

THE REWARD OF LABOUR.

A DIALOGUE.

Persons: An EARNEST ENQUIRER, an EAST-END WEAVER, a WEST-END LANDOWNER.

Scene: Outside a philanthropical meeting on Social Science.

Earnest Enquirer. Excuse me, gentle—h'm, gentlemen! neither of you seem quite comfortable after the noble sentiments showing the harmony that should exist between the rich and the poor, and the inculcation of altruism, and self-sacrifice on both sides, which we have heard in there. You, sir (*to the Weaver*), whom I take to be a soldier in the noble army of industry, seem discontented; a little sour—sulky even, if I may say so. And you, sir (*to the Landowner*), you also (again a million apologies!) seem sulky: although, probably because of the restraint which the refinement of hereditary culture and habits of command makes easy to you, I can't think why.

Landowner (somewhat languidly). Not at all. I assure you I was much interested. The subject is a very interesting one; I heard much which I did not know before. (*Lapses into thinking of something else.*)

E. E. Were you puzzled?

L. No, I quite agreed with it all.

E. E. All? was it all alike then?

Weaver (with a grin). Pretty much.

E. E. Eh! what's that? Would you answer me a question or two, my friend?

W. Well, yes, so long as it's not chaff and you really want information. You began as if you were going to chaff me openly, and him slyly. Now, you know, you said I was sulky, and perhaps I am; anyhow I know I am irritable because of my liver (you'd know why if you was me); and being irritable, I can't stand chaff. So if you do chaff me, since I'm not big enough to hit you, I shall be off.

E. E. Well, thank you. I really didn't mean to chaff you; one must begin somehow, you know. (*To L.*) And you, sir, will you answer me a question or two?

L. Well—yes; though I have a suspicion of what you are driving at. Begin with this good man; I am curious to hear what he has to say; he looks thoughtful and intelligent. (*Aside.*) Might get something out of him; looks like an ultra-Radical—perhaps a Socialist; and we're all expected to be so damned original in the House now.

E. E. (To W.) You heard that gentleman who moved the vote of thanks just now, and who spoke so—well, so elegantly on the compensation which the working classes have for their apparently inferior position; and how necessary it was for the progress of civilisation that there should be this division of labour and life; and what a noble position it was for the workers to hold; and how the slight sacrifices they had to make they ought to make cheerfully and almost as a matter of religion, that new religion of Humanity, considering their position as the foundation of all the culture, thought, light and leading which is the glory of Humanity. What did you think of all that?

W. What's the use of asking me such questions as that? I shall go away at once if you haven't got something more than that to say to me.

L. (to W.) My dear sir, if you would but pay a little more attention to such speeches as that which this gentleman is speaking of, it would be a very good thing for you.

W. Think so? Do you know what he meant by it?

L. Yes, I think I do.

W. (to E. E.) Do you know what he meant by it?

E. E. No, I think I don't.

W. Well, I think I do. Besides, it ain't quite new to me, you see. But that's neither here nor there; don't waste your time by asking me what I think of a vote-of-thanks speech, but ask me something about my work and my earnings, and the sort of way I live in.

E. E. Well, well, I was going to, but allow me a little explanation, I want to find out something about that compensation which our altruistic friend in there did apparently think was due to you for your apparently inferior position; which, indeed, so far as I can see, is abundantly apparent to me. Your clothes are old, worn, and when they were new they were bad; you're not very clean, you don't speak like an educated man (though I perceive in you some of the intelligence which this educated man here spoke about so patronisingly) and worst of all you don't look properly grown or healthy; you are stunted, sallow, and ugly—there, don't bounce out at me! I cannot fail to see that some compensation is due to you, if all this, as I suppose, is the result of your being the foundation of the progress of civilisation, and a bearer of the palm branch of martyrdom for the behoof of the religion of Humanity. No, no, don't go! That vote-of-thanks speech will stick in my memory, as meaningless words often will, when they are spoken according to art. What I want to get at is how you get that compensation above spoken of. So here goes for my definite questions. What is your occupation?

W. I am a silk weaver.

E. E. Is that difficult? Does it take skill to do?

W. Well, you wouldn't ask that if you had seen a weaver at work, taking care that his pattern doesn't work out longer or shorter than it should; mending half-a-dozen of the fine silk threads of the warp, for instance.

E. E. As difficult as a barrister's work, for instance?

W. I'm sure I don't know—it's not so easy as lying, at any rate. But don't get off the subject.

E. E. Is it a useful occupation?

W. It seems so. People will have silk; and why not since they can? It is pretty stuff and clean, and wears well. Didn't you notice that lady at the back of the platform, the young and pretty one, who went to sleep during the lecture, and how nice she looked in her new silk gown. Well, I wove her gown.

