

## NEWS FROM NOWHERE:

OR,

## AN EPOCH OF REST.

BEING SOME CHAPTERS FROM A UTOPIAN ROMANCE.

CHAP. XVII. (continued).—HOW THE CHANGE CAME.

"BUT the measures passed for the relief of the workers, though to the upper classes they seemed ruinously revolutionary, were not thorough enough to give the people food and a decent life, and they had to be supplemented by unwritten enactments without legality to back them. Although the Government and Parliament had the law-courts, the army and "society" at their backs, the Committee of Public Safety began to be a force in the country, and really represented the producing classes. It began to improve immensely in the days which followed on the acquittal of its members. Its old members had little administrative capacity, though with the exception of a few self-seekers and traitors, they were honest, courageous men, and many of them endowed with considerable talent. But now that the times called for immediate action, came forward the men capable of setting it on foot; and a great network of workmen's associations grew up very speedily, whose avowed object was the tiding over of the ship of the community into a simple condition of Communism; and as they practically undertook also the management of the ordinary labour war, they soon became the mouthpiece and intermediary of the whole of the working classes, and the manufacturing profit-grinders now found themselves powerless before this combination: unless *their* committee, Parliament, plucked up courage to begin the civil war again, and to shoot right and left, they were bound to yield to the demands of the men whom they employed, and pay higher and higher wages for shorter and shorter day's work. Yet one ally they had, and that was the rapidly approaching breakdown of the whole system founded on the world-market and its supply; which now became so clear to all people that the middle classes, shocked for the moment into condemnation of the Government for the great massacre, turned round nearly in a mass, and called on the Government to look to matters and put an end to the tyranny of the Socialist leaders.

"Thus stimulated, the reactionist plot exploded probably before it was ripe; but this time the people and their leaders were forewarned, and before the reactionaries could get under way had taken the steps they thought necessary.

"The Liberal Government (clearly by collusion) was beaten by the Conservatives, though the latter were nominally much in the minority. The popular representatives in the House understood pretty well what this meant, and after an attempt to fight the matter out by divisions in the House of Commons, they made a protest, left the House, and came in a body to the Committee of Public Safety: and the civil war began again in good earnest.

"Yet its first act was not one of mere fighting. The new Tory Government determined to act, yet durst not re-enact the state of siege, but it sent a body of soldiers and police to arrest the Committee of Public Safety in the lump. They made no resistance, though they might have done so, as they had now a considerable body of men who were quite prepared for extremities. But they were determined to try first a weapon which they thought stronger than street fighting.

"The members of the Committee went off quietly to prison; but they had left their soul and their organisation behind them. For they depended not on a carefully arranged centre with all kinds of checks and counter checks about it, but on a huge mass of people in thorough sympathy with the movement, officered by a great number of links of small centres with very simple instructions. These instructions were now carried out.

"The next morning, when the leaders of the reaction were chuckling at the effect which the report in the newspapers of their stroke would have upon the public—no newspapers appeared; and it was only towards noon that a few straggling sheets, about the size of the gazettes of the seventeenth century, worked by policemen, soldiers, managers, and press-writers, were dribbled through the streets. They were greedily seized on and read; but by this time the serious part of their news was stale, and people did not need to be told that the GENERAL STRIKE had begun. The railways did not run, the telegraph-wires were unserved; flesh, fish, and green stuff brought to market was allowed to lie there still packed and perishing; the thousands of middle-class families, who were utterly dependent for the next meal on the workers, made frantic efforts through their more energetic members to cater for the needs of the day, and amongst those of them who could throw off the fear of what was to follow, there was, I am told, a certain enjoyment of this unexpected picnic—a forecast of the days to come, in which all labour grew pleasant.

"So passed the first day, and towards evening the Government grew quite distracted. They had but one resource for putting down any popular movement—to wit, mere brute-force; but there was nothing for them against which to use their army and police: no armed bodies appeared in the streets; the offices of the federated workmen were now, in appearance at least, turned into places for the relief of people thrown out of work, and under the circumstances they durst not arrest the men engaged in such work; all the more, as even that night many quite respectable people applied at these offices for relief, and swallowed down the charity of the revolutionists along with their supper. So the Government massed soldiers and police here and there—and sat still for that night, fully expecting on the morrow some manifesto from 'the rebels,' as they now began to be called, which would give them an

