

# THE COMMONWEAL

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WEEKLY; ONE PENNY.

### 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 mine-owners 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-grips with organised labour. The fight began Wednesday last week in Nottingham, and it has been spreading over the country since as 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's* correspondent says:

"The coalowners 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 apace, 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 relapse. 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 and determined element. And the owners feel that if the fight does not come off 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 go 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 sear 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 baton, the red coat replace 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 Match-box" a byword of terror. You are not likely to pay much heed to what *Commonweal* 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 embittered will be those that remain; that if he can do nothing else, 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, down-trodden as we are, willing and cowardly slaves as we are, have still the capability of the proverbial worm for turning, and when we do so can make things so warm for you that you will be "sorry you spoke." S.

It seems that Bismark 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 prosaic 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, govern 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:

OR,

### 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 maternity should be highly honoured amongst us? Surely it is a matter of course that the natural and necessary pains which the mother must go through, form 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 sordid 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. In times past, it is clear that the 'Society' 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 constant cares of the thoughtful men amongst us. So that, you see, the ordinarily healthy woman (and almost all our women are both healthy and at least comely), respected as a child-bearer and rearer of children, desired as a woman, loved as a companion, unanxious for the future 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, reared in an atmosphere of mingled prudery and prurience."

"You speak warmly," I said, "but I can see you are right."

"Yes," he said, "and I will point out to you a token of all the benefits which we have gained by our freedom. What did you think of the looks of the people whom you have come across to-day?"

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

He crowed a little, like the old bird he was. "What! are we still civilised?" said he. Well, as to our looks, the English and Jutish blood, which on the whole is predominant 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 everyday faces in these times, puts the improvement in our good looks beyond a doubt. Now, there are some people who think it not too fantastic to connect this increase of beauty directly with our freedom and good sense in the matters we have been speaking of: they believe that a child born from the natural and healthy love 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 drudge of that system. They say, Pleasure begets pleasure. 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."

Said I: "I want an extra word or two about your ideas of education; although I gathered from Dick that you let your children 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 left-handed," quoth he. "But of course I understand your point of view about education, which is that of times past, when 'the struggle for life,' as men used to phrase it (*i.e.*, the struggle for a slave's rations on one side, and for a bouncing share of the slaveholders' privilege on the other), pinched 'education' for most people into a niggardly dole 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 chewed and digested over and over again by people who didn't care about it in order to serve it out to other people who didn't care about it."

I stopped the old man's rising wrath by a laugh, and said: "Well, you were not taught 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 thrust 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't you see that such a proceeding means ignoring the fact of *growth*, bodily and mental? No one could come out of such a mill uninjured; 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 old times all this was the result of *poverty*. In the nineteenth century, 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 necessary to shove a little information into a child, even if it were 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 hurry of poverty forbade anything else. All that is past; we are no longer hurried, 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 grow."

"Yes," said I, "but suppose the child, youth, man, never wants the information, never grows in the direction you might hope him to do: suppose, for instance, he objects to learning arithmetic or mathematics; you can't force him when he is grown; can't you 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?"

"Say fifty-six," said I.

"And how much arithmetic and mathematics do you know now?" quoth the old man, smiling rather mockingly.

Said I: "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 hopeless on that side.

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 should have thought you would have lived more in public."

"Phalangsteries, eh?" said he. "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 phalangsteries and all their kind, as was but natural at the time, implied nothing but a refuge from mere destitution. Such a way of life as that, could only have been conceived of by people surrounded by the worst form of poverty. But you must understand therewith, that though 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 of it to alter their habits to please him, since he can go elsewhere and live as he pleases. However, I need not say much about 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 civilisation, 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 was. But let that pass. After all, there is a good deal of population in places between here and Hammersmith; nor have you seen the most populous part of the town yet."

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

Said he: "Time was when if you mounted a good horse and rode 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, places of torture 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 was; tell me something of what is. Is any of that left?"

"Not an inch," said he; "but some memory of it abides with us, and I am glad of it. Once a year, on May-day, we hold a solemn feast in those easterly communes 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 of the old slums, the traditional memory of which we have kept. On that occasion the custom is for the prettiest girls to sing some of the old revolutionary songs, and those which were the groans of the discontent, once so hopeless, on the very spots where those terrible crimes of class-murder were committed day by day for so many years. To a man like me, who have studied the past so diligently, it is a curious and touching sight to see some beautiful girl, daintily clad, and crowned with flowers from the neighbouring meadows, standing amongst 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 amongst the filth like pilchards in a cask; lived in such a way that 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 Hood'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. Think of that, if you can, and of how glorious life is grown!"

"Indeed," said I, "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.

WILLIAM MORRIS.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

#### AN INTERNATIONAL APPEAL.

FOR eight months past the blanket-weavers and workers associated with them have been on strike at Cours (Rhône). Counting their families, more than 4,000 have been affected—practically the entire population of the place. Their wages had been lowered again and again, until they were face to face with starvation. Banding themselves together in a union, they resolved to resist further encroachment. But the millowners had enjoyed unquestioned supremacy so long that they refused to recognise the union, and gave notice of their intention to crush it. Seven have since acceded to the men's demand, 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, but they are now compelled to ask for help from their fellow-countrymen and from all sympathisers throughout the world. They feel that although everywhere the workers have their own troubles to attend to, there must be some able 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 they will gratefully reciprocate the proofs of international solidarity. Address, *au Secrétaire du Syndicat de Cours, Rhône, France.*

An adjourned meeting and conference of anti-Parliamentary Socialists will take place on Sunday, March 23rd, at 7.30 p.m., to consider propaganda for ensuing year and other important business. All comrades are asked to attend.