellow man? No one could say that, but he had no right to hinder any work by his fellow man. In these times religion was ignored. They had capital on the one side and the worker on the other, and between them bringing ruin to each other. God would have the capitalist to use his money aright, but He would also have the worker to live a good life by his work, each hoping for wise legislation and conditions, and proceeding according to the truths of the Gospel of Christ, thus harmonising things so that the industrial machine was kept moving and the worker was able to keep himself and those dependent on him in comfort. In that sense it was the same as murder to keep a man from work if work was necessary for his daily bread. And since it was necessary that the majority of men must work to live, it was the highest patriotism to provide employment for those able and willing to work. The worker had every right to believe that he should receive sufficient for his labor to supply his needs, but in the world to-day there was a danger that their social organisations, by being misled, might act prejudicially to the best interests of themselves and their country. There was no place in the world to-day where there were better opportunities for a happier and fuller life than Australia. It might be said that priests should not meddle with these questions, but when they found that the trend of things material could not bring hope of heaven it became their duty to cry out. When a man set class against class, that man was not working for the benefit of any class. He (the Archbishop) might just as well set one hand against the other. That would be just as logical.

There might be times when the worker would have to strike to secure redress, but they must remember a strike would always hit them the hardest, and if only they had a little patience in Australia they would rectify the little things they had to complain of now. In society to-day the balance was altogether wrong, but he thought that would ultimately pass away. By all means the worker should stand for his rights, but he should employ means that would not break the bounds of peace and paralyse industry. He felt that the remedy would be found in co-operation and not in fighting it out. They must get a voice in the management of industry and secure their share of the profits. That principle had been in operation a long time in France and a lesser period in Italy, and the workers in Australia must have patience, for it was surely coming. In this way they would prosper instead of bringing industrial progress to a standstill, with what result?—ruin. The remedy for this latter was to give the worker some interest in his work, so that when profits were made they would not go into the hands of the few—such as the shipping owners, except that the Government took some—but be distributed among many. The womenfolk would not then have so much anxiety as they had at the present time, and the little children would have better chances in life. The price of this was patience and doing the right thing by following the right counsel. The world was in a way sick, and the best possible advice was to

keep the peace and try to bring about a better state of things gradually. To preach a war of class against class was to preach a war of destruction.

Amplifying this in a sermon at night, the Archbishop said that, no matter how perfect were the conditions, there would always be agitators, but it was only necessary to remind the working man that much more had always been accomplished by peaceful methods than by violent upheavals—by evolution than by revolution. Capital should be wisely used and distributed, which in many cases it was not; but he advised the working men, a large proportion of whom were Catholics, to be careful in the choice of their leaders, and not trust any man who had no stake in the issue or an interest in the country, no matter how clever or eloquent he might be.

VICTORIA.

In a recent leader the Melbourne *Age* denounces the rapacious profiteer. The writer says:—"As excuses for the high prices of goods that did or did not come overseas, shortage of shipping and high freights have done the profitmakers valuable service. But is it not time that these excuses were dropped, and that prices began to drop with them? It was announced recently that while there was a demand for every foot of outward tonnage, inward tonnage was going begging, numbers of vessels reaching here in ballast or only partly loaded. The strike, of course, is putting obstacles in the way of all shipping, but it will collapse in the course of time, and cannot be advanced as a reason for the maintenance of the abnormal figures demanded for all imported goods. In October of last year freight on general merchandise from London was 200s per ton. Now it is 125s. Within the same period the freight from New York had fallen from 229s to 104s 2d. The charges for imported goods have not declined in sympathy; rather have they further advanced. The fact suggests an interesting question in commercial ethics. As the consumer was charged the high freights on imported goods, although the goods were here before the freights were raised, has he not a right to expect a reduction in accordance with the falling of freights, even though the goods have paid the highest rate?"

"The ordinary upholder of the doctrine that 'business is business' will deride the innocent expectation that a trader ought to forgo any profit the public can be made to pay, but in these days this particular brand of commercialism is hardly durable," continues the *Age*. "The people look for and expect their Government to guarantee what they are pleased to call 'a fair thing.' As half-empty ships are arriving at our ports, the racked and ruined consumer begins to wonder whether trade associations or friendly trade understandings have not been made to cut off certain supplies until existing stocks have been unloaded at the highest figures. Everybody knows that immense stocks, cheap and often out of date, were in hand before shipping was scarce and dear, and were placed at the top of the market, yielding a wealth of profit almost fabulous. Thus it becomes possible for the big importing interests to win at both ends. Governments control the shipping, and it is pertinent to ask whether in these important affairs they are not responsible for the public protection. Is the duty of a Government restricted mainly to dunning the people for taxes and loans? And when is the consumer or the producer going to receive a little advantage from the Commonwealth shipping line? Or has that famous line been unobtrusively absorbed by the combine, making the Government a partner in the trading abuses it is required to prevent? The consumers' daily experience drives home one important lesson with stronger and stronger emphasis. It is that a country which depends largely upon imports is powerless to prevent exploitation, and must expect to pay to the bottom of its purse for its people's requirements. When we make goods for ourselves in our own factories, it may be open for manufacturers to combine to fix prices after the manner of the importing interests, but they are here subject to our own regulation, and if they are unjust it is poor political wisdom that cannot protect the people against them."

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