NEWS FROM NOWHERE:

ON AN EPOCH OF REST.

BEING SOME CHAPTERS FROM A UTOPIAN ROMANCE.

CHAPTER XXII.

HAMPION COURT.

AND A PRAIDER OF PART TAKEN.

We have here, up a pretty room, paneled and carved, and as clean as a new pin; but the chief ornament of which was a young girl, light-haired and grey-eyed, but with her face and hands and bare feet tanned quite brown with the sun. She was very lightly clad, that wasobby as from choice, not from poverty, though these were the first cottage-dwellers I had come across; for her gown was of silk, and on her wrists were bracelets that seemed to me of great value. She was lying on a shew-ship near the window, but jumped up as soon as we entered, and when she saw the guests behind the old man, she clapped her hands and cried out with pleasure, and when she got into the middle of the room, we found it in perfect order, and greatly to the delight of our company. She was not only fresh, but more so, than I had expected to find out about her, and in her face was a sweet and lovely charm, and to my mind very pleasant:

"What!" said the old man, "you are pleased, are you, Ellen!"

The girl danced up to him and threw her arms around him, and said:

"Yes, I am, and so ought you to be grandfather."

"Well, well, I say," said he, "as much as I can be pleased. Guests shall be seated."

This seemed rather strange to us; stranger, I suspect, to my friends than to me; but Dick took the opportunity of both the host and his grand-daughter sitting out of the room to say more unconfortable:

"Him, perch! I am sorry we can’t do better for you, guests. The times, you see, are not so good, and we have had a good piece of salmon from London for you; but the times have grown mean and petty."

"Yes, but you might have had it now," said the girl, giggling, "if you had known that you were coming."

"It’s our fault for not bringing us, with our neighbours," said Dick, good-humouredly. "But if the times have grown petty, at any rate the perch haven’t; that fellow in the middle there must have weighed a good two pounds when he was showing his dark stripes and red fins to the minnows yonder. And as to the salmon, why, neighbour, my friend here, who comes from the outlands, was quite surprised yester-day morning when I told him we had plenty of salmon at Hamner-smith. I am afraid he has nothing to do with the salmon fishing."

He looked a little uncomfortable. And the old man, turning to me, said very courteously:

"Well, sir, I am happy to see a man from over the water; but I really must ask you to say whether on the whole you are not better off in your country; where I suppose, from what our guest says, you are bicker and more alive, because you have not wholly got rid of complications."

I had no desire to enter into that question, and certainly they are much more alive than those which are written now; and good sound unlimited competition was the condition under which they were written,—if we didn’t know that from the record of history. Here, in the books themselves, there is a spirit of adventure in them, and signs of a capacity to extract good out of evil which our literature quite lacks now; and I cannot help thinking that our moralists and historians exaggerate the unhappy spirit of the past days, in which such splendid works of imagination and intellect were produced.

Clara listened to him with restless eyes, as if she were excited and pleased; Dick knitted his brow and looked still more uncomfortable, but said nothing. Indeed, the old man gradually, as he warred to his subject, dropped his sneering manner, and both spoke and looked very seriously. But the girl broke out before I could deliver myself of the answer I was framing:

"Books, books! always books, grandfather! When will you understand?" I saw her face grow red and green while talking; "that all the light is lost by letting the veins and flowers of your mind wither in the garden, through which ran a little shiver of the summer night-wind, "look! these are our books in these days—and these," she said, stepping lightly up to the two lovers and laying a hand on each of their shoulders, "are the books you have read with your own hands and with your best knowledge and experience,—yes, and even you, grandfather!" (a smile ran over her face as she spoke), "with all your grumbling and wishing yourself back again, in the good old days, in which you could make our eyes, our skin, our very heads, sulkily, or have had to pay soldiers and people to take the folks’ victuals and clothes and houses away from them by force. Yes, these are your books; or at least, if you want more, we can not find work to the beautiful buildings that we raise up all over the country (and I know there was nothing like them in past times), wherein a man can put forth whatever is in him, and make his hands set forth his mind and soul."

