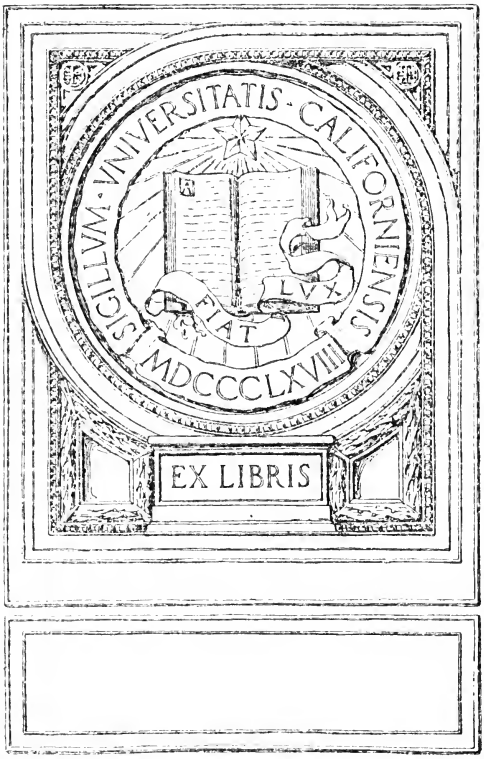

SOME REMARKS

ON THE

PRESENT DISCONTENT

BY

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San Francisco, February 29th, 1880.

The words of wise men are heard in quiet more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools.—ECCLESIASTES ix, 17.

The preacher might have added also that the words of the wise are sometimes spoken so quietly that they are not heard at all beyond the ear in which they are spoken, and yet they get abroad into the common air, and modify the thoughts and feelings of men. Wisdom is a sort of calm, penetrating, round-about judgment of times, events, men, and things. It is no conceit of knowledge, but such an appreciation of things as discharges the mind of all conceit, and brings in humility at the sense of how little it knows. Then, too, as men grow wise they grow silent, and sparing of their words. I do not remember of ever having seen a garrulous man who was a wise man. I suppose that it was in view of this fact that wisdom is inclined to be a little reticent—that Mr. Carlyle, in one of his pungent paragraphs, so satirizes the passion for rhetoric, talking, speech-making;

and praises silence and work. Of all business, talking, declaiming, popular address is most trying to integrity of feeling, clear convictions and thorough inward honesty. It was this profession of loquacity that Augustine so bitterly repented of, in his years of wisdom, when the excellence of truth and simplicity had dawned on him. History records that a sure indication of the decline of the Roman Empire was that the profession of public speaker had become so popular, and the grave old taciturn Roman had got to drivelling words in weak loquacity. Webster, once, in his place in the Senate, disgusted beyond endurance at the fulsome flattery heaped on him by a feeble speaker, drew his head down in chagrin, and cried "O get out!" He said, on another occasion, that any man would have a large hearing and a great popularity who would go through the country abusing the government and telling the people that they were abused, and that the government was the cause of all their trouble.

The freedom of speech and of the press are equivalent to popular liberty and free institutions, inasmuch as there can be no free institutions without freedom of thought and expression. The abuse of so great a principle is not to be wondered at. Even the abuse is a safety-valve to that which might explode if confined, if only a large body of the people are well grounded in intelligence and right. Popular appeals to popular feeling are the best remedy for popular wrongs or popular discontent. The very idea of it is that it reduces vague feeling to terms of intelligence; and, on reflection, men find that they can feel more strongly than they can think.

For a considerable period there has been here in this city a free swing given to a very broad style of popular talk, ranging from indecent and vulgar phrase, and black-guard lingo, and extravagant epithets, and reckless statements to tirades against individuals, institutions and things in general. The sitting of the Legislature, the inauguration of a new Constitution and the pinch of labor, have for a few weeks revived what seemed to be the expiring discontent; and society, by contagious moral sympathy, has been some-

what depressed. I think, myself, that it has been exaggerated, and that too much attention has been given to it, and that society has shown itself too much on a level with it.

