

Chapter 48

The Wise men of the East

At the end of the following week there was a terrible slaughter at Rushton's. Barrington and all the casual hands were sacked, including Newman, Easton and Harlow, and there was so little work that it looked as if everyone else would have to stand off also. The summer was practically over, so those who were stood off had but a poor chance of getting a start anywhere else, because most other firms were discharging hands as well.

There was only one other shop in the town that was doing anything at all to speak of, and that was the firm of Dauber and Botchit. This firm had come very much to the front during the summer, and had captured several big jobs that Rushton & Co. had expected to get, besides taking away several of the latter's old customers.

This firm took work at almost half the price that Rushton's could do it for, and they had a foreman whose little finger was thicker than Nimrod's thigh. Some of the men who had worked for both firms during the summer, said that after working for Dauber and Botchit, working for Rushton seemed like having a holiday.

'There's one bloke there,' said Newman, in conversation with Harlow and Easton. 'There's one bloke there wot puts up twenty-five rolls o'

paper in a day an' trims and pastes for 'imself; and as for the painters, nearly everyone of 'em gets over as much work as us three put together, and if you're working there you've got to do the same or get the sack.'

However much truth or falsehood or exaggeration there may have been in the stories of the sweating and driving that prevailed at Dauber and Botchit's, it was an indisputable fact that the other builders found it very difficult to compete with them, and between the lot of them what work there was to do was all finished or messed up in about a quarter of the time that it would have taken to do it properly.

By the end of September there were great numbers of men out of employment, and the practical persons who controlled the town were already preparing to enact the usual farce of 'Dealing' with the distress that was certain to ensue. The Rev. Mr Boshier talked of reopening the Labour Yard; the secretary of the OBS appealed for more money and cast-off clothing and boots--the funds of the Society had been depleted by the payment of his quarter's salary. There were rumours that the Soup Kitchen would be reopened at an early date for the sale of 'nourishment', and charitable persons began to talk of Rummage Sales and soup tickets.

Now and then, whenever a 'job' 'came in', a few of Rushton's men were able to put in a few hours' work, but Barrington never went back. His manner of life was the subject of much speculation on the part of his former workmates, who were not a little puzzled by the fact that he was

much better dressed than they had ever known him to be before, and that he was never without money. He generally had a tanner or a bob to lend, and was always ready to stand a drink, to say nothing of what it must have cost him for the quantities of Socialist pamphlets and leaflets that he gave away broadcast. He lodged over at Windley, but he used to take his meals at a little coffee tavern down town, where he used often to invite one or two of his old mates to take dinner with him. It sometimes happened that one of them would invite him home of an evening, to drink a cup of tea, or to see some curiosity that the other thought would interest him, and on these occasions--if there were any children in the house to which they were going--Barrington usually made a point of going into a shop on their way, and buying a bag of cakes or fruit for them.

All sorts of theories were put forward to account for his apparent affluence. Some said he was a toff in disguise; others that he had rich relations who were ashamed of him because he was a Socialist, and who allowed him so much a week so long as he kept away from them and did not use his real name. Some of the Liberals said that he was in the pay of the Tories, who were seeking by underhand methods to split up the Progressive Liberal Party. Just about that time several burglaries took place in the town, the thieves getting clear away with the plunder, and this circumstance led to a dark rumour that Barrington was the culprit, and that it was these ill-gotten gains that he was spending so freely.

About the middle of October an event happened that drew the town into a

state of wild excitement, and such comparatively unimportant subjects as unemployment and starvation were almost forgotten.

Sir Graball D'Encloeland had been promoted to yet a higher post in the service of the country that he owned such a large part of; he was not only to have a higher and more honourable position, but also--as was nothing but right--a higher salary. His pay was to be increased to seven thousand five hundred a year or one hundred and fifty pounds per week, and in consequence of this promotion it was necessary for him to resign his seat and seek re-election.

The ragged-trousered Tory workmen as they loitered about the streets, their stomachs empty, said to each other that it was a great honour for Mugsborough that their Member should be promoted in this way. They boasted about it and assumed as much swagger in their gait as their broken boots permitted.

They stuck election cards bearing Sir Graball's photograph in their windows and tied bits of blue and yellow ribbon--Sir Graball's colours--on their underfed children.

The Liberals were furious. They said that an election had been sprung on them--they had been taken a mean advantage of--they had no candidate ready.

