

# THE COMMONWEAL

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WEEKLY; ONE PENNY.

### NOTES ON NEWS.

“He overtakes at last who tires not,” says an old proverb. In the face of a thousand failures and rebuffs, over a thousand apparently insurmountable barriers, seeing a multitude of men and women falling around us as we went, and many a trusted one dropping out of the ranks, sometimes to turn traitor; in spite of all dangers and discouragements we have kept on working for the Good Cause. Under all the strain and amid the trouble, we have held on our way unflinchingly; but it may be that we are become so inured to long-continued effort, that we do not fully realise how near we are to success. And now, in all truth, our reward would seem to be at hand. It may be only a false dawn this time, but the true dawn cannot be far behind. Nor is it easy to believe that it is not the real dawn. In every country the proletariat is stirring as it never stirred before; not even in the “Year of Revolutions” was there such a universal movement; never once has the feeling of international solidarity risen so high.

From Holy Russia, that mysterious land of terror, messages crowd fast upon one another, telling of this and that manifestation of the rising tide. From Germany we hear such news as this:

“A new Socialist song, with the refrain ‘*Das sind die Arbeitsmänner,*’ sung to the melody of the formerly prohibited Andreas Hofer song, is being widely sung in Berlin, and it is significant that soldiers and Socialists may be seen daily marching up and down the *Tempelhofer Feld* arm-in-arm singing the new *Volkslied*.”

France, Italy, Spain—every country in Europe sends cheering news of the activity and wakefulness of the workers. Even England, Conservative England, is moving more rapidly than her masters like, though more slowly than her neighbours.

“Labour Day,” May 1st, is drawing near, and already hearts are quickening at its approach. On the side of Labour it is looked forward to as what it is, a great manifestation of the solidarity of the workers of the world. On the side of the rulers it is looked upon with dread, resentment, and distrust. Right round the globe that day will fly the warm and fraternal greetings of men, who, a few short years ago, were ready and willing to fly at one another’s throats, but who are now learning to combine for mutual benefit. If one could only stand aloof in space a little, and see the earth revolve under one’s feet that day! As country after country came into sight, one would see the armies of Labour, marshalled under many flags, it is true, but with the red flag over all. Then, as that mighty panorama unfolded itself, one would realise that in all the history of the world there has not been such a mass of men moved with one object before.

In the very height of the Crusades there were fewer eyes turned toward Palestine than there are now toward our latter-day Land of Promise; the armies of Alexander, Xerxes, Napoleon, and all the conquerors who have led vast armies to victory, sink into utter insignificance when compared with the Army of Labour as it is to-day. Yet there are millions of the lukewarm and half-converted who cannot be counted yet, although they are being forced into the ranks. And what is to be done with this host? Is it to be led on to victory? Or be turned aside from attacking its enemies to pick shells upon the seashore?

It will be to our eternal disgrace, we Revolutionary Socialists, if this great occasion should be so belittled and vulgarised, by being taken hold of to promote catchpenny palliatives or to afford an opportunity for parliamentary place-hunting and political chicanery, that its true meaning will be overlooked. We must exert ourselves to the utmost to keep it from this degradation, and to press forward its true end and aim, the celebration of the international solidarity of Labour.

Not that we are or need be antagonistic to the demand for an eight-hour day, which has been to a certain extent mixed up with the larger question. We antagonise no amelioration of the workers’ position which can be wrought by themselves without danger to their ultimate and speedy emancipation. But we do and must oppose and explode

the specious promises of those who would persuade the workers to distrust their own strength and to rely upon anybody, emperor or M.P., who is outside their ranks and enrolled among their enemies; to “sell the sow and buy bacon,” surrender their own power and right of action in return for “gifts” which they might readily and more effectively take for themselves.

I notice that even in the discussion by the London Trades Council on Thursday of the Chamber of Commerce “conciliation” proposals, one of the delegates pointed out that the power of combination under the Trades Union Act was already in danger through parliamentary action. The representatives of the (rich) people will be only too apt to ask: “If you want us to do everything for you, why should you retain power to do anything for yourselves?”