She paused a little, and I for my part could not help staring at her, and thinking that if she were a book, the pictures in it were most wonderful. The colour, the anguish, the indescribable, made my eyes, light amidst the tan of her face, looked kindly on us all as she spoke. She paused, and said again:

"As for your books, I say daily that in spite of all their cleverness and soundness, and the art of telling the story, they are something lacking about them. Some of them, indeed, do here and there show some feeling for those whom the history-books call [poor], and of the misery of whose lives we have some inkling; but presently they give it up, and towards the end one must be very much an ass indeed to think that a heroine living happily in an island of bliss on other people’s troubles; and that after a long series of sham troubles (or mostly sham) of their own making, united by the silken gossamer of her faithful feelings and aspirations, and all the rest of it; while the world must even then have gone on its way, and dug and sewed and baked and built and carpentered round about these useless—animals."

Fairy! there! said the old man, reverting to his dry sulkily manner again.

"There’s eloquence! I suppose you like it?"

"Yes," said I, very emphatically.

"Well," said he, "now the storm of eloquence has lulled for a little, suppose you answer any question—that is, if you like, you know," quoth he, with a sudden access of courtesy.

"What question?" said I. For I must confess that Ellen’s strange and almost wild beauty had put it out of my head.

"What question?" said he. "First of all (except my catechising), is there competition in life, after the old kind, in the country whence you come?"

"Yes," said I, "it is the rule there."

"And I wondered as I spoke what fresh complications I should get into as a result of this answer."

"Question two," said the dear: "Are you not on the whole much freer, more energetic—in a word, healthier and happier—for it?"

He smiled. "You wouldn’t talk so if you had any idea of life. To me you seem as if you were living in heaven compared with us of the country from which I came."

"Heaven!" said he: "you like heaven, do you?"

"Yes," said I. "If happily, I am afraid; for I was beginning rather to resent his formula.

"Well, I am far from sure that I do," quoth he. "I think one may do more with one’s life than sitting on a dauph cloud and singing hymns."

I was rather nettled by this inconsequence, and said: "Well, neighbour, to be short, and without using metaphors, in the land whence you come, where the competition which produced these literature books which you admire so much is still the rule, most people are thoroughly unhappy; here, to me at least, most people seem thoroughly happy."

"No offence, guest,—no offence," said he; but let me ask you: you like that, do you?"

His formula, put with such obstinate persistence, made us all laugh heartily; and even the old man joined in the laughter on the sly. However, he was by no means beaten, and said presently: "I have nothing more all I can say is, that singing hymns so beautiful as my dear Ellen yonder would have been a lady, as they called it in the old time, and wouldn’t have had to wear a few raggs of silk as she is now, or to have browned herself in the sun as she has to do now. What do you say to that, eh?"

Here Clara, who had been pretty much silent hitherto, struck in, and said: "Well, really, I don’t think that would have mended matters, you know; or that they could have been made happier."

Dick didn’t see that she was pretty, clean-skinned a girl as might be met with anywhere at the best. Dick struck the beautiful arm rather shyly, and pulled down the sleeve again, while she blushed at his touch; and the old man said laughingly: "Well, I suppose you do like that, don’t you?"
Ellen kissed her new friend, and we all sat silent for a little, till she broke out into a sweet shrill song, and held on all encircled with the wonderful words of her grumbling, and looking so lovingly.

The other young people sang also in due time; and then Ellen showed us to our beds in small cottage chambers, fragrant and clean. As we left the room an hour later, the clock struck eleven and the evening quite extinguished my fear of the last night that I should wake up in the old miserable world of worn-out pleasures, and hopes that were false.

TO BE CONTINUED.

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

THE LABOUR REVOLT.

The Postman's Strike.

This strike has failed, mainly through the cowardice and weakness of the leaders. It will be remembered that on Monday, July 7, a meeting was held at Holborn Town Hall, to consider what action should be taken on account of the continued suspicions of men for attending the union meetings by the Postmaster-General. Through the advice of the union officials, the men decided to accept the mediation of the London Trades Council, and postponed the strike for twelve days. But the men insisted that if there was any attempt to bring blackleg labour into any post-office, all unionists should strike at once.

