NEWS FROM NOWHERE:

OR,

AN EPOCH OF REST.

BEING SOME CHAPTERS FROM A UTOPIAN ROMANCE.

CHAP. X. (*continued*).—QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.

"TELL me in detail," said I, "what lies east of Bloomsbury now?"

Said he: "There are but few houses between this and the outer part of the old city; but in the city we have a thickly-dwelling population. Our forefathers, in the first clearing of the slums, were not in a hurry to pull down the houses in what was called at the end of the nineteenth century the business quarter of the town, and what later got to be known as the Swindling Kens. You see, these houses, though they stood hideously thick on the ground, were roomy and fairly solid in building, and clean, because they were not used for living in, but as mere gambling booths; so the poor people from the cleared slums took them for lodgings and dwelt there, till the folk of those days had time to think of something better for them; so the buildings were pulled down so gradually that people got used to living thicker on the ground than in most places; therefore it remains the most populous part of London, or perhaps of all these islands. But it is very pleasant there, partly because of the splendour of the architecture, which goes further than what you will see elsewhere. However, this crowding, if it may be called so, does not go further than a street called Aldgate, a name which perhaps you may have heard of. Beyond that the houses are scattered wide about the meadows there, which are very beautiful, especially when you get on to the lovely river Lea (where old Isaak Walton used to fish, you know) about the places called Stratford and Old Ford, names which of course you will not have heard of, though the Romans were busy there once upon a time."

Not heard of them! thought I to myself. How strange! that I who had seen the very last remnant of the pleasantness of the meadows by the Lea destroyed, should have heard them spoken of with pleasantness come back to them in full measure.

Hammond went on: "When you get down to the Thames-side you come on the Docks, which are works of the nineteenth century, and are still in use, although not so thronged as they once were, since we discourage centralisation all we can, and we have long ago dropped the pretention to be the market of the world. About these Docks are a good few houses, which, however, are not inhabited by many people permanently; I mean, those who use them come and go a good deal, the place being too low and marshy for pleasant dwelling. Past the Docks eastward and landward it is all flat pasture, once marsh, except for a few gardens, and there are very few permanent dwellings there: scarcely anything but a few sheds, and cots for the men who come to look after the great herds of cattle pasturing there. But however, what with the beasts and the men, and the scattered red-tiled roofs and the big hayricks, it does not make a bad holiday to get a quiet pony and ride about there on a sunny afternoon of autumn, and look over the river and the craft passing up and down, and on to Shooters' Hill and the Kentish uplands, and then turn round to the wide green sea of the Essex marsh-land, with the great domed line of the sky, and the sun shining down in one flood of peaceful light over the long distance. There is a place called Canning's Town, and further out, Silvertown, where the pleasant meadows are at their pleasantest: doubtless they were once slums, and wretched enough."

The names grated on my ear, but I could not explain why to him. So I said: "And south of the river, what is it like?"

He said: "You would find it much the same as the land about Hammersmith. North, again, the land runs up high, and there is an agreeable and well-built town called Hampstead, which fitly ends London on that side. It looks down on the north-western end of the forest you passed through."

I smiled. "So much for what was once London," said I. "Now tell me about the other towns of the country."

He said: "As to the big murky places which were once, as we know, the centres of manufacture, they have, like the brick and mortar desert of London, disappeared; only, since they were centres of nothing but 'manufacture,' and served no purpose but that of the gambling market, they have left less signs of their existence than London. Of course, the great change in the use of mechanical force made this an easy matter, and some approach to their break-up as centres would probably have taken place, even if we had not changed our habits so much: but they being such as they are, no sacrifice would have seemed too great a price to pay for getting rid of the 'manufacturing districts,' as they used to be called. For the rest, whatever coal or mineral we need is brought to grass and sent whither it is needed with as little as possible of dirt, confusion, and the distressing of quiet people's lives. One is tempted to believe from what one has read of the condition of those districts in the nineteenth century, that those who had them under their power worried, befouled, and degraded men out of malice prepense: but it was not so; like the mis-education of which we were talking just now, it came of their dreadful poverty. They were obliged to put up with everything, and even pretend that they liked it; whereas we can deal with things reasonably, and refuse to be saddled with what we do not want."

I confess I was not sorry to cut short with a question his glorifications of the age he lived in. Said I: "How about the smaller towns? I suppose you have swept those away entirely?"

"No, no," said he, "it hasn't gone that way. On the contrary, there has been but little clearance, though much rebuilding, in the smaller towns. Their suburbs, indeed, when they had any, have melted away into the general country, and space and elbow-room has been got in their centres: but there are the towns still with their streets and squares and market-places; so that it is by means of these smaller towns that we of to-day can get some kind of idea of what the towns of the older world were like;—I mean to say, at their best."

