

**BOSTON MONDAY LECTURES:
CONSCIENCE, WITH PRELUDES
ON CURRENT EVENTS, AND A
COPIOUS ANALYTICAL INDEX**

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Boston Monday Lectures: Conscience, with Preludes on Current Events, and a Copious
Analytical Index by Joseph Cook

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JOSEPH COOK

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BOSTON MONDAY LECTURES.

CONSCIENCE,

WITH

PRELUDES ON CURRENT EVENTS,

AND A COPIOUS ANALYTICAL INDEX.

By JOSEPH COOK.



"Ethical science teaches now not so much that man has conscience,
as that conscience has man."—DORNER.

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CONSCIENCE.

I.

*UNEXPLORED REMAINDERS IN CONSCIENCE.**

Zwei Dinge erfüllen das Gemüth mit immer neuer und zunehmender Bewunderung und Ehrfurcht, je öfter und achaltender sich das Nachdenken damit beschäftigt: der bestirnte Himmel über mir, und das moralische Gesetz in mir.—KANT: *Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. Hartenstein, v. 167.

Kant's "two things that strike me dumb:"—these are perceptible at Königsberg in Prussia or at Charing Cross in London. And all eyes shall yet see them better; and the heroic Few, who are the salt of the earth, shall at length see them well.—CARLYLE: *Shooting Niagara: and After?* vi.

PRELUDE—INSURRECTIONS OF HUNGER.

In the year 1877 America has seen her first, but probably not her last, insurrection of hunger. Low-paid labour has at least occasionally not had enough to eat; and therefore a thin flame of fire burst out of the hitherto rarely ruptured social soil on a line extending from Baltimore to San Francisco. This ominous, wavering but intense radiance rose from a fruitful, a largely unoccupied, and a monumentally unoppressed country. Our cities gather to themselves the tramps, the roughts, and the sneaks; several of them contain organised bands of emigrant communists; and this loose material caught fire when the sudden flame shot up from the volcanic crevice. We were not very swift in putting down the conflagration. It happens, therefore, that in a land which has twice been washed in blood, and was a hundred years old, society suffered painfully for several weeks from a wide-spread strike of railway labourers, a riot of roughts and sneaks, and an inefficient self-defence. We are all agreed that it takes two to make a bargain; and even low-paid labour occasionally forgot that first principle of social science. The chief trouble came, however, not from the working-men, and not from the real princes of capital, but from second-rate business managers, who hardly know how to make a fortune except by cut-throat competition.

How many railways of this country are in receivers' hands? We talk of various cures for the ills of our railway strikes; but is not one of the most practical remedies a requisition by law that every railway corporation, and every money company that is in debt, and yet in receivers' hands and in business, shall be compelled to lay aside at least one per cent. of its income as a sinking fund to pay its debt?

* The Eighty-first Lecture in the Boston Monday Lecturability, Delivered in Tremont Temple, October 14, 1878.

We must in some way insist upon it, that unprincipled competition shall not grind the faces of the poor. Your Vanderbilt did not grind those faces. I do not know that Thomas Scott did; however, I think he is paid a large salary not for his knowledge of legitimate railroading, but for his knowledge of illegitimate railroading. No railway deserves to succeed whose manager would tremble if their ledgers were turned inside out and read by the whole American people. Here, for instance, are two railway companies, each containing a dozen men. A majority in each company secretly arrive at an understanding with each other. They form in fact, though not in name, a third company. That third collection of managers own no railroad; but it has a majority in two companies that do own, perhaps, competing lines. By making a ring, they can turn aside, for a time to their own uses, a very large part of the profits of these railway companies. These conspirators have not a wheel, they have not a track, of their own; but they put into their pockets a lion's share of the proceeds of the companies in which they have a majority. They place profits on board one car, and turn this off upon a side track; and, when the train of their enterprise reaches the station farther on, they announce that there is nothing left for the stockholders; and of course, if stockholders suffer, workmen must.

Mines and factories and railways are likely to be heard of in the maturity of the American republic, not so loudly, but perhaps as pointedly, as the cotton-field and the rice-swamp were in its infancy. As the Old World has had peril enough from industrial questions to make already classic much of the literature of the conflict between labour and capital, this New and young World does not act unwisely in turning attention, with all the power of American conscientiousness and shrewdness, upon the inquiry, What are comfortable wages, and how can they be paid? Is it possible to arrive at a definition of starvation wages?

