

furniture have gone down; that their hours of labour are decreasing; that their skill as handicraftsmen is on the increase, owing probably to the fact that it is not needed as much as it was; and so on and so on. It is, however, a matter of fact that the number of the unemployed is increasing, and Mr. Maple's admission of it, if it could by any possibility be denied, may be considered the one grain of usefulness in the clammy jam of twaddle which this feeble committee allowed the workman's friend to shove down their throats. W. M.

THE REVOLT OF GHENT.

THE events of which an account is here given took place towards the close of the fourteenth century amongst a people of kindred blood to ourselves, dwelling not many hours' journey (as we travel now) from the place where we dwell; and yet to us are wonderful enough, if we think of them.

Few epochs of history, indeed, are more interesting than this defeated struggle to be free of the craftsmen of Flanders: whether we look upon the story as a mere story, a true tale, of the Middle Ages at their fullest development, rife with all the peculiarities of the period, exemplifying their manners and customs, the forms that their industry, their religion, their heroism took at the time; or whether we look upon it, as we Socialists cannot help doing, as a link in the great chain of the evolution of society, an incident, full of instruction, in the class-struggle which we have now recognised as the one living fact in the history of the world, since civilisation began, and which will only end when civilisation has been transformed into something else. Whether we look upon the Revolt of Ghent as a story of the past or as a part of our own lives and the battle which is not wasting, but using them, it is one of the great tales of the world.

One piece of good fortune also it has, that, as Horace says, it has not lacked a sacred poet. As the tale is here told, its incidents, often the very words of them, are taken from the writings of one of those men who make past times live before our eyes for ever. John Froissart, canon of Chimay in Hainault, was indeed but a hanger-on of the aristocracy; he was in such a position as would in our days have prevented him on principle from admitting any good qualities whatever in those people whom he was helping to oppress; but class-lying was not the fine art which it has since become; and the simpler habits of thought of Froissart's days gave people intense delight in the stories of deeds done, and developed in them what has been called epic impartiality: added to which, one domain for the cultivation of historical lies was not available in the Middle Ages, since, owing to the form feudal society had then taken, what we now call patriotism—i.e., national envy and rancour—did not exist. Englishman, Scotchman, Fleming, Spaniard, Frenchman, Gascon, Breton, are treated by John Froissart as men capable of valiancy, their deeds to be told of and listened to with little comment of blame or discrimination: and I think you will say before you have done with him that he could even see the good side of the revolutionary characters of his time, so long as they were not slack in noble deeds. The result of a low standard of morals, you will say. Maybe; and indeed I have noticed that a would-be high standard of morality is sometimes pretty fertile of lying, because it is so anxious that every event should square itself to an *a priori* theory. However that may be, there is the general epic impartiality of the mediæval chronicler amidst all his mistakes and misconceptions.

Now a word or two as to the political and social condition of Flanders in the fourteenth century, and then without more to do I will get to my story and introduce you to John Froissart, who has given me at least as much pleasure as he did to any one of the lords, ladies, knights, squires and sergeants who first heard him read.

First very briefly as to the political position of the country. Lying as it did between the growing monarchy or rather suzerainty of France and the disjointed members of the "Holy Roman" empire, it was with the former power that it had to deal. The rise of the great cities of Flanders and Hainault, and the power they could not fail to acquire, made the feudal lord of the country but a weak potentate, and he always had a tendency to lean on France for support. The French king on his part was ambitious of making the Earl of Flanders his vassal, and the help he gave him against his rebellious subjects had to be paid for by homage to the French Suzerainty, or at least by promises of homage. France therefore was distinctly the enemy of the Flemish people, though it was, when occasion served, the friend of the Flemish feudal lord. France also could strike a blow at the prosperity of the country without even putting an army in the field, by forbidding the export of wool, the great necessity to the woollen-weaving which was the main industry of Flanders, and this was done on several occasions.

Therefore it was natural for the leaders of the Flemish people to turn towards England as a support, both because there was a standing quarrel between the feudal lords of England and France, and because England was the wool-producing country of Europe. On the other hand, to an English king with a quarrel on hand with a French one, the advantage of the Flemish alliance was obvious enough; and accordingly at the beginning of the great feudal war between England and France we find our King Edward III. in firm alliance with James van Artevelde, the leader of the Flemish people, or rather bourgeoisie, treaties made between them as to the free passage of wool, and Queen Philippa godmother to the enfant child of the great Bourgeois, while the Earl of Flanders was hanging about the French Court a disinherited lord.

