

NEWS FROM NOWHERE:

OR,

AN EPOCH OF REST.

BEING SOME CHAPTERS FROM A UTOPIAN ROMANCE.

CHAP. IX.—CONCERNING LOVE.

"Your kinsman doesn't much care for beautiful building, then," said I, as we entered the rather dreary classical house; which indeed was as bare as need be, except for some big pots of the June flowers which stood about here and there; though it was very clean and nicely whitewashed.

"O, I don't know," said Dick, rather absently. "He is getting old, certainly, for he is over a hundred and five, and no doubt he doesn't care about moving. But of course he could live in a prettier house if he liked: he is not obliged to live in one place any more than anyone else. This way, Guest."

And he led the way upstairs, and opening a door we went into a fair-sized room of the old type, as plain as the rest of the house, with a few necessary pieces of furniture, and those very simple and even rude, but solid and with a good deal of carving about them, well designed but rather crudely executed. At the furthest corner of the room, at a desk near the window, sat a little old man in a rooney oak chair, well be cushioned. He was dressed in a sort of Norfolk jacket of blue serge worn threadbare, with breeches of the same, and grey worsted stockings. He jumped up from his chair, and cried out in a voice of considerable volume for such an old man, "Welcome, Dick, my lad; Clara is here, and will be more than glad to see you; so keep your heart up!"

"Clara here?" quoth Dick; "if I had known, I would not have brought— At least, I mean I would—"

He was stuttering and confused, clearly because he was anxious to say nothing to make me feel one too many. But the old man, who had not seen me at first, helped him out by coming forward and saying to me in a kind tone:

"Pray pardon me, for I did not notice that Dick, who is big enough to hide anybody, you know, had brought a friend with him. A most hearty welcome to you! All the more, as I almost hope that you are going to amuse an old man by giving him news from over sea, for I can see that you are come from over the water and far off countries."

He looked at me thoughtfully, almost anxiously, as he said in a changed voice, "Might I ask you where you come from, as you are so clearly a stranger?"

I said in an absent way: "I used to live in England, and now I am come back again; and I slept last night at the Hammersmith Guest House."

He bowed gravely, but seemed, I thought, a little disappointed with my answer. As for me, I was now looking at him harder than good manners allowed of, perhaps; for in truth his face, dried-apple-like as it was, seemed strangely familiar to me; as if I had seen it before—in a looking-glass it might be, said I to myself.

"Well," said the old man, "wherever you come from, you are come among friends. And I see my kinsman Richard Hammond has an air about him as if he had brought you here for me to do something for you. Is that so, Dick?"

Dick, who was getting still more absent-minded and kept looking uneasily at the door, managed to say, "Well, yes, kinsman: our guest finds things much altered, and cannot understand it; nor can I; so I thought I would bring him to you, since you know more of all that has happened within the last two hundred years than anybody else does.—What's that?"

And he turned toward the door again. We heard footsteps outside; the door opened, and in came a very beautiful young woman, who stopped short on seeing Dick, and flushed as red as a rose, but faced him nevertheless. Dick looked at her hard, and half reached out his hand toward her, and his whole face quivered with emotion.

The old man did not leave them long in this shy discomfort, but said, smiling with an old man's mirth: "Dick, my lad, and you, my dear Clara, I rather think that we two oldsters are in your way; for I think you will have plenty to say to each other. You had better go into Nelson's room up above; I know he has gone out; and he has just been covering the walls all over with mediæval books, so it will be pretty enough even for you two and your renewed pleasure."

The girl reached out her hand to Dick, and taking his led him out of the room, looking straight before her; but it was easy to see that her blushes came from happiness, not anger; as, indeed, love is far more self-conscious than wrath.

When the door had shut on them the old man turned to me, still smiling, and said:

"Frankly, my dear guest, you will do me a great service if you are come to set my old tongue wagging. My love of talk still abides with me, or rather grows on me; and though it is pleasant enough to see these youngsters moving about and playing together so seriously, as if the whole world depended on their kisses (as indeed it does somewhat), yet I don't think my tales of the past interest them much. The last harvest, the last baby, the last knot of carving in the marketplace, is history enough for them. It was different, I think, when I was a lad, when we were not so assured of peace and continuous plenty as we are now—Well, well! Without putting you to the question, let me ask you this: Am I to consider you as an enquirer who knows a little of our modern ways of life, or as one who comes from some place

where the very foundations of life are different from ours,—do you know anything or nothing about us?"

He looked at me keenly and with growing wonder in his eyes as he spoke; and I answered in a low voice—

"I know only so much of your modern life as I could gather from using my eyes on the way here from Hammersmith, and from asking some questions of Richard Hammond, most of which he could hardly understand."

