

THE COMMONWEAL

The Official Journal of the Socialist League.

VOL. 3.—No. 81.

SATURDAY, JULY 30, 1887.

WEEKLY; ONE PENNY.

THE BOY-FARMS AT FAULT.

THE silly season in the newspapers is beginning briskly with a rain of letters from distressed parents concerning their troubles in dealing with their male children home for the holidays. This is a kind of twaddle which is always recurring: this well-fed, well-housed bourgeois on the hunt for some artificial trouble or another, some sham grievance, since he has no real ones, except his own inherent stupidity and vacancy; but on this occasion there is, if the said bourgeois only knew it, a moral to be drawn. I can imagine the "boy," "the enemy of the human race," as Dickens called him, retorting on his injured parent somewhat in this style:

Father. Well my lad, haven't you nearly had enough of it?

Son. Enough of what, Pa?

F. The holidays, my lad, the holidays.

S. No, Pa.

F. Because if you haven't, I have. No answer? Now you're sulking.

S. Well what am I to say? You're always badgering me.

F. There, there! Say something that isn't mere peevishness. I can see that you are sick of the holidays or else you wouldn't be like that.

S. Very well; I will then. Why do you want me back at the boy-farm? What have I been doing that's wrong?

F. Boy-farm! What do you mean by that impudence? As to what have you been doing; that's just it. You've been doing nothing, while here I am feeding, clothing and housing you, and having you expensively educated (not that I suppose you learn anything) and then you come home and kick your heels about, and do nothing but gorge and make a noise.

S. (with a grin) What do you do, Pa, when you're not having a holiday?

F. (seeming to swallow something and turning very red) Why, I do business and make money for you.

S. (rudely) O ah! I know what that means; precious hard work that is, isn't it?

F. (with dignity) Yes it is; as you'll know when you grow up and have to face the troubles of life.

S. (with increased rudeness). Come, I say, Pa, how much will you take to don't? I remember you taking me to your office last Christmas holidays when I was to be measured for a suit of clothes; and there I sat all the morning, and as I hadn't a book to read I fidgetted, and you nagged me; so I said to myself now I'll just take notice of what the governor does. Well, first you read the newspaper and warmed your front at the fire; and then you didn't read the paper and warmed your back; and then you were crusty with me; and then one of the junior clerks came in to ask you a question and you were beastly rude to him and I wonder he didn't punch your head for you (I heard him say he should like to as he passed me). And then you went and talked to the senior clerk, that little dry grey old chap; and you were civil enough to him, and I could see that you were rather afraid of him and that he did all your business; and then that chap came in that dines at home sometimes, and he was deuced smartly dressed, and he asked you to come to lunch at two o'clock; and you said you couldn't, and hitched your head over your shoulder at me; and he said, "Oh, never mind! bring the shaver along." And you were sulky, but you said "All right," and he said, "Well, I must go and order lunch." And then you sat down and wrote a letter, and that took you a quarter of an hour; and then you were crusty and told me not to sniff, and you stood and warmed your back again; and all the time the clerks were scribbling away as hard as they could, and chaps kept coming into the office and talking to the head clerk about business; and the head clerk came to you with some papers and a gentleman, and I heard you say "damn it" to yourself; but you were mighty politeful to him; and you went away with him and were away for half-an-hour; and then you came back and said "Come along and don't sniff." And then you went with me to an awfully swell place to lunch where there were lots of flunkeys in blue coats and orange-coloured plush breeches, and then we had lunch with that other chap and another chap; and it was a mortal gorge and very jolly; only you and the other chaps would talk about Russia and France and Austria; awful rot, don't you know, like Mr. Toots and the other fellow in 'Dombey.' So that took till four o'clock, and the other fellows asked you to come and play at whist with another fellow, and you couldn't because you had to take me to the tailor's; and then you took me back to the office and the head-clerk said something to you, and you didn't pay much attention to him; and then you said to me "Come along and don't sniff," and so we went home and you couldn't eat much for dinner, and Ma said, "I'm afraid you're not well

dear." And you said "I've had a very tiring and anxious day in the city, my dear." So I suppose that sometimes you have a less tiring day than that; and if that's the case I think you are soon tired.

F. Well what do you mean by all that rigmarole I should like to know? Are you qualifying yourself to write a realistic novel, pray?

S. Bosh! You know what I mean. You're always bullying me about the holidays and say I do nothing in them; and all the time you do nothing in the days that ain't your holidays.

F. You're a young fool and don't understand these things.

S. And then you are always saying that you are spending money on me. Well, I should like to know who spends money on you, since you don't do anything to earn it?—not even Latin prose.

F. Ah, well, you will be wiser one of these days when you have sons of your own.

S. (grinning). Come, Pa, turn to and make me wiser now by telling me how it is that you can't stand me doing nothing and boring people through the holidays, and you keeping me gratis all the while; and there you are all the while doing the same thing, and being kept gratis; and you would be very much surprised if they were to send you off to a man-farm and try to get something out of you in the way of work—a big strong chap like you.

F. Come, I'm not going to stand this any more.

S. Very well, then, why did you begin bullying me? You may think yourself very lucky to have such jolly long holidays. Why, the other day when you came on that chap who was carpentering upstairs, and he was having a nap after his dinner—my! how you did bullyrag him for resting twenty minutes! and he looked sheepish as though he had been caught doing wrong. I say, I wonder why you don't look sheepish.

F. Just take yourself and your wonder out of the room. I never heard such a parcel of impudent rubbish as you've been talking now you have found your tongue.

S. Very well, then, why did you begin bullying me? [Exit.

F. Really! I wonder what will happen to that boy. Suppose he should turn Socialist when he grows up!!! WILLIAM MORRIS.

INHUMAN ARITHMETIC.

Most words have in the course of human development changed greatly in meaning. Our lords and ladies, our art and commerce, are not more distant from their prototypes than is the arithmetic of to-day from that orderly arrangement to which it originally referred. If, for example, in ancient times a certain number of sheep had to be put up for the night into two sheep-folds of different sizes, the number of sheep put into each would have been accommodated to the size of the fold; if a number of men, women, and children had to occupy tents or houses, they would have been distributed among these with due consideration, not only for the mere number of persons in a tent, but also for the natural fitness to each other of the persons set to occupy the same abode, whether of men or of women or of children. The sheep and people, when so distributed in natural or convenient order, were *arithmetized*, in the ancient sense of this word. We still deal with sheep in that natural way, but we *arithmetize* our fellow-creatures in very inhuman style.

Our modern arithmetic has about it a kind of arrangement, a kind of symmetry, at least in words. We take say fifty people, and put forty of them into a house with ten small rooms, and ten of them into a palace with forty large rooms. Here the ten people are counted as of more consideration than the forty; they are reckoned as being in a better position, and all things about them are in accord with this idea; their palaces are also in a better position, are better lighted, more open and airy. The remote invention of the Hindoos of an Arithmetic of Position is thus applied in quite a surprising way.

Consider the number 10. There is the unit-digit 1, but this is raised into importance by its position, by being placed on the back of the other zero-digit 0. The "one" is taken to mean ten times as much as it ordinarily means, being thrust into a high position by something which has no value of itself, but is only of use in supporting this "one" in its "elevated position." In the same way 1000, 10,000, or even 1,000,000 may be taken to mean individuals supported in still higher posts, even as princes or millionaires, on the shoulders of a thousand, ten thousand, or a million zero persons, who are of no consideration except for the purpose of bearing up these elevated persons. And it is no light labour to bear them up and to save them from falling. In the treadmill of society it is weight alone, common coarse weight alone,