A DREAM OF JOHN BALL

(Concluded from p. 33.)

"Poor man!" said I. "Learn that in those very days when it shall be with the making of things as with the carter in the cart, that there he siteth and shaketh the reins and the horse draweth and the cart goeth in those streets. I tell thee, now and woe betide by and look out, lest the multitudes shall till the ground where thou standest. I tell thee, shall be a many, so that they shall see to the making of all laws, and in their hands shall be all power, and the labourers shall think that they cannot do without these men that live by robbing their fellows, and shall bind to them and array them with fine furniture, as the saints, and the best worshipped man in the land shall be he who by forstalling and regrating hath gotten to him the most money."

"Nay," said I, "but the robbery they shall not see; for have I not told thee that they shall hold themselves to be free men? And for why I will tell thee: but first tell me how it fares with men now, may the labouring man become a lord?"

He said: "The thing hath been seen that churchmen have risen from the dortoir of the monastery to the abbot's chair and the bishop's throne; yet not often; and whilst a bold son of a poor man have been captains, and they have made him squire and knight; and yet but very seldom. And now I suppose thou wilt tell me that the Church will open her arms wider to this poor people, and that many through her grace shall be lifted up. But will it not be he of the abbot of St. Albans with his golden mitre sitting guarded by his knights and surgeons, or the Prior of Merton with his hawks and hounds, who in all the days of his long life has never been worse than an honest poor man; nor would it better the matter if there were ten times as many houses of Religion in the land than now are, and each with a abbots and an abbot for over it."

"Comforted and cheered though I be; for in those days shall there be neither abbey nor priory in the land, nor monks nor friars, nor any religious." (He started as I spoke.) "But thou hast told me that hardly in those days may a poor man rise to be a lord: now I see that in the days to come poor men shall be able to become lords and masters and do-nothings; and oft will it be seen that they shall do so; and it shall be even for that cause that their eyes shall be blinded by boasting and by pride, and others, whose lives are dedicated to the souls that they may each live to rob others: and this shall be the very safeguard of all rule and law in those days."

"I am a better man than thou hast yet made me," said he; "for when once I am established, how then can it be changed? Strong shall be the tyranny of thy latter days. And now messen, if thou sayest sooth, this time of the conquest of the earth shall not bring heaven down to the earth, as erst I deemed it would, but rather that it shall bring hell up to the earth. Woe's me, brother, for thy sad and weary foretelling! And yet saidst thou that the men of those days would remonstrate. Canst thou yet tell me, brother, what that remedy shall be, lest the curse of me and mine lie upon their heads, and of what is to be? And, lo, you soon shall arise upon the earth."

In truth the dawn was widening now, and the colours coming into the sunshine on the two masts and in winding through the world the varied glancing of these last (and one window before me had as yet nothing but white glass in it), the ruddy glow, which had but so little a while quite died out in the west, was now beginning to gather in the east and the new day was beginning to show itself. I felt, moreover, that I was carrying in my hand, and it seemed to me to have withered and dwindled. I felt anxious to speak to my companion and tell him much, and I felt that I must hasten, or for some reason or other I should be too late; so I spoke at last loud and hurriedly:

"John Ball, be of good cheer; for once more thou knowest as I know that the Fellowship of Men shall endure, however many tribulations it may have to wear through with, as thou knowest the light bright about us; but it was because of the moon, and the time was deep notwithstanding, and when the moonlight wanished and died there was with it a little glimmering of the dawning of the world glad because all things knew that the glimmer was of day and not of night. Lo, you an image of the times to betide the hope of the Fellowship of Men. Yet forsooth, it may be well that this bright day of many hours which is dawning up to us is no image of the beginning of the day that shall be; but rather shall that day dawn be cold and grey and sultry; and yet by its light shall men see things as they verify are, and do not prehend them to be, and the glamour of the dream-tide. By such grey light shall wise men and valiant souls see the remedy, and deal with it, a real thing that may be touched and handled, and no glory of the heavens to be worshipped from the earth, and all the labours and the pains, and the effort to get the world into a working-class to combine for "self-preservation" against monopoly!

Will somebody help to explain? Individualists are complaining through their organ that the municipalities have a way of leaving "their" work to individual action. But combined action on the part of the community must necessarily somewhere interfere with the freedom to "do as you damn please" that Individualists claim; and, if compromise be possible, how far should it go?"
villains becoming tenants paying their lord quit-rent; therefore, hast thou done well to hope it; and, if thou hearest this also, as I suppose thou hearest it little, thy name shall be saved by thy hope in those days to come or be forgotten.

I heard his voice come out of the twilight, scarcely seeing him though now the light was growing fast. He said:

"Brother, thou givest me a warning again; yet since now I wet well the wind and am getting from far-off times and far-off things; tell thou, if thou mayest, to a man who is going to his death how this shall come about."

