NOTES ON NEWS.

So the great battle has begun! Even the dock strike will pale into insignificance compared to that of the coal-miners, if only these latter will hold together, and show anything like the courage, self-sacrifice, and solidarity of the dockers. Their demand is a moderate one—5 per cent advance now and 5 per cent. more in July. This a few mineowners have granted, but the very large majority have absolutely refused; a good many have asked for arbitration, but for the most part there is a determination to fight the matter through and come to death or life with organised labour. The battle began Wednesday last week in Nottingham, and it has been spreading over the country since the notices expired, until there are over a quarter of a million workers out.

Coal experts, who are not colliery-owners, admit that the men are not only entitled, even as things go, to the rise, but that the owners can well afford to give it. However, the latter know that sooner or later they will be compelled to try a fall with the men if they would retain their power of exploitation, and as the present time is a good time they may as well force it on and have it over. A good time for them that is; and so, whatever be the misery or mischief they may inflict on the community, the mandate has been given and the fight begun.

As the Pall Mall correspondent says:

"The colliery-workers feel that they must try their strength with the men, and that there cannot possibly be a better time than the present. The spring is coming on, and the demand for gas coals and house coals lessens every day. The Baltic does not open fully for six weeks. The demand for iron is not so brisk. Under these circumstances, the colliery-owners see that if they give way now, prices will immediately relax. It must also be borne in mind that years have now elapsed since any serious strike took place, and that a new generation of young miners has arisen who do not know the privations and miseries which a strike entails, and these young miners are the energetic and bellicose determined element. And the owners feel that the fight does not cost now 20 per cent. may be demanded in September, and could not well be resisted then; whereas, if the fight is forced on now, and the men’s funds are exhausted and their union weakened or broken up, they won’t have the stomach for a further battle in the autumn."

However, the men say that in spite of the time of the year they can hold out, and it is quite certain that if they can do so and hang well together they must win. They have announced that they can go three weeks or more without strike pay, and if this be true, and their reserve funds be what they are said to be, there is no reason to fear the collapse of the strike for a couple of months to come. If it does break down before, or even then, it will be because they are not united. There are large districts which are standing aloof altogether and there are other doubtful ones which may rat if the thing looks at all like going against them; so that the result is far from certain. Meanwhile, so long as the struggle does last, the miners should have the enthusiastic support of every workman in every trade, and should be helped and encouraged in every possible way.

One thing which they will have to face is, that in spite of Mr. Gladstone’s expressed approval of the strike as a weapon, the governing classes as a whole are exasperated by the frequency and effect with which it has been used of late. As may be plainly seen in Liverpool just now, where an ostentatious display of military force is being made, they would only be too pleased to have a fairly good excuse for “quieting” discontent. A little blood-letting would cow the mob, they think; and they will be in for it, too, if they can only manage to work up a case for it, a case which would secure public opinion on their side, the “public opinion” they care about.

But if they do this, they could do nothing better for the progress of revolutionary ideas. To repeat Peterloo would be to bring out in a condensed and dramatic fashion the facts of the commercial system, to soar them into the popular soul as twenty years of our talking would not do. Even with “Bloody Sunday” and a hundred other examples of class-hatred before their eyes, English workmen do not realise what sorry slaves they are. They are so used, in towns, anyhow, to being bullied and beaten by the police, that a little extra tyranny has no effect if only it is manifested in the familiar form. Let the bullet and the sabre supplant the hand, the red coat face the blue, and the rattle of the musketry will roll from one end of the land to the other and the swish of the sword be heard in every wind that blows.

It would mean despair—and the politics of despair! One can but marvel at the insensate folly which would provoke of set purpose the spirit which spoke in the Chartist motto, “If you Peterloo us, we will Moscow you!” or that of the men who made the “Man with a Matchbox” a byword of terror. You are not likely to pay much heed to what Commonspeak says, Messieurs our masters! If you were, enemies though you be, one might ask you to reflect on the one-sided battle you would be waging, if once the masses of the people were really driven to despair. You might recall, with advantage, the fact that the have not has nothing but his miserable life to lose; that there is a good many of him, so many, you can’t kill all, and the more you kill the more will arise. The social question, which is for all time, every insignificant unit in the mass can manage to destroy—there is none too feeble for that. And everything is yours, and thus he can destroy nothing without injuring you; and then you are not, like him, lost in the immensity of the mob, you are set on high for a mark, and can be readily hit at.

Just call a halt, O sapient rulers! and keep your soldiers from firing on us; go on fooling us and don’t try forcing us; or, you will find that even we English workmen, degraded as we are, will, in the end, feel what the proverbial worms for turning, and when we do so can make things so warm for you that you will be “sorry you spoke.”