They had no complaint to make about the salary, all they complained of was the short notice. It wasn't fair because while they--the leading

Liberals--had been treating the electors with the contemptuous indifference that is customary, Sir Graball D'Encloeland had been most active amongst his constituents for months past, cunningly preparing for the contest. He had really been electioneering for the past six months! Last winter he had kicked off at quite a number of football matches besides doing all sorts of things for the local teams. He had joined the Buffalos and the Druids, been elected President of the Skull and Crossbones Boys' Society, and, although he was not himself an abstainer, he was so friendly to Temperance that he had on several occasions, taken the chair at teetotal meetings, to say nothing of the teas to the poor school children and things of that sort. In short, he had been quite an active politician, in the Tory sense of the word, for months past and the poor Liberals had not smelt a rat until the election was sprung upon them.

A hurried meeting of the Liberal Three Hundred was held, and a deputation sent to London to find a candidate but as there was only a week before polling day they were unsuccessful in their mission.

Another meeting was held, presided over by Mr Adam Sweater--Rushton and Didlum also being present.

Profound dejection was depicted on the countenances of those assembled slave-drivers as they listened to the delegates' report. The sombre silence that followed was broken at length by Mr Rushton, who suddenly started up and said that he began to think they had made a mistake in going outside the constituency at all to look for a man. It was strange but true that a prophet never received honour in his own land.

They had been wasting the precious time running about all over the country, begging and praying for a candidate, and overlooking the fact that they had in their midst a gentleman--a fellow townsman, who, he believed, would have a better chance of success than any stranger. Surely they would all agree--if they could only prevail upon him to stand--that Adam Sweater would be an ideal Liberal Candidate!

While Mr Rushton was speaking the drooping spirits of the Three Hundred were reviving, and at the name of Sweater they all began to clap their hands and stamp their feet. Loud shouts of enthusiastic approval burst forth, and cries of 'Good old Sweater' resounded through the room.

When Sweater rose to reply, the tumult died away as suddenly as it had commenced. He thanked them for the honour they were conferring upon him. There was no time to waste in words or idle compliments; rather than allow the Enemy to have a walk-over, he would accede to their request and contest the seat.

A roar of applause burst from the throats of the delighted Three Hundred.

Outside the hail in which the meeting was being held a large crowd of poverty-stricken Liberal working men, many of them wearing broken boots and other men's cast-off clothing, was waiting to hear the report of the slave-drivers' deputation, and as soon as Sweater had consented to be nominated, Didlum rushed and opened the window overlooking the street and shouted the good news down to the crowd, which joined in the

cheering. In response to their demands for a speech, Sweater brought his, obese carcass to the window and addressed a few words to them, reminding them of the shortness of the time at their disposal, and intreating them to work hard in order that the Grand old Flag might be carried to victory.

At such times these people forgot all about unemployment and starvation, and became enthusiastic about 'Grand old Flags'. Their devotion to this flag was so great that so long as they were able to carry it to victory, they did not mind being poverty stricken and hungry and ragged; all that mattered was to score off their hated 'enemies' their fellow countrymen the Tories, and carry the grand old flag to victory. The fact that they had carried the flag to victory so often in the past without obtaining any of the spoils, did not seem to damp their ardour in the least. Being philanthropists, they were content--after winning the victory--that their masters should always do the looting.

At the conclusion of Sweater's remarks the philanthropists gave three frantic cheers and then someone in the crowd shouted 'What's the colour?' After a hasty consultation with Rushton, who being a 'master' decorator, was thought to be an authority on colours--green--grass green--was decided upon, and the information was shouted down to the crowd, who cheered again. Then a rush was made to Sweater's Emporium and several yards of cheap green ribbon were bought, and divided up into little pieces, which they tied into their buttonholes, and thus appropriately decorated, formed themselves into military order, four

deep, and marched through all the principal streets, up and down the Grand Parade, round and round the Fountain, and finally over the hill to Windley, singing to the tune of 'Tramp, tramp, tramp, the Boys are marching':

'Vote, Vote, Vote for Adam Sweater!
Hang old Closeland on a tree!
Adam Sweater is our man,
And we'll have him if we can,
Then we'll always have the biggest loaf for tea.'

The spectacle presented by these men--some of them with grey heads and beards--as they marked time or tramped along singing this childish twaddle, would have been amusing if it had not been disgusting.

