

BOSTON MONDAY LECTURES.

IF Mr. Cook is not to be classed as a charlatan, it is not because he does not give abundant warrant for the assumption, but because the public are inclined to give all possible credit to one who is fighting unbelief, even if he has some very grave defects. But it is very clear that his superficial learning, vanity, and love of sensationalism have often done as much to repel as his rhetoric has to attract those only whom it is expected he should influence. His great merit is his ability in putting questions in a forcible and yet striking way; it is a rhetorical engine which he can turn at will upon any subject. Consequently, he succeeds in giving the public a false notion of his scholarship—such, at least, as cannot follow him to his sources.

It is particularly unfortunate, therefore, that a man who has this power of impressing his fellow-men should venture to harangue with authority on subjects he has not properly grasped, as in the first of the volumes before us.¹ His self-confidence is so great that he cannot conceive of a subject which is beyond his powers, or which requires not only a peculiar mind but a considerable time to get the right instincts coming wholly from long training. When he talks about "natural wages," he shows his superficial thinking (Chaps. VIII and IX). The worst thing he can do is to parade statistics of ill-paid labor and misery—they are quite too ready to the hand everywhere—and then declare that the laborer ought to have "natural wages"; creating a feeling in the breast of the man he is talking about that, somehow or other, society must help him, and owes him "natural wages" for all whom he may bring into the world; instead of teaching him that he may, by self-help and self-control, improve his position. That a man who seems to have the authority of Christian thought behind him should approach the laborer in this way, and so pour the subtle poison of this the cause of socialism in his ears, can scarcely be condemned too harshly, even if the mischief be done ignorantly. Such children should not be allowed to carry fire near powder. Mr. Cook does not know the common economic facts. He asserts (p. 240) that "when wages go below a certain point (*i. e.*, natural wages) the increase of population is so diminished . . . that you cannot reproduce the labor. Natural wages are such as will reproduce labor." This is entirely opposed to the well-known fact—and it is the most difficult part of the labor problem—that population increases most rapidly in the lowest grades of society.

There is, of course, no space here to give other reasons why thinking men dread to

have Mr. Cook turn his peculiar methods to a really important social question.

On such a subject as Socialism,² where the speaker must chiefly be a historian, Mr. Cook's merits show to more advantage and his defects are less apparent. When it is a question of recommending to our people such successful institutions as the Schultze-Delitzsch Banks of Germany, the writer's clear and forcible way of stating and arranging his facts makes him a useful man. It is a very brief statement, of course, but it was only intended to be such. But in this volume he advocates in the most proper manner the true doctrine of self-help for the workingman, both for his own material good and as a safeguard against socialism, without seeming to recognize that he has been taking the opposite ground in a previous lecture on labor. As an example of his style, of his bad political economy, and of his flippancy on sacred subjects, the following will serve as well for an illustration as any:

When every peasant can have, as often as he pleases, a chicken for dinner, will not both the pauper and the millionaire be improved off the face of the earth? [Applause.] So thinks Socialism; and, if God thinks so, the result will be accomplished.

As to the success of socialism here, of course, the necessities of his rhetoric require that he should find causes for terrible dread; but in 1880 it is hardly the issue he thinks it would be, and, in fact, although there is need of the best public teaching, we do not think there is reason for extraordinary fright.

² Socialism, with Preludes on Current Events. By Joseph Cook. Houghton, Osgood & Co. \$1.50.

¹ Labor, with Preludes on Current Events. By Joseph Cook. Houghton, Osgood & Co. \$1.50.