

return ; the dock-masters of the Clyde and the Mersey kept a firm hold of what they had got ; and all that was accomplished by the successful strike of the Dublin ship-carpenters was simply 'the ruin of the ship-carpentry of Dublin. Nor would the result have been different had the combination been more extensive. Had it included all the carpenters of Britain and Ireland, the competition in ship-building would have lain between, not the opposite sides of the Irish Channel, but the opposite sides of the German Ocean : our merchants would have purchased their vessels, not from the Clyde and the Mersey, but from the dockyards of the Baltic and the Zuyder Zee ; and our British carpenters, instead of being, as of old, the fabricators of navies, might set out, shovel in hand, for the railways, and become navvies themselves. Unless the originators of the strikes of the country were also the makers of its laws, and could re-introduce the protective system, very successful strikes could have but the effect of striking down the trade of the empire, and prostrating its commerce.

And yet, disastrous as strikes almost always are, it cannot be questioned that the general principle which they involve is a just one,—quite as just as that of the masters who continue to resist them. In the labour-market, as in every other, it is as fair to sell dear as to buy cheap ; and it is in no degree more unjust for five hundred, five thousand, or fifty thousand men, to agree together that they shall demand a high price for their labour, than it is for five or for one. The laws framed to compel working men to labour at whatever rate of remuneration legislators may choose to fix,—and in this country the terms *legislators* and *employers* have in the main been ever synonymous,—are properly regarded as evidences of a barbarous and unscrupulous time. The unquestioned right of the working man is, however, of all others one of the most liable to abuse. It is greatly more so than