A DREAM OF JOHN BALL.

(Continued from p. 273.)

He left off as one who had yet something else to say; and, indeed, I thought he would give us some word as to the next place, for the army was to go from it; because it was now clear to me that this gathering was but a band of an army. But much happened before John Ball spoke again from the cross, and it was on this wise. When there was silence after the last shout that the crowd had raised a while ago, I thought I heard a thump sharp noise far away, somewhat to the north of the cross, which I took rather for the sound of a file or horse, than for the voice of a man. While this was going on, Green also seemed to have heard it, for he turned his head sharply, and then back again, and looked keenly into the crowd as though seeking to catch some one's eye. There was a very tall man standing by the prisoner near the outskirt of the crowd, and holding his bridle. This man, who was well armed, I saw something to the prisoner, who stopped down and seemed to whisper in his ear. The tall man nodded his head and the prisoner got off his horse, which was a clean and shod, better built beast than the other, belonging to the hand, and the tall man quietly led him a little way from the crowd, mounted him, and rode off toward a smart pace.

Will Green looked on sharply at all this, and when the man rode off, smiled as one who is content, and deems that all is going well, and settled himself down again to listen to the priest.

But now when John Ball had ceased speaking, and after another shout, and a hum of excited pleasure, and the following silence, there was silence again, and the priest addressed himself to speaking once more. He raised his head and turned toward the wind, as if he heard something, which certainly I heard, and felt every one in the throng, though it was not over loud, for sounds carry in such clear quiet evenings. It was the thump a-thump of a horse drawing near a hand-gallop along the grassy upland road, and I know well it was the tall man coming back with tidings, the purport of which I could well guess.

I looked up at Will Green's face. He was smiling as one pleased, and said softly as he nodded to me, "Yes, shall we see the grey goose fly this eve?"

But John Ball said in a great voice from the cross, "Hear ye the tidings on the way, fellows! Hold ye together and look to your gear; ye hurry not, for no great matter shall this be. I wot well there is little force between Canterbury and Kingston, for the roads are looking north of Thames toward Wat Tyler and his men. Yet well it is, well it is!"

The crowd opened and spread out a little, and the men moved in it, some tightening a girdle, some getting their side arms more in reach of their hands, and those who had bows stringing them. When Will Green had seen that, he and some others met me, and we started along with others to see if we could not get a glimpse of the grey goose, for it was well known in that part of the country that the grey goose was always a sure clue to the approach of the enemy.

By this time one of our best armed men had got through the throng and was standing on the cross beside John Ball. When the long man had done, there was the confusion of talk for a while, and the throng parted out more and more, but not in a disorderly manner; the bowmen drawing together toward the outside, and the hillmen forming behind them. Will Green was still standing beside me and had held of my arm, as though he knew both where he and I were to go.

"Fellow," quoth the captain from the cross, "be like this stour shall not live to be older than the day, if ye get into a plump together for their archers to shoot bolts into, and their men-at-arms to thrust spears into. Get you to the edge of the crofts and spread between man and man, and shoot, ye bowmen, with the arrows, and ye with the arrows keep your hands below the level of the edges, or else all they be thick a bolt may win its way in.

"He grinned as he said this, and there was laughter enough in the throng to have done honour to a better joke. Then he sung out, "Hob Wright, Rafe Wood, John Partridge, and thou Will Green, best ye shall in the bow-shot; and thou Nicholas Woolsey shall be under my own ordering. Gregory Tailor and myself.

"Clark, fair and fine are ye clad in the arms of the Canterbury fold; ye shall shine from afar; go ye with the banner into the highway, and the bows on either side ye shall ward ye; ye jump lads, and over the hedge with you when the bolts begin to fly your way! Take heed, good fellows all, that our business be beside the highway, and not let them get in on our flank the while; so half to the right, half to the left of the highway. Shoot straight and strong, and waste no breath with noise; I am your bow-string cry for you; and look you! I think both a loss of manhood to cover your bodies with trees and bush; for one of us who know is worth a hundred of those proud fools. To it, and let them see what the grey goose bears between his wings! Abide us here, brother John Ball, and pray for us if thou wilt; but for me, if God will not do for Jack Straw what Jack Straw would do for God were he in like case, I can see no help for it."