By way of variety they sang several other things, including:

'We'll hang ole Closeland
On a sour apple tree,'

and

'Rally, Rally, men of Windley
For Sweater's sure to win.'

As they passed the big church in Quality Street, the clock began to strike. It was one of those that strike four chimes at each quarter of

the hour. It was now ten o'clock so there were sixteen musical chimes:

Ding, dong! Ding Dong!

Ding dong! Ding dong!

Ding dong! Ding dong!

Ding dong! Ding dong!

They all chanted A-dam Sweat-er' in time with the striking clock. In the same way the Tories would chant:

'Grab--all Close--land!

Grab--all Close--land!

Grab--all Close--land!

Grab--all Close--land!

The town was soon deluged with mendacious literature and smothered with huge posters:

'Vote for Adam Sweater!

The Working-man's Friend!

'Vote for Sweater and Temperance Reform.'

'Vote for Sweater--Free Trade and Cheap Food.'

or

'Vote for D'Encoseland: Tariff Reform and Plenty of Work!'

This beautiful idea--'Plenty of Work'--appealed strongly to the Tory workmen. They seemed to regard themselves and their children as a sort of machines or beasts of burden, created for the purpose of working for the benefit of other people. They did not think it right that they should live, and enjoy the benefits of civilization. All they desired for themselves and their children was 'Plenty of Work'.

They marched about the streets singing their Marseillaise, 'Work, Boys, Work and be contented', to the tune of 'Tramp, tramp, tramp the Boys are marching', and at intervals as they tramped along, they gave three cheers for Sir Graball, Tariff Reform, and--Plenty of Work.

Both sides imported gangs of hired orators who held forth every night at the corners of the principal streets, and on the open spaces from portable platforms, and from motor cars and lorries. The Tories said that the Liberal Party in the House of Commons was composed principally of scoundrels and fools, the Liberals said that the Tory Party were fools and scoundrels. A host of richly dressed canvassers descended upon Windley in carriages and motor cars, and begged for votes from the poverty-stricken working men who lived there.

One evening a Liberal demonstration was held at the Cross Roads on Windley Hill. Notwithstanding the cold weather, there was a great crowd of shabbily dressed people, many of whom had not had a really good meal for months. It was a clear night. The moon was at the full, and the scene was further illuminated by the fitful glare of several torches, stuck on the end of twelve-foot poles. The platform was a

large lorry, and there were several speakers, including Adam Sweater himself and a real live Liberal Peer--Lord Ammenegg. This individual had made a considerable fortune in the grocery and provision line, and had been elevated to the Peerage by the last Liberal Government on account of his services to the Party, and in consideration of other considerations.

Both Sweater and Ammenegg were to speak at two other meetings that night and were not expected at Windley until about eight-thirty, so to keep the ball rolling till they arrived, several other gentlemen, including Rushton--who presided--and Didlum, and one of the five pounds a week orators, addressed the meeting. Mingled with the crowd were about twenty rough-looking men--strangers to the town--who wore huge green rosettes and loudly applauded the speakers. They also distributed Sweater literature and cards with lists of the different meetings that were to be held during the election. These men were bullies hired by Sweater's agent. They came from the neighbourhood of Seven Dials in London and were paid ten shillings a day. One of their duties was to incite the crowd to bash anyone who disturbed the meetings or tried to put awkward questions to the speakers.

The hired orator was a tall, slight man with dark hair, beard and moustache, he might have been called well-looking if it had not been for a ugly scar upon his forehead, which gave him a rather sinister appearance. He was an effective speaker; the audience punctuated his speech with cheers, and when he wound up with an earnest appeal to them--as working men--to vote for Adam Sweater, their enthusiasm knew

no bounds.

'I've seen him somewhere before,' remarked Barrington, who was standing in the crowd with Harlow, Owen and Easton.

'So have I,' said Owen, with a puzzled expression. 'But for the life of me, I can't remember where.'

Harlow and Easton also thought they had seen the man before, but their speculations were put an end to by the roar of cheering that heralded the arrival of the motor car, containing Adam Sweater and his friend, Lord Ammenegg. Unfortunately, those who had arranged the meeting had forgotten to provide a pair of steps, so Sweater found it a matter of considerable difficulty to mount the platform. However, while his friends were hoisting and pushing him up, the meeting beguiled the time by singing:

'Vote, vote, vote for Adam Sweater.'

