

# THE COMMONWEAL

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### LABOUR DAY.

Is the demonstration of Labour Day a mere isolated demonstration, bearing no relation to anything but to the claim for a legal restriction of the hours of labour to the arbitrary figure of eight? Surely it is not so, whatever may be the wishes of some of those who may take part in it. On the one hand it points to what has taken place within the last few years, on the other to the coming events of the next few.

The great event in the history of labour of the last few years has been the growing comprehension of Socialism by the English workmen, as shown by the spirit underlying all the strikes which have lately taken place, and which has been quite different to that of the strikes of the decade before the revival of Socialism in this country.

That spirit is bred from a consciousness, or instinct perhaps, on the part of the workers that these strikes are a part of a definite war which the essential circumstances of their position force them to carry on against their employers; and the upshot of which must be, either the transformation of the workers in general into mere machines without any will at all; or the destruction of the position of the employers; or lastly, as Mr. Giffen and some others try to persuade themselves, the creation of a large class of capable workmen, who, if not really well off, will be better off than ordinary workmen are now; and of a residuum beneath them of hopeless misery and brutality, whose numbers we shall try to reduce as much as we can, but whom we shall not otherwise heed, because they will be kept down by the great mass of the contented and well-to-do workmen.

Of these three conceivable outcomes of the labour war, it cannot be said that the first is really possible, although it is what may be called the high commercial ideal. For supposing the war between masters and men come to an end in the complete and hopeless subjection of the men, there would still remain the war between masters and masters, which, unrestrained by any possible struggle of the workers to free themselves, would at last reach such a pitch that it would bring the whole system to the ground, and result in mere disorganisation and confusion.

Of the third, the outcome of the reasonable and enlightened employer—the contented honest workman and the residuum or helots of both, who don't like it, but can't help themselves—it must be said that it is the ideal of the rich man, who admits that the world is an ugly creation, but knows that he profits by its ugliness and misery, and is therefore content. Happily, it is a baseless dream; for so far from there being any likelihood of any such sharp distinction taking place between one class of workers and another, the whole set of the stream of modern production tends towards breaking down such distinctions. The contented and capable workmen would be very few, instead of being the great mass of workers, and would consist of foremen, sub-managers, and the like; the discontented would be very many, and therefore their discontent would be apt to take a practical form. Have the theorists who support this possibility forgotten the agricultural labourers? If so, they may one day be reminded of them in an uncomfortable manner. There remains the revolutionary outcome; that is to say, the hope that the workers will set themselves free and become their own employers; that they will work, not as captives for a conquering enemy, but as neighbours for neighbours, exchanging labour against labour, without loss on either side, for each other's convenience and happiness.

As this outcome of the labour war is the only one which offers any betterment to the world, so most happily it is the only one which there is any chance of realising. As the war goes on, and therewith the value of the privilege of capital to compel labour without payment decreases, rent, profit, and interest will sink lower and lower, until they will scarcely be worth defending: the function of the employers will be gone, and necessity will compel the workers to push them out of their position of dignity in order that labour may be reorganised, so the world may not starve.

This, then, is the meaning of the unity of labour which the May Labour Day proclaims—that the workers must no longer be a class, but all society, or else there will soon be no society; and this new society they will certainly realise before long.

And how is it to be brought about? In the first place by the workers knowing that they are slaves and longing to be free. In the

next place, by their learning that it is possible for them to be free. And lastly, by the enforcing of their will, so that they may become free.

Now, as to this last matter, Labour Day points out to us at least one instrument for the winning of freedom—to wit, an universal strike. The rich live on the labour of the workers in no way metaphorically, but really. Teach the rich this lesson practically, and their power, backed up by their armed slaves, is gone. The workers have shown that they have striking-power capable of victory on minor occasions: let them combine and organise their striking power—capitalise their resources, to borrow a word from the enemy—and how can they be resisted?

It is true that this idea of an universal strike was current amongst the Chartists and was given up by them as unfeasible: but in those days, near as they are to our own, labour was so much less elaborately organised, and the different trades so much less dependent on one another, that they assumed that a strike of a month (the Sacred Month, as they called it) would be necessary; whereas to-day if the coalminers struck with the full assent of the mass of the workers, would not three days be more than enough? The ruling classes would have either to give up or to attack the workers with the armed hand.

Would they do that? or rather, could they? Effectually, they could not; another Peterloo massacre would be the downfall of our present society, far more perilously balanced as it is now than it was in 1820. Some ineffectual sputter there might be; but if we make such a possibility a lion in our path toward freedom, we have degenerated from our forefathers' valiancy.

In short, the lesson of Labour Day is, first of all, consciousness of the unity of interests of labour; secondly, the necessity of the workers learning what it is that they can claim; and thirdly, unity once more in setting about the winning of the freedom of labour.

WILLIAM MORRIS.

### STANLEY'S EXPLOITS:

OR,  
CIVILISING AFRICA.

(Continued from p. 130.)

In the *Daily Telegraph* of August 7th, 1876, we find Mr. Stanley in hot water again with the natives of Bambireh, an island on the western side of Albert Nyanza. These lawless savages dragged Stanley's boat ashore and stole his oars and a drum. On the whole, their attitude was threatening, and the explorer wanted to get away. He says:

"As soon as I saw the savages had arrived in the presence of Shekka with our drum, I shouted to my men to push the boat into the water. With one desperate effort my crew of eleven hands lifted and shot it far into the lake, the impetus they had given it causing it to drag them all into deep water. In the meantime the savages, uttering a furious yell of disappointment and baffled rage, came rushing like a whirlwind towards their canoes at the water's edge. I discharged my elephant rifle with two large conical bullets into their midst; and then assisting one of my crew into the boat, told him to help his fellows in while I continued to fight. My double-barrelled shotgun loaded with buckshot was next discharged with terrible effect, for without drawing a single bow or launching a single spear they fell back upon the slope of the hill, leaving us to exert our wits to get ourselves out of the cove before the enemy should decide to man the canoes. My crew was composed of picked men, and in this dire emergency they did ample justice to my choice. Though we were without oars, they were at no loss for a substitute. As soon as they found themselves in the boat they tore up the seats and footboards and begun to paddle, while I was left to single out with my rifle the most prominent and boldest of the enemy. Twice I succeeded in dropping men determined on launching the canoes; and seeing the chief who commanded the party that took the drum, I took deliberate aim with my elephant rifle at him. That bullet, I have since been told, killed the chief and two others who happened to be standing a few paces behind him; and this extraordinary result had more effect, I think, on the superstitious minds of the natives than all previous or subsequent shots. On getting out of the cove we saw two canoes loaded with men coming out in pursuit from another small inlet. I permitted them to come within a hundred yards of us, and this time I used the elephant rifle with explosive balls. Four shots killed five men and sunk the canoes. This decisive affair disheartened the