THE COMMONWEAL
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May not be used for or with many a cause before now: first, few men end it; next, most men content it; lastly, all men accept it—and the cause is won.

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Contents

The "Eighth Hour" and the Demonstration

Stanley’s Exploits or, Civilizing Africa (concluded)

Freedom

In New Zealand

News from Nowhere; or, an Epoch of Rest (continued)

Degree in Critic

In France

Notes

The Labour Struggle

An Empire of London

Executive Authorizations, Reports, Lecture Places, and Notices of Meetings

Statement of Principles, Advertisements, etc., etc.

Periodicals received during the week ending Wednesday May 14

England

Freedom

Justice

Socialism

Socialists’ Press

People’s Press

Workers’ Press

Women’s Press

Workers’ Union

Workers’ Rights

New South Wales

Sydney—Bulletin

Bankruptcy—The Poor

United States

New York Freewill

Europe

Volland’s Freewill

Bankruptcy—The Poor

Greece

Germany

Paris—Anarchist Bulletin

Belgium

Hague—Reform Now Alliance

Russia

Basle—Janus

Emma Goldman

Naples—Socialist Review

Socialists

Bolton—Liberty

Russia

Reports

Nationalist

NEWS FROM NOWHERE: OR, AN EPOCH OF REST.

BEING SOME CHAPTEERS FROM A UTOPIAN ROMANCE.

I.

DINNER IN THE LIBRARY OF THE LONDON MARKET.

When we had done eating, and were sitting a little while, with a bottle of very good Bordeaux wine before us, Clara came back to the question of the subject-matter of the pictures, as though it had troubled her. She looked up at them, and said: "How is it that though we are so interested in our life for the most part, yet when people take to writing poems or painting pictures they seldom deal with our modern life, or if they do, take care good to make their poems or pictures unlike life? Is it not good enough to persuade people that you fooling in that wise? How is it that we find the dreadful times of the past so interesting to us—in pictures and poetry?"

Old Hammond smiled. "It always was so, and I suppose always will be," he said. And, however much meaning was placed in it, it was quite true that in the nineteenth century, when there was so little art and so much talk about it, there was a theory that art and imaginative literature ought to deal with contemporary life; but they never did so; for, if there was any pretence of it, the author always took care (as Clara hinted just now) to disguise, or over-draw, or idealize, and in some way or another make it strange; so that, for all the verisimilitude there was, he might just as well have dealt with the times of the Pharaohs."

"Well," said Dick, "surely it is but natural to like these things strange; just as we were children, we love to find artificial flowers to pretend to be so-and-so in such-and-such a place. That’s what these pictures and poems do; and why shouldn’t they?"

"You least hit it," said old Hammond, "it is the child-like part of us that produces works of imagination. When we are children time passes so slow with us that we seem to have time for everything."

He sighed, and then smiled and said: "At least let us rejoice that we have got back to the child-like age of childhood again."

"Second childhood," said I in a low voice, and then blushed at my double rudeness, and hoped that he hadn’t heard. But he had, and nodded to me slyly, and said: "Yes, why not? And for my part I hope it may last long; and that the world’s next period of wise and unhappy manhood, if that should happen, will speedily lead us to a third childhood: if indeed this age be not our third. Meanwhile, my friend, reminding you of this present happy, both individually and collectively, to trouble ourselves about what is to come hereafter."

"Well, for my part," said Clara, "I wish we were interesting enough to be written or painted about."

Dick answered her with some lover’s speech, impossible to be written down, and then we sat quiet a little.

CHAP. XV.—HOW THE CHANGE CAME.

Duck broke the silence at last, saying: "Guest, forgive us for a little after-dinner dulness. What would you like to do? Shall we have got Greylocks and trot back to Hammersmith or will you come with us and hear some Welsh folk sing in a hall close by here? or would you rather come into the City and see some real fine building? —or what shall it be?"

"Well," said I, "as I am a stranger, I must let you choose for me."

