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WEEKLY; ONE PENNY.

THE LESSON OF THE HOUR.

THE labour revolt in the East-end, whatever the result of the dock-labourers' strike may be, will leave a lasting impression behind it, at least on the working men. The wiseacre Norwood, in his speech of Tuesday last, made the very remarkable discovery that "the strike was aimed at capital and employers generally," and seemed to think that this *discovery* was a set-off against his other shortcomings.

As a matter of fact, it is just this element of conscious or semi-conscious attack on the slave-drivers generally which distinguishes this strike from the ordinary trades-union bickerings. These latter, as individual struggles, have been usually little more than business disputes between the two parties to a contract, recognised as such by both parties to it. But this is a revolt against oppression: a protest against the brute force which keeps a huge population down in the depths of the most dire degradation, for the benefit of a knot of profit-hunters; and there is no doubt that nothing except the physical force of the executive which is, as it were, keeping the ring in this fight between the public and the shareholders, prevents the revolt from achieving far more success than the attainment of its immediate and declared aims.

In short, other strikes have been, on the surface, strikes of the business-accessories of the factory against its financial managers; this is a strike of the poor against the rich.

Let us hope that those of the respectable classes who have so loudly expressed sympathy with the strikers understand this: because if they do, it gives us a dawning hope that they will be prepared to meet us half-way when the crisis comes, when the workmen have come to understand definitely their full claim. For indeed they may be sure that this will be the only way to prevent those terrors which haunt the dreams of the the useless rich; it will be worth more to the pleasure of their lives than all the array of brute force, which they will certainly not always be able to depend upon; since, after all, that force is necessarily made up of men who are *workmen* forced by ill-luck into the ranks of the soldiery and the police.

As Burns hinted when the guards passed the meeting on Tower Hill the other day, they who are now hapless tools of the rich will presently become their hapless slaves once more, as they were before they put on their livery-coats.

Meantime, do not let us deceive ourselves as to the amount and quality of this respectable sympathy. We will not be ungenerous; we are quite sure that with many of the well-to-do the sympathy is genuine; that the horrible poverty of the East-end workers (and how many thousands outside the East end) has touched their hearts; and these people will become Socialists of some kind before the end. But I fear that they are in the minority among the respectables (or rather I know it) and that the rest have been rather *cowed* into silence, or into venting their irritation against the strike, by falling foul of Norwood and his gang; who, after all, are only following the necessary custom of the *whole gang*.

If this were not so, why do not the subscriptions to the strike fund amount to £20,000 or £30,000 instead of what they amount to now? They are workmen's pennies, somewhat eked out by contributions from a few of the better off; mostly those who can least afford it.

One word about the withdrawn manifesto of the Strike Committee. It was to have been expected that it would be attacked furiously by the capitalist press, but it was not to be expected that any calling themselves Socialists should have attacked it; and it is most lamentable that they should have done so, as they may perhaps see by the avidity with which their opinions were recorded by the capitalist press. For us surely the mere fact that it was thought possible to bring about a general strike in London remains the central point in the history of

the strike; let us hope that the aspiration toward the use of such an effective weapon against Capital may remain in the minds of the more considerate of the workers and bring forth fruit before long.

"A good man will be contented fast enough if he be fed and clothed sufficiently; but if a man be not well fed and clad, he is a base wretch to be contented." So says William Cobbett, and certainly the strikers might have one more banner with this inscription written on it. We have learned a good deal since William Cobbett's time, and some of us have become very "refined" indeed; but still on this foundation of victuals and shelter without anxiety must you build "refinement" and all.

Those who are "discontented" on the grounds given by Cobbett, know all about the meaning of that phrase so often used, "insufficiency of food and shelter"; and I am afraid it says little for the keenness of imagination at the present day, that those who have *not* suffered the insufficiency have so very little an idea of what it means. From that unimaginative content of the well-to-do comes all that covert hatred of the poor as inconvenient people, which is so common amongst us, and will one day (who can doubt it?) be so bitterly revenged.