On Tuesday morning the men at the General Post-Office discovered, shortly after they had started work, that there were thirty blacklegs in the place, who were being removed, and if there was even a whisper that there would be a strike in the event of a refusal, the officials were obliged to submit to the demands of the blacklegs.

On Wednesday the blacklegs employed at the Parcels Post-Office at Mount Pleasant had to run for their lives before a furious crowd of men. Alarmed at the prospect of the existence of a powerful combination of blacklegs, the postmen to sign a paper promising that they would not strike during the crisis. This the men refused to do, according to the instructions of the union.

Then on Thursday Mr. Baikes determined on vengeance, and a hundred men were sent to the Mount Pleasant ill-trial, who were blacklegged was followed by suspensions and dismissals at other offices. Then the union officials gave the word to strike, and the men turned out at several offices. At Finbury Park they shut themselves in the office and refused to budge an inch. A number of tradesmen applied for their letters, when the postmen at the bars and dragged them out of their hands, crying, "No letters until we are treated as our equals."

There were many hundreds set upon by our gallant police and dragged from the office with brutal violence. At Leicest-

er Street, the men rushed into the offices and made a scene of excitement. Everywhere the cowardly postmen, who had not sufficient pluck to strike to remedy their own grievances, did their utmost to crush the postmen. These slovish bullies would take to a delight in the work. Never mind; Sir Edward Bradford will avenge the postmen, as the cowardly and unappreciative public will see.

But although the men turned out very well at many of the district offices — particularly North Islington, where, according even to official report, 108 left their work — yet at St. Martin's Lane they did not turn out. Here the men had lost confidence through the vacillating conduct of their leaders, and moreover had been deceived by a traitor on the executive of the union, who had given the promise of the blacklegs that it was safe for them to go out. Meanwhile Mr. Mahon had mysteriously disappeared, and they could get no word from him all day Thursday. The strike eventually turned out; so they determined to march on without him. He arrived, however, soon after, and on the P.O. Committee he made the statement that a committee had arrived at the Post-Office, he had vanished again, this time into a hansom cab, drove off, leaving the men to march along without their "leader." When they arrived at the meeting place, they found the hall full of a kind old man, despite his position, who asked them "where their leader was" — a question which they could not answer. After they had marched up and down two or three times, the superintendent informed them that he could not allow them to continue to do so, but they must break up and leave the road clear. This they did, and established pickets; but despite their "leaders," they had lost all hope, and the strike had evidently gone to pieces.

Monday, however, the strike did not quite turn out; it was evidently all over. A petition was received from 83 of the 94 men who struck in the Eastern district, begging in the most humble terms for a strike. The Postmaster-General pleased to reiterate them. This humiliating appeal only showed how thoroughly the men were broken down.

But these few men may lick the dust beneath Mr. Raikes' feet, it will avail them but little. That gentleman was very amiable to a deputation of postmen that waited upon him on Friday, when there was still a chance that they might succeed, yet he shows a very different temper nowadays.

On Saturday, when the possibility of a strike had vanished, eight men were dismissed; therefore it is not likely they will listen to their petition, as they might have saved themselves the humiliation.

Corruption in Parliament.

Many workmen have often wondered why it so often happens that a man who is honest and upright while working in the public interest outside the House of Commons, immediately becomes tainted and corrupt soon after he enters Parliament. In a great many cases it is within 24 hours after the speech of Mr. Cremer on the Directors' Liability Bill, given in the Railway House, will perhaps supply an answer to this question.

As to the present member of the House of Commons, the son of Mr. Cremer, and there had been so much of temptation put in his way. A few months ago he was introduced to the association of the hon. member for Kirkcaldy (Sir G. Campbell), but knowing the hon. member to be a cautious man, and to be in a position of authority, as he was, he was not so likely to be exposed to temptation. In the course of the conversation, Mr. Cremer asked the hon. member what thing he would do if he was present at the destruction of one of the houses. The hon. member said he would be cautious. There is a chance that a man might be deceived by such questions, and better keep his eyes open in matters of the utmost importance, after he was dismissed from the back office, and found himself in the grander offices of the House of Commons.

