

# THE COMMONWEAL

## The Official Journal of the SOCIALIST LEAGUE.

VOL. 4.—No. 143.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 6, 1888.

WEEKLY; ONE PENNY.

### NOTES ON NEWS.

MR. DILLON in his speech before the National League in Dublin, said all that he was likely to say, and no doubt said it well enough. He upheld the Plan of Campaign stoutly; as he well might, because at present, now the alliance between Parnellites and Gladstonians is so close, the Plan is the one distinctively Irish piece of strategy, and if it were gone, mere party politics would bury the whole Irish business under the usual mountain of procrastination and trickery.

On the other hand, Mr. Dillon deprecated "impatience"; that is to say, in his position—very different to that of Mr. Davitt—he could not say anything that could be construed by stupid people into the beginning of a quarrel with the Liberal allies. This is the policy which Mr. Dillon is pledged to, and of course he cannot get out of it, unless the Gladstonites formally abandon the Irish cause, which probably they cannot do. When the fulness of time comes the electoral pendulum will swing the other way; Gladstone will be in, and Parnell with him.

But the "impatience" of Davitt has another purpose than merely quickening the pace of the worn-out Liberal post-horse on the road to party victory. It is a warning to the Liberals not to be too liberal of compromise when their day of office comes. Of course what they will want to do is to grant the Irish the semblance of their claims without the reality, if they can thereby stop the mouth of the British democracy even though the Irish democracy is not satisfied. This is the reason why all Irishmen who are not precluded from it by official position should be steadily "impatient."

Those of our friends who are inclined to be "impatient," in another sense, of this long-dragging Irish Question, which bears with it so much that is indifferent or hostile to Socialism, should consider one remark made by Mr. Dillon in his speech which I believe to be made quite honestly and with a single heart. He said that all the old enmity which was once one of the master feelings of his heart had disappeared before the present action of the English democracy. So hollow, so easily got rid of, are these monstrous national antipathies which foolish persons believe to be so deeply rooted. If the Home Rule agitation does nothing else than destroy one branch of this deadly upas-tree of sham patriotism it will have been worth all the trouble.

Moralists are trying to find out causes for the horrors which have lately shocked the sensibilities of "cultured" society. Lord William Compton sees, as all people who have ever thought for a moment on the subject must see, that the condition of life in the East end slums is quite enough to account for such brutality, which is a necessary consequence of it. But what causes the condition of life in Whitechapel? The answer is plain: the *exclusive* culture of those whose sensibilities are so shocked by the brutality, the responsibility for which their greed and cowardice evades. These sensitive, moral, cultivated people are prepared to do anything (by the hands of others) which will sustain the inequality which is the foundation of modern society and which they glory in; and when the dark side of this glorious inequality is thrust on their notice, they are shocked and read moving articles in the newspapers—and go on eating, drinking, and making merry, and hoping it will last for ever, Whitechapel murders and all.

Have they considered a little event of which we have just had news, which comes of this determination of theirs to be thieves as long as possible? Another glorious victory for the British army, and indeed a real good cheap one, with the killing *all* on one side: 400 Thibetans killed and wounded and half a dozen slight hurts on the side of—culture. If the history of this slaughter had been given Homerically—*i.e.*, with abundance of realistic detail—it would have made a pretty good multiplication of a Whitechapel murder.

And was the reason for it any more excuse for this multiplied murder than the reason for the London horror? No. No worse cause could be found for a slaughter. It was perpetrated (and remember

it is one among hundreds) in order to keep going that degradation of life which Lord William Compton so much deplores, which he would doubtless remedy if he knew how to without destroying our "society" of inequality; but which under those circumstances he *cannot* know how to remedy.

Apropos of these "little wars," or great murders, our friend the *Star* has a well-meant article which misses the point disastrously. After having attacked the commercial Jingo policy, it says: "Our profound conviction is that *as a rule*" (italics ours, in honour of journalistic qualification) "warfare tends not to the advancement, but to the postponement of large commercial relations with another country. . . . Trade may be compared to a great natural force—silent, invisible, and invincible," and so on after the Manchester manner. In short, our contemporary, for the moment at least forgetting the blessings of civilisation, such as Vandeleur evictions and London rent-grabbing from working-men, which it often laudably denounces, wants to purge the march of commerce of war and violence.

