

THE COMMONWEAL

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WEEKLY; ONE PENNY.

AFTER THE STORM, A CALM.

WE can hardly imagine that it is barely a week ago that London was filled with tumult and excitement. Unexpectedly the storm came upon us, and *even* we were taken by surprise. Who among the comfortable middle classes dreamt a month ago that their faithful servants the police—the Bow Street police, the picked men of the London force, the giants who guard Trafalgar Square against the assaults of the sacrilegious Socialist—would be in open mutiny? Little, too, did they think that the Guards—Her Majesty's Guards—would lead the way in revolt, and that their middle-class Government would be forced to send for another regiment to overawe the men in whom they once put their whole trust and confidence.

On the other hand, the whole Labour world is agitated, even the dullest, the most crushed among the workers, are raising their heads and dreaming of hope at last. Everywhere the talk is not of the virtues of Gladstone and Salisbury, nor the merits of Whig or Tory, the subjects of discussion are Strikes, Socialism, and the Great Revolution that is coming upon the world. The people have got new hope, a hope that nothing will take from them. They are beginning in their moments of exultation and excitement to defy the police and the military, and set at nought those who "are set in authority over them." "The Spirit of Revolt" is abroad. Two years ago you might search files of English newspapers and see nothing of "the spirit of revolt." It was a French phrase, utterly un-English. Now you may see repeated till you are almost sick of it in respectable Tory newspapers. Charming, is it not? It only shows how very ready our friends the journalists are to borrow the language of Revolutionary Socialists. Another instance, though rather a ludicrous one, is the origin of the phrase, "Who killed Cock Warren?" It was the cry with which Cunninghamham Graham was saluted on 12th November, 1888, at the meeting held to commemorate the anniversary of the martyrdom of our Chicago comrades and the massacre of Trafalgar Square. On that night Warren fell. The phrase caught the public fancy, became popular, and ultimately enshrined itself in a comic song that was sung on the stage of every music hall in London.

The notion also of gaining the eight hour day by a General Strike is forcing its way everywhere, and yet at one time we heard nothing of a General Strike but from a few Revolutionary Socialists—a sect that was so feeble that policemen, judges, jailors, and magistrates looked upon us with contemptuous toleration. That stage is passed now, and we almost seem to have passed our period of persecution also. Surely this must be so, when a Bow Street magistrate dismisses a charge against "a well-known Socialist," though the police had "sworn" that he was guilty of all sorts of "awful crimes."

"What can the world be coming to?" say old middle-class fogies. What? indeed! But to us the spectacle is full of hope and enthusiasm, for now we find our lightest words caught up and repeated again and again from press and platform. It is the advanced thinkers who lead the way; the multitude will follow those who have minds of their own, and speak without fear and flinching. Forward then, comrades! What have we to fear? A Government of doddering imbeciles; a hopeless, helpless mass of muddle and mediocrity, who are so confused and puzzled at the entanglement into which they have managed to get the "affairs of the nation," that they do not know whether to turn to the right or the left. And what have they to support their authority? A disorganised police, and a soldiery seething with mutiny. True, they have crushed the revolt; it has sunk into silence—for a time. True, the storm has passed and all is calm and quiet—for a time. But what a calm! The sky is grey and gloomy, and is growing blacker and blacker; the air is thick, close, and oppressive; a trembling of the earth, and muttered thunder in the distance. Surely this does not mean peace and quietness, but storm and earthquake. What of the winter full of gloom and terror which is now approaching? What of the commercial crisis coming nearer and nearer? What of the crash; ruin spread far and wide; closed factories; thousands thrown starving upon the streets; the spread of revolutionary ideas among the masses; wild hope in the hearts of the people? and yet among them starvation—bitter starvation—empty cupboards, hungry children, despair and desperation! Would

not a modern Lord Chesterfield find to-day in England all the signs that tell of the approaching Revolution?