After a terrible struggle they succeeded in getting him on to the cart, and while he was recovering his wind, Rushton made a few remarks to the crowd. Sweater then advanced to the front, but in consequence of the cheering and singing, he was unable to make himself heard for several minutes.

When at length he was able to proceed, he made a very clever speech--it

had been specially written for him and had cost ten guineas. A large part of it consisted of warnings against the dangers of Socialism.

Sweater had carefully rehearsed this speech and he delivered it very effectively. Some of those Socialists, he said, were well-meaning but mistaken people, who did not realize the harm that would result if their extraordinary ideas were ever put into practice. He lowered his voice to a blood-curdling stage whisper as he asked:

'What is this Socialism that we hear so much about, but which so few understand? What is it, and what does it mean?'

Then, raising his voice till it rang through the air and fell upon the ears of the assembled multitude like the clanging of a funeral bell, he continued:

'It is madness! Chaos! Anarchy! It means Ruin! Black Ruin for the rich, and consequently, of course, Blacker Ruin still for the poor!'

As Sweater paused, a thrill of horror ran through the meeting. Men wearing broken boots and with patches upon the seats and knees, and ragged fringes round the bottoms of the legs of their trousers, grew pale, and glanced apprehensively at each other. If ever Socialism did come to pass, they evidently thought it very probable that they would have to walk about in a sort of prehistoric highland costume, without any trousers or boots at all.

Toil-worn women, most of them dressed in other women's shabby cast-off

clothing--weary, tired-looking mothers who fed their children for the most part on adulterated tea, tinned skimmed milk and bread and margarine, grew furious as they thought of the wicked Socialists who were trying to bring Ruin upon them.

It never occurred to any of these poor people that they were in a condition of Ruin, Black Ruin, already. But if Sweater had suddenly found himself reduced to the same social condition as the majority of those he addressed, there is not much doubt that he would have thought that he was in a condition of Black Ruin.

The awful silence that had fallen on the panic-stricken crowd, was presently broken by a ragged-trousered Philanthropist, who shouted out:

'We knows wot they are, sir. Most of 'em is chaps wot's got tired of workin' for their livin', so they wants us to keep 'em.'

Encouraged by numerous expressions of approval from the other Philanthropists, the man continued:

'But we ain't such fools as they thinks, and so they'll find out next Monday. Most of 'em wants 'angin', and I wouldn't mind lendin' a 'and with the rope myself.'

Applause and laughter greeted these noble sentiments, and Sweater resumed his address, when another man--evidently a Socialist--for he was accompanied by three or four others who like himself wore red

ties--interrupted and said that he would like to ask him a question. No notice was taken of this request either by Mr Sweater or the chairman, but a few angry cries of 'Order!' came from the crowd. Sweater continued, but the man again interrupted and the cries of the crowd became more threatening. Rushton started up and said that he could not allow the speaker to be interrupted, but if the gentleman would wait till the end of the meeting, he would have an opportunity of asking his question then.

The man said he would wait as desired; Sweater resumed his oration, and presently the interrupter and his friends found themselves surrounded by the gang of hired bullies who wore the big rosettes and who glared menacingly at them.

Sweater concluded his speech with an appeal to the crowd to deal a 'Slashing Bow at the Enemy' next Monday, and then amid a storm of applause, Lord Ammenegg stepped to the front. He said that he did not intend to inflict a long speech upon them that evening, and as it was nomination day tomorrow he would not be able to have the honour of addressing them again during the election; but even if he had wished to make a long speech, it would be very difficult after the brilliant and eloquent address they had just listened to from Mr Sweater, for it seemed to him (Ammenegg) that Adam Sweater had left nothing for anyone else to say. But he would like to tell them of a Thought that had occurred to him that evening. They read in the Bible that the Wise Men came from the East. Windley, as they all knew, was the East end of the town. They were the men of the East, and he was sure that next Monday

they would prove that they were the Wise Men of the East, by voting for Adam Sweater and putting him at the top of the poll with a 'Thumping Majority'.

The Wise Men of the East greeted Ammenegg's remarks with prolonged, imbecile cheers, and amid the tumult his Lordship and Sweater got into the motor car and cleared off without giving the man with the red tie or anyone else who desired to ask questions any opportunity of doing so. Rushton and the other leaders got into another motor car, and followed the first to take part in another meeting down-town, which was to be addressed by the great Sir Featherstone Blood.