But unhappily it is *itself* war, and violence is of its essence, whether that violence takes the form of "the soldier with his gun or the sailor with his iron-clad," or the other form of the sword of cheapness and the spear of shoddy backed up by law—*i.e.*, the policeman *masking* the soldier and sailor—is a mere incident of its ceaseless, remorseless war. For as the aim is, so must the means be; and what is the aim of Commerce? Answer: to substitute its peculiar form of slavery for whatever it happens to find on the ground which it is bent on conquering; and that form of slavery is a "Society" (or gang of robbers) governed by rich men, who shall make slaves of the producers of goods without the expense of buying the said slaves and without the responsibility of feeding them. Friend *Star*, the Sikkim massacre is bad, and you do well to object to it (though you do *that* very mildly), but the cause of it is worse—*nay* the worst.

*Re* the Salt Trust, the *Pall Mall* says: "The syndicate will for a time have a depressing effect upon the labour-market in the salt districts of Cheshire, as the low range of prices prevailing for the past five years is directly due to over-production. . . . Owing to intense competition, prices have fallen 50 per cent. during the past ten years. Great confidence is felt in the future of the trust in Cheshire, where the money has been largely subscribed."

I beg to propose a design for the seal or badge of this glorious modern gild, to wit: A Benefactor of Humanity with one hand in the pocket of a working-man, a salt operative, and the other in the pocket of the public typified by a respectable London mechanic. It is indeed pleasing to see the B. H.'s so naive and outspoken as to the robbery which they are contemplating, and we Socialists should wish them all success. Monopoly has, unhappily, so far been made bearable by competition, but monopoly without competition will turn out to be altogether unbearable, and will help on the beginning of the end.

The vegetarians have tried to collect the London parsons to sing their praises, but the reverend gentlemen for the most part declined to be caught with chaff. Only thirty attended, presided over by Canon Farrar. I have not a word to say against vegetarianism voluntarily practised on the grounds of its suiting the health of the practiser, or of a natural sentiment against "corpse-eating" as a friend of ours has called it; but in most more or less laudable associations that are not Socialist there lurks a snake in the grass; and the reptile is not lacking in the verdant meadow of vegetarianism. Canon Farrar, *e.g.*, not knowing, I suppose, what the devil to say, praised it because it would lead to simplicity of life, and because it would be a remedy for poverty.

Simplicity of life—good, most good, so long as it is voluntary; but surely there is enough involuntary simplicity of life, *i.e.*, hard fare, already; and to live poorly is no remedy against poverty, but a necessity of it. And really, hasn't Canon Farrar had time amidst his arduous ecclesiastical duties to learn that if our whole capitalistic

society were to become vegetarian together, the "poor," i.e., the producers, would be forced to live upon vegetarian cag-mag, while the rich, i.e., the proprietary class, lived upon vegetarian dainties? When we are a society of equals we shall be able to consider all these niceties of life, and to do what we think best. Meantime, I bid Canon Farrar and the school of social reformers to which he belongs, not to evade the real question: Why are we not a society of equals? W. M.

## LABOUR'S TRIANGULAR PROBLEM;

OR, MEN VERSUS MACHINES.

(Continued from p. 306.)

THE statement that numbers of men were being deprived of means of living by increased machinery, used to be met by the statement that they could find work at some other trade, and that there were so many more engineers and machine makers wanted that all came out level in the end. Leaving out of consideration the absurdity of the nineteen agricultural labourers finding employment as reaping machine makers, it must be patent that as the same process is going on in every trade, the forced idleness must be increasing in every trade, even in the trade which is the great agent of all this idleness, the engineers and machine makers.

It is rather startling to find at what a rate this disestablishing of disestablishers is going on; to find how very rapidly the engineer is being hoisted on his own petard.

