

THE NATIONAL LABOR CONGRESS.—The proceedings of the National Labor Congress, which has just closed its deliberations, after a session of five days in this city, have been duly reported in our columns. The natural equality of man, which underlies as a principle all our institutions, has for its corollary the dignity of labor. The primal curse which is imposed upon humanity, that every man shall earn his bread in the sweat of his brow, is, according to American ideas, a common law of brotherhood to the whole people. No true republican can be insensible to every effort which is made to separate labor from degradation and ignorance, and to crown its other rewards with all the happiness and the moral and intellectual advancement of which our nature is capable.

The profoundest of problems, social and political, are, however, involved in the subject of labor and its relations to capital. The two are dependent one upon the other, and the best interests of both secured only when there is real harmony between them. Yet in the nature of things, and in the nature of man himself, with his selfishness, his ambitions, and his passions, begetting individual and class antagonisms, nothing can be more difficult and delicate than the regulation of those influences and the devising of those steps which shall place capital and labor permanently in healthful and equitable accord. These questions have deeply engaged the ablest intellects and the most enlightened philanthropy, and they are yet undetermined, though the great law of demand and supply comes in primarily to affect them, and ordinarily disposes for the time of all such issues.

Coming, therefore, into general council for the first time, it was not to be anticipated that the Congress of laboring men should devise more than a few general propositions for the consideration of their brothers throughout the country, and that of these a portion would require fuller discussion and some modification before they are finally accepted as representing the universal interests of the laboring classes. As was expected, a first and prominent subject which engaged the attention of the Congress was the ascertainment of the hours of labor, and the resolutions propose to fix eight hours as the time for a day's labor. State laws are to be sought to this end; therefore, discussion is likely to ensue in legislative bodies on the subject, bringing out facts and argument on both sides, by which to determine whether it be practicable and wise.

There is one subject on which this Congress has expressed its views—that is, the surplus labor of the cities seeking employment in agriculture—which seems to be most opportune. Many of our cities are overcrowded with laboring men, who engage in ruinous competition with each other, and nevertheless are unable properly to provide for wives and children, whereas, if they were to turn their efforts to agriculture they would prosper, maintain their families in comfort, and add materially to the wealth and development of the country. So again their deprecation of strikes among workingmen. This is, of course, a deduction from past experience, and is an authentic condemnation of a most injudicious practice, which has been too frequently resorted to by members of different trades to force a proper market value upon their labor, which there may be found other means more surely and beneficially to effect.

Other subjects upon which the resolutions of this Congress have spoken, such as the condition of that most oppressed, suffering, meekest, uncomplaining class of God's creatures, the sewing women; the importance of establishing lyceums, reading rooms in every town and city and for the intellectual improvement and social culture, and the necessity for reformation in the construction of tenement houses, possess an interest and will attract attention and awaken discussion that must in the end be productive of important and beneficial results to society at large.

These and other topics, assuming certain definiteness of outline in the resolutions of the Congress, are to be canvassed by the various trades organizations; and whatever measures of benefit can be hit upon will, through these agencies, be more rapidly impressed upon the public attention. One by one the abuses of society, whatever they are, must give way before discussion and the free expression of opinion, and there can be no objection in this country to the great experiment of the laboring classes defining their wants, and through direct appeals to the intelligence of mankind, seeking to obtain just demands. Here labor is the support of the State, and when allied to justice and moderation, it will always have its due influence and power.