"This may I tell thee," said I: "to thee, when thou didst try to conceive of them, the ways of the days to come seemed fables scarce to be thought of; yet shall they come to be familiar things, and an order of events made, even as those that read of them, that thus it hath been since the beginning of the world, and that thus it shall be while the world lasts; and in this wise so shall they be thought of a long time, and the wonder of them, and the manner of their being, as much and no more as he who lieth in pleasure may dream of under the lime trees in the summer beneath the murmur of its toiling bees.

In time shall this also grow old, and doubt shall creep in, because men shall be old, and tender, and the complacency of the heart shall be hearkened, no longer as a tale not utterly grievous, but as a threat of ruin, and a fear. Then shall those things, which to thee seemed fables, and to the man between thee and me more wisdom and the bond of stability, seem fables once more; yet, whereas men have so long lived by them, they shall cling to them yet from blindness and from fear; and those that see, and that have thus much conquered fear that they are furthering the real time that cometh and not the dream that falleth, these men shall bend the blind and the fearful mock and mis- say, and torment and murder; and great and grievous shall be the strife in those days, and many the failures of the wise, and many the fallings of the wise, and many the fallings of the great; and of those whose prominent place is now in the world, thereby awaiting the gate of Paradise, those awaiting benevolence may expect to be refused admission unless they have held the membership of the S. D. F. since it was inaugurated, and have to some extent and in some degree taken part in the course of disputation and swallowed its programme, stepping-stones and all, and moreover can bring vouchers and witnesses to attest their "purely English Socialism." But I will warn thee to be above being a part of the present tactics, but with the knowledge of the tactics that have been employed to destroy and undermine our Branches—notably in Marylebone and the North End, and all over and in particular, and not a sneaking professer professing the same aims as ourselves and yet seeking to injure us.—Yours faithfully, F. T. R. T."

MORE JUBILEE SUGGESTIONS!

Our comrade, to whose letters in the Southport Visitor we have before referred, in the last issue criticizes a discussion which took place some time ago, and the Correspondent of this paper, who lost his life in the late lifeboat disaster, as to an expected surplus. He suggests that, even if a surplus be not fairly forthcoming, a large slice be cut off the fund, in the usual way, by the tod-sellers who administer it, that this slice be invested "permanently," and sent to the Jubilee Fund, saying:

"The progress, sir, that we have made during the past fifty years is, as you are doubtless aware, remarkable; the rapid development of labour-saving and therefore labour-starving, machinery, we have steadily increased the wealth of this great and free country till it stands at the appalling and the sum is a horrid thousand millions, which might be put in the human machine, giving him or her of course the choice between starvation, emigration, crime, or the workhouse to obtain a living or die; but those who have 'been here' have strenuously opposed all this, and have stood by; and hands,—will vote for my suggestion, and also contribute something toward the cost. Wake up; wake up! thousands who spend under railway arches, and ye who spend under streets. There is a pleasant weather wrapped in newspapers; wake up and rejoice, for the next Jubilee Year is 1888. Yes a Jubilee Year. We all have a right to the thought of the large fund which will be raised by a 'happy' and 'prosperous' community to celebrate this glorious year. Oh! you pick up one of those warm newspapers; the London Times, and by the light of the frosty moon and a friendly lamp turn to the Local Government Board return of paupers. Well, what then? 1863, 86,018 paupers; 1864, 84,221; 1865, 90,145; 1866, 90,096. And you sigh, happy, happy, and remember what glorious institutions we live under. Suicides. What I only 1800 per annum on an average sacrificed to the god of Mammon. Oh, don't bother about such tribes. Look at the peaceful and contented condition of Ireland. Look at the Welsh title payers, and the Scotch. Look at the English title payers, and the Irish. Look at the prosperous landlords, and remember they have the majority of the living of this glorious Established Church at their disposal, and throw up your battered hat and about the business. Yes, and when the 'Jubilee' year comes the land will lay up for yourselves treasures in this world. Oh, you are doubtful and say you have to look at the bills on the window-sills. Come forth ye dwellers in the slums and cellars of Manchester and Liverpool; get from off your beds of straw, reeking with filth, look at your cheerless glumness; get up, hurry to your work, till you are ready to burst with your heads, ye everlasting fools, and prepare to join in the Jubilee hymn that no doubt Barnabas is busy at. It may be to 'hold your own,' but do not forget the important point that you shall get a lot of newspapers for coffee-stall at the corner, or the sick child at home, but march straight to the local secretary of this great fund, if your shivering limbs will permit, and see if you are not missing out anything there will be no surplus arising from that fund. And you men of Southport, especially good Conservative workmen, who have served your masters these many years, are now some of you receiving the price of three decent cigars per day from the tramp ward, on which to support, in 'happiness' and comfort, your families. You will surely and justly make yourselves something yourselves, but, on the other hand, if you think there is a strong tinge of irony running through my letter, it will not very much surprise me."

A Southport.