It seems that Bismarck really has resigned, and yet the world hangs together and has not been dispersed into space. Exultation at the disappearance from active life of this most prossic of all tyrants, this tyrant of a commercial age, is checked by the doubt as to whether it is not merely a theatrical stroke; as to whether he may not, after all, go on governing safely and irresponsibly under the veil of resignation. On the other hand, if circumstances have driven him to resign, it is once more a clear enough token of the advance which Socialism is making. Let us hope that it is so.

W. M.

NEWS FROM NOWHERE:

AN EPOCH OF REST.

BEING SOME CHAPTERS FROM A UTOPIAN ROMANCE.

CHAP. IX. (continued.)—CONCERNING LOVE.

The old man grew quite serious again. Said he: “I do remember about that strange piece of baseless folly, the result, like all other follies of the period, of the hideous class tyranny which then obtained. What do we think of it now? you would say. My friend, that is a question easy to answer. How could it possibly be but that motherhood should be highly honoured amongst us! Surely it is a matter of course that we are all Jews in that sense, we are all one body under the law, a bond of union between man and woman, an extra stimulus to love and affection between them, and that this is universally recognised. For the rest, remember that all the artificial burdens of motherhood are now done away with. A mother has no longer any mere social anxieties for the future of her children. They may indeed turn out better or worse; they may disappoint her highest hopes; such anxieties as these are a part of the mingled pleasure and pain which goes to make up the life of mankind. But at least she is spared the fear (it was most commonly the certainty) that artificial disabilities would make her children something less than men and women: she knows
that they will live and act according to the measure of their own faculties; but it is clear that the ‘fate’ of the day helped its Judaic god, and the ‘Man of Science’ of the time, in visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children. How to reverse this process, how to take the sting out of heredity, has been one of the most consistent research tasks for thoughtful men throughout the nineteenth century. So that has been the struggle for the ordinary healthy woman (and almost all our women are both healthy and at least comely), respected as a child-bearer and rearer of children, distinguished by a companion and equal in any respect of her children, has far more instinct for maternity than the poor drudge and mother of drudges of past days could ever have had; or than her sister of the upper classes, brought up in affected ignorance of natural facts. And the struggle is not merely a battle of minds, but a battle of wills. We have absolutely nothing but a refuge from mere destitution. Such a way of life that as such could only be conceived of by people surrounded by the worst extremes of poverty. What did you think of the looks of the people whom you have come across to-day?"

"I said: 'I could hardly have believed that there could be so many good-looking people in any civilised country."

He crowded a little, like the old bird he was. "What! are we still civilized?" he said. Well, as to our looks, the English and Jutish blood, which on the whole predominates here, used not to produce much beauty. But I think we have improved it. I know a man who has a large collection of portraits printed from photographs of the nineteenth century, and going over those and comparing them with the every-day faces in this town, puts the improvement in our good looks in a very right way, now, and that there are only too fantastic to connect this increase of beauty directly with our freedom and good sense in the matters we have been speaking of. This improvement has been from a gregarious race between a man and a woman, even if that be transient, is likely to turn out better in all ways, and especially in bodily beauty, than the birth of the respectable commercial marriage bed, or of the dull despair of the family system. They say, Pleasure begins beauty. What do you think?"

"I am much of that mind," said I.

**CHAP. X.—QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.**

"Well," said the old man, shifting in his chair, "you must get on with your questions, Guest; I have been some time answering this first one.

"I said: 'I want an extra word or two about your ideas of education. They seem so glad of free Dick to you that your little race run wild and didn’t teach them anything; and in short, that your education is like the “snakes in Iceland” —non-existent.’"

Then you gathered himself, said he. "But of course I understand ordinary folks, few shallow folks, and women. It is not the case that of two people into a gregarious dont of not very accurate information, something to be swallowed by the beginner in the art of living whether he liked it or not, and was hungry for it or not; and which had been centred in one, and over the other; and you were not taught about it in order to serve it to other people who didn’t care about it."

I stopped the old man’s rising wrath by a laugh, and said: "Well, you really should have that way, at any rate, so you may let your anger run off you a little."

"True, true," said he, smiling, "I thank you for correcting my ill-temper: I always fancy myself as living in any period of which we may be speaking. But however, to put it in a cooler way: you expected to see children thrashed into schools when they have reached an age conventionally supposed to be the due age, whatever their varying faculties and dispositions may be, and when there, with like disregard to be subjected to a certain conventional course of ‘learning.’ My friend, can you see that such a proceeding means ignoring the fact of "growth," bodily and mental? No one could come out of such a mill unjured; and those only would avoid being crushed by it who would have the spirit of rebellion strong in them. Fortunately most children have had that at all times. Now you see what it all comes to. In the midst of the thraldom of poverty. In the midst of the most fashionable poverty. In the midst of the most gregarious poverty. In the midst of the most gregarious poverty of the most gregarious of society, was so miserably poor, owing to the systematised robbery on which it was founded, that real education was impossible for anybody. The whole theory of their so-called education was that it was in a state of constant change and was nothing more than a little information which was always by means of torture, and accompanied by twaddle which it was well known was of no use, or else he would lack information lifelong: the child was formed by this. All that is that has been necessary. He is no longer hurled, and the information lies ready to each one’s hand when his own inclinations impel him to seek it. In this as in other matters we have become wealthy: we can afford to give ourselves time to go on."