By the way, that same discussion was in itself a sign of the times. Remembering what the London Trades Council was, and to a certain extent still is, how do the following speeches strike you?

Mr. Caiger (Cigar-makers’ Society) said the whole scheme [that of a permanent Board of Conciliation equally composed of capitalists and workmen] was fraught with danger to workmen. If they accepted this scheme they would be playing into the hands of the employers by giving them information they should not possess, and they would be undermining their trade organisations. Boards of conciliation had hitherto been failures, as witness the strikes of the miners, whose cases were always compromised out of existence. Mr. McBean (Compositors) opposed the scheme. Chambers of Commerce had failed to settle the dockers’ dispute in Liverpool, and it would be the same in London. Mr. Marks (Compositors) asked if they were to go cap in hand to the employers’ board of conciliation for an advance of 5 per cent. in their wages. They should like to see the employers’ profits before they submitted to the judgment of the boards of conciliation. Mr. Griffiths (Silver Plate Polishers) believed the scheme was the result of capitalist fear of the organisation of the workmen. The proposal simply meant to break up the trades unions. Mr. Left (Bricklayers) said he never knew a board of conciliation give the benefit of the doubt to the workmen in a dispute.

The scheme was unanimously rejected.

To think of that lunch in the servants’ pantry at Sandringham!

S.

The continental workers are going to show in an imposing manner their growing sense of international unity by making the *first of May* a general Holiday of Labour and a demonstration in favour of an eight hours’ working day. There is to be no manual work of any kind on that day, and the trades have agreed to go out in the open country for a regular feast, and to leave all the exploiters severely to themselves. The enthusiasm evoked by this idea is so great in Berlin and Vienna that at the headquarters of the Socialist party fears are entertained lest the zeal of the workers may overstep the bounds of discretion and give the barrack governments on the Spree and Danube the much desired pretext for a general massacre of the people. But I think that those who profess to be Socialists may be depended on to know what they are about, and that beyond a scuffle here and there the grand holiday demonstration will come off a success and with flying colours.

A. S.

### NEWS FROM NOWHERE:

OR,

### AN EPOCH OF REST.

BEING SOME CHAPTERS FROM A UTOPIAN ROMANCE.

CHAP. XII.—CONCERNING THE ARRANGEMENT OF LIFE.

“WELL,” I said, “about those ‘arrangements’ which you spoke of as taking the place of government, could you give me any account of them?”

“Neighbour,” he said, “although we have simplified our lives a great deal from what they were, and got rid of many conventionalities and many sham wants, which used to give our forefathers much trouble, yet our life is too complex for me to tell you in detail by means of

words how it is arranged; you must find that out by living amongst us. It is true that I can better tell you what we don't do than what we do do."

"Well?" said I.

"This is the way to put it," said he: "we have been living for a hundred and fifty years, at least, more or less in our present manner, and a tradition or habit of life has been growing on us; and that habit has become a habit of acting on the whole for the best. It is easy for us to live without robbing each other. It would be possible for us to contend with and rob each other, but it would be harder for us than refraining from strife and robbery. That is in short the foundation of our life and our happiness."

"Whereas in the old days," said I, "it was very hard to live without strife and robbery. That's what you mean, isn't it, by giving me the negative side of your good conditions?"

"Yes," he said, "it was so hard, that those who habitually acted fairly to their neighbours were celebrated as saints and heroes, and were looked up to with the greatest reverence."

"While they were alive?" said I.

"No," said he, "after they were dead."

"But as to these days," I said; "you don't mean to tell me that no one ever transgresses this habit of good fellowship?"

"Certainly not," said Hammond, "but when the transgressions occur, everybody, transgressors and all, know them for what they are; the errors of friends, not the habitual actions of persons driven into enmity against society."

"I see," said I; "you mean that you have no 'criminal classes.'"

"How could we have them," said he, "since there is no rich class to breed enemies against the state by means of the injustice of the state?"

