A DREAM OF JOHN BALL

(Continued from p. 258.)

I entered the door and started at first with my old astonishment, with which I had woke up, so strange and beautiful did this interior appear, and so many of these who were there. The usual self-assertion that was side-board held an array of bright pewter pots and dishes and wooden and earthen bowls; a very stout oak table went up and down the room, and a carved oak chair stood by the chimney corner now still or very old man dined in silence, and the chairs were moved through the stools and benches on which the company sat, was all the furniture. The walls were panelled roughly enough with oak boards to about six inches thick, and the chimney was in the middle of the room. The fire was wrought in a pattern of a rose stem running all round the room, very freely and roughly done, but with (as it seemed to my unused eyes) skill and spirit. On the hood of the great chimney a huge rose was wrought in the same manner by the aid of a circle. And the poetical and the men seemed little troubled by it, although they were talking earnestly and seriously too. A well-made comely girl leaned up against the chimney for the gaffer’s chair, and seemed to be in waiting on the company: she was clad in a close-fitting gown of bright blue cloth, with a broad silver girdle, very daintily wrought, round her loins, a rose wreath on her head, her hair hung down; the gaffer grumbled a few words to her from time to time, so that I judged he was her grandfather.

The men all looked up as we came into the room, my mate leading out in the hand, and in the midst of them stood the gaffer. 

‘Here, my masters, I bring you tidings and a tale; give it meat and drink that it may be strong and sweet.’

‘What has made you sound, Sir Griffin?’ said one.

My mate grinned again with the pleasure of making his joke once more in a bigger company: ‘It seemeth from heaven, since this good old lad hath no master,” said he.

‘I am more fool to start with, and foundation and build slowly up. First they will set about arranging all the things, so that every one, old and young, has enough of all requisites of life. We hope this, that the more opportunities arise. The commune, or the members of them, will be incessantly adapting their lives and customs to increased knowledge, for science will not then be the servitor of a class, but the handmaid of society. An education has for its foundation in itself. There are no longer the gentry, the men who gain accruing from combination for definite purposes, communal methods of life will be more and more adopted, and we may picture to ourselves the cluster of good houses round the great common hall for lectures and the like, while amidst the trees arise the roofs of stately buildings, interpersed with cloistered squares and glorious gardens, such as we can but think of with a sigh.

And why will these be different in the world before? Hitherto she has expressed the power of a nation upon the brink of its decay, has lavished her profusion upon the triumph of a tyrant or the luxury of a class. There is no man in our commune, in her full majesty and all the splendour of the age of men, of a people’s delight in life. However men distribute themselves, in city or small town, they will look to their surroundings and will make them fruitful. It will not be only the kitchen and its work that will be the common hall, these and gardens and vennel and the whole to which they receive their due need of attention, nor will schools, colleges, and playgrounds be overlooked. Architecture emancipated from commercialism, released from the yoke of the speculative builder, will unite sculpture and painting and pure freedom from the glorification phantasmals or “self-made” parasitics, to provide adequate abodes for a folk who have cast aside desire from among them; for whom there is no class-division or caste-prejudice which will keep that all are educating and cared for; that are free from the corruption of excessive one-sided wealth or the crippling effects of poverty. This is a fair world toward which we bend not, nor is there a distance, but it is brought to the city by the realisation even here by the organised educative force of a combined people.

H. HALLIDAY SPARLING.
bread on the table. But Will Green mocked at me as I cut, and said, "Curses, brother, thou hast not been a lord's earner, though but for the work thou mightest have been his reader. Hast thou seen Oxford, Robin?"

A vision of grey-roofed houses and a long winding street and the sound of many bells came over me at that word as I nodded "Yes" to him. I had seen the Oxford of dull grey stones and the bells of Christ Church, and the clouds of the Oxford fog, and the flowers of the Oxford garden. I had seen the Oxford of the Oxford people — and now I found it, and we made the clattering mugs kiss and I drank, and the fire of the good Kentish meal ran through my veins and deepened my dream of things past, present, and to come. But I did not say how heartily I had drunk, since I drank, for some time after that.

For last autumn I was in Suffolke at the good town of Dunwich, and thither came the keels from Iceland, and on them were some men of Iceland, and many a tale they had on their tongues. They had been first gatherers of the thickest sheets of the mind, and they had brought to the crown the sound not of the rich voices, and they ran almost into rhyme and metre, and I told it; and when I had done there was silence awhile, till one man spoke, but not loudly: "Yes, in that land was the summer short and the winter long, and I found no one but mankind, and the trees grew ill and the corn threw not, yet the plant called man thrive and do well. God send us such men even here."

"Nay," said another, "such men have been and will be, and belike are not far from this same door even now." "Yes," said a third, "hearken a slave of Robin Hood; that shall hasten the coming of one I wet of. And he fell to singing in a clear voice, for he was a young man, and to a tale made better by the clearness of his youth, for the men had grown so degraded form you have read perhaps. My heart rose high as I heard him, for it was concerning the struggle against tyranny for the freedom of the man, how the wild wood and the heath wilderness was better than the town and the church, and a little over the right of the poor; of the life of man rather than the existence of machines. The men all listened eagerly, and at whiles took up as a refrain a common strength and voice at, and in that hour of the unprosperous voices; and as it were a picture of the wild-beds passed by me, as they were indeed, and no parklire dainty glades and lawns, but rough and tangled thickets and bare waste and heath, solemn under the morning mists with the rising of the evening wind and the drift of the night-long rain."