Mr. Shaftoe, President at the Trades' Union Congress, Sept. 4, 1888, dealing with "Labour-saving Machines," said:

"There is scarcely any branch of industry to which these mechanical inventions have not been applied; and the effects have been intensified by the subdivision of labour. We find, for instance in the use of steam hammers, that nine men have been displaced out of every ten formerly required. Machinery has displaced five men out of every six in the glass bottle trade; in the manufacture of agricultural implements 600 men now do the work which fifteen or twenty years ago required 2,145, thus displacing 1,545. In the production of machinery itself, there is a saving of 25 per cent. of human labour; and this even reaches 33 per cent. in the production of metals. In the boot and shoe trade one man now does the same work as required five; we find a single lace machine displacing 2,000 women; in paper-making 10 persons can do what used to require 100; in ship-building the displacement is 4 or 5 out of every 6; in clothing 1 man can do what used to employ 6 to 9. The general effect during the last 40 years is a saving of labour to the extent of 40 per cent. in producing any given article."

No matter which way one looks there is no variation, not the slightest; increased production to the capitalist, the machinery controller; decreased consumption to the worker, the producer. A striking example was given by one of the speakers at the Industrial Remuneration Conference, 1885. Mr. J. G. Hutchinson made an elaborate statement to prove the general improvement in the worker's position; he was answered by Mr. James Aitkin (Greenock Chamber of Commerce):—

"In carpet weaving fifty years ago the workman drove the shuttle with the hand, and produced from forty-five to fifty yards per week, for which he was paid from 9d. to 1s. per yard, while at the present day a girl attending a steam loom can produce sixty yards a day, and does not cost her employer 1½d. per yard for her labour. That girl with her loom is now doing the work of eight men. The question is, How are these men employed now? In a clothier's establishment, seeing a girl at work at a sewing machine, he asked the employer how many men's labour that machine saved him. He said it saved him twelve men's labour. Then he asked, 'What would those twelve men be doing now?' 'Oh,' he said, 'they will be much better employed than if they had been with me, perhaps at some new industry.' He asked, 'What new industry?' But the employer could not point out any except photography; at last he said they would probably have found employment in making sewing machines. Shortly afterwards he was asked to visit the American Singer Sewing Machine Factory, near Glasgow. He got this clothier to accompany him, and when going over the works they came upon the very same kind of machines as the clothier had in his establishment. Then he put the question to the manager, 'How long would it take a man to make one of these machines?' He said he could not tell, as no man made a machine, they had a more expeditious way of doing it than that; there would be upwards of thirty men employed in the making of one machine; but he said 'if they were to make this particular kind of machine, they would turn out one for every four and a-half days' work of each man in their employment.' Now, there was a machine that with a girl had done the work of twelve men for nearly ten years, and the owner of that machine was under the impression that these twelve men would be employed making another machine, while four and a-half days of each of these men was sufficient to make another machine that was capable of displacing other twelve men."<sup>1</sup>

It has been urged by the orthodox economists that although the individual worker may have suffered from his enforced idleness, that since competition resulted to the good of the public generally, competition must continue.

In some cases the reduction in the sale price of an article has been reduced in proportion to the reduced sum paid for labour, but in hundreds of instances which could be given, the whole of the amount saved has for years been the sole profit of the monopolist machinery-controller.

When Charles Babbage issued his 'Economy of Machinery and Manufactures,' great as had been the strides made in developing the power of steam, its position then was not a circumstance as compared with to-day. For a book dated 1832, in many respects its tone in dealing with the worker was in advance of the day; some hard knocks are dealt at employers and monopolists. It is admittedly in favour of machinery and economy in manufacture; but, when dealing with the "Effects of the Application of Machinery," the summing-up is roughly, which is the best—or rather, which is the least evil—sudden death or slow starvation?

<sup>1</sup> 'Report,' p. 72.

"It is almost the invariable consequence of such improvements ultimately to cause a greater demand for labour, and often the new labour requires a higher degree of skill than the old; but, unfortunately, the class of persons who have been driven out of the old employment are not always qualified for the new one; and in all cases a considerable time elapses before the whole of their labour is wanted. One very important inquiry which this subject presents is the question, Whether it is for the interest of the working-classes that any improved machinery should be so perfect as to defy the competition of hand-labour, and that they should be at once driven out of the trade by it; or whether it is more advantageous for them to be gradually forced to quit the trade by the slow and successive advances of the machine?"