So far as the labor question, as it is called, or labor and capital, is concerned with the social discontent, there can be no settlement on any present terms of labor and capital. It is no local question, but of universal human interest, and pervades Christendom. The only reconciliation of that difficulty is in moving forward on to a new ground, where the moral relations of employer and workman are recognized as clearly as the politico-economic relation. What men want is a respectful consideration of their welfare. It does not consist in the government taking them up, and finding work for all who want it. A parental government is a monarchy or a despotism where men cannot take care of themselves; but in a free State men are supposed to be of age and able to take care of themselves. Capital and labor will never be at peace, nor will they ever reap their full rewards until they have a material and moral interest in each other's welfare over and above the wages paid on the one hand, or the service rendered on the other. The final goal is not parental government, nor socialism, nor communism, nor trades-unions, but co-operation. This will not be accomplished primarily by legislation, but it will be begun here and there by enlightened men of comprehensive and liberal views, who understand that good workmen must be the allies of their employers. A writer from that part of the country which we call The West—evidently a proprietor and influential director of railroad management, has recently sent a letter to a distinguished journal, setting forth in a clear and forcible way that owners, directors and managers of railroads should adopt some method of helping their workmen, outside the duties for which they are paid, in their private lives. He is a man of experience and ability. His view I will not discuss; it is the spirit of it that I notice. It is the appearance of the moral element in political economy which, until recently, has been altogether ignored. Such movements will get into form after a while. All intelligent and thoughtful men should inform themselves on these things, and know what is being done, and with what success.

It is, according to my way of thinking and feeling, one of the most interesting and important subjects that our modern society presents. If intelligent and wise men do not take it up, passionate and ignorant men will. Men who can only feel a wrong need to be guided by those who can see it. If there is anything in the future that seems to me certain in the unfolding of principles, it is that labor and capital can never settle down on the old bare political - economy - proposition of demand and supply. The matter can never rest, so it seems to me, save on terms of mutual moral support. In the mean time, the man who talks only to human passions, who talks carelessly about the rights of property, and only disturbs men where they are, before they can do better, is a moral incendiary, and deserves condign punishment.

In respect to the new Constitution, and the uncertainty that attends legislative and judicial proceedings under it, I wish to make one remark only, and that is in regard to that provision of the Constitution which forbids the employment of Chinese laborers by corporations created by the laws of the State. I have nothing to do with the law, but only with the *morale* of the matter as it has appeared in the streets of the city. A body of men marching through town and taking it upon themselves to ask citizens what they proposed to do in regard to the management of their business, is an act of usurpation, which, if carried out to its legitimate conclusion, would subvert the government of any municipality. The good sense of our citizens in keeping their temper in the presence of an offensive intrusion, is honorable, and probably is to be understood as an illustration of that kind of patience that does not hold out forever. All that can be said about it is that it was impudent and insulting.

On the other hand, I think citizens who were hiring Chinese laborers at the time of the inauguration of the new Constitution should have obeyed the law, if there was a law forbidding the hiring of that class, or they should have anticipated the new state of things and brought the whole matter before the proper tribunals at the earliest moment to ascertain whether or not this particular law is law. But I think

citizens ought to obey the laws. The best way to get a bad law repealed is to execute it rigidly. And so in regard to the condemnation of any portion of the city on account of the manners and customs and habits of the population there. Let the law be executed, and let all good citizens say that the law shall be executed according to law, that is, left to the decision of the Courts. The violent language we hear in the street would make us shudder if we were not accustomed to it; but we have become so familiar with all this style of popular language that many would miss it from the substance of the daily news.

