

A WORKINGMAN OPPOSES EIGHT HOURS.

JOHN McAULIFFE, the Socialist, gave a lecture on Sunday last on the subject of "What Eight Hours Will Not Do for the Workingman." A few weeks ago Mr. IRA STEWARD, who is represented as the foremost advocate and ablest representative of the Eight-Hour League, delivered an elaborate and philosophical address in this city, in which he presented the whole theory of how mankind was to be benefited by the reduction of the hours of labor. He represented the whole human family as of one country, and as having the same rights and prerogatives, and as men who ought to have the same hopes and ambitions, the same tastes and wants, and who ought to work the same number of hours and days, and be entitled to the same rates of wages. Of this human family, however, the great mass were savages or reduced to slavery, whose labor was cheaper than any kind of machinery, whose wants were reduced to the minimum, and were satisfied with wages at five cents per day. So long as the hordes of human laborers of Asia and Africa, and of other parts of the world, could work at such wages, it was impossible for the workingmen of civilized nations to secure for themselves any fixed time for labor or fixed rate of wages. It was necessary, then, Mr. STEWARD contended, that mankind generally should be elevated to a common level, that nothing could be done when wages was \$6 a day in one place and six cents a day in another, and one people working one number of hours per day and other people working twice that number. The eight-hour principle was the universal equalization of the hours of labor and of wages. It could not be done by one trade, or in one town, or one section, or one nation. To be successful it must be general and universal, and not partial and spasmodic. This argument by Mr. STEWARD was accepted by Mr. McAULIFFE as an admission that the eight-hour scheme in this city was impracticable. It was an admission that to establish eight hours as the limit of a day's labor in Chicago was to transfer all productive business from this city to other places where that system was not in operation, and to adopt it in the United States would increase the cost of production in this country and transfer the business done here to other lands, producing cheaper. This was illustrated by the transfer of British capital to Belgium, where the cost of production was less than at home. The practical difficulty in the way of adopting the eight-hour rule by any community or country was confessed; it stood in the way of any such scheme, even if the scheme was desirable.

The expectation that by agitation the whole world will be moved to adopt this scheme was not well founded. The greater part of mankind were educated and confirmed in their habits of thought and action. The imitative Chinese would have to be untaught and newly educated in order to rise to the world level of adopting eight hours as a day for labor, or any fixed rate for wages. To undertake to enlighten mankind, to lift all nations and peoples to the same level of thought, and to induce them to act as members of one and the same family, having one and the same common interest, was hopeless. It was not possible. Any such improvement as that must be slow and progressive, if possible at all. He did not accept the theory that the reduction of the hours of labor and the abolition of children's labor, by increasing the demand for labor, would raise the price of all labor productions, and thus, going round and round, everybody would be benefited. The cost of living had a controlling power over the rates of wages, and the cost of living, therefore, was regulated by the cost of production. To increase the cost of production by reducing the hours of labor was of necessity to reduce the demand for consumption. The demand for consumption being reduced, the demand for labor must decline accordingly.

We refer to McAULIFFE'S lecture to show that there is at least one of the most intelligent and studious of the agitators on this labor question who has been convinced by the discussion that the eight-hour scheme is impracticable, and, even if practicable, would not accomplish for the workingmen any of the results which they claim. It is not improbable that thousands of others who are honestly considering this subject may, when they have had all sides of the matter presented to them, reach the same conclusion as that reached by Mr. McAULIFFE. We know that he has another theory, and that is that the welfare of workingmen can only be secured by the overthrow of the competitive system, and he is right in assuming that under the competitive system the eight-hour scheme as a measure of compulsion is an impossibility.

The cost of living is an essential circumstance to be considered in establishing the rate of wages. The cost of production is no less an essential circumstance to be considered in establishing the rate of wages. The cost of living depends to a great extent upon the degree of production. Where the production of all the essential wants and comforts of mankind is so abundant as in this country that there is a large surplus for sale, then the cost of living is so far reduced that wages become liberal which, under a condition of scarcity and high cost of pro-

duction, would be wholly inadequate. That rate of wages which affords the laborer the greatest quantity and the largest variety of what is needed to supply his wants and his comforts—which rate of wages is only possible in case of the most abundant production—is the most satisfactory. When the rate of wages is so advanced that the cost of production is increased to the extent of limiting production and consumption, then the demand for labor is reduced and idleness and its suffering take the place of employment and abundance. The value of wages is not to be estimated by the nominal number of dollars per day or per week, but is to be measured by what it will buy. One day's wages will buy the product of a day's work. The day's wages of one man should be able to buy the product of another man's day's work. The work of eight days will not purchase the work of ten days' labor, nor will the work of eight hours purchase the work of ten hours. It is accepted that ten hours' labor per day should enable the workman to produce enough to subsist thereon, and on that theory ten hours have become recognized as a day's labor. Whenever the wage classes can satisfactorily subsist on eight-tenths of their present production and earnings, they will be able to establish the eight-hour system during the longer days of the year, between March and November. Employers will necessarily pay for labor by the hour where they do not pay by the piece; and those who are not content with the proceeds of eight hours will inevitably work extra hours. No law can ever be enacted or enforced which can prevent them working in that way or any other which enables them to add to their earnings.

The great delusion under which many of these men labor is that to reduce the hours of labor will increase the number of persons employed. This would be true if it were not for certain difficulties which are always overlooked. To reduce the hours of labor without a corresponding reduction of wages would be to add 25 per cent to the cost of everything produced, and consequently to the cost of living. Then the wages, though the same nominally, will purchase only 80 per cent of the same goods and commodities that it would have purchased before the change, and the aggregate wages of the increased number of men will purchase 20 per cent less of the necessities of life than the same sum would have purchased before.

So far as the distribution of wages is concerned, how will anybody be benefited? Practically, the change will operate as a reduction of wages. This is not the only difficulty. The increase in the cost of production will reduce the purchasing power of the wages 20 per cent, and consequently there will be 20 per cent less demand for the thing produced, resulting in the immediate reduction of the number of laborers required. In the end, the wages will be reduced 20 per cent, and the number of persons employed will not be increased at all.

The greatest number of men will always find employment when the cost of the thing produced is at the lowest and the production is the greatest, and at such time, the cost of living being the lowest, the purchasing power of wages will be at its maximum. The best wages are those when the cost of living is at the lowest; the greatest demand for labor is when the cost of production is so low that the demand for consumption is at its highest; anything that tends to reduce production or increase the cost of living directly and injuriously affects labor, both in the number of persons employed and in the value of the wages.