The italics are Babbage's, and to me seem to suggest that Babbage was rather wanting to give the machinery owners a hint to be careful. There may be some question as to which would be best or worst for the worker—rapid starvation or slow —there is no manner of doubt as to which has been the best for the exploiters. By the gradual process it has been possible to bring the workers to a degree of endurance of suffering, which by no conceivable stretch of imagination could have come about by a sudden change. By slow degrees we have become accustomed to an immense army of unemployed, which would have sent society to everlasting smash had it been formed or made suddenly by one or two great machines, instead of an infinite number of changes towards automatism.

Constantly, constantly, constantly growing, growing, growing, recruited by tens, by hundreds, by thousands, the army of wholly unemployed, and the army of very irregularly employed, has grown until to-day there is ready for some great Carnot of Labour such a body as never the Hannibals of the past led to the victory of the gory field.

The passage in Babbage above quoted continues thus, "The suffering which arises from a quick transition is undoubtedly more intense; but it is also much less permanent than that which results from the slower process." Just so: Had the mechanical perfection of to-day been possible in say two or three years, instead of taking from eighty to a hundred to bring about, there would have been enough of energy to overthrow the tyrant and break the cords; but year by year the sufferer became more and more accustomed to the suffering; year by year new cords were woven on, and it is only just now that education, a quickened intelligence and mental grasp, is enabling him to understand the causes of his troubles, and will enable him to do by wit and mind what might have been done by main force, had only the accumulated miseries of to-day have been placed on one generation, instead of filtering down through several.

The "right to live" must be made to mean something nearer "right living" than the mere standing by a machine to feed it with raw material to make a monopolist's profit.

The full displacing power of machinery is hardly sufficiently realised by many. The displacement has in most cases been so gradual, and therefore the starvation so gradual, that the starvelings have gradually become accustomed to it, and quietly submitted. But these gradual displacements have been tolerably severe in cases.<sup>1</sup>

In hollow-ware, for instance, Richard Roberts, civil engineer, stated in evidence given to House of Lords' Committee on Patent Law Amendment, that by "stamping up" from sheets of metal the labour-cost was one-fiftieth of that by the old process. A certain article made at one blow by machine in France could not be done in England without fifty blows and ten annealings; made by machine at the rate of ten a minute, but by hand hardly ten in the hour.<sup>2</sup>

This means, therefore, that out of each fifty men employed, forty-nine would by the machine be dispensed with. Since 1851 this stamping machine has been much improved.

In evidence before a Commons' Committee 1829, Joseph Merry, ribbon-manufacturer, said he was possessed of an improvement in making ribbon velvets which enabled him to make forty pieces while another man was making one,<sup>3</sup> and exhibited a sample of the goods made.

This book of Macfie's from which I have been quoting has more similar evidence as to the displacing power of machinery; but the work is specially devoted to a question which leads immediately to one other point on which a few words must be said when dealing with the question of "Men v. Machines." THOS. SHORE, jun.

(To be continued.)

A BRAVE PARSON!—Rev. F. Minton, vicar of Midlewich, Cheshire, presiding at a meeting addressed by Mr. Brunner, M.P., said Liberals had the greatest cause for congratulation on the democratic spirit which every month was becoming more apparant among workmen. They had not yet crushed out injustice to Ireland, but they had stirred the people. "There was no more useful gospel than the gospel of discontent. The world was not meant for privileged parasites, and workmen should combine to hasten the social revolution."

HOW A CHINESE MAGISTRATE SETTLED A DISPUTE.—That modern Haroun-al-Raschid, the magistrate of the Mixed Court at Shanghai, had lately before him a complicated family dispute about land, which he settled in this way. Finding that only one lawyer was engaged in the case, he had this gentleman haled before him and soundly whipped; then he invited the litigants to dinner with him, enlivened the repast by having the sermon from the sacred edict on the benefits of harmony between relatives read out, and lectured the parties severely as obstinate blockheads.

<sup>1</sup> How exceedingly gradual in some cases may be seen by this example; "The present spinning machinery which we now use is supposed to be a compound of about eight hundred inventions. The present carding machinery is a compound of about sixty patents."—(Paul Rapsey Hodge, civil engineer: evidence before House of Lords, 1851; quoted in 'Copyright and Patents for Inventions,' R. A. Macfie, 1883, p. 233.)

<sup>2</sup> Report, 1851, quoted in 'Copyright and Patents for Inventions,' R. A. Macfie, 1883, p. 241.

<sup>3</sup> Macfie, p. 214.