

A DEAD LETTER LAW.

Hundreds of Contract Laborers Are Brought in Annually, to THE DETRIMENT OF AMERICANS. Inspectors Who Don't Inspect and Careless Port Officials the CAUSE OF THE EXISTING TROUBLES.

(CORRESPONDENCE OF THE DISPATCH.) NEW YORK, Sept. 5.—The contract labor law is now six years old, and it is conceded by everybody who has had anything to do with it to be a complete failure. It was passed to protect American labor against bodies of workmen from abroad, but the universal experience is that there has been no protection. The law was drafted by the labor unions, and passed exactly as they wanted it. Representative workmen were selected to serve at the port of New York as special agents or examiners to carry out the law; but the efforts of these chosen representatives of the men who were to be protected have been ridiculously barren of results. Large operators in need of labor, skilled or unskilled, to take the place of striking workmen have no trouble whatever in bringing into the country precisely all the help they want. Nothing is easier than to beat the law.

I have been talking with the Treasury authorities in New York on this subject. They acknowledge fully the uselessness of the law, and are very indifferent about it. One of the officials of the service says the Pennsylvania law demanded a piece of crank legislation and got it, and now they are not willing to co-operate with the Treasury Department in its enforcement. Therefore, he said, the department people are not lying awake nights or shedding any hot salt tears over the situation.

MUST FIGHT THEIR OWN BATTLES. He said further that if the labor unions want protection under this law they must work it out for themselves, as the port officers are powerless without their help. Two hundred or 500 able-bodied men come along in a ship, all healthy and able to do for themselves, and they are let in as ordinary immigrants, yet these men come with the tacit understanding that they are to concentrate at a given point where the labor unions are out on a strike, and take their places.

This is a typical case. It is contract labor without a contract. Every man comes as an individual. He has been told by the agent of a large employer that there is a job open at so much a day for so many men. On this verbal assurance he comes to America, probably with the employer's money in his pocket; but in any event he comes, and passes the contract labor inspectors without the slightest trouble. The inspectors are objects of quiet ridicule among the men who pass them as immigrants. It is unfortunate that bright men, as these inspectors are, should be placed in such a position; still, as long as the Government can afford to give them \$5 or \$6 a day for going through the motions of executing an impracticable law they seem to be willing to stand it.

HEAVY VIOLATIONS OF THE LAW. One of these Government agents, Mr. Mulholland, has lately expressed the opinion that 25 per cent of the immigration into this country through the port of New York is of the induced kind and comes contrary to the spirit, if not the terms, of the contract labor statute.

A late and rather exasperating instance of the evasion of the law is noted in New England. The granite cutters who are working on the great blocks that are shipped by rail and steamer to Washington to be placed in the new Congressional Library, had trouble with the "association" or company that runs the quarry, and they threw their picks and shovels to the employers to terms. An advertisement was immediately enabled to London for the desired number of stone cutters, who were referred in an advertisement to the agent in that city. Fifty cents an hour was offered, and as the price in England and Scotland is but 20 cents an hour, there was no trouble in getting very speedily as many skilled stone cutters as were needed. The contract was made, but they came on rail and in a body to the number of 250 or 300 brawny English and Scotch artisans.

TAUGHT TO ANSWER QUESTIONS. Every fellow was coached in advance and all were admitted; and within a month from the time of the trouble the sturdy foreign workmen took away from the dissatisfied Americans, who had been prostituted temporarily by the company, jobs that aggregated from \$500 to \$1,200 a year in hard cash. The foreigners did not come to stay as a rule, but are described officially as "birds of passage." The company has a limited contract and could not afford to waste time in compensating with its dissatisfied quarrymen and cutters, and therefore gave them heroic treatment with the unfortunates result stated.

This is the kind of thing the contract labor law is intended to prevent; but it is about as effective in a case like this as so many pages of soft brown manila paper would be. It simply might as well have been passed.

During the fiscal year which ended June 30, 1891, 818 immigrants were barred and sent back in all the classes, out of a total of more than 400,000 arrivals at the port of New York. Of these exclusions those sent back under the contract labor law number lower than 60, the great bulk having been barred on the ground that they were paupers or were "likely to become a public charge." Considerably more than one-half of the immigrants are men; but counting the proportion as even up between men and women, Inspector Mulholland's estimates would signify the admission of 50,000 laborers in the course of the year contrary to the contract labor law, or about 1,000 unlawful admissions to every one seeking to come in lawfully who was detected and sent back.