The crowd now resolved itself into military order, headed by the men with torches and a large white banner on which was written in huge black letters, 'Our man is Adam Sweater'.

They marched down the hill singing, and when they reached the Fountain on the Grand Parade they saw another crowd holding a meeting there. These were Tories and they became so infuriated at the sound of the Liberal songs and by the sight of the banner, that they abandoned their meeting and charged the processionists. A free fight ensued. Both sides fought like savages, but as the Liberals were outnumbered by about three to one, they were driven off the field with great slaughter; most of the torch poles were taken from them, and the banner was torn to ribbons. Then the Tories went back to the Fountain carrying the captured torches, and singing to the tune of 'Has anyone seen a German Band?'

'Has anyone seen a Lib'ral Flag,
Lib'ral Flag, Lib'ral Flag?'

While the Tories resumed their meeting at the Fountain, the Liberals rallied in one of the back streets. Messengers were sent in various directions for reinforcements, and about half an hour afterwards they emerged from their retreat and swooped down upon the Tory meeting. They overturned the platform, recaptured their torches, tore the enemy's banner to tatters and drove them from their position. Then the Liberals in their turn paraded the streets singing 'Has anyone seen a Tory Flag?' and proceeded to the hall where Sir Featherstone was speaking, arriving as the audience left.

The crowd that came pouring out of the hall was worked up to a frenzy of enthusiasm, for the speech they had just listened to had been a sort of manifesto to the country.

In response to the cheering of the processionists--who, of course, had not heard the speech, but were cheering from force of habit--Sir Featherstone Blood stood up in the carriage and addressed the crowd, briefly outlining the great measures of Social Reform that his party proposed to enact to improve the condition of the working classes; and as they listened, the Wise Men grew delirious with enthusiasm. He referred to Land Taxes and Death Duties which would provide money to build battleships to protect the property of the rich, and provide Work for the poor. Another tax was to provide a nice, smooth road for the

rich to ride upon in motor cars--and to provide Work for the poor. Another tax would be used for Development, which would also make Work for the poor. And so on. A great point was made of the fact that the rich were actually to be made to pay something towards the cost of their road themselves! But nothing was said about how they would get the money to do it. No reference was made to how the workers would be sweated and driven and starved to earn Dividends and Rent and Interest and Profits to put into the pockets of the rich before the latter would be able to pay for anything at all.

These are the things, Gentlemen, that we propose to do for you, and, at the rate of progress which we propose to adopt, I say without fear or contradiction, that within the next Five Hundred years we shall so reform social conditions in this country, that the working classes will be able to enjoy some of the benefits of civilization.

'The only question before you is: Are you willing to wait for Five Hundred Years?'

'Yes, sir,' shouted the Wise Men with enthusiasm at the glorious prospect.

'Yes, Sir: we'll wait a thousand years if you like, Sir!'

'I've been waiting all my life,' said one poor old veteran, who had assisted to 'carry the "Old Flag" to victory' times out of number in the past and who for his share of the spoils of those victories was now

in a condition of abject, miserable poverty, with the portals of the workhouse yawning open to receive him; 'I've waited all my life, hoping and trusting for better conditions so a few more years won't make much difference to me.'

'Don't you trouble to 'urry yourself, Sir,' shouted another Solomon in the crowd. 'We don't mind waiting. Take your own time, Sir. You know better than the likes of us 'ow long it ought to take.'

In conclusion, the great man warned them against being led away by the Socialists, those foolish, unreasonable, impractical people who wanted to see an immediate improvement in their condition; and he reminded them that Rome was not built in a day.

The Wise Men applauded lustily. It did not appear to occur to any of them that the rate at which the ancient Roman conducted their building operations had nothing whatever to do with the case.

Sir Featherstone Blood sat down amid a wild storm of cheering, and then the procession reformed, and, reinforced by the audience from the hall, they proceeded to march about the dreary streets, singing, to the tune of the 'Men of Harlech':

'Vote for Sweater, Vote for Sweater!

Vote for Sweater, VOTE FOR SWEATER!

'He's the Man, who has a plan,

To liberate and reinstate the workers!

'Men of Mugs'bro', show your mettle,
Let them see that you're in fettle!
Once for all this question settle
Sweater shall Prevail!

