

OUR INDUSTRIAL PROBLEMS.

By "Sigma" (F. SINCLAIRE, 54 Wattle-road, Hawthorn, Victoria.)

We must begin by setting our aspirations in a reasonable key. Our instrument is human nature, not as it should be or might be or is to be, but as it is. We are legislating not for Utopia or for any earthly Paradise, but for the actual world. In such a world the possibilities of change are indeed great and even incalculable, but they are not unlimited. The refusal to accept limitations is the flaw in the towering and splendid visions of many noble idealists. There is almost nothing amiss with their schemes except the fatal fact that people will not adopt them. We begin therefore by humbly disclaiming the search for a perfect society. "That no grievance ever should arise in the commonwealth," says Milton, "that let no man in this world expect." Our problem is how to produce such an approximation to perfect justice and perfect stability as can be attained by men who are not perfect. We proceed on the assumption that imperfect things may be made indefinitely better, and that as in the past so in the present men who are incapable of responding to an ultra-heroic appeal are yet able and willing to exercise intelligence and good will in the effort to remove glaring evils.

Co-operation or Conflict.

We are not the first in the field. Wisdom will not die with us, folly was not born with us. We must accept our inheritance, for good or bad, as we find it. We are like chess-players called upon to take a hand in a complicated game already in process, and we must accept the good and bad moves of those who have left the game where it is. In the society into which we are born, we observe at work two opposite forces, the principle of co-operation and the principle of conflict. Of the two it is the former that is the less obtrusive and dramatic. But

it is there, or our society would fall to pieces. What chiefly attracts our attention is the more dramatic element of conflict. We live in a world of industrial strife. Whether we like it or not, the forces of Labour and the forces of Capital are not acting in perfect co-operation. "Industrial unrest" is the euphemistic name commonly given to that outstanding feature of our social life which is sometimes more picturesquely described as the "class war." If the one phrase is too suggestive of violence, the other is a ludicrously mild description of the actual facts. Two organised forces, on whose co-operation we are dependent for our material existence, meet from time to time in open battle, and in the longer or shorter intervals of "industrial peace" are consolidating their rival forces and providing against the next battle which both sides regard as inevitable. As in the case of wars between nation and nation, so here each side accuses the other of aggression, professes to act only in self-defence—and goes on preparing. Our trade unions and employers' federations are like the fellow in Shakespeare who "claps his sword upon the table and says 'God send me no need of thee'; and presently draws it 'when indeed, there is no need.'"

For indeed, as it is the purpose of this essay to show, "there is no need." To say this is not to fall into the error of those industrial pacifists who would end the conflict by refusing to acknowledge it. To aim at industrial peace is to begin by recognising the state of war which exists. This is not to preach the class war, as is sometimes foolishly imagined, for that would be to admit its wisdom and necessity, which is just what we deny.

A Fight in the Dark.

Now the tragedy of all war lies not merely in the fact of conflict, for conflict in some form or other is apparently a condition of progress and even of life itself; nor yet in the waste of material and spiritual energy which it involves, for

Pack all your troubles in your old kit bag and read 'The Western Mail'