**“National Reform Principles Despotic” American Sentinel 2, 5.**

E. J. Waggoner

We have received an address which a gentleman of Quincy, Mass., has addressed to the Legislature of that State. The writer strongly objects to making the Sunday laws any less strict, or to making concessions in favor of any, and says:- {AMS May 1887, p. 36.1}

“The greatest good to the greatest number of our citizens, demands that the Sunday laws shall remain unchanged. They may be slightly oppressive in some respects, but the Legislature which is capable of pruning them just enough to make them perfect, and stopping at that point, has, in my humble opinion, yet to be elected. Better let well enough alone.” {AMS May 1887, p. 36.2}

This is the idea that underlies all National Reform would-be legislation,-the idea that laws are simply for the majority, that if the majority are satisfied it matters not if a few are oppressed. Such an idea of law is in harmony with despotism, but not with a republican, or any other just form of government. A despotism is simply the rule of the majority, only the majority of strength is lodged in one man. But the principle is the same, no matter whether the majority of strength be lodged in one man, or whether the numerical majority has the majority of strength. Five hundred men have no more right to unite to oppress one man, than one man has to oppress five hundred men. {AMS May 1887, p. 36.3}

It is not true that a just law is ever oppressive to a few. A law that does injustice to one man, is an unjust law. We heartily agree with President Cleveland, who, in a recent interview on the land laws, said:- {AMS May 1887, p. 36.4}

“If by any construction of a law, seeming injustice is done to the humblest the farmer in the furthest corner of the land, then that law ought to be changed, and changed at once.” {AMS May 1887, p. 36.5}

If a law oppresses a single honest man, it has in it the elements of oppression, and so is an unjust and oppressive law. Just laws cannot by any possibility be made to oppress an upright man. This is the principle upon which our laws are framed. It is a legal maxim that it is better to let a guilty man escape than to punish an innocent man. This does not imply that a just law will sanction the escape of a guilty man, but it simply recognizes the fact that men are fallible, and are liable to improperly execute even a just law; and therefore it provides that the failure, if there be any failure, shall lean to the side of mercy. {AMS May 1887, p. 36.6}

The fact that National Reformers claim that majorities should have their way, even though it might oppress some citizens, shows that if they should gain control oppression would certainly follow. Let us beware of despotism, whatever form it may assume. E. J. W. {AMS May 1887, p. 36.7}

**“Personal Liberty” American Sentinel 2, 5.**

E. J. Waggoner

The editor of the *Christian Union* Dr. Lyman Abbott, is writing in his paper a series of “Letters to Workingmen,” in which he is discussing the labor problem. In the issue of March 10, he considers the principle of strikes and boycotts, and among other illustrations he gives the following:- {AMS May 1887, p. 36.8}

“My friend Michael S. owns a horse and cart. He goes out to work with his horse and cart, and for a day’s work receives $3.50. he is a capital workman, and is always in great demand.... His horse and his cart are his own. I have no right to tell him where or how he can use them. If he should choose now to get a Pole to help him load his cart, and I should not like Poles, and should say to him, ‘Mr. S. you must not have a Pole to help you; you must have an American or an Irishman,’ I should expect the same answer from him, ‘Mind your own business. This is my horse and cart,’ he would say, ‘and I am one free man, and this Pole is another free man, and if he chooses to help me, and I choose to have him help me, it is none of your business.’ And it would clearly be none of my business. And it would not dignify or materially improve my impertinence, if I should go round our village and stir up the people to demand of Mr. S. that he only use his horse and cart so many hours a day, or get only Irishmen or Americans as helpers. I might perhaps succeed in making life so uncomfortable for Mr. S. that he would yield. But if he did, it is palpably clear that he would yield to an impertinence and an injustice. {AMS May 1887, p. 36.9}

There is also in our village a steam saw-mill. The men who own it have built it up by hard work, thrift, and economy. They have acquired it just as Michael S. has acquired his horse and cart, by honest industry. It is theirs, honestly theirs. Suppose I should undertake to tell them how many hours they may work their mill, and whether they may employ a Pole in it; this would be no less an impertinence. I have a little garden, and I sometimes work in it with garden tools which I have bought with my own money. It is nobody’s business but my own when or how I work, or what I do with my tools. And it nobody’s business but their own when or how my friend Michael S. works with his horse and cart, or my friends, the owners of the steam-mill, work with their steam-mill, or whom they get to help them.” {AMS May 1887, p. 37.1}

This is sound doctrine, and nobody can gainsay it. That every man is of right master of his own actions, so long as he does no injury to his fellow-men, is self-evident. This is in harmony with our famous declaration of human rights: “We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” And this was but the enunciation of the Golden Rule, the divine law which says: “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” That means that in every transaction with a fellow-man you should “put yourself in his place.” I love liberty, and do not like to be dictated to arbitrarily; therefore I must allow others the same freedom by not presuming to interfere in their affairs. {AMS May 1887, p. 37.2}

If I have hired myself to another man, I have the liberty to leave his employ if I do not it like the work or the wages. But here is B. who is satisfied with both the work and the wages. Now if I say to him, “I am dissatisfied, and am going to leave, and therefore you must leave too,” all right-minded people can see that it would be insufferable impertinence on my part, which B., if he has the spirit of a man, will resent or ignore. If I bring influences to bear which he cannot resist, and force him to leave, I make him my slave. In so doing I violate the fundamental principles of all morality; for I certainly do to him What I would not like to have him do to me, thus showing that I do not love my neighbor as myself; and “he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?” {AMS May 1887, p. 37.3}