I suppose it is fair in all our judgments of the present condition of things here, to make some allowance for the motley class of people that may be found in the city. I am accustomed to think that as regards the population of the city, it is the most American city in the Union. There are people here from every State, and there are people here attracted by every motive that ever influenced human conduct. I suppose there are more people here who belong to that class commonly known as "living by their wits" than in any other city of equal population in the Republic. I suppose there are more people here "from every town but this," than in any other town of equal dimensions. There is some reason to believe that our fellow citizens of the workingmen are not aware how large a class of this sort are hanging upon their skirts. And it is just toward the workingmen to tell them that they inadvertently and unwittingly get a good deal of damaging reputation from that class. Industrious men are not violent men, and they commonly have sense enough to know that passion is not energy, and that the man who killed the goose that laid the golden egg has not had any eggs since. Those honest, working, and hard-pressed men who have nothing to do, and can get nothing to do by which to earn their bread and their children's bread, should be afforded some relief. Good citizens ought to help them by contriving some industry, which, if it will not pay, will do something better than that—keep a respectable class from humiliating charity, and do something, however clumsily, to show that there is some good-will toward men. But all

such, who are in the sharp pinch of necessity, and in the prison of enforced idleness, must cut loose from every association with violence or the semblance of violence. Men who live by their hands can never gain anything from those who live by their wits. Yet it is the very cunning, and craft and vocation of those who live by their wits, to attach themselves to, and mix themselves up with those who live with their hands. Were it not for this fact, a fact manifest to all, the spontaneous good feeling of men would relieve the distress of enforced idleness until settled opinions and reviving industry, that must come at no distant day, sent their genial beams over the land.

There has, within a few days, been a marked change in the tone of feeling and speech. Some wise man has uttered a word in quiet that has been heard and felt. Nobody can for a moment doubt the power of society here to maintain order, and to inflict a terrible doom upon the breeders of mischief. But wisdom is profitable to direct, and all may be congratulated upon the changed temperature of the air. Let us be firm, good-natured, intelligent and kind, without prejudice or passion, but with wisdom and strength, holding to the good of all.

It is very natural at a time like this, and in circumstances so peculiar, that the Mayor of the city, the officer and conservator of the public welfare, should be the subject of much criticism, while he is also looked to as the guardian of the city. I am now only interested in him as a public man, and I desire success and honor to attend him in his municipal administration. He is a man manifestly of many abilities, much neutralized by indiscretion, and of great admiration for popular applause. His faculty for speech is dangerous alike to his usefulness and to his own fame. Adding to that his fondness for place, and an unmistakeable tendency to interpret place to mean the respect of mankind, and to conclude that those who vote for him honor and admire him, the Mayor unites many elements of weakness as a ruler. He should admonish himself in the moment of his successes, of those things that check the pride of men, and make them silent in the presence of much their own hands

have not wrought. The Mayor, above all, should remember that his notoriety is much greater than his reputation. He should, in gratitude to that Almighty Providence by which his life was preserved from the hand of an assassin, humbly remember that had he died by that cowardly hand, it would have been no martyr's death, and no martyr's name that he would have died or won. It was a tavern brawl, all but the tavern. The Mayor should remember that it is not becoming, nor fitted to increase or win the respect of his fellowmen, for him in loose and voicy oratory to tell his fellowcitizens that 'twas for their cause he bled. The Mayor should remember, in the brief moment of official station, that so merciful are men, that the assassin's shot carried a wave of sympathy to him, that was the prime moment of his success, and which if he were a wise man he would never waste in his great need. The Mayor should remember, that notwithstanding his great fondness for speech, silence and activity are his security and success, and that few words and modest honor become him best. I can wish him no better success and no truer honor, than that he may discharge the duties of his office with an eye single to the public good, and that the fierce experience of human passions, which he has done so much to kindle, and whose deadly recoil has struck him so heavily, may bring forth in him the fruits of wisdom, humility and self-control. To the end of the welfare of the city, to the end of every humane and Christian sentiment towards the poor, to the end of wisdom, gratitude and charity in the rich, to the end of private honor and public duty well done, and to the end of a good name, which may he attain, I give him my sincere public and private wishes.