THE COMMONWEAL

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NEWS FROM NOWHERE:

OR AN EPOCH OF REST.

BEING SOME CHAPTERS FROM A UTOPIAN ROMANCE.

CHAP. XIX. — THE DRIVE BACK TO HAMMERSMITH.

I said nothing for I was inclined to more politeness to him after such very serious talk; but in fact I should like to have gone on talking with the older man, who could understand something at least of my wanted ways of looking at life, whereas with the younger people, in all but the slightest thing, I really was a being from another planet. However, I made the best of it, and smiled as amiably as I could on the young couple; and Dick returned the smile by saying: "Well, guest, I am glad to have you again, and to find that you and my kinsman have not quite talked yourselves into another world; I was half suspecting as I was listening to the Welshmen yonder that you would presently be vanishing away from us, and began to picture my kinman sitting staring in a hall at nothing and finding that he had been talking a while past to nobody."

I felt rather uncomfortable at this speech, for suddenly the picture of the discord squabbly, the dirty and miserable tragedy of the life I had left for a moment behind me, and I had as it were a vision of all my longings for rest and peace in the past, and I loathed the idea of going back to it again. But the old man chuckled and said:

"Don't be afraid, Dick. In any case, I have not been talking to thin air; nor, indeed, to this new friend of ours only. Who knows but I may not have been talking to many people! For perhaps our guest may some day go back to the people he has come from, and may take a message from us which may bear fruit for them, and consequently for us."

Dick looked puzzled, and said: "Well, giver, I do not quite understand you. All I can say is that hopes will not leave us: for don't you see, he is another kind of man to what we are used to, and somehow he makes us think of all kinds of things; and already I feel I could understand Dickens the better for having talked with him."

"Yes," said Clara, "and I think in a few months we shall make him look younger; and I should like to see what he was like with the wrinkles smoothed out of his face. Don't you think he will look younger after a little time with us?"

The old man shook his head, and looked earnestly at me, but did not answer her, and for a minute or two we were all silent. Then Clara broke out:

"Kinsman, I don't like this: something or another troubles me, and I feel as if something untoward was going to happen. You have been talking about a guest, a guest, and have been living in a unhappy times, and it's in the air all round us, and makes us feel as if we were longing for something that we cannot have."

The old man smiled on her kindly, and said: "Well, my child, if that is so, go and sit down, and be good to yourselves."

Then he turned to me, and said: "Do you remember anything like that, guest, in the country from which you come?"

The lovers had turned aside now, and were talking together softly, and I heard them no more voice."

"Yes, when I was a happy child on a sunny holiday, and had everything that I could think of."

And Dick thought the same thing, as he said, "You remember just now you twitted me with living in the second childhood of the world. You will find it a happy world to live in; you will be happy there—for a while."

Again I did not like his scarcely veiled threat, and was beginning to tremble with trying to remember how I had got amongst these curious people, when the old man called out in a cheery voice:

"Now, my children, take your guest away, and make much of him; for he is a guest, make him sleek of skin and peaceful of mind: he has by no means been lucky as you have. Farewell, guest! and he grasped my hand warmly."

"Good-bye," said I, "and thank you very much for all that you have told me. I will come and see as soon as I come back to London. May I?"

"Yes," he said, "come by all means—if you can."

"It won't be for some time yet," quoth Dick, in his cheery voice: "for when the hay is in up the river, I shall be for taking him round through the country between hay and wheat harvest, to see how our industries, in the country, have got on."

Then he turned to the young man: "I shall do a good stroke of work, I hope,—in Wiltshire by preference; for he will be getting a little hard with all the open-air living, and I shall try to toughen him."

"But you will take me along, won't you, Dick?" said Clara, laying her pretty hand on his shoulder.

"Will I not?" said Dick, somewhat boisterously. "And we will do it and send you stories of the people, and the country so beautiful with your neck all brown, and your hands too, and you under your gown as white as privet: that will get some of those strange discontented whims out of your head, I hope. However, for you, and for my kinsman, we shall do all we can to make you comfortable."