"Yes," said the priest, "here will I abide you my fellows if ye come back; or if ye come not back, here will I abide the foe. Depart, and the blessing of the fellowship be with you."

Down then leapt Jack Straw from the cross, and the whole throng set off without noise or hurry, soberly and steadily in outward seeming. Will Green led me by the hand if I were a boy, yet nothing he said, being forsooth intent on his charge. We were some four hundred men, and to myself that without some advantage of the ground and we were not seen by the men-at-arms that long Gregory Tailor had said of; for I had not seen yet the yard-long shaft at its work.

We carried more than half of the word turned into the
IS SOCIALISM SPREADING?

Mr. Bradlaugh, if a recently reported interview in the *Evening News* be not a joke, has been trying to calm the fears of the "respectable" middle-class by declaring that Socialists are either crack-brained enthusiasts or brainwashed fools, and that Socialism is not making any perceptible progress in this country. If Socialists were as likely to be discouraged, or to do anything but laugh at such utterances from such a quarter, they might take a lesson from the past again to find another proof amongst many of the spread of Socialist ideas in the following very unorthodox sentiments, which are taken from a leading article in the *Daily News* of November 25:

"People who have once found that they can support themselves in idleness by sending their children to begging will not return to industry. They are not demoralized by the indolent younger son who has been at Eton and cannot imagine why he should ever do any harder work than is demanded from a drudgey private secretary. The street-sellers are not morally ones whit worse than this delinquent young gentleman, and so long as we cannot help supporting them they will go begging." Again:

"We cannot do this, and we cannot do that; people say, because it is "economically unwise." But this is no reason for never doing anything at all. If nearly everything that is proposed is economically unwise, what is left of anything that is economically sound? Is it to resort to the most possible and costliest way of earning a living, which must be output by prostitution, theft, and begging? If that kind of economy be sound economically, it is rotten every other way. One might feel it a relief to do something that was wrong, rather than to sit still for doing nothing in the odd of economical suavity. It is not institutions, but institutions that are evil, which are wrong in every way, and not the reverse.

Lissagar's 'History of the Commune.'

This important work has at last appeared in English, and we do not hesitate to say that it ought to be in the hands of every Socialist and Anti-Socialist. The history of the Commune, as presented in the generally unbiased narrative of Lissagar, bears a profound moral with it. It is the story of the struggle of noble enthusiasm, genuine disinterestedness and devotion, and in the ordinary sense, very great opportunities, with division of labors, personal sacrifices, insufficiency of organization, and pedantry, resulting in the ascendancy of the latter, and a consequent general collapse. The Versailles entered upon a victory already prepared for them. And it will be so again in the next great popular movement, unless due subordination of function and organization are not able to keep the whip-hand of mere confusion, cliquishness, and particularism. But the moral to be drawn is of more immediate application than to the next popular rising. To compare small matters with great, there are Socialistic organisations (save the mark!) in existence to-day which are litigiously qualifying for disaster when the tide comes. We see precisely the same elements at work in them which caused the failure of the Commune with the horrors of the 'bloody week.' Again and again as he reads the story of the tragedy of 71, the friend of the Cause feels inclined to wring his hands over the opportunities lost. But because everything was in confusion, nearly everybody was wrong, and nobody else's work, and consequently doing nothing at all, and in many cases double-crossed with the best intentions. Even at the supreme hour, when the Versailles were actually inside Paris, there was a chance of rolling back the invasion by means of a cross fire between Montmartre and the Pantheon, had these portions been properly fortified and garrisoned; but there was no one there. Again, when the Commune was in death-throws, street after street was sacrificed because officers and others carrying important messages were ambushed and forced to remain in the ordinary work of barricade making—the last defence being thus literally immolated before a false and idiotic notion of equality.

We wish that every true Socialist, at whose head is led astray by disintegrative tendencies would read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the important lessons of this volume. The cause was wrecked in 1871, in great part at least, not because of spies or traitors, but because there were marvellously few of those who took any prominent part in the movement who could fairly be accused of sinister motives, or of attempts to make personal gain out of it. But the lesson of the Commune is a lesson to be learned, and learned well, by the rest of us who, as we understand the word, are Socialists.