This is the cause of the filling of the jails with manufactured criminals, a sort of criminal capital to be used for the production of more criminals; the preaching of thrift to people earning precarious starvation wages; the horrors of the workhouse, where poverty is punished for being poor; the horrors of the slum, which mocks the beauty of the earth outside the city, and the attempt to get rid of which is thrust aside as an insoluble problem; while all sorts of miracles, chemical, mechanical, and what not, are being invented for the benefit of capitalistic man, each one of them a million times more difficult than the due feeding and housing of all industrious persons.—IF we could but once have the wits to cease oppressing others for our own discomfort.

One thing is to me certain, that anyone of the well-to-do class whose imagination is sufficiently touched for him to have a vision of poverty and to gain an inkling of what it means, must either become a Socialist of some sort, or else join Mr. Justice Stephen's Religion of Inhumanity; and rather than that they had better, for their own sakes, have been knocked on the head while they were young enough to be innocent of cynicism at least. I say to all rich men, "Once feel what poverty is, and you must either be a Socialist or a cruel tyrant conscious of your tyranny." Are there such men? I should hope only a very few, and that the rest who sin against the people do so out of sheer stupidity.

The Great Strike does seem (as such things sometimes will) to have enlightened these last a little, to have touched their sluggish imaginations. If that could last, it would be something of a gain if there were no other. Yet I cannot help thinking that fear was an element of that enlightenment, at all events with many.

Meantime, surely a man of any imagination must have felt both puzzled and disgusted at the sentences on the men for intimidation. Here was the public sympathising with the efforts of the men to gain a better livelihood, and scolding at their immediate tyrants the Dock Companies; and yet through their magistrates and police-courts these very same sympathisers were punishing the strikers for doing what was necessary to carry on the strike. And this although the capitalist papers—*e.g.*, the *Daily News*—admitted that the intimidation was probably merely formal, and that the men were quite willing to accept the intimidation as an excuse for coming out. Certainly hypocrisy is a very useful—virtue—and one cannot wonder that it is so sedulously cultivated in the first commercial country, the *most practical* people, in the world.

The recovery of trade, the cessation of depression, has been crowed over considerably of late; and some persons, both foes and friends,

have seen in it the herald of the disappearance of Socialism; a most stupid assumption, and on the part of friends most cowardly, as has been pointed out in these columns a week or two back. But in any case a full recovery of trade to the period of Mr. Gladstone's "leaps and bounds" is a very unlikely event. Even now in the full flush of the "recovery" we find the cotton-trade in a disastrous condition; Blackburn, *eg.*, which but less than a year ago, was, as I was told when there, doing as brisk a business as might be, now shutting up mills on all hands.

By all means no fatalistic folding of the hands for Socialists! Let us go on with our work as briskly as possible, whatever temporary discouragements we may meet with. But this we may be sure of: first, that modern capitalism is doomed to destroy itself; and secondly, that no new form of capitalism can arise from its ashes: that nothing but Socialism can arise from them.

W. M.

ABSTINENCE.

I AM not a total abstainer, nor a vegetarian. Although I believe in Malthusianism as a theory, I scorn the life of a cold-blooded bachelor. It goes without saying that I smoke a pipe. I have no great admiration for abstentions of any kind. There are thin people whose only virtues consist of abnegation, which, when you note the superior pleasure it seems to afford them, is no great mortification of the flesh after all. Surely a man is admirable more for the good he does than for the evil he abstains from doing. I can conceive of a person so anxious to avoid evil that he would miss all opportunity of doing good—his rule of life being a mere wary evasion of danger and difficulty. Indeed, one does not need to conceive such persons; we all know them.

I have known a glass work wonders in the way of thawing frosty reserve, which, but for its kindly influence, would never have dissolved. As for a pipe, to praise its offices would carry me beyond my depth. When I see a man who fidgets as he sits, who does not know what to do with his feet and hands, who never dreams or philosophises, I judge at once that his education has been neglected—that he does not smoke. Smoking is an employment which, providing amusement, while leaving the mind clear and free, reconciles men to physical passivity, and makes patience possible. By disposing men to follow things to their roots, it develops the bump of causation; and the person who smokes can afford to think twice before he speaks.