opportunity of acting in some way or another. They were disappointed. The ordinary newspapers gave up the struggle that morning, and only one very violent reactionary paper (called the *Daily Telegraph*) attempted an appearance, and rated the 'rebels' in good set terms for their folly and ingratitude in tearing out the bowels of their 'common mother,' the English Nation, for the benefit of a few greedy paid agitators and the fools whom they were deluding. On the other hand, the Socialist papers (of which three only, representing somewhat different schools, were published in London) came out full to the throat of well-printed matter. They were greedily bought by the whole public, who, of course, like the Government, expected a manifesto in them. But they found no word of reference to the great subject. It seemed as if their editors had ransacked their drawers for articles which would have been in place forty years before, under the technical name of educational articles. Most of these were admirable and straightforward expositions of the doctrines and practice of Socialism, free from haste and spite and hard words, and came upon the public with a kind of May-day freshness, amidst the worry and terror of the moment; and though the knowing well understood that the meaning of this move in the game was mere defiance, and a token of irreconcilable hostility to the then rulers of society, and though, also, they were meant for nothing else by the rebels, yet they really had their effect as 'educational articles.' However, 'education' of another kind was acting upon them with irresistible power, and probably cleared their heads a little.

"As to the Government, they were absolutely terrified by the act of 'boycotting' (the slang word then current for such acts of abstention). Their counsels became wild and vacillating to the last degree: one hour they were for giving way for the present till they could hatch another plot; the next they all but sent an order for the arrest in the lump of all the workmen's committees; the next they were on the point of ordering their brisk young general to take any excuse that offered for another massacre. But when they called to mind that the soldiery in that 'Battle' of Trafalgar Square were so daunted by the slaughter which they had made that they could not be got to fire a second volley, they shrank back again from the dreadful courage necessary for carrying out another massacre. Meantime the prisoners, brought the second time before the magistrates under a strong escort of soldiers, were the second time remanded.

"The strike went on this day also. The workmen's committees were extended, and gave relief to great numbers of people, for they had organised a considerable amount of production of food by men whom they could depend upon. Quite a number of well-to-do people were now compelled to seek relief of them. But another curious thing happened: a band of young men of the upper classes armed themselves, and coolly went marauding in the streets, taking what suited them of such eatables and portables they came across in the shops which had ventured to open. This operation they carried out in Oxford Street, then a great street of shops of all kinds. The Government, being at that hour in one of their yielding moods, thought this a fine opportunity for showing their impartiality in the maintenance of 'order,' and sent to arrest these hungry rich youths; who, however, surprised the police by a valiant resistance, so that all but three escaped. The Government did not gain the reputation for impartiality which they expected from this move; for they forgot that there were no evening papers; and the account of the skirmish spread wide indeed, but in a distorted form, for it was mostly told simply as an exploit of the starving people from the East-end; and everybody thought it was but natural for the Government to put them down when and where they could."

WILLIAM MORRIS.

TO BE CONTINUED.]

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

## 5TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE INTERNATIONAL WORKING MEN'S CLUB, BERNER STREET, E.

THE 5th Anniversary of the above Club will be celebrated on Sunday, June 8th, 1890, on which occasion a Tea, Concert, and Ball will take place. Wm. Morris will preside, and among others who will address the gathering will be P. Kropotkin, Stepniak, J. Turner, Janovsky, H. Sparling, and Feigénbaum; C. Graham, M.P., and John Burns are also expected. The Hammer-smith choir will render revolutionary songs. To begin at 4 p.m.

**Cours Fund.**—Amount already acknowledged—£28 18s. 10d. Received—And. Scheu, 5s.; A Friend, 1s. 6d.; Etudiant en Médecine, 2s.; J. Tochatti, 5s.

**ERRATUM.**—Comrade W. H. Chapman presided over the Annual Conference, not E. C. Chapman, as stated in last week's issue.

**SHEFFIELD.**—Our comrade Bruce Glasier of Glasgow has been with us during Saturday and Sunday, and gave us some stirring addresses. We held two meetings on Saturday, three on Sunday, and one on Monday, at which about 230 *Commonweal* were sold, and many more could have been sold had we not sold quite out of the first six quires early on Sunday. A quantity of other literature was sold. Next week we open a campaign in the mining districts; and generally must report splendid progress; fine meetings, growing interest taken in our propaganda by all sections of workers, and a largely increased sale of literature. R. Bingham, J. Bingham, Bullas, and Charles addressed these various meetings, and were opposed at Rotherham by a typical Mr. Stiggins in the shape of a local Methodist parson, who told us we should have equality in heaven, but it was wicked to strive for it here. He further told us that he preached fifty-two Sundays in the year for no payment, but after being pressed by Glasier, he admitted that he received some £100 or so for the other six days in the week for attending to the secular work of the church.—F. CHARLES.