"I am a poet, and a man of feeling:—I have more to do with you and the guest here, and that is I. I am not going to lose the pleasure of my company just now, especially as I know he has something else to ask me. So go to your Welshmen, by all means; but first of all bring us another bottle of wine to this nook, and then be off as soon as you like; and come again and fetch our friend to go westward, but not too soon.

Duck nodded smilingly, and the old man and I were soon alone in the great hall, the afternoon sun glistening on the red wine in our tall quaint-shaped glasses. Then said Hammond:

"Does anything especially puzzle you about our way of living, now you have heard a little life and seen a little."

Said I: "I think what puzzles me most is how it all came about."

"It well may," said he, "so great as the change is. It would be difficult indeed to tell the whole story of the eighteenth century, when the old第一版结束了。
"Well, these men, though conscious of this feeling, had no faith in it. Nor was it for looking among the huge masses of the oppressed classes too much burdened with the misery of their lives, and too much overwhelmed by the selfishness of misery, to be able to form a conception of any escape from it except by the ordinary way prescribed by the system of slavery under which they lived; which was nothing more than a remote chance of climbing out of the oppressed into the oppressing classes.

"You see, though they knew that the only reasonable aim for those who wish to be among the masters was in a condition of equality, in their impatience and despair they managed to convince themselves that if they could by hook or by crook get the machinery of production and the management of property so altered that the 'lower classes' (so the horrible word ran) might have their slavery somewhat ameliorated, they would be ready to fit into this machinery, and would use it for bettering their condition still more and still more, until at last result would be a practical equality (though they were very fond of using the word 'practical'), because 'the rich' would be forced to pay so much for keeping 'the poor' in a tolerable condition that the condition of rich and poor would have been no longer valuable and would gradually die out.

"Do you follow me?"

"Partly," said I. "Go on."

"Said old Hammond: "Well, since you follow me, you will see that this theory was not altogether unreasonable; but practically, it turned out a failure."

"How so?" said I.

"Well, don't you see," said he, "because it involves the making of a machinery by those who didn't know what they wanted the machines to do. So far as the masses of the oppressed class furthered this scheme of improvement, they did it to get themselves improved slavery— themselves. And if the working classes were incapable of being touched by that instinct which produced the passion for freedom and equality aforesaid, what would have happened. I think it would have turned out thus: that the working classes would have been so far improved in condition that they would have approached the condition of the middling rich men; but below them there would have been a great mass of miserable slaves, whose slavery would have been far more hopeless than the older class slavery had been."

[To be continued.]

WILLIAM MORRIS.

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

DEGREES IN CRIME.

If you should steal a million golden dollars in a hump, The people would regard you as a genius and a trump.

If you secure but half the pile, a "shortage" that would be: Whereas a somewhat less amount would be "insolvency."

Steal a tiny, paltry sum would give them the belief That you were a dishonest man—a robber, and a thief.

But if you steal a loaf of bread whereby your life is saved, They'll put you into prison with the "totally depraved."

IN FRANCE.

Thuggism has ruled for the last three weeks in France. M. Constant, M. de la Convention, is certainly not a man of genius; he is a very clever rascal, has quite well understood how to support the bourgeoisie in his own interest, and is succeeded being paid by the employed, and some men having through their talent and education a certain influence over their friends and the mass of the workers. M. Constant saw that depriving the working classes of the working classes would have been so far improved in condition that they would have approached the condition of the middling rich men; but below them would have been a great mass of miserable slaves, whose slavery would have been far more hopeless than the older class slavery had been.

William Morris.

NOTE.

The Commission on the ill-treatment of the so-called dynamiters in Chatham prison has reported on the subject in the way that might have been expected from a Commission sitting on a very bad case; and, to say the least, it concluded: "Well, it doesn't matter." The case seems to have been so plain that even the respectable Daily News has had its turban turned by it, and some of sensibly and humanly writing in its columns has condemned the finding of the Commission on the above-named words, but very shortly.

Let us say a few plain words on the subject.