And yet I feel that I ought to be a teetotaler. The sociability that requires drink to call it forth is not worth much; and how many men have sworn eternal friendship at the street corner after a carouse, and ever after passed one another with a dry and distant nod. If drink sometimes performs the social function of forming and cementing friendships, it has ruined more friendships than ever it formed. To say nothing of the expenditure of money, time, and health over drink, it befogs the brains of those who have need of all the brains they possess to enable them to circumvent the enemy. The fellow who shouts his beery applause at whatever you say, and effusively shakes your hand at the close of a meeting, disgusts the by-standers and is a nuisance and a disgrace to every cause he favours.

There is an immense deal of truth in what the temperance people say as to the widely pervasive anti-social effects of intemperance. The large proportion of the people who live in slums are there, directly, or indirectly, through drink. There are, indeed, thousands of widows in the slums who, like Mrs. Nubbles, in "The Old Curiosity Shop," support a family by charring, sewing, and matchbox-making, and, by hard work, manage to preserve a measure of decency and self-respect. But was it hard work, or drink, that took away the husbands? Probably, a good deal of both, but especially drink, which, when it does not cut off the drinker precipitately, shortens his life by an insidious process of devitalisation. Drink helps to fill our prisons and asylums. It leads the giddy girl into harlotry. It carries distress and sorrow into millions of homes. It robs the masses of the education that might go on after the lad or lass has left school. It reconciles the miserable to their misery. I know scores of youths who look forward to their "pint" on Saturday night, and who, while that can be had, find the drudgery and abuse of the rest of the week tolerable. Your pothouse politician is no great social force.

The workers of Britain are said to spend about one hundred million pounds a year in liquor. That is not the entire national drink bill, which I have seen stated at one hundred-and-thirty-six millions; but the most enthusiastic temperance advocate will admit that the upper and middle classes contribute thirty-six millions of that amount. Well, if the masses spend one hundred million pounds in drink, I have no hesitation in saying, although I contribute my mite to this grand total, that it is one hundred millions too much; for I would not have liquor used even as a medicine. I know that doctors disagree; but intelligent people usually incline to one view or the other, whether they care to admit it or not; and I have adopted the view that alcohol, as a medicine, does more harm than good, and that any good it does could be better accomplished by other means.

Some of our comrades contend, according to the theory of the iron law of wages, that if the workers did not spend this money on drink they would not get it to spend at all. I myself have, I regret to say, blundered into this contention when, in the hurry of speaking, a better argument against the claim of teetotalism escaped my recollection. The iron law theory, as applied to total abstinence, will not bear examination. It is easy to see that if the workers did not spend their money on drink they could spend it on something else. Could not the standard

of comfort be kept as high under a system of total abstinence as it is at present? Nay; could it not be raised higher? I am aware that saving, living beneath one's income, might, if generally practised, have the effect of lowering wages. (I say *might*, because the so-called iron law of wages has no great rigidity about it, but can be, and is, defeated by combination and legislation). But to save money by overcoming a bad habit does not involve that we should live on less. The money spent on drink could, and, if the drinking were stopped, would, be spent on useful articles, the manufacture of which would benefit the worker as producer, and the use and enjoyment of which would benefit the worker as consumer.

It is not worth much to say that the man who drinks his wages as he earns them has nothing to fall back upon in the event of a strike. He will be under strong temptation to turn rat, or scab, and he will be likely to put up with more oppression from his foreman, say, than the man who feels he can afford to be out of a job for a week, while he looks for work elsewhere. He must not suppose that prosperity makes for contentment. It is not the prosperous people, but the soakers, the people who are in debt and difficulties, who are our opponents. Political organisations and trade combinations are supported by the sober, rather than by the drinking, section of the working class. The periods of prosperity are the epochs of progress. Then the outlook takes the form of hope, and a steady hope is a better stimulus than despair.