The carriage containing Sir Featherstone, Adam Sweater, and Rushton and Didlum was in the middle of the procession. The banner and the torches were at the head, and the grandeur of the scene was heightened by four men who walked--two on each side of the carriage, burning green fire in frying pans. As they passed by the Slave Market, a poor, shabbily dressed wretch whose boots were so worn and rotten that they were almost falling off his feet, climbed up a lamp-post, and taking off his cap waved it in the air and shrieked out: 'Three Cheers for Sir Featherstone Blood, our future Prime Minister!'

The Philanthropists cheered themselves hoarse and finally took the horses out of the traces and harnessed themselves to the carriage instead.

'Ow much wages will Sir Featherstone get if 'e is made Prime Minister?' asked Harlow of another Philanthropist who was also pushing up behind the carriage.

'Five thousand a year,' replied the other, who by some strange chance happened to know. 'That comes to a 'underd pounds a week.'

'Little enough, too, for a man like 'im,' said Harlow.

'You're right, mate,' said the other, with deep sympathy in his voice.

'Last time 'e 'eld office 'e was only in for five years, so 'e only made twenty-five thousand pounds out of it. Of course 'e got a pension as well--two thousand a year for life, I think it is; but after all, what's that--for a man like 'im?'

'Nothing,' replied Harlow, in a tone of commiseration, and Newman, who was also there, helping to drag the carriage, said that it ought to be at least double that amount.

However, they found some consolation in knowing that Sir Featherstone would not have to wait till he was seventy before he obtained his pension; he would get it directly he came out of office.

The following evening Barrington, Owen and a few others of the same way of thinking, who had subscribed enough money between them to purchase a lot of Socialist leaflets, employed themselves distributing them to the crowds at the Liberal and Tory meetings, and whilst they were doing this they frequently became involved in arguments with the supporters of the capitalist system. In their attempts to persuade others to refrain from voting for either of the candidates, they were opposed even by some who professed to believe in Socialism, who said that as there was no better Socialist candidate the thing to do was to vote for the better of the two. This was the view of Harlow and Easton, whom

they met. Harlow had a green ribbon in his buttonhole, but Easton wore D'Encloeland's colours.

One man said that if he had his way, all those who had votes should be compelled to record them--whether they liked it or not--or be disenfranchised! Barrington asked him if he believed in Tarrif Reform. The man said no.

'Why not?' demanded Barrington.

The other replied that he opposed Tariff Reform because he believed it would ruin the country. Barrington inquired if he were a supporter of Socialism. The man said he was not, and when further questioned he said that he believed if it were ever adopted it would bring black ruin upon the country--he believed this because Mr Sweater had said so. When Barrington asked him--supposing there were only two candidates, one a Socialist and the other a Tariff Reformer--how would he like to be compelled to vote for one of them, he was at a loss for an answer.

During the next few days the contest continued. The hired orators continued to pour forth their streams of eloquence; and tons of literature flooded the town. The walls were covered with huge posters: 'Another Liberal Lie.' 'Another Tory Fraud.'

Unconsciously each of these two parties put in some splendid work for Socialism, in so much that each of them thoroughly exposed the hypocrisy of the other. If the people had only had the sense, they

might have seen that the quarrel between the Liberal and Tory leaders was merely a quarrel between thieves over the spoil; but unfortunately most of the people had not the sense to perceive this. They were blinded by bigoted devotion to their parties, and--inflamed with maniacal enthusiasm--thought of nothing but 'carrying their flags to victory'.

At considerable danger to themselves, Barrington, Owen and the other Socialists continued to distribute their leaflets and to heckle the Liberal and Tory speakers. They asked the Tories to explain the prevalence of unemployment and poverty in protected countries, like Germany and America, and at Sweater's meetings they requested to be informed what was the Liberal remedy for unemployment. From both parties the Socialists obtained the same kinds of answer--threats of violence and requests 'not to disturb the meeting'.

These Socialists held quite a lot of informal meetings on their own. Every now and then when they were giving their leaflets away, some unwary supporter of the capitalist system would start an argument, and soon a crowd would gather round and listen.