E. E. Well, your work is useful and requires skill; let's see on what terms you carry it on. How many hours a day do you work?

W. As many as I can. That's none too many as things go I assure you!

E. E. You mean to say that you are sometimes out of work.

W. Sometimes!!

E. E. And you take all the work you can get? You're not one of those lazy ones of which I have heard a good deal?

W. Now I want to keep my temper, and I really think you don't believe that 'good deal' you have heard.

E. E. Well, no I don't. But tell me, would you work eight hours a day if you could?

W. Eight hours! I shouldn't get a job if I didn't put it through as quick as I could; ten at the very least.

E. E. Well, now as to payment. Suppose you worked ten hours a day all the year round except Sundays, how much would you earn?

W. From 35s. to 40s. a-week.

E. E. Say £90 a-year?

W. No, I won't say £90. Haven't I just told you that I've got to sit and look at my loom many and many a-day? I should think it a good year's work in which I got nine months full employment. I'll say £60 if you like—and don't I wish I may get it, year in and year out!

E. E. Have you got a family?

W. Wife and five children.

E. E. Do they make anything?

W. My wife gets a job now and then weaving plain silk or winding, and one of the lads is a half-timer in a shoe-shop; it don't come to much altogether; £75 a year, since we must put it in the grand style, will cover it all.

E. E. H'm, well (*aside*: Poor devil!) Rent's cheap, I suppose in the East-end, since you are all working-men there?

W. (in sudden wrath) No, it's not, I pay £26 a-year for my house; how much do you pay for yours?

E. E. Well, never mind.

W. Yes, I know; and then the whole of my house together isn't as big as your drawing-room.

E. E. Well what sort of a house is your house?

W. Good enough for me, I suppose; it's a weaver's house.

L. (with sudden interest) Dear me, I should like to see it; it must be quite curious.

W. Should you? Well I shouldn't like you to see it; it isn't fit for a gentleman.

E. E. (to L.) Excuse me, sir, let me have our friend to myself; think about the sort of questions I am likely to be asking you presently. (*To W.*) Well, certainly I haven't come to the compensation which we all think you have a right to claim as a representative of that noble army of labour which we all praise so highly—especially at election time.

WILLIAM MORRIS.

(To be concluded.)

AGRARIAN COMMUNITIES IN ITALY.

IN Italy, as in all other countries, one finds everywhere below the surface, so to speak, of the existing social organisation based on individual property and exploitation of labour, the community of the peasants, which is the natural form of the economy of equality. On traversing the south, one comes upon vast private lands, formerly possessed by the barons, and now by their descendants or by wealthy bourgeois, who are also members of Parliament, senators, or mayors—in short, the masters and factotums of the lands; and side by side with these immense stretches of country belonging either to the Government (such as Sila) or to the municipalities, by whom they are leased out to speculators, often to the councillors of the commune itself by the intermediary of their confederates and men of straw. . . . These last lands belong by right to the people, and properly to the poorest peasants, to whom the Acts of 1806, 1807, abolishing feudality, reserved these in compensation for the lost rights of cutting wood, pasturage, etc. . . . But while these rights were lost directly the Acts were passed, the parcelling out of the land to-day in spite of the 80 years that have passed, is still to do, and the poor peasants are obliged, whilst waiting, to work their own lands as common labourers for the profit of my lords the speculators and municipal councillors.

This situation being insupportable, there have occurred in the southern provinces of Italy these frequent revolts of peasants against the municipality and against the large usurping proprietors, which are at once the outcome of the past and forerunners of the future. While this agrarian community forms the historical substratum of the existing proprietary constitution in Italy, there are here and there places where it still exists in the light of day. In the province of Ancona alone, according to an official document (*Atti della Giunta per l'Inchiesta Agraria*, Vol. XI., tome ii., 384), this number reaches 351 spread over 37 communes. The character of these communities or *universities* or *consortia* is identical with that of all agrarian communities. The land is divided into three parts: Wood, pasturage, and arable. . . . In some communities, as that in the Vestignano territory, they even sow the grain in common and divide the produce.—*Le Rivolte*.

DEATHS FROM STARVATION IN THE METROPOLIS.—A return issued shows that the number of deaths from starvation or accelerated by privation during 1886 in the metropolitan area was 40. In the eastern division of Middlesex there were 16 deaths; in the central division, 15; and in the western division, 1. In the city and liberty of Westminster, the Greenwich division of Kent, and the city and borough of Southwark, 2 each; in the Newington division of Surrey and the liberty of the Duchy of Lancaster, 1 each.