The old man smiled at this. "Then," said he, "I am to speak to you as—"

"As if I were a being from another planet," said I.

The old man, whose name, by the bye, like his kinsman's, was Hammond, smiled and nodded, and wheeling his seat round to me, bade me sit in a heavy oak chair, and said, as he saw my eyes fix on its curious carving—

"Yes, I am much tied to the past, *my* past, you understand. These very pieces of furniture belong to a time before my early days; it was my father who got them made; if they had been done within the last fifty years they would have been much cleverer in execution; but I don't think I should have liked them the better. We were almost beginning again in those days; and they were brisk, hot-headed times. But you hear how garrulous I am: ask me questions, ask me questions about anything, dear guest; since I *must* talk, make my talk profitable to you."

I was silent for a minute, and then I said, somewhat nervously: "Excuse me if I am rude; but I am so much interested in Richard, since he has been so kind to me a perfect stranger, that I should like to ask a question about him."

"Well," said old Hammond, "if he were not 'kind,' as you call it, to a perfect stranger he would be thought a strange person, and people would be apt to shun him. But ask on, ask on! don't be shy of asking."

Said I: "That beautiful girl, is he going to be married to her?"

"Well," said he, "yes, he is. He has been married to her once already, and now I should say it is pretty clear that he will be married to her again."

"Indeed," quoth I, wondering what that meant.

WILLIAM MORRIS.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

IN AUSTRALIA.

OUT of an adult male population of about 75,000 there are 15,000 trades-unionists in Queensland. The Central Carriers, the Labourers, and the Shearers Unions have unanimously agreed to the Labour Federation proposals. The Bushmen are also expected in. The Western drovers have formed a union, their headquarters being at Tambo. The telegraph operators have also formed a union. The railway employes received consideration when the Civil Service Bill was before Parliament, but the P.O. and telegraph employes did not get any concession, although they were bitterly opposed to the bill. They were not organised then.

The annual delegates meeting of the labourers' unions of the Central district terminated at Blackall on Saturday week. It was unanimously decided to affiliate with the Labour Federation, and assist in establishing a journal in the interests of labour, though the proposed name of *Swaggman* was objected to. The new monthly will consist of eight pages, *Boomerang* size. Several conferences also took place between the Employers Association and the Labourers Union to consider the proposed reduction of the labourers' wages to 25s., but no satisfactory conclusion was arrived at. The men want 30s. as the minimum wage, and the employers want 20s. to be the maximum. The Queensland shearers have decided to amalgamate with the N.S.W. union, and will send delegates to the conference in February. As an instance of the good feeling prevailing between the shearers of the two colonies, the employes on Corona Downs Station, Queensland, have sent £10 to the fund for the Brookong shearers, who have now been in prison over fifteen months.

The master bakers of Sydney make out that by selling bread at 1½d. per pound they have only made 3d. on every 100 pounds of flour manufactured (or 4½ per cent. on their outlay), and that is why they have determined to raise the price to 3½d. per 2½ lb. loaf. It further appears that after all they have decided to sell their bread at 3d. Inference?

There is a case to come before the Albury Quarter Sessions in a week or two of a man who "mistook" 1,250 sheep—and mis-took them. He isn't a workman and therefore not a thief.

A Mr. John Farrell has been writing in the *Sydney Daily Telegraph* on "The Philosophy of the Single-Tax," and in so doing went out of his way to misrepresent Socialism. Whereupon comrade Yewen arose and smote him in a letter which has attracted a good deal of attention. You will be glad to hear that Yewen has very much improved in health since he has been here. He is doing valuable work for the Cause.

We have lectures and debates every Sunday evening at our rooms, 533, George Street, and they are very well attended. The Free Reading Room is a great success, and much used. We have a very fine collection of the Socialist, Labour, and Radical papers of the world, which are doing great good in letting the people here see how things are going on elsewhere. "Smallest contributions thankfully received."

The Melbourne Socialists are fighting valiantly the battle for free speech on the Wharf. Some of the prominent men have been fined and imprisoned by the Victorian Nupkinses for their persistence, but they keep right on. There are two things over which the battle rages there—Free Speech and the Sunday Opening of Museums and Libraries. They look like winning, but meanwhile the struggle is a fierce one.

CORNSTALK.

Sydney, N.S.W., Jan. 14, 1890.

Never did the proletariat more literally deserve its name than since the advent of the factory period, their rapid and degenerative increase, indeed, primarily representing "the progress of investments."—*The Evolution of Sex*, by Prof. Geddes and J. A. Thomson.

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