The Guards.

The Guards' grievances are being "squibbed into," and meanwhile the excess of duty which the men complained has been reduced. It looks as though the men are afraid to press the matter for "mutiny." No wonder, when the whole army is wincilling with discontent, only waiting a break to blow it into a flame.

POLICE BRUTALITY.

We have received several letters concerning the police brutality on Tuesday, July 8th, at Bow Street, and surrounding neighbourhood, of which we think our readers should be informed. The crowd appeared to us to be very peaceable and quiet, and of course the police bulleted the crowd with the opportunity of doing their duty. The instruction of the G division is specially noted for their ruffianism, and how shamefully they behaved our readers will see from the following:

On Tuesday night, after leaving the shrine of that glorious institution the International Arbitration and Peace Association at Extern Hall, I came upon a rather to-did recusant on my way home. I was accompanied by two ladies, one of whom was most eager to see what was going on. On reaching the foot of Bow Street, about 9.30, we found the street blocked by a crowd of policemen, so we remained in Catherine Street, just facing Drury Lane Theatre. The crowd, so far, was not excessively large, very angry, and composed of what I call the lower-middle class men; but there was an air of expectancy about the people, which showed that something was expected. We had not long to wait for the cry was "Here they come!" and a good many policemen came down the street at a trot, driving the people before them, accompanied by a number of policemen, who attempted to drive everyone off the sidewalk. They were a ragged lot, for police-beggars than the doorways, and the orderly street instantly became a scene of confusion. Of my companions were harrowed into a bar, and the door locked, but the other bravely remained with me in a doorway. The police now tried to make us leave our position by bullying, but as we refused to stir, they passed on. I and sometimes the performance was gone through, the crowd each time becoming more irritated and indignant, hoisting their on their way down, and accompanying their return with volleys of stones from the dark side streets. On one occasion, a large stone was hurled at the window of the public house, and for a moment the crowd seemed as if they were about to add to their collection; and so until the stone did not fall, but just passed the window of the house. When the police attempted to the house, they were met by cheers from the crowd. As I was about to leave the house, I cried, "Here comes the crowd," and they came down the street in masses. But the police were in the crowd. In the crowd, the with a great shout, surged up and swept her out of the way.

The effect of this show was that the art of the barricade is not unknown here, though at present in a very elementary stage. Just before the mounted police were expected down again, a number of the band of the band was in front of us, and placed broadside across the road; they then retired to await the result. This was the end of the conflict, and it was the success of the movement. The column of the house stopped by a bar, and the crowd was taken down, and we were breathlessly waiting the crush, about a dozen ominous bobbies dashed round and carried it off —just in time. It was now nearly half-past ten, so we made for home, having to make a large detour to reach Tottenham Court Road.

The following glaring instance of police brutality seems to show that by Tuesday night they were very thoroughly cowed by the merciless action of the police. I have often been told that they were within a stone's throw of revolution. Between 11 and 12 o'clock on that night I saw a respectable-looking young man standing at the corner of Great Queen Street and Drury Lane. He was the chief of the police, but I never saw anyone like him. He was a strong, big fellow, and as he moved away another guard came forward, and twisting his leg in the stomach of the police, he was violently pulled, but still the police were about rushed up to try and save him, when several more guards of the peace ran up and pushed the people back, while four of them gave him an almighty hard pull. This was done right in front of us, and my friend's body was a limb and carried him face downwards. The effect of the violence, was helpless, and very soon black in the face. The subsequent fate of this young man is unknown to me.

The press were very careful to state on the Wednesday that the presiding judge of the court at Bow Street was not aware of the violence on the part of the police. As a matter of fact some desperate charges were made by foot and horse police. Amongst the crowd opposite the buildings, there was a front wall of the house which was completely at that time.