**THE RIGHT TO REST**

Dr. Abbott says: “I have a little garden, and I sometimes work in it with garden tools which I have bought with my own money. It is nobody’s business but my own how or when I work, or what I do with my own tools.” Now suppose we make a little broader application of the principles above laid down. Dr. Abbott’s neighbor across the street has a garden also, in which he works when occasion demands. Some fine summer morning while Dr. A. is working in his garden, neighbor C comes over, and says: “Dr. Abbott, you must not work in your garden to-day.” “Why not?” “Because I am going to take a holiday to-day,” says C. “Very well,” says the Doctor, “go ahead, and have your holiday; I have no objection; but I don’t feel as though I could afford a holiday to-day, for I took one yesterday; therefore I shall continue work.” Everybody will say that Dr. A. does just right, and most people will say that if neighbor C. should insist on his laying off for the day, the Doctor would be justified in politely signifying to him that he better mind his own business. {AMS May 1887, p. 37.4}

The case would be none the less absurd if Mr. C. should come over to Dr. A.’s garden, and say: “Doctor, I want you to stop work to-day, for I have worked very hard for several days past, and I feel as though it would be an injury to my physical system if I should work to-day. It is a law of nature that man should have regular periods of rest, and I am going to take mine to-day, and so you must rest too.” Dr. A. would say: “I rested all day yesterday, and feel perfectly refreshed. My system is in good condition, and does not at present require rest; if you need rest, I would certainly advise you to take it at once; my corn needs attention, and it would be wrong for me to neglect it, when I can attend to it as well as not; but I will not lay a straw in the way of your resting; go right home and rest.” {AMS May 1887, p. 37.5}

Will not everybody say that C.’s request is very unreasonable, and that if he should insist upon it, and should force Dr. A. to leave his quiet work in his garden, he would be acting most unjustly? None could say otherwise; for Dr. A.’s working does not in the least interfere with Mr. C.’s resting. {AMS May 1887, p. 37.6}

The reader sees by this time that we are not discussing the labor problem, in the generally accepted sense of that term; and yet the principles which apply in the matter of strikes and boycotts, apply equally to the matter of Sunday rest or labor. If I choose to rest on Sunday I have that privilege, but I have no right to say that somebody else must rest just because I do. If my neighbors choose to work in their shops or gardens on Sunday, they do not hinder me from resting. In like manner if I choose to rest on Saturday, I have no right to request or demand that others shall likewise rest, unless they feel free to do so. {AMS May 1887, p. 37.7}

We know that the plea is constantly being made that observers of Sunday must be protected in their right to rest. We readily agree. No man on earth, nor any company of men, has the right to say that another man shall work on Sunday. To do so would be a gross interference with his rights. But, by the same rule, no man, or set of men, has the right to say that another man shall not work on Sunday. A man may say, “You shall not work *for me* on Sunday;” a corporation may say, “You shall not work *for us* on Sunday;” and they have the right to say so to any man any day in the week. But when they undertake to say, “You shall not work for yourself, or for some other man if he wishes to hire you,” they are going beyond their rights. {AMS May 1887, p. 37.8}

**THE RIGHT OF CONSCIENCE**

But the case is put as a matter of conscience. Thus, A. says, “My conscience requires me to rest on Sunday, and it offends and grieves me sorely to see others working on that day. To be sure, it doesn’t hinder me from resting, but it disturbs my peace of mind.” Well, suppose we interview your neighbor who thus disturbs your peace of mind. B. says, “My conscience and my understanding of the Bible demand that I should rest on Saturday, and consequently labor on Sunday. It grieves me sorely to see neighbor A. working as I am going to church, and my worship is often disturbed by the rattling of his heavy wagon, or the sound of his hammer.” Now is there any principle which can be invoked to uphold the State in compelling B. to rest on Sunday, so that A.’s feelings shall not be ruffled, while it allows A. to go his way on Saturday, regardless of the feelings of B.? We have never heard of any, except that ninety-nine one-hundredths of the people want to rest on Sunday, while only about one one-hundredth of the people care to rest on Saturday. But this is the principle that the wishes of the majority must be gratified regardless of the wishes, or even the rights, of the minority. It is the principle of tyrants, the principle that might makes right. It is the principle which protects the lion from the lamb; which grants concessions to the rich, who can take care of themselves, at the expense of the poor, who have not power to protest. It is the principle which directly contravenes the divine command: “All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.” “This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.” {AMS May 1887, p. 37.9}

But it is urged that Sunday is the day divinely appointed for rest, and that, therefore, the State in enforcing its observance, is compelling men simply to do what is right, and what they ought to do voluntarily. Well, suppose that men really ought to keep Sunday; here are some honest, conscientious men who cannot see it so; they read their Bibles carefully, and can see no command for Sunday observance, but think that they are plainly commanded to observe the seventh day. They cannot rest on Sunday without working on Saturday, and their conscience will not allow them to do that. If now the State steps in and says that they must, because it is right, the State becomes conscience for them, and Paul’s declaration, “To his own Master he standeth or falleth,” is ignored. And if the man submits in this, he becomes the worst kind of a slave. One may by force of circumstances yield his bodily strength to another, and still be a free man, but he who submits his conscience to another, parts with his manhood. We think no one who has a mind capable of deciding a case upon its merits, can deny the simple principles which are here laid down. They are in harmony with the law of God and our own charter of liberty; and therefore they who seek to compel even a single individual to violate is conscience, proclaim themselves the enemies both of God and of man. E. J. W. {AMS May 1887, p. 37.10}