Suppose that a man were to put forward the proposition that any thing less than twice the cost of the uncooked food for a family containing several small children is starvation wages to the unassisted father of that family, would you think such a position very heretical? Regard for a moment the perplexities of low-paid labour. After all, the pulpit has the right, and the platform,—especially if it be as free as this one,—at least this will take the privilege of looking into the vexed arithmetic of the very poor. A man has in his family a wife and three children. He must therefore feed five mouths. What do you pay for your board each week? Five dollars, perhaps, and it is not very good at that. What could you get the bare food for, without any charges for cooking or rent? Three dollars? Two and a half? Two? I should not like to live and do hard work ten hours a day on food that cost less than two hundred cents a week, or twenty-nine cents a day. You would not. But I am at the head of a family; and my wife has only health enough to cook the food, and take care of the children and the house. She really earns nothing except in acting as a housekeeper and as a mother to my children,—there are three of them,—and now I must maintain five persons. Food certainly cannot keep soul and body together, and cost less on the average than a dollar a week. I must starve, or have five dollars a week for the uncooked food of my family. How much do I earn a day? A dollar, without board. My children cannot earn any thing. If I obtain work every day, I have at the end of the week a dollar left to pay for rent and everything else. Is it hard times with my family? The children must have shoes, or they will be hooted at in the street when they go to the public school. America is, indeed, kind. She opens the school to the poor. But I ought to be able to put shoes on the feet of my children; and yet I cannot always put coats on their backs, nor even can I have ragged calico for my babes at times, for I have but a

dollar a day, and they can earn nothing, and my wife is a little ill. But I must send my children to school, or I must drop to a lower social scale. My children ought to go to church, but they have nothing to wear. I ought to send my wife to church; I ought to go myself; and I am not to be excused for keeping away, because it would be better for me if conscientiousness were diffused throughout the community, and I know that one great object of the church is to diffuse conscientiousness, in order that property may be safely diffused. I ought to be, with my brethren of the labouring class, in God's house every sabbath day; and I ought to be there with my children. But I must pay five dollars a week for the food of my family; and I earn but a dollar a day or a little more,—some of my brethren earn but ninety cents,—and I work but six days in the week. I want to get my children a few school-books. I ought to take a newspaper. There must be now and then a doctor's bill paid. I must have a little coal in the winter; and it is not possible for me to buy it as the millionaire does, in great quantities: I must buy it by the basket, and my wood in little parcels. And it is hard times. I have just been dropped from employment. There is often not much for me to do. I cannot always find work six days of the week.

Undoubtedly there are some corporations that have paid as wages more than they have received as profits. Working-men have occasionally been retained in place at a temporary loss to their employers. But supply and demand are the law of business, and I am discussing the dull average sky of low-paid labour under that rule, and not the starry exceptions.

I sat in a parlour beyond the Mississippi, with two leaders of business, one of them a millionaire, and the other nearly such, and we added up the necessary expenses of a family of five, in which children are supposed to be too young to labour remuneratively; and we found that such a family could not very well live through a year respectably in our climate, and according to the standard of the working-men of America, if the father is their only support, and is paid less than ten or twelve dollars a week. The low-paid labourer often has wages that are less than six hundred dollars a year. Your Massachusetts Bureau of Labour in 1875 published a large collection of details from the life of families in this Commonwealth, and asserted that "the fact stands out plainly, that the recipient of a yearly wage of less than six hundred dollars must get in debt."* I know how high wages often are in the ranks of skilled labour; but, as John Bright used to say, "the nation lives in the cottage." I undertake to maintain here in Boston, where heresies are popular, the astounding proposition, that if the unassisted father of a family of three children who cannot labour remuneratively is paid no more than twice the cost of unprepared food for a family, he is on starvation wages.

THE LECTURE.

When Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the poet, was a poor boy, and a charity scholar in London, he was one day walking along the Strand at an hour during which the streets were crowded, and was throwing out his arms vigorously towards the right and the left. One of his hands came in contact with a gentleman's waistcoat pocket, and the man immediately accused the boy of thievish intentions. "No," said Coleridge, "I am not intending to pick your pocket."

* *Pub. Doc. No. 31, 1875, p. 380.*