The girl reddened very prettily, not for shame but for pleasure; and the old man laughed, and said:

"Oh, I see, you will be as comfortable as need be; for you need not fear that those two will be too officious with you: they will be so busy with each other that they will leave you a good deal to yourself, I am sure, and that is real kindness to a guest, after all. O, you need not be afraid of being one too many, either: for what these birds in a nest like, to have a good convenient friend to turn to, so that they may relieve the ecstasies of love with the solid commonplaces of friendship. Besides, Dick, and much more Clara, like a kind talk to know of you; and your tesserae, I am sure, will do all that may appear to you. And if they get into trouble, they only prattle. Good-bye, guest; may you be happy!"

Clara went up to old Hamm amy, threw her arms about his neck and kissed him heartily, and said: "You are a dear old man, and may have your just about as much as you please; and it won't be long before we see you again; and you may be sure that we shall make our guest happy; though, mind you, there is some truth in what you say."

Then I shook hands again, and we went out of the hall and into the cloisters, and in the street found Greylocks in the shafts waiting for us. He was well looked after; for a little lad of about seven years of age, in his hand, and the rest of his retinue, was his face; on his back, withal, was a girl of fourteen, holding a three-year-old sister before her; while another girl, about an year older than the young one, was back to back with them. The three were occupied partly with eating cherries, partly with patching and punching Greylocks, who took all their care in good part, but pricked up his ears when Dick made his appearance. The girls got off quietly, and going up to Clara, made much of her and snuggled to her, and then they got into the carriage, Dick shook the reins, and we went under way at once, Greylocks trotting soberly between the lovely trees of the London streets, that were sending floods of fragrance into the cool evening air, for it was now getting to be summer evening.

We could hardly go but fair and softly all the way, as there were a great many people abroad in that cool hour. Seeing so many people made me notice their looks the more; and I must say, my taste, cultivated in the sombre greyness, or rather brownness, of the nineteenth century, was rather apt to condemn the gaiety and brightness of the raiment; and I even ventured to say as much to Clara. She seemed rather surprised, and even slightly indignant, and said: "Well, well, what's the matter? They are not about any dirty work; they are only amusing themselves in the fine evening; there is nothing to frighten their clothes. Come, doesn't it all look very pretty? It isn't gaudy, you know."

Indeed that was true; for many of the people were clad in colours that were sober enough, though beautiful, and the harmony of the colours was perfectly en harmonious."

I said, "Yes, that is so; but can any one see from here that it is made of very fine woollen stuff, and ornamented with silk embroidery?"

Clara said: "He could wear shabby clothes if he pleased,—that is, if he didn't think he would hurt people's feelings by doing so."

"But please tell me," said I, "how can they afford things made like that?"

Clara said: "I don't know."

WILLIAM MORRIS.

TO BE CONTINUED.

(THIS STORY BEGAN IN NO. 298, JANUARY 11, 1890. A FEW SETS OF BACK NUMBERS CAN STILL BE HAD.)

ABROADE. — There may be reason to doubt whether eight hours demonstration meetings held in Edinburgh and Glasgow, and proposed meetings to direct the attention of the Scottish Socialists; but it must be gratifying to all Socialists to see discontent promptiug men to formulate demands of any definite character, and, in the absence of kindred bodies, to see the secret meetings held under the auspices of the Mill and Factory operatives Union, and in other great manufacturing centres, which have been held by Socialists among the workers, a good deal more than the ordinary trade unionists talk even. Ritchie (Dundee), Eddy (Glasgow), Spence, Bisset, and myself (from Aberdeen) supported the resolutions, which were carried unanimously, and with a的心 that might have surprised those who think that Socialism can't cheer. With so much discontent expressed by the speakers, and endorsed by the hearers, the wonder is that not a small a safety-valve as the demand for an eight hours day is sufficient to let it off. —L.