We need not be statesmen or politicians to see this. The plain workman in his work-day talking to his mates, can feel the storm coming closer and closer. It was only the other day that one quiet and honest workman, not as a rule given to wild enthusiasm, said to us "that the London workmen had been so excited and discontented by recent Labour troubles, that they only needed a leader to sweep the present system into ruin!" Those who mingle with the people can judge of the truth of this; we, at least, can confirm it from personal experience. If this is so now, what will it be when the next depression comes? It is not certain that the people will starve with that Christian meekness so highly commended by the well-fed journalists of the capitalist press. Nor will Lazarus be content any longer to put up with the crumbs of insulting charity that fall from the rich man's table. He will rise and grasp the rich robber by the throat, demanding and taking his own. The storm has passed, and there is calm. Let us use this period of quiet to prepare for what is coming. Do not let the trumpet sound of the Last Day of a corrupt and rotten society find us lying in lazy slumber. Let us be up and ready for action, for we know not at what hour the Revolution cometh!

D. J. NICOLL.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN SOCIETY.

ALL the progressive races of man have gone through a stage of development during which society has been very different to what it is now. At present there is a very definite line of distinction drawn between the personal life of a man and his life as a member of society. As a rule, the only direction in which this social life is felt is in that of his nearest kindred—his wife, children, parents, brothers and sisters. This is so much the case that we to-day have given to the word *relations* (which should mean all those with whom a man has serious and continuous dealings) a fresh meaning, and made it signify only those near members of kinship aforesaid. For the rest most civilised men acknowledge no responsibility. Though the word State is in everybody's mouth, most people have but the vaguest idea as to what it means; it is even generally considered as a synonym to the Government, which also indicates either the heads of one of the political parties, or the vague entity called by Carlyle the parish constable—in other words, the executive power of the ruling classes in our society. So little do we feel any responsibilities to this hardly conceivable thing, the State, that while few indeed feel any loyalty towards it, most men do not realise it sufficiently even to feel any enmity against it—except, perhaps, when the tax-gatherer's hand is on the knocker.

Now all this is so far the result of a long series of history, which I must just hint at before one comes to the condition of the workman during its different stages,—a series of events which tended to give to the word *property* the meaning which it now has; a series of events which tended more and more to consider *things* as the important matter of consideration rather than *persons*; which I may illustrate by the fact that nowadays the law looks upon the *estate* as of more importance than the user of it, as for instance in the case of the estate of a lunatic, which it will defend to the utmost against all attacks, and treat as if it had a genuine life and soul capable of feeling all injuries and pains, while all the time the lunatic is under restraint.

I will now contrast this entire ignoring of the community (for that will be a better word than *State* to use at present) with the conditions under which men lived in earlier ages of the world, and through which, as I have said, all the progressive races have passed, some of them so early that when we first meet them in history they are already passing out of it into the next development. In this early period the individual is so far from feeling no responsibility to the community, that all his responsibilities have relation to the community. Indeed, this sense of responsibility, as we shall see later on, has only been completely extinguished since the introduction of the present economical and political system—since the death of feudality, in short: but in the period I am thinking about it was a quite unquestioned habit. The unit of society, the first, and in the beginning the only bond, was the narrowest form of clan, called the *gens*. This was an association of persons who

were traceably of one blood or kinship. Intermarriage between its members was forbidden, or rather was not even dreamed of: a man of the Eagle gens could have no sexual intercourse with an Eagle woman, nor thought of it. All property was in common within the gens, and descent was traced, not through the father, but through the mother, who was the obvious parent of the child. Whatever *competition* (war, you may call it, for competition was simple in those days), was outside the group of blood relations, each of which felt no responsibility for other groups or their members. But the fact that intermarriage was impossible within these groups brought about a larger association. Since an Eagle could not marry an Eagle, the Eagles must either get their wives by violent robbery in a haphazard fashion from outsiders, or have some other society at hand into which they could marry, and who could marry into their society. It used to be thought that the violent robbery was the method, but I believe the second method was the one used. There were groups of neighbours at hand who were recognised as belonging to the same stock, but who were not too near in blood to make marriage impossible. Between these groups there was affinity, therefore; the Eagles could intermarry with the Owls, the Sparrows, the Cats, or what not, according to a somewhat intricate system, and this quite without violence. And also between the clans or gentes who composed these tribes there would be no war, and the use of whatever land they fed their stock upon or cultivated (for in some places or ages this gentile-tribal system lasted well into the agricultural period) was arranged peaceably in a communal method.