If the hundred millions annually spent on drink were spent on clothing, food, furniture, and books, it would give employment to a million men at 30s. a week, after making full allowance for the displacement of labour caused by the abolition of the drink traffic. If the hundred millions spent on drink were spent on useful commodities, it would make up the difference between the most prosperous year and the most depressed year in trade. One hundred million pounds is about a thirteenth of the annual national income.

All this is very commonplace, and by association may seem even vulgar. But in following up new light, and in seeking to found a new gospel which will charm, as the old has failed to do, we are in danger of overlooking or underrating the value of the truth that lies in the commonplace.

Of course I do not for one moment pretend, as some temperance advocates do, that to shut the public house is to solve the social problem. I do not forget that, if the masses spend one hundred millions on drink, they are also fleeced every year of eight times as much by landlords, capitalists, and their hangers-on; that in interest alone they lose two hundred-and-fifty millions annually; that in rent 200 millions go past them. I do not barter, nor even abate, my ideal of the full-developed, well-rounded, communal life of the future for a teetotalist's mess of pottage, but I have jotted down these observations because I feel that some of us are not sound, not quite wise, on this matter.

I am of opinion, moreover, that the drink question is one with which we shall have to deal, either before, or soon after, we enter on the communal life. We all believe, with Bellamy, that to-day the position of humanity is as that of "a rosebush planted in a swamp, watered with black bog-water, breathing miasmatic fogs by day, and chilled with poison dews at night," and that when it is transplanted into the conditions of a better world, and has for the first time a chance of growing in goodness and beauty, it will be so transformed that we shall forget it was once the mean and vicious thing which it appears at present. We all believe this, I repeat, but one does not require to be a pessimist to see that the very virtues which the new order will call forth may, without due safeguards, lead us into the temptation of intemperance. To lift the yoke from the shoulders of toil-burdened, care-deadened men and women, and give them leisure, and the means of enjoying it, is a process not unattended with danger. It is not difficult to conceive of circumstances in which drink may exercise a fascination over generous and impulsive men; and I trust we shall always have impulsive men. Conduct is largely, if not wholly, determined by temptation, both good and bad, and it ought to be our aim to make it, as a great phrase-master has said, easy to do right and difficult to do wrong.

JAMES LEATHAM.

Live your own life in your own day. *You are not your grandmother!*

COLLECTIONS FOR DOCKER'S STRIKE.—Hammersmith and North Kensington branches of the S.L., £1; Aberdeen branch, £2 8s.; collected by Mr. Tochatti at Beadon Road, Hammersmith, on Monday, Aug. 26th, 16s. 3d.

Anyone who wants to see what a few workmen can do for themselves without injuring their fellows—even benefitting a good many of them—should send a stamp to the Hebden Bridge Fustian Manufacturing Society, Nutclough Works, Hebden Bridge, Yorks, for a pamphlet giving the story of the formation of the society and its subsequent history. It is a record of high resolve and strong endeavour, that we are glad to see is bearing fruit. If only the mass of the workers could see how easily masters are dispensed with, and how easy it is to combine!

SOCIALISM IN ABERDEEN.—A capital week's work has been done here. At indoor meeting on Monday, Leatham lectured to crowded audience on the question, "Why do we Punish Criminals?" *re* the Maybrick case; 5s. collected for dock labourers. The following meetings have been held at Castle Street during the week, the collections being for the strikers:—On Thursday night, speaker Duncan, collected 9s.; on Friday night, speakers, Duncan and Leatham, collected 6s.; on Saturday night, speakers, Duncan, Aiken, and Leatham, collected 19s. 4d.; large sale of literature; tall hat, which insinuated that we would "have a good booze off that," threatened by crowd with a ducking in the fountain. On Sunday afternoon, Duncan and Leatham addressed a meeting on the Inches, collecting 13s. 8d. Total for the five meetings, £2 13s. We are adding to our membership every week.—L.