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EDITORIAL

LIVING BETTER THAN QUEEN ELIZABETH.

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SECRETARY WILSON, of the Department of Agriculture, has come out of the West with the proclamation that “the average laborer is to-day living better than Queen Elizabeth did in her time.” And he backs up that proclamation with this other, that in Washington, D.C., they “eat meat three times a day.”

This latter assertion may or may not be so. About that there is at least a “reasonable doubt.” James J. Hill, whose prediction of the panic came true, recently further predicted the almost total disappearance of meat from the table of the American workingman. Within the last two weeks the threatening jump in the prices of beef has shown that that prophecy, too, is on the road to fulfilment. With the cost of living gone up over 49 per cent. since 1896, that meat “three times a day” begins to seem a little less than meat—fishy, in fact.

But suppose it were true. False as falsehood would still be the assumption that the American workman was therefore all around better fed. Eating meat thrice daily, if it be preserved with benzoate of soda, is more a slow poisoning than good feeding. Neither do milk embalmed with formaldehyde, sardines made of mummychubs stewed in cottonseed oil, or fruit products coined out of corn syrup, with hayseed thrown in for effect, and the whole colored with “harmless coal tar dyes,” appeal to one as a diet Queen Elizabeth would jump at exchanging for her baked boars’ heads, her broiled flanks of venison or her roast peacocks. Canned peas iridescent with copper sulphate and canned corn radiant with boracic acid the American worker may have in abundance, but one imagines Queen Bess preferred those succulent vegetables in native splendor unadorned. The veal that graced her board was not killed unborn, and the bread under which her trenchers groaned knew no alum. Take it whichever way one will, the dietary of the American working

class to-day is so far below the regal cuisine of Queen Elizabeth—so far below even that of all but the most miserable of her time—as to be beyond comparison.

But again yielding the point, and assuming that the worker to-day is better fed, false again would be the further implication which Secretary Wilson would seem to give to his words, namely that the worker is therefore better off in every way. Food, though a necessary, is still but a small part, of one's life. To deny that, is to bind the race down forever to the level of the animal, and even Aesop's wolf preferred a hazardous living in freedom to the full paunch he could have gotten by wearing a collar. The Roman slave-girls who were feasted at their master's best and then made the toys of his debauchery, were as miserable as their fellow-slaves of the loom and the farm, whose diet was but coarse and slim. Under modern conditions man refuses to be satisfied with merely filling his stomach. He would also fill his mind. He demands books, pictures, music, scientific recreations, sports and exercise, and the leisure to enjoy them. The capitalists themselves acknowledge this by being capitalists, an estate which they chiefly prize because it affords them unbounded leisure. What impudence for them, or their official representatives, to tell the worker, who by the hard conditions of his life is shut out from all these things, that he should feel compensated by having more to eat!

And when in fact he has not more, but less, and worse, the impudence touches its climax.

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