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NOTES ON NEWS.

THE "intelligent and sympathetic" middle-classes do not seem to have had the strike-fever in a very severe form. After having contributed to the victory of the dockers (whatever that amounted to), they seem to have thought that they had exhausted all the claims that could be made on their "intelligent sympathy," and allowed the poor folk at Silvertown to be slowly crushed down by capitalist tyranny, without showing any signs that they were conscious of that terrible struggle against starvation with or without employment.

Of course, I except Stopford Brooke's eloquent appeal for justice to these poor people; but it fell upon the ears of a class who were not going to accept two such bothers in one year as *two* strikes that shocked their sensibility.

As to the gas-stokers' strike, that is quite another matter. For are they not in the receipt of quite splendid wages? Don't they get as much in a week as a very small gentleman of the proprietary class, or the parasitical class, gets in a day? What on earth can they want more? They want to be free to strike, forsooth, in case their employer thinks fit to put on the screw! What next? They will get ideas of independence into their heads, and what becomes of us, then, the pensioners, of us the parasites? No, no, this is no case for sympathy; these men are our *enemies*, and, what is more, are beginning to know it. Instead of subscribing *for* them, let us use brute force *against* them, and show them that *they* shall not be allowed to argue with their fellow-workmen.

Well, gentlemen! there is much truth in this view of your period of convalescence from the strike fever. These men are indeed your enemies, for their interests are opposed to yours; and as a class, gentlemen, whatever you may think in your more maudlin moments, when your hypocrisy gets so much the better of your tyrannical greed that it even deceives yourselves, you will not and cannot give up anything to the workers beyond the mere subsistence wage according to the standard of the day, unless you are compelled to do so by force; *i.e.*, by the fear of material injury to your purse or persons.

And that standard of the day, gentlemen, do you really trouble yourselves as to the lowness of it? the horror and disgrace of such a mass of semi-starvation? Silvertown did not move you. And indeed why should it have done so, when such a livelihood is so common? When you know, or could know by asking a very few questions, what the standard of livelihood is for our field-labourers! When you know, and cannot help knowing, that you have made the beautiful garden-like country-side of England into a mere hell of barrenness for the people who feed you! A hell from which the country people flee to that other hell of the city slums, to make for you fresh entanglements of that "social problem" that you gabble about continuously—with no real intention of trying to solve it.

Who can wonder, so sweet as life is for rich people in our civilisation? Nothing short of the fear of imminent break-up, of a break-up of the "status and lives" of those now living at least, can really fix their attention on the fate of the "nation of the poor" amongst whom they dwell; and, for the rest, the strikes do not seem to them threatening enough for them to trouble much about them. As for the field-labourers, they know how weak they are; perhaps they think them weaker than they really are; and the cry of "the land for the people" frightens them so little, that some of them will even coquette with it in the game of politics, which is the top amusement of the proprietary classes. Let us hope that we may live to see the day when they will learn what it really means—to wit, the abolition of the class of compulsory pensioners.

I wonder whether these strike-cured gentlemen noted, as I did, a little incident of civilisation which took place the other day about the Solomon Islands, where one of our war-ships was used for the safe

amusement of "punishing" the islanders for cannibalism? Did it in that case occur to them, as it did to me, that while the poor devils of Solomon Islanders were engaged in eating their enemies, the "superior persons" of British Islanders were eating the people whom they call their friends and fellow-countrymen; their equals before the law, and before God, as the cant phrase goes?

Cannibalism for cannibalism, it seems to me, that that of the poor ignorant poverty-stricken Solomon Islanders is less deserving of punishment than that of the British Islanders; and that the word "punishment" ought to make the latter shake in their shoes, if ever they think, as I fear few of them do, of the natural results of artificial compulsory poverty in a land which nature and the traditions of labour would make so wealthy for all people if the non-producers did not eat up the lives of the producers after the manner of civilised cannibalism.

W. M.

Now is the chosen time of the charity-fiend, the busiest season for the professional philanthropist. At Christmas-tide, the most hide-bound bourgeois will allow himself to be moved, either by compassion or prudence, into rendering back to the poor some infinitesimal part of what he has been busily stealing from them all the year. But, having for so long devoted all his energies to getting, he is unskilled and awkward at giving. Not only that; he would be made uncomfortable if himself brought face to face with the misery he has been making. Even if he took himself and his charity quite seriously, he would still be made uncomfortable; and if, as would probably happen, a dim perception of the humbug and blasphemy of it all forced itself upon his hardened conscience, he would be unable to face his victim without a blush. So that, all things considered, he would very decidedly prefer not to come into close relations with the recipient of his "bounty."

The workman or his wife, on their side, are ridden with a fearful dread of the master and of the landlord; there is so strongly associated with them the fear of dismissal in the one case, of eviction or a rise of rent in the other, that a personal interview is, to put it mildly, rather too suggestive of unpleasantness. It would bring to mind so many scenes of the past, that the pleasantness which would attend the friendly meeting of free men, and the pleasure of accepting a gift from one whom one liked and respected, would be very far removed indeed from the actual realities. So far, indeed, that those realities would more resemble to the workman, either a contemptuous flinging of degrading alms or a shamefaced half-measure of would-be atonement for the wrongs he had suffered.

Here, then, is a field for the philanthropist; here is a gap into which he can fling himself; a function he can justify his existence by fulfilling. On the one hand he can relieve the benevolent landlord or employer of all trouble or responsibility beyond writing out a cheque; and on the other, he can save the workman at his charity-dinner or under his charity-blanket (special quality: see Messrs. Vampire and Co.'s Christmas price-list) from having his appetite spoiled, or his angry passions roused, by the strong contrast between his well-fed benefactor and his unfortunate self. So, into a charitable conduit, with a leak in it here and there, the self-sacrificing philanthropist turns himself, and waxes fat on the consciousness of well-doing. A cheque placed in his right hand becomes coal or soup or blankets in his left. He is a close follower of scriptural commands, and his right hand very rarely knows what his left hand doeth: in other words, so absorbed is he in heavenly work that so base and material a thing as a balance-sheet does not occur to him.

Nor does he ever lose sight of the heavenly side of his mission; the bodily comforts (?) he sparingly administers are made the baits wherewith he fishes for the souls of men. The bread is seasoned and the blankets embroidered with scriptural admonitions to contentment and obedience, with explanations of the worthlessness of perishable bodies as compared with immortal "souls." All of which leads up to the moral, that this is the best of all possible worlds; that his hearers ought to be happy, and would be if they only looked at things in the