Said I: "I thought that I understood from something that fell from you a little while ago that you had abolished civil law. Is that so, literally?"

"It abolished itself, my friend," said he. "As I said before, the civil law courts were upheld for the defence of private property; for nobody ever pretended that it was possible to make people act fairly to each other by means of brute force. Well, private property being abolished, all the laws and all the legal 'crimes' which it had manufactured of course came to an end. Thou shalt not steal, had to be translated into, Thou shalt work in order to live happily. Is there any need to enforce that commandment by violence?"

"Well," said I, "that is understood, and I agree with it; but how about crimes of violence? would not their occurrence (and you admit that they occur) make criminal law necessary?"

Said he: "In your sense of the word, we have no criminal law either. Let us look at the matter closer, and see whence crimes of violence spring. By far the greater part of these in past days were the result of the laws of private property, which forbade the satisfaction of their natural desires to all but a privileged few, and of the general visible coercion which came of those laws. All that cause of violent crime is gone. Again, many violent acts came from the artificial perversion of the sexual passions, which caused over-weening jealousy and the like miseries. Now, when you look carefully into these, you will find that what lay at the bottom of them was mostly the idea (a law-made idea) of the woman being the property of the man, whether he were husband, father, brother, or what not. That idea has of course vanished with private property, as well as certain follies about the 'ruin' of women for following their natural desires in an illegal way, which was of course a convention caused by the laws of private property."

"Another cognate cause of crimes of violence was the family tyranny, which was the subject of so many novels and stories of the past, and which once more was the result of private property. Of course that is all ended, since families are held together by no bond of coercion, legal or social, but by mutual liking and affection, and everybody is free to come or go as he or she pleases. Furthermore, our standards of honour and public estimation are very different from the old ones, and success in besting our neighbours is a road to renown now closed, let us hope for ever. Each man is free to exercise his special faculty to the utmost, and everyone encourages him in so doing. So that we have got rid of the scowling envy, coupled by the poets with hatred, and surely with good reason; heaps of unhappiness and ill-blood was caused by it, which with irritable and passionate men—*i.e.*, energetic and active men—often led to violence."

I laughed, and said: "So that you now withdraw your admission, and say that there is no violence amongst you?"

"No," said he, "I withdraw nothing; as I told you, such things will happen. Hot blood will err sometimes. A man may strike another, and the stricken strike back again, and the result be a homicide, to put it at the worst. But what then? Shall we the neighbours make it worse still? Shall we think so poorly of each other as to suppose that the slain man calls on us to revenge him? when we know that if he had been maimed he would, when in cold blood and able to weigh all the circumstances, have forgiven his maimer? Or will the death of the slayer bring the slain man to life again and cure the unhappiness his loss has caused?"

"Yes," I said, "but consider, must not the safety of society be safeguarded by some punishment?"

"There, neighbour!" said the old man, with some exultation. "You have hit the mark. That punishment of which men used to talk so wisely and act so foolishly, what was it but the expression of their fear? And they had need to fear, since they—*i.e.*, the rulers of society—were dwelling like an armed band in a hostile country. But we who live amongst our friends need neither fear nor punish. Surely if we, in dread of an occasional rare homicide, an occasional

rough blow, were to solemnly and legally commit homicide and violence, we could only be a society of ferocious cowards. Don't you think so, neighbour?"

"Yes, I do, when I come to think of it from that side," said I.

"Yet you must understand," said the old man, that when any violence is committed, we expect the transgressor to make any atonement possible to him; and he himself expects it. But again, think if the destruction or serious injury of a man momentarily overcome by wrath or folly can be any atonement to the commonwealth? Surely it can only be an additional injury to it."

Said I: "But suppose the man has a habit of violence,—kills a man a-year, for instance?"

"Such a thing is unknown," said he. "In a society where there is no punishment to evade, no law to triumph over, remorse will certainly follow transgression."