"Yes," said I, "but suppose the child, youth, man, never wants the information, never grows in the direction you might hope to do: suppose you are compelled to bring up the subject of learning arithmetic or mathematics?"

"You can’t force him when he is grown; you can’t force him while he is growing, and oughtn’t you to do so?"

"Well," said he, "were you forced to learn arithmetic and mathematics?"

"A little," said I.

"And how old are you now?"

"Slightly fifty-six," said I.

"And how much arithmetic and mathematics do you know now?" I quoted the old man his own society.

"I said: ‘None whatever, I am sorry to say.’"

Hammond laughed quietly, but made no other comment on my admission, and I dropped the subject of education, perceiving him to be perhaps wrong on this point."

I thought a little, and said: "You were speaking just now of households; that sounded to me a little like the customs of past times; I don’t think we have any households."

"Phalansteries, eh?" he said. "Well, we live as we like, and we like to live as a rule with certain house-mates that we have got used to. Remember, again, that poverty is extinct, and that the Fourierist phalansteries and such institutions were meant to be temporary or transitional nothing but a refuge from mere destitution. Such a way of life as that could only be conceived of by people surrounded by the worst extremes of poverty, and no household can exist remotely separate households are the rule amongst us, and though they differ in their habits more or less, yet no door is shut to any good-tempered person who is content to live as the other house-mates do; only of course it would be unreasonable for one man to drop into a household and bid the folk to alter their habits to please him, since he can go elsewhere and live as he pleases. However, I need not say much at all this, as you are going up the river with Dick, and will find out for yourself by experience how these matters are managed."

After a pause, I said: "Your big towns, now; how about them? London, which—which I have read about as the modern Babylon of civilization, seems to have disappeared."

"Well, well," said old Hammond, "perhaps after all it is more like ancient Babylon now than the ‘modern Babylon’ of the nineteenth century."

But I, as you may have observed already, have lived in Iceland; I have been in Iceland; and no one can be ignorant of the population in places between here and Hammermsnith; nor have you seen the most populous part of the town yet."

"Tell me, then," said I, "how is it towards the east?"

"Surely," said he, "time was when a horse and road straight away from my door here at a round trot for an hour and a half, you would still be in the thick of London, and the greater part of that would be slums, as they were called; that is to say, for innocent men and women; or worse, stews for rearing and breeding men and women in such degradation that that torture should seem to them mere ordinary and natural life.

"I know, I know," I said rather impatiently. "That was what; tell me something of what. Is any of that left?"

"Not an inch," said he; "but some memory of it abides with us, and indeed the old town, on May-day, we hold a solemn feast in those eastern ecclesias of London to commemorate The Clearing of Misery, as it is called. On that day we have music and dancing, and merry games and happy feasting on the site of some of the worst slums, the tradition is that the happy people, on some mound where of old time stood the wretched apology for a house, a den in which men and women lived packed like sheep in the fifth like pigs in a sty, the happy as they could only have endured it, as I said just now, by being degraded out of humanity—to hear the terrible words of threatening and lamentation coming from her sweet and beautiful lips, and she unconscious of their real meaning: to hear her say, singing Hool’s Song of the Shirt, and to think that all the time she does not understand what it is all about—a tragedy grown inconceivable to her and her listeners. Listen to that, if ever you hear it, said he; and indeed I said, "it is difficult for me to think of it."

And I sat watching how his eyes glittered, and how the fresh life seemed to glow in his face, and I wondered how at his age he should think of the happiness of the world, or indeed anything but his coming dinner.

**[TO BE CONTINUED.]**

**AN INTERNATIONAL APPEAL.**

For eight months past the blanket-weavers and workers associated with them have been on strike at Ruine (Rhone). Counting their families, more than twenty thousand men, women, and children were involved. Their wages had been lowered again and again, until they were face to face with starvation. Banding together they had succeeded in resist further encroachment. But the millowners had enjoyed unquestioned supremacy so long that they refused to recognize the union, and gave notice to terminate their contract. So the workers, instead of breaking up, but the others are determined to destroy the trade of the district rather than give in. For eight months the men have held out, in spite of privation, and are now hoping to obtain help from this meeting and from all sympathizers throughout the world. They feel that although the working men have not advanced a trifle in the money side, they are some and willing to help them. As they suffer in the cause of labour, so they appeal to all friends of labour to aid them in the fight. In better times we shall gratefully recognize their international solidarity. Address, du Secretariat du Syndicat de, Rohe, France.

An adjourned meeting and conference of anti-Parliamentary Socialists will be held on Monday, May 2d, to consider propaganda for ensuing year and other important business. All comrades are invited to attend.

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