

THE EIGHT-HOUR SCHEME.

Mr. IRA STEWARD, President of the Boston Eight-Hour League, and who is conceded to be the intellectual leader of the eight-hour movement in this country, did not deliver the oration on that subject which had been expected at the Fourth-of-July picnic. In order to give it more emphasis, and to obtain for it a more attentive audience than could be had at an open-air meeting on a festive occasion, the speech of Mr. STEWARD was deferred, and was delivered last night at Farwell Hall. The speech was of a character above that of the ordinary speeches made by the professional orators on the Labor question.

The plan by which human wrongs are to be remedied, and by which wealth is to be made the common lot of man instead of poverty, was pointed out last night. It is to consist in establishing the brotherhood of the human family; "our country is to be the world, and our countrymen mankind." There were many truisms repeated, such as he that can produce the cheapest and can undersell must rule the market. In this grand struggle for the power to undersell, labor-saving machinery is of immense power. It has added to the productions of the world, and to their cheapness. The population of the world is divided between the 200,000,000 of civilized and cultured people and the 1,200,000,000 of poor and ignorant, even barbarous, people. The smaller class utterly neglect the more numerous. Where the labor of wages is the best paid, there is wealth, and comfort, and intelligence; where the wages of labor are the lowest, there are poverty and ignorance. In countries where human labor is cheaper than machinery there is no use for machinery. The reduction of the cost of transportation has so drawn all parts of the world together that it is possible for even people groveling in poverty to undersell us in our own markets. Emigration has its motive in the expectation of better wages. Men flee from their own country not from political oppression, but from poverty; they come hither seeking bread and not an idea. The comparatively few of the world's population neglect—forget—the vast multitudes of peoples in the slavery of poverty, and from time to time are punished by these neglected races, who are able to undersell us. The argument was made that the oft-recurring commercial disasters which crush all civilized nations, producing destruction, and reducing labor to the condition of a tramp, are due to the thousand or twelve hundred millions of neglected and forgotten human beings who are able to undersell Christendom. It was further argued that no local remedies can be effective. The value of labor must be brought to a level; there is no room in this world for six-cent and five-dollar laborers, and the process of placing the labor of the human family on a level must be the raising of wages in those countries where the lowest rates are paid. All remedies for poverty and low wages must be world-wide. The only object in the universe to be made dear is man, and a whole world of men sufficiently dear can make a world of wealth cheaper than a world of poverty.

We are afraid that this argument is altogether too impracticable to win much attention or excite much enthusiasm. The stonecutters of Chicago will have little sympathy for the stonecutters in Peking, and the cotton-spinners of Falls City care but little for the cotton-spinners in India. The elevation of the industrial condition of 1,200,000,000 outside of civilization, and the leveling of their wages up to the wages of the workmen of Chicago, is a grand scheme, far-reaching and comprehensive, but the utilitarianism of this day will hardly pause to engage in it. It will be some time yet before the American workmen will interest themselves in the elevation to their own level of the vast population of Asia and Africa, or even Europe or South America; and if the grand struggle of the working classes of the United States is to have for its object the extension of the Eight-Hour law to the Empire of China, and the advancement there of wages from six cents per day to such rate as may be fixed by the trades-unions of Chicago, we fear the enthusiasm of the League will grow cool. If we understand the drift of this speech correctly, the speaker intends that the Eight-Hour law in the United States is to be the entering wedge which is to burst asunder the industrial condition of mankind, and lead not only to an international but universal, world-including level, upon which the human family is to stand, each worker obtaining the same rate of wages, such wages to be so high as to enable mankind generally to have the same habits, tastes, desires, and wants, and the same means of gratifying them. In other words, the world is to be civilized, educated, redeemed, regenerated, and disenthralled, wars to be abolished, peace and brotherhood to be established universally, each man's country to be the world and mankind his countrymen. All this is to

be accomplished by the reduction of labor in the United States to eight hours per day.

We abandon the discussion of results so far distant. That subject may be left to posterity and several generations remote. We turn it over for debate to those who are looking for the end of the world to decide whether such a result is possible within the limited centuries in which man is to exist. We prefer to look at it more practically. Suppose the eight-hour rule be adopted in Illinois, how many will be able to accept it? In the first place, all those persons engaged in agriculture and horticulture will be excluded, and those are more than half the laboring population. In the next place are those engaged in commerce and in the professions, all those engaged in transportation, all those skilled workmen who are paid for the work they produce, and all those who in any occupation work, as it is called, by "the piece," and every day the circle including these is becoming wider and embracing more of those whose skill is more valuable than the mere force of others. The remaining workers who can avail themselves of an eight-hour rule are necessarily confined to a few special trades and to those who are unskilled laborers. Four-fifths of the population of the State of Illinois therefore are engaged in occupations to which it is not possible to apply the eight-hour rule, and who will, in self-defense, resist the enforcement of any such rule upon their employments. Reduced, then, to fact, we have one-fifth of the working population of this State demanding that their employers shall pay 25 per cent more for the product of their labor than is now paid. Assuming the like advance in the cost of wages of this comparatively small and limited class in all parts of the United States, then we have as a result a general advance in the cost of production of everything produced by these branches of industry, and a consequent addition to the cost of living of the whole population of the country. The man who now gets \$2 per day will find that, when the 25 per cent be added to the cost of living, his \$2 per day will count only as \$1.60 does now when he makes his purchases.

The picture of 1,200,000,000 people of the world relieved from ignorance and poverty, and made free, happy, and intelligent, working only eight or six hours per day, and each receiving an equal wages of \$2 per day, and with this liberal income enjoying the comforts, and elegances, and cultivation now enjoyed by the comparatively few people on earth, with each producing what he needs, no person, or people, or nation having anything to sell, and no one ever underselling one another, is one that has been dreamed of occasionally, as has the Millennium, but of whose realization there is no indication.

If there be no competition in this world; if there be no man more skilled, or wiser, or better informed than all other men; if each man's lot is to receive his daily measure of food, his necessary clothing, and his lodging; if these are to be the sole end and aim of human life, with no hope of better things, no higher thoughts than those of mere animal existence, then non-competitive labor may be considered human luxury. That prevails already extensively in the human family. It is inseparable from slavery and barbarism, and is the essential principle of paternal government. But freedom of mind and of body has larger wants. It has higher aims and hopes. It seeks the largest liberty of thought and action. It furnishes the great spur to intellectual and physical development, which is the product of competitive labor. To reduce all men to a level of regard, to limit all men to the minimum of production, is to shackle mankind and reduce all to a common slavery. The man who produces most is the greatest benefactor. The people who produce the most are the greatest contributors to human happiness. The man who produces two loaves of bread, two yards of cloth, two pounds of beef, where there was but one before, is to that extent a benefactor of his race; while he who would limit production and reduce the supply to one-half of what human wants demand, is a destructive, warring against society. The scheme to establish eight hours as the limit of human labor throughout the globe and to establish uniform wages, to destroy the capacity to undersell, and thereby annihilate commerce, is a proposition to turn back the civilization of the past, to relapse into barbarism, to render useless the inventions which have brought all nations into closer relations and overcome time and space. Such a scheme is humanitarianism wrong side upward.