

Current Topics

A Living Wage

Most reasonable people have come to accept as the minimum of justice for the worker Pope Leo's definition of a minimum wage: that is wages sufficient to afford the worker and his family decent conditions of life. Of course the words "decent conditions" imply not merely what is necessary to keep together soul and body, but also what is necessary to keep the worker and his family in frugal comfort when the clothes' bills and the house bills and the school bills have been paid. The old idea, deeply rooted in Protestant England, was to grind down the laborer and treat him as a slave, often than of less value than a horse or a dog. It took centuries of hard struggles and of determined fighting against tyranny to lift the worker from slavery, and there is danger that after all he is heir to he is now becoming through his own blindness a slave of the Servile State and a chattel of capitalism. The Government is an instrument of capitalism, the press is the voice of capitalism. When the profiteer complains about high wages the politicians back him and the day-lie men denounce the rapacity of the worker. Recently the press held up its hands in horror at the idea that high wages ought to be maintained after the war. They do not manifest much concern regarding the high profits of the profiteer, nor did they lose much energy in lamenting the exploitation of the people by the politicians who were ready to send the last son of the poor to die for them but had no notion of asking for the last son of their wealthy patrons. If the price of commodities is high it is not fair to blame it on high wages, for we know that when wages go up one per cent. profits go up ten at the same time. One has only to recollect the rise in the wages of miners and in the cost of coal to the consumer during the war. A press that objects to give a few shillings a week extra to the worker has no objection at all to giving a few thousand pounds to the capitalist at the public expense, and politicians who oppose justice for laborers will have no sort of scruple about condoning terrible waste and even peculation in the public services, especially if the speculators and the wasters know how to give the Masonic grip. Now, in direct opposition to the views of press and politicians, we say that the high wages paid during the war ought to be maintained. The American Catholic Bishops urged that in their programme of social reform two or three years ago, and, apart from the capitalists and their machinery in press and parliament, the world knows the proposal was right and fair. The question is not what the workers can be induced or forced to accept: it is a question of what they ought to get; and the measure of what is due to them is still to be found in Leo's rule, that their wages ought to suffice to keep them in decent and frugal comfort. The worker is a man, not a serf, and unlike a horse, his wants are not supplied when you give him a meal and a roof: he is a man, and therefore has a right to live like a man—as much right as his master and more. What was a living wage in other days is so no longer, and it is useless to say that high wages are the cause of that. The chief causes are high profits, trusts, exploitation of the poor, high taxes, useless and criminal waste of public monies, the public expenditure necessary to pay useless beings like the Nosworthys and the Masseys and the Andersons, and the foolish outlay involved in sending such persons on joy-rides to the Islands or to conferences at which they are as useful as wax-works.

Dress and Morals

Words were originally intended to express ideas: politicians (an ignoble race) appeared and perverted them into disguises for ideas that exist, or more often for empty signs of ideas that do not exist. Much in the same way clothes were invented to keep the body warm and to protect modesty. A degenerate people

have changed all that, and now their purpose is to bring into glaring notice the nakedness of young women. To young girls who imagine that shameless display of their skin is a bait whereby men may be induced to propose we commend a serious meditation on the following words of Father Martin Scott, S.J.:

The purpose of dress is twofold, to protect the body and to ornament it. Some women nowadays pervert the use of dress. It is the nature of woman to be attractive. But her greatest attraction is her modesty. Any woman can attract men by a certain style of dress, or the lack of dress, but it is not the attraction that a proper woman cares for. No man whose love is worth having cares for a woman of that kind. He may use her as a toy, but he will not love her. Some men will take every concession a woman will make; but the more she yields, the less they respect her. They will amuse themselves with her, but they will not marry her, ordinarily.

God put the instinct of attractiveness in women in order to induce honest love and marriage. The way some women dress now induces only dishonorable love. In fact it is wrong to call it a love at all. It is just passion, sex passion, and implies no esteem, no honest purpose, no idea of true affection.

In women the instinct to be attractive is very strong. But whenever that instinct is gratified by a lack of self-respect it acts as a boomerang. Any woman who attracts attention or admiration at the cost of modesty is

COMMITTING MORAL SUICIDE.

She is doing harm to herself and others. Do not think that I speak thus merely because I am a priest. It is not only religious people who lament the indecency of modern dress. Physicians and statesmen and moralists join in the condemnation of the present immodest fashions. They condemn them because of their positive harm.

Dr. Foveau de Courmelles, one of the best known physicians in Europe, declares that some of the worst evils now confronting civilised nations may be laid at the door of the feminine craze for indecent dress. Among other things he says: "Woman's clothing has reduced itself to the most simple expression by its scantiness. She is dressed in these days when she is undressed." What a dreadful indictment by a man of the world!

The unusual always attracts. If a woman concedes more than propriety allows, of course she will attract notice. She may even get a certain sort of admiration, the admiration that spells ruin. Man has a twofold nature, animal and spiritual. An immodestly dressed woman may win the admiration of man's animal nature; but it is only a brutal admiration, not only not worth having, but positively dangerous to both men and women. A decent woman does not want the admiration which comes from sacrificing her modesty. And a decent man does not want to associate honorably with

A WOMAN WHO DISREGARDS MODESTY.

If a woman wins a man by any improper display of her person, she will regret it. Such a man will treat her in accordance with his brutal instincts. A marriage resulting from such admiration will be a matter of lust, and not love. Lust is cruel, and when it is too late the woman will realise it.

If all this is so, you say, why is it that in society there is so much immodesty in dress? And I ask you: Why is it that in society there is so much divorce and separation, and so many charges of cruelty and incompatibility and so many tragedies? Unfortunate marriages are frequently the consequence of merely sensual attraction. Nothing fades so fast as the attraction founded on animal passion. That is one reason why there are so many regrettable marriages now. The scandalous dress of some women exposes them to lustful eyes, generates false love, and lays the foundation for lifelong misery.

It is because the Catholic Church seeks the true welfare of women that it insists so much on modesty in dress. The qualities which in a woman attract the