ANXIETY TO ENFORCE THE LAW. General O'Brien, acting Superintendent of Immigration at New York, has assured me that the Treasury Department is not only willing but anxious to investigate fully any case that the labor unions may communicate, in order that laborers illegally admitted may be found out and sent back to the point of embarkation. There is a large fund available for this purpose, and representatives of the workingmen's organizations have been asked to lend a hand, as the results would be exclusively for their benefit, but thus far not a single effort has been made by the labor unions, as far as the department has been advised, to ferret out cases of illegal importation of workmen. As long as the people immediately interested are so indifferent, the astonishing record of the fiscal year just closed may be expected to be repeated indefinitely, and as before noted, the federal officers charged with the execution of the law are not likely to take things to heart to any great extent, no matter how many jobs are lost or how many troops have to be sent to keep the peace in riotous labor communities. I have had a long interview with Senator Chandler, the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Immigration, on this subject. He has given the immigration question more careful study than any of our public men and is well qualified to discuss it in all its phases.

WHERE THE TROUBLE LIES. He thinks the contract labor law is all that could be desired as a statute. The trouble lies in the execution, and not in the law, he says, which is cutting pretty close to the truth, for the law is strongly and clearly drawn, and is comprehensive enough to meet the most exacting conditions. Mr. Chandler is not hopeful that the law will

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ever be a brilliant success, owing to the difficulty of enforcing it. He does not say straight that it is a flat and ridiculous failure, because he is too smart to say things that may seem impolitic, but he has a way of thinking out loud so as to convey strong expressions without bringing himself within set terms. The Senator suggested that the time may not be far distant when it may be necessary for Congress to shut down on the great influx of foreign workmen, especially those having no legal right of protection of our shores. This, I inferred, was his idea of the relief which was sought to be accomplished by the contract labor law.

When I was at Mr. Chandler's beautiful summer home in the Warner Valley, under the shadow of the famed Kearsarge Mountain, a couple of weeks ago, he let me see the draft of a very pointed letter he had written to Secretary Foster on the subject of bonding in pauper immigrants, which the Treasury Department has lately gone into very extensively.

AFTER THE TREASURY DEPARTMENT. The Senator wrote the Secretary that the department was violating the immigration laws in accepting such bonds, and was going beyond its legitimate field in allowing the practice to grow up without the express authority of Congress. I had conveyed to the Senator some information in this connection which caused him, in his capacity of Chairman of the Senate committee and as the father of the present immigration law, to send this rattling admonisher to Secretary Foster.

This is mentioned because it has a direct bearing upon the labor phase of immigration. Since April 1, when the present law went into effect, 325 bonds have been accepted at New York, which let in 1,000 persons who otherwise would have been sent back as paupers. There is not a scintilla of law for the taking of these bonds, though the department has the backing of two Attorney Generals, Garland and Miller, as to the practice, if not the legality.

Mr. Chandler makes the issue, with his accustomed sharpness, that the practice is bad and that the law is being violated; but the same bond clerk at the barge office is kept as busy as three ordinary men filling out more of these bonds for signature, and a lot of Polish, Hebrew exiles and Italians are coming in thereunder who, but for their good fortune in having somebody to vouch for them, would not be able to pass the inspection.

SENATOR CHANDLER WILL FIGHT. These are the elements of a good-sized rumus in these proceedings when Congress shall assemble again, and the pugacious New England Senator is the man who will be likely to start the fun. This is something that organized labor is directly interested in. It should be understood that as a rule the bonded paupers are sent away, immediately upon their admission, to distant parts of the country, far beyond the reach of the immigrant officials at New York. The bonded persons might therefore become a public charge a half dozen times over, and the officials would never hear of it; and even if they did, the remoteness of the cases would make it very troublesome, if not practically impossible, to ship the pauper back to New York, and spring nothing of the further trouble of hunting up and suing the bondsmen for the Government's costs, and also saying nothing of the fact that some very good lawyers think these bonds are not worth the paper they are made out on in a court of law.

The Chairman of the Senate Committee is anxious to hear from people who have suggestions to make for the improvement of the contract labor, immigration and naturalization laws. He says legislation on these subjects must be entirely non-partisan, and he will be happy to receive the views of people representing all shades of politics. It is evident that there is to be a stir in the next Congress on these subjects. EDSON BRACE.

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