"And lesser outbreaks of violence," said I, "how do you deal with them? for hitherto we have been talking of great tragedies, I suppose?"

Said Hammond: "If the ill-doer is not sick or mad (in which case he must be restrained till his sickness or madness is cured) it is clear that grief and humiliation must follow the ill-deed; and society in general will make that pretty clear to the ill-doer if he should chance to be dull to it; and again, some kind of atonement will follow,—at the least, an open acknowledgement of the grief and humiliation. Is it so hard to say, I ask your pardon, neighbour?—Well, sometimes it is hard—and let it be."

"You think that enough?" said I.

"Yes," said he, "and moreover it is all that we can do. In addition we torture the man, we turn his grief into anger, and the humiliation he would otherwise feel for his wrong-doing is swallowed up by a hope of revenge for our wrong-doing to him. He has paid the legal penalty, and can 'go and sin again' with comfort. Shall we commit such a folly, then? Remember Jesus had got the legal penalty remitted before he said 'Go and sin no more.' Let alone that in a society of equals you will not find anyone to play the part of torturer or jailer, though many to act as nurse or doctor."

"So," said I, "you consider crime a mere spasmodic disease, which requires no body of criminal law to deal with it?"

"Pretty much so," said he; "and since, as I have told you, we are a healthy people generally, so we are not likely to be much troubled with this disease."

Said I: "Well, you have no civil law, and no criminal law. But have you no laws of the market, so to say—no regulation for the exchange of wares? for you must exchange, even if you have no property."

Said he: "We have no obvious individual exchange, as you saw this morning when you went a-shopping; but of course there are regulations of the markets, varying according to the circumstances and guided by general custom. But as these are matters of general assent, which nobody dreams of objecting to, so also we have made no provision for enforcing them: therefore I don't call them laws. In law, whether it be criminal or civil, execution always follows judgment, and someone must suffer. When you see the judge on his bench, you see through him, as clearly as if he were made of glass, the policeman to imprison and the soldier to slay some actual living person. Such follies would make an agreeable market, wouldn't they?"

"Certainly," said I, "that means turning the market into a mere battle-field, in which many people must suffer as much as in the battle-field of bullet and bayonet. And from what I have seen I should suppose that your marketing, great and little, is carried on in a way that makes it a pleasant occupation."

"You are right, neighbour," said he. "Although there are so many, indeed by far the greater number amongst us, who would be unhappy if they were not engaged in actually making things, and things which turn out beautiful under their hands,—there are many, like the house-keepers I was speaking of, whose delight is in administration, organisation, to use long-tailed words; I mean people who like keeping things together, avoiding waste, seeing that nothing sticks fast uselessly. Such people are thoroughly happy in their business, all the more as they are dealing with actual facts, and not merely passing counters round to see what share they shall have in the privileged taxation of useful people, which was the business of the commercial folk in past days. Well, what are you going to ask me next?"

WILLIAM MORRIS.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

(This Story began in No. 209, January 11, 1890. A few sets of Back Numbers can still be had.)

STRIKE IN THE STATES.—NEW YORK, April 11.—A thousand men employed in the building trade here have struck work owing to a firm of contractors refusing to employ union men.

THREATENED POLICE STRIKE.—The reports of a strike of the metropolitan police are by no means without foundation, says the *Pall Mall*. For some time past there has existed a feeling of considerable discontent at what is termed "the unfairness of the present pension rules," and this feeling is at the bottom of the trouble. There are also a number of men who are dissatisfied with the long hours and meagre pay, and these now come forward and add their grievances to the others. Some weeks ago Mr. John Burns asked that two men, well acquainted with the grievances of the force, should assist him in agitating the cause of the police. He made one stipulation—namely, that a sum of £600 should be raised in order to indemnify these two men in the event of their being discharged. It is said that there is no difficulty in raising the money, but that the martyr-champions are not forthcoming as yet. Several secret meetings have been held recently, and the agitation, which is going on strictly *sub rosa*, has already created a great deal of disaffection in the ranks of the metropolitan police.