"Take Oxford, for instance," said I.

"Yes," said he, "I suppose Oxford was beautiful even in the nineteenth century. At present it has the great interest of still preserving a great mass of pre-commercial building, and is a very beautiful place, yet there are many towns which have become scarcely less beautiful."

Said I: "In passing, may I ask if it is still a place of learning?"

"Still?" said he, smiling. "Well, it has reverted to some of its best traditions; so you may imagine how far it is from its nineteenth century position. It is real learning, knowledge cultivated for its own sake—the Art of Knowledge, in short—which is followed there, not the Commercial learning of the past. Though perhaps you do not know that in the nineteenth century Oxford and its less interesting sister Cambridge became definitely commercial. They (and especially Oxford) were the breeding places of a peculiar class of parasites, who called themselves cultivated people; they were indeed cynical enough, as the so-called educated classes of the day generally were; but they affected an exaggeration of cynicism in order that they might be thought knowing and worldly-wise. The rich middle classes (they had no relation with the working classes) treated them with the kind of contemptuous toleration with which a mediæval baron treated his jester; though it must be said that they were by no means so pleasant as the old jesters were, being, in fact, *the* bores of society. They were laughed at, despised—and paid. Which last was what they aimed at."

Dear me! thought I, how apt history is to reverse contemporary judgments. Surely only the worst of them were as bad as that. But I must admit that they were mostly prigs, and that they *were* commercial. I said aloud, though more to myself than to Hammond, "Well, how could they be better than the age that made them?"

"True," he said, "but their pretentions were higher."

"Were they?" said I, smiling.

"You drive me from corner to corner," said he, smiling in turn. "Let me say at least that they were a poor sequence to the aspirations of Oxford of 'the barbarous Middle Ages.'"

"Yes, that will do," said I.

"Also," said Hammond, "what I have been saying of them is true in the main. But ask on!"

WILLIAM MORRIS.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

CORRESPONDENCE.

INVENTORS UNDER SOCIALISM.

SIR,—In course of my studies of social matters, I have carefully considered the subject of the Manifesto of the Socialist League, published in pamphlet form, and am also a subscriber to your paper.

I can readily apprehend that certain employers of labour who appropriate large profits from the industry of their workpeople, may from a Socialist point of view be considered merely as monied gangers or foremen, and who, if interest on capital be not considered due to them, are entitled to no more than such salary as their skill as organisers of labour entitle them to. But superior to this class, there constantly arises men of original talent, who invent new things, or new ways, and whose claim on profit appear to me to be of a higher character than the preceding. For example: An individual of inventive faculty may do what has constantly been done before—namely, devise an improved cheaper process of producing an article which is useful to the people, and already in demand. He employs labour for the manufacture, and pays liberally the fullest wages of the trade, but the new process being economical, a large margin of profit is left over that selling price which has hitherto been readily paid, and not considered as oppressive.

This hypothetical case may be taken as representative of the position of men who possess mental, not money capital, such as the Arkwrights, the Wedgwoods and the Salts; and my difficulty is, How would Socialism deal with the matter?

Would the inventor be permitted to appropriate the increased profit, and so become a money capitalist, accumulate property, and become rich on the labour of his workpeople? Would he be only allowed to charge a rate of profit agreeable with his needs? Then on the one hand he might argue that since he was the creator of the idea, and his workpeople only mere manipulators, all the full profit was his due and therefore his need, for all need their due. On the other hand, did he reduce his profit, he would undersell his fellow manufacturers and become a monopolist. Or would he be expected to make his invention common property?—voluntarily, which is contrary to our experience of human nature, and I apprehend we must reckon with man's faculties and dispositions as we find them, not as we would have them to be. Or to make his invention known by compulsion? which would cause to be left to a sense of philanthropy alone the incentive to commercial improvement.

I am sorry this note is so long, but should be gratified if you would assist me by your opinion of the matter.—Yours truly, JOHN W. LOVE.

52 Wellesley Road, Wanstead, March 18.

HARD TO PLEASE.—"Look here," said a subscriber as he walked into the office, "I want you to stop my paper." "What's the reason?" "There ain't enough news in it. Too much opinions, and that sort of thing." In about half an hour another subscriber made his appearance. "I've concluded to stop my paper," said he. "You have?" "Yes, sir. I'm tired of reading about strikes and meetings and such things. What I want is good, solid opinions." And the editor sat down and thought great ponderous opinions about people in general.