Now the tribe in which a common ancestor (worshipped as a god) was always assumed, and was generally a fact, tended to federate with other tribes who still felt that they belonged to a common stock, who thus formed an association called by our ancestors the *thiod*, or people; an association much looser, of course, than that of the gens or tribe, but like those, founded on an idea of common kindred; founded on the personal kinship of all its members to the god-ancestor, and not on locality or the holding of certain property or position. The officers of the body, under whatever names they went, were appointed by the tribesmen for their personal qualities to perform definite duties. There was no central executive body; every freeman had certain necessary duties to perform, a shadow of which still exists in our jury, who were originally the neighbours called together to utter their finding (without direction from a judge) as to how such an one had come by his death, what was to do between two neighbours who could not agree, and so forth. If a man was injured, it was the duty of the members of his gens or clan to take up the injury as an injury to the community. This is the meaning of the blood-feud of which we hear so much in the early literature of the North, and of the Celtic clans, and a survival of which still exists among out-of-the-way folks. The practice of the vendetta in Corsica, *e.g.*, does not indicate that the Corsicans are a specially vindictive people; it is a survival of the tribal customary law: its sentimentalising by novelists and poets is a matter of ignorance—natural enough, I admit. "Government" or administration, or whatever else you may call it, was in this condition of society as direct as it ever can be; nor had government by majority been invented—*e.g.*, if the clans could not agree to unite in war, the war could not go on, unless any clan chose to go to war by itself.

I am conscious of not explaining fully the difference between such a state of society and ours; but it is indeed difficult to do so now, when all our ideas and the language which expresses them have been for so many ages moulded by such a totally different society. But I must, at least, try to make you understand that the whole of the duties of a freeman in this society had reference to the community of which he formed a part, and that he had no interests but the interest of the community; the assertion of any such private interests would have been looked upon as a crime, or rather a monstrosity, hardly possible to understand. This federal union of the tribes is the last state of society under barbarism; but before I go on to the next stage, I must connect it with our special subject, the condition of productive labour.

With the development of the clans into federated tribes came a condition of organised aggressive war, since all were recognised as enemies outside of the tribe or federation; and with this came the question what was to be done with the prisoners taken in battle, and, furthermore, what was to be done with the tribe conquered so entirely as not to be able to defend its possessions, the land, which it used. Chattel slavery was the answer to the one question, serfdom to the second. You see this question was bound to come up in some form, as soon as the productive powers of man had grown to a certain point. The very early stages of society slaves are of no use, because your slave will die unless you allow him to consume all that he produces; it is only when by means of tools and the organisation of labour that he can produce more than is absolutely necessary for his livelihood, that you can take anything from him. Robbery only begins when property begins; so that slavery doesn't begin till tribes are past the mere hunter period. When they go to war they only save their prisoners to have some fun out of them by torturing them, as the redskins did, unless, perhaps, as sometimes happened, they adopt them into the tribe, which also the redskins did at times. But in the pastoral stage slaves become possible, and when you come to the agricultural stage (to say nothing of further developments) they become necessary till the time when privilege is destroyed and all men are equal. There are, then, three conditions of mankind, mere gregarious unorganised savagery, slavery, and social equality. When you once have come to that conclusion you must also come to this deduction from it, that if you shrink from any sacrifice to the Cause of Socialism it must be because we are either weak or criminal, either cowards or tyrants—perhaps both.

Well, this last stage of barbarism, that of the federated tribes, gave way in ancient history, the history of the Greeks and Romans, into the first stage of civilisation. The life of the city, and in mediæval history into feudalism; it is under the latter that the development of the treatment of the conquered tribe as serfs is the most obvious; serfdom being the essence of mediæval society proper, and its decay beginning with the decline of serfdom. But, undoubtedly, there were serfs in the classical period; that is to say an inferior class to the freemen, who were allowed to get their own livelihood on the condition of their performing certain services for them, and with a certain status, though a low one, which raised them above the condition of the chattel-slave, whose position was not recognised at all more than that of his fellow labourer, the horse or the ass. The Helots, for example, were the serfs rather than the slaves of the Spartans, and there were other instances both among the Greeks and the Romans of labourers in a similar position.