But amidst my musing the song dropped suddenly, and one of the men held up his hand as who should say: "Now then through the open window came the sound of another song, gradually softer, though sung by men on the march. This time the melody was a piece of the plain-song of the Church, familiar enough to me to bring back to me the glories of some cathedral in France and the canons singing in the choir.

All leapt up and hurried to take their bows from wall and corner; some had had within a week, circles of bolted and hardened leather, some two handbreadths thick. In the midst of these bushes in the aisles, Will Green went to the corner where the bills leaned against the wall and handed them round to the first comers as far as they could go, and out we all went gravely and quietly into the village street and the fair sunlight of the calm afternoon, now waning into evening. None had said anything since we first heard the new coming singer save that, "Where is the chap to do the ballad singer clapped me on the shoulder and said: "Was it not plain to you, I said, brother, that Robin Hood should bring us John Ball?"

The street was pretty full of men by then we were out in it, and all the men were singing. The song grew wilder, louder, and even as we looked we saw it turning the corner through the hedges of the orchards and closes; a good clump of men, more armed, as it would seem, than our villagers, as the low sung flashed back and forth between them. I joined in the general song, which could now be heard, and amidst them I could pick out Will Green's challenge to me and my answer; but as I was bending all my mind and scholarship into my turn of the song, suddenly from the new white tower behind us clashed out the church bells, harsh and hurried at first, but presently falling into measured chime; and at the first sound of them a great shout went up from us and was echoed by the new army singing another song, and before we pressed on and presently we were all mingled together at the cross.

Will Green had good-naturedly thrust and pulled me forward, so that I was standing on the lowest step of the cross, his twenty-two inches of man standing on the lowest step of the cross, his seventy-two inches of man standing on my shoulders, while a hundred feet above me and said: "There's for thee a good hearing and seeing stead, old lad. Thou art tall among thy belly and not otherwise, and thy wind, beside, is none of the best, but that for me that thou shouldst be the thickest of the throne, and have heard words muffled by Kentish bells, and seen little but whisky woolen elbows and greasy plates and Jakcs. Look no more on the ground, as though thou sawest a hare, but let think that there's in these ears be busy to gather tidings to bear back to Essex—or heaven!"

I grinned good-fellowship at him but said nothing, for in truth my eyes were still on the scenery of the cross, and he would have none to be. A buzz of general talk went up from the throng and as the regular cast fell in the bells, which now seemed far away and as it were that they were not touched by hands, but were living creatures making that of their own will.

I looked around and saw that the new comers mingled with us must have been a regular armed band; all had backless slacks at their backs, few lacked a sword at the side. Some had bows, some "staves" — that is, bills, pole-axes, or pikes. Yet, unlike our villagers, they had defensive arms. Most had steel-caps on their heads, and some body armour, generally a "jack," or coat into which pieces of iron were sewn; some had also steel or steel-and-leather arm of thigh pieces. There were a number amongst them, their horses being big-boned hammer-headed beasts, that looked as if they had been taken from plough or wagon, but their riders were well mounted, and looking at the great pikes and the picture of a man of the horsemen I noted the man that had ridden past me when I first awoke; but he seemed to be a prisoner, as he had a woollen hood on his head and a grey tippet 

William Morris

"To be continued.

DIVES AND HIS DINNERS."

The Poll Roll Gazette of November 10 contains the following suggestive letter from the Rev. G. S. Reaney:

"Sir,—The Mayor's banquet, you say, cost £500. What could be done to make that a good meal for £10, or even £7? Beetroot pudding and coffee for 200,000 men, or a meal for 1000 daily for seven months, or a dinner to 50,000 men, or a dinner to 500,000?" But, I fear, but fact, as I have given 100 men a good dinner for £1 5s., and a dinner for 100 children for less than half. Dives ought to be more than satisfied with the sign of this country, which I am sure the people of this country are."

Anent the same subject a correspondent sends the following grim suggestion for the next 9th of November, if unhappily the miserable make-believe festival survive the shock it has received:

"I would suggest to the city magnates that as they parade their fine horses, and their fine ladies and their fine prancing horses, that they make it understand the difference between the clothing of the rich and the poor, so they might further heighten the contrast by having a number of men or ladies of the opposite temperament and the opposite dress, and when the horses and portable fires might be arranged before which the legs of mutton and the like might be cooked, etc., and kept for the benefit of the people that the people might get an expensive treat by smelling the smoky dishes as they passed by. Of course this would be a good idea, and give a good deal of employment, such a number of people being out in providing a staff of policemen to keep the fascinating ones from rushing in to seize them."

Will the monopoly press inform us whether it would permit every producer to enjoy the products of his own labour or not? If so, will they tell us why any one should be compelled to give any portion of the products of his labour to any one for an opportunity to sell?"