The prison system of this country, and is meant to be, a system of torture applied by Society to those whom it considers its enemies; but this fact is kept in the dark as much as possible, lest ordinary good-natured people, who do not want to torture persons unless fear makes them willing, and should not be kept, as is now, so long an object of horror and disgust away—or at least altered. The ordinary middle class man, till within the last few years, had no idea of what went on in a prison; and even now, after some light has been thrown on it by the imprisonment of Mr. Molinari and Mr. Shipton in Ireland as political prisoners, he can hardly make up his mind to much as he can. Keeping things dark is the necessary rule in a prison.

Now it is clear that no one could accept the office of habitually torturing his fellow-creatures unless he were a specially callous and degraded man, and was probably also driven to it by hard need; it follows as a matter of course that the officials of a prison must be chosen from the scions of the earth. Surely the evidence of such people should be taken with great reserve by men not interested in suppressing anything.

But the ruling classes are, as we have seen, deeply interested in proving that the prisons are overcrowded by the facts of reality itself. So that, with a similar purpose in view, the system of prison torture is a great deal more humane than is that of the modern prisons; it is a system of hideous and wanton cruelty. Can we expect, therefore, that any enquiry into the treatment of men considered as the special enemies of Society will be a fair inquiry? It is as clear as it should be, as that highly respectable, the Daily News, has found out.

I appeal to all honest and generous-minded men, whatever their opinions may be, to consider what this extra torment and insult means applied to men already tortured by the mere bast-ion system up to the limits of insufferable torture. Since a prisoner so over-burdened with misery already, so helpless as he is, is such a dastardly and abominable crime, that any crime committed by the prisoners in a jail sinks by comparison into insignificance. You men of the comfortable middle-classes, so kind and unselfish in family life, so scrupulous in business—so respectable, in a word—think of what you are doing vicariously by means of the dreadful tools you have made necessary to you? Think of it—if you dare!

Amongst this Commission of Erasion we read the names of Mr. Drummond and Mr. George Shipton. These gentlemen were, no doubt, put there because our rulers thought, or pretended to think, that they represent the working-classes. I appeal, not to Socialists, but to the working-men in general to say whether it is not about time to let the said rulers understand clearly that this humbug can be stood no longer, and that these gentlemen and others like them must not represent the working-classes, or any section of them. W. M.

Hunger pierces stone walls.

Eighty destitute men are receiving food and shelter at the old Immigration Depot, Birmingham (March 15).

Henry George says he "believes in nothing half-way." Then why, asks the Bulletin, is he not a land-nationalisationist or a Socialist.

The boy question is yet not (March 16) settled among the Charters Towers unions. At the mines where men were working for boy's pay, the management, out of pitiful spasm, discharged all the lads employed, and a small minority of the miners, fathers of the lads, are attacking the government of their sons. One of the complaints of the boys who appears to a "white" man, coming in for plenty of abuse. The large majority recognise the union only did its duty when it shut down on men receiving boy's wages.

All We Like Sheep.—Tobacco, a newspaper published in the interests of the cigar and tobacco manufacturers, gives in a recent issue the circumstances sent out to manufacturers in this line of industry by a committee who are opposing the clauses in the Tariff Bill affecting tobacco imports. The clauses include a term of payment to manufacturers, and a charge to employers in the trade as follows: "We would advise that you copy the following in duplicate, have the petition signed by every employer in your force," etc. Just to notice, says the Bulletin, that the Employers' Trade of Labour, the cool assumption in the passage we have italicised, that the employers' Trade of Labour, as a matter of course, could and should, and is supposed to, and can dictate to them what petitions they shall sign. Unfortunately, the despotic language of the circular only reflects the actual conditions of matters in many establishments where the employers are completely subservient to the dictates of their masters in their political movements. But we cannot help thinking that the framers of this circular might at least have preserved a semblance of the respect which the employers were to be appealed to on some other ground than the mere will of the employer. It would have looked better and been more politic. We commend this instance to those who are so terribly solicitations that the "individuality" of the citizen will be sacrificed by labour reform.