Now as to the social condition of the Flemings. Manufacturing by handicraft pure and simple, without division of labour, was carried by them about as far as it could go, and the gild-system was fully developed there, accompanied by a complete municipal system, democratic and social as far as matters within the association were concerned, though exclusive as regarded outsiders. The great towns of northern Europe, it must be remembered, were not originally "cities," sovereign bodies with a definite polity like those of the ancient classical world. The origin of them was the agricultural district, the land that gave subsistence to the clan, all the free men of which took part in the affairs of the community; the first towns were not as in Greece and Rome, the sacred spots of the tribal ancestor, but pallisaded places where convenience had made the population thicker than in other parts of the district. These as they grew kept their territory, and developed at last within themselves an aristocratic and oligarchic government.

But as these towns changed from being mere centres of an agricultural population, into being places of resort for handicraftsmen and merchants, and as the associations for the organisation of industry, that is the guilds, grew up amongst the former, a new democratic feeling rose up which opposed itself to the remains of the old tribal band of freemen, now become a mere exclusive oligarchy, who considered the practice of handicraft a disgrace.

The new democracy triumphed at last, and by the end of the thirteenth century the guilds, the actual workmen, were the masters of the great towns; under the feudal lords, however, to whom they owed homage and fealty.

Within the guilds themselves there could be no capitalists or great men, because the rules of the guilds were framed to prevent the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few, the masters were master workers, and were kept so by the rules aforesaid.

I suspect, however, that there were remains of the old municipal aristocracy (the lineages, as they were called in Flanders) still in existence in the towns, otherwise it would not be easy to account for the masterful position of James van Artevelde, and others whom we shall meet with later on in our story, who were certainly both wealthy and of importance, apart from any office they might happen to hold.

In Ghent also and elsewhere, notably at Bruges its rival, an aristocracy of the crafts was forming, as is apparent in the fact of the jealousy between the greater and the lesser crafts,¹ so that if the development of commerce joined with the rise of bureaucratic monarchy had not supervened and swept away the power and freedom of the towns altogether, the struggle between the municipal aristocracy and the craftsmen would have been repeated in the fifteenth century in another form.

Meantime, one thing is to be noted, which is specially interesting to us, and that is the visible existence of strong Communistic feeling along with the development of the gild democracy.

In the popular literature of the epoch one comes across passages whose mediæval quaintness gives a pleasant sense of surprise and freshness to aspirations and denunciations which are familiar enough to us Socialists to-day, and, so to say, at once make us free of the brotherhood of the old gildsmen. The two following centuries obliterated this feeling, or rather drew a dark veil of misery and degradation over all the feelings of the working-classes; but we now in our hope of better days soon to come can look back cheerfully to the times when the craftsman citizen of the great towns had his hope also, which he hands over to us across the lapse of the drearier days.

WILLIAM MORRIS.

(To be continued.)

NEWS OF JOHN DILLON.—John Dillon's health is reported to be improving. The prison doctor has extended the period of exercise from three to four hours a day, and full advantage is taken of the concession. A garden seat has also been provided. Dr. McDonnell takes great interest in his distinguished patient, and has friendly chats with him every day. Two local justices who visited Mr. Dillon state that he is in a cheerful mood, and appears entirely recovered from the excitement of the trial.

THE TITHE WAR IN WALES.—The proceedings in Anglesea are being characterised by scenes almost identical with those which followed the advent of Mr. Peterson for the Clergy Defence Association. The attacking party now acting in the interests of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners is, however, much stronger than on those occasions when Mr. Peterson was twice driven out of the island. On the 27th the forces engaged were ten emergency men, a sort of special bodyguard for Mr. Stevens, the acting agent for the Commissioners; thirty police constables under command of Colonel Thomas, chief constable of Anglesea; and a half company of the Cheshire Regiment from Chester Castle, under charge of Captain St. George and Lieut. Howard. The combined forces number 110 rank and file, the emergency men and police being armed with the regulation batons, and the infantry with rifles and an ample supply of ball cartridge. During the day there was an extraordinary series of scenes. Large crowds collected, carrying every imaginable instrument with which to create a noise. Free fights were indulged in, and during the afternoon the aspect of affairs became so serious that Mr. C. F. Priestley, J.P., read the Riot Act in English and in Welsh. Many farms were visited, and twenty miles of ground were covered, but the only result was the collection of a five-pound note. At one point the gorse lining the road was set ablaze, and some inconvenience was caused while marching through the stifling smoke. Cheers were given for Mr. Gladstone, and Messrs. Gee and Parry, the anti-tithe leaders; and exultation was expressed everywhere at the failure of the authorities to secure the tithes.

¹ The lesser crafts were the weavers and fullers, that is to say, the workmen of the staple industry of the country.