LABOUR FEDERATION.

One of the best indications of the progress of the labour movement is the growing feeling amongst trade-unionists for a federation of all workers. This feeling is vague and unasserted just now, but it is very widespread and it is growing stronger. The trade-union leaders who occasionally speak in favour of it do nothing to carry it out; indeed it is plain that with their narrow spirit and inability to move out of the accustomed rut, they are really afraid of it and want to see it smothered. But in spite of this the mass of the workmen feel more and more that a central federation should be formed in order that the interests of the workers in all trades and in all lands are much the same.

This means a good deal to the Socialists. Everything that shows a growing feeling of solidarity amongst the wage-slaves is in the right direction. The labour struggle has always been weakened by petty jealousies, splits, and contradictions amongst the workmen. In the past it has been difficult to get the men of one trade to act together against the capitalist and impossible to get several trades to co-operate. This is passing away. The miners see one district after another go on strike and get beaten. While the miners of Northumberland were being starved into submission, the miners of Yorkshire, Lancashire, Derbyshire, Durham, Wales, and Scotland, were producing extra coal to supply the market. The capitalists are a helpless lot in themselves, a mere nothing against the workmen; but they generally get the best of it, because they play off one part of the working-men against the other. It was not the mine-owners who beat the miners of Northumberland in the late struggle. It was their fellow-miners elsewhere. The miners see this now and so far as Northumberland is concerned, they will not see any more. No stone unturned in preparing to present a solid and organised front to their employers in the next fight. Coal is essential to every other industry in the country, and were the men thoroughly combined they could compel society to render up their rights or dislocate the whole system by temporarily stopping production.

The great benefit of labour federation must be apparent to every workman who knows anything of the present crisis in the labour organisations. The Socialists have preached it for a long time. The efforts of Karl Marx to weld the working-men of all countries into an international union though unsuccessful (chiefly because the times were not ripe) are full of interesting lessons which no friend of labour can afford to neglect. But as the trade-unionists got their first lesson in labour federation from the Socialists they would do well to learn it thoroughly.

The federation of all workers merely to force a rise of wages would be useless. If that were its only object it could only appeal to one section of the working-class; it would never raise the universal enthusiasm and fervid devotion that a great popular cause must have behind it, and without two results it would be either a great disappointment to the capitalists and their catspaw the Government. Even if it conquered all these difficulties, however, it would still be cheated out of its object. If the capitalists could not resist a rise of wages they could force a rise of prices in all other lines of work. It was not what they should aim so much to do to make the working-men richer, but to give them the means of obtaining the same article at a lower rate. Let us say that to-day the average wage is 20s. per week and the average cost of living 17s. In three years a Labour Federation, well enough organised to stop the run of a few individuals (say an ounce of cotton) for one week, might force a general rise of 50 per cent in wages. The average wage would then be 30s. per week. But the traders could immediately raise prices 50 per cent, and then the