However, chattel slavery as opposed to serfdom is the characteristic form of servitude in the ancient city life. In that life you must understand the idea of the merging of the individual into the community was still strong, although *property* had come into existence, and had created a political condition of society under which *things* were growing to be of more moment than *persons*. But the community had got to be an abstraction, and it was to that abstraction, and not to the real visible body of persons that individual interests were to be sacrificed. This is more obvious among the Romans than the Greeks, whose mental individuality was so strong and so various, that no system could restrain it; so that when that system began to press heavily upon them they could not bear it, and in their attempts to escape from its consequences fell into the mere corruption of competitive tyranny at an early period. The Romans, on the other hand, without art or literature, a hard and narrow-minded race, cultivated this worship of the city into an over-mastering passion, so fierce and so irrational that their history before their period of corruption reads more like that of a set of logical demons bent on torturing themselves and everybody else, than a history of human beings. They must be credited with the preservation of the art and literature of Greece (though with its corruptions and stultification as well), and for the rest I think the world owes them little but its curse, unless indeed we must accept them as a terrible example of over-organisation. Of their state one may say what one of their poets said of their individual citizens, when they were sunk in their well-earned degradation, that for the sake of life they cast away the reasons for living.

WILLIAM MORRIS.

(To be continued.)

SOCIALISM IN LONDON.

WEST-CENTRAL ('COMMONWEAL')

THIS branch, which was formed out of the scattered elements of the late Clerkenwell branch, together with a large number of comrades who hitherto belonged simply to the League and to no branch in particular, has now been in existence several months. Up to the present we have been content to help all the London branches who desired it, having taken up no stations of our own until lately. Of course we have not been idle, for we have held a number of indoor meetings which have been addressed by various friends and comrades of all schools of Socialist thought. So successful have the meetings and concerts held by the branch been, that we have since the last Conference been enabled to aid the *Commonweal* considerably by supporting the Guarantee Fund. Acting on the spirit of the resolution of the Conference we were not content alone to pay the 2s. per week asked for, but have been able to hand over something like 30s. during the last few weeks, which sum will be increased as time goes on. The comrades have worked with a will in pushing papers, pamphlets, and collecting funds for propaganda purposes. During the last month a female comrade kindly made the branch a present of a piano. A choir is in course of formation, which is being conducted by a comrade of the North London Branch, who is assisted at the piano by our comrade Hurford. The choir will greatly facilitate our out and indoor propaganda, and I am sure one ought to be started by every branch. Social evenings have been held on Saturdays, when the members find a little relaxation from the every-day worry and struggle for bread, in singing revolutionary songs and dancing. This has been and might still further be, a means of keeping our members together in the bonds of close fellowship. Several new members have joined during the last month, and they are of the right kind, ready and willing to aid the movement in every way. For so young a branch we can feel pleased at having 65 members, all I hope good and true to the Cause of Socialism, and all stirred by the spirit of revolt against the present system.

C. W. M.

NORTH LONDON.—On Sunday week we held a meeting in Regent's Park, in spite of the rain; speakers were Stone, Edwards, Nicoll, and Mrs. Lahr; and last Sunday morning our meeting was addressed by Cantwell, Stone, Edwards, Nicoll, and Mrs. Schaack. A Mr. Whelan offered some very weak opposition. Collection, 3s. 5d. In Hyde Park, in the afternoon, Cantwell, Miss Lupton, Parker, Moore, and Saint were the speakers, and we also enlivened the meeting with a couple of songs. Collected 2s. 9d. We sold 15s. worth of literature at these meetings.

ABERDEEN.—At Castle Street, on the 12th, the usual meeting was addressed by Rennie and Leatham. Questions at close. On Sunday, 13th, at weekly indoor meeting Grant Allen's "Individualism and Socialism" was read and discussed with ability and animation by W. Cooper, Rennie, Fowlie, McKenzie, Duncan, and Leatham.—L.

GLASGOW.—On Friday evening Glasier, Joe Burgoyne, McNaughton (S.D.F.), and Biggar (Christian Socialists) spoke at Bridgeton Cross. On Sunday evening Glasier spoke at Paisley Road Toll. At the conclusion, an individual disputed some of our comrade's statements in the form of a number of questions, but ran away without waiting a reply, amid the jeers of the crowd. No meetings will be held next week, owing to the Fair holidays.

EDINBURGH.—SCOTTISH SOCIALIST FEDERATION.—Good meetings were held on Sunday—at Leith in the afternoon, and on the Meadows in the evening. Smith, Hamilton, Bell, and Gilray were the speakers. Smith was in grand form. Literature sold well.—W. D. T.