Sometimes the Socialists succeeded in arguing their opponents to an absolute standstill, for the Liberals and Tories found it impossible to deny that machinery is the cause of the overcrowded state of the labour market; that the overcrowded labour market is the cause of unemployment; that the fact of there being always an army of unemployed waiting to take other men's jobs away from them destroys the

independence of those who are in employment and keeps them in subjection to their masters. They found it impossible to deny that this machinery is being used, not for the benefit of all, but to make fortunes for a few. In short, they were unable to disprove that the monopoly of the land and machinery by a comparatively few persons, is the cause of the poverty of the majority. But when these arguments that they were unable to answer were put before them and when it was pointed out that the only possible remedy was the Public Ownership and Management of the Means of production, they remained angrily silent, having no alternative plan to suggest.

At other times the meeting resolved itself into a number of quarrelsome disputes between the Liberals and Tories that formed the crowd, which split itself up into a lot of little groups and whatever the original subject might have been they soon drifted to a hundred other things, for most of the supporters of the present system seemed incapable of pursuing any one subject to its logical conclusion. A discussion would be started about something or other; presently an unimportant side issue would crop up, then the original subject would be left unfinished, and they would argue and shout about the side issue. In a little while another side issue would arise, and then the first side issue would be abandoned also unfinished, and an angry wrangle about the second issue would ensue, the original subject being altogether forgotten.

They did not seem to really desire to discover the truth or to find out the best way to bring about an improvement in their condition, their

only object seemed to be to score off their opponents.

Usually after one of these arguments, Owen would wander off by himself, with his head throbbing and a feeling of unutterable depression and misery at his heart; weighed down by a growing conviction of the hopelessness of everything, of the folly of expecting that his fellow workmen would ever be willing to try to understand for themselves the causes that produced their sufferings. It was not that those causes were so obscure that it required exceptional intelligence to perceive them; the causes of all the misery were so apparent that a little child could easily be made to understand both the disease and the remedy; but it seemed to him that the majority of his fellow workmen had become so convinced of their own intellectual inferiority that they did not dare to rely on their own intelligence to guide them, preferring to resign the management of their affairs unreservedly into the hands of those who battered upon and robbed them. They did not know the causes of the poverty that perpetually held them and their children in its cruel grip, and--they did not want to know! And if one explained those causes to them in such language and in such a manner that they were almost compelled to understand, and afterwards pointed out to them the obvious remedy, they were neither glad nor responsive, but remained silent and were angry because they found themselves unable to answer and disprove.

They remained silent; afraid to trust their own intelligence, and the reason of this attitude was that they had to choose between the evidence and their own intelligence, and the stories told them by their

masters and exploiters. And when it came to making this choice they deemed it safer to follow their old guides, than to rely on their own judgement, because from their very infancy they had had drilled into them the doctrine of their own mental and social inferiority, and their conviction of the truth of this doctrine was voiced in the degraded expression that fell so frequently from their lips, when speaking of themselves and each other--'The Likes of Us!'

They did not know the causes of their poverty, they did not want to know, they did not want to hear.

All they desired was to be left alone so that they might continue to worship and follow those who took advantage of their simplicity, and robbed them of the fruits of their toil; their old leaders, the fools or scoundrels who fed them with words, who had led them into the desolation where they now seemed to be content to grind out treasure for their masters, and to starve when those masters did not find it profitable to employ them. It was as if a flock of foolish sheep placed themselves under the protection of a pack of ravening wolves.

Several times the small band of Socialists narrowly escaped being mobbed, but they succeeded in disposing of most of their leaflets without any serious trouble. Towards the latter part of one evening Barrington and Owen became separated from the others, and shortly afterwards these two lost each other in the crush.

About nine o'clock, Barrington was in a large Liberal crowd, listening

to the same hired orator who had spoken a few evenings before on the hill--the man with the scar on his forehead. The crowd was applauding him loudly and Barrington again fell to wondering where he had seen this man before. As on the previous occasion, this speaker made no reference to Socialism, confining himself to other matters. Barrington examined him closely, trying to recall under what circumstances they had met previously, and presently he remembered that this was one of the Socialists who had come with the band of cyclists into the town that Sunday morning, away back at the beginning of the summer, the man who had come afterwards with the van, and who had been struck down by a stone while attempting to speak from the platform of the van, the man who had been nearly killed by the upholders of the capitalist system. It was the same man! The Socialist had been clean-shaven--this man wore beard and moustache--but Barrington was certain he was the same.

When the man had concluded his speech he got down and stood in the shade behind the platform, while someone else addressed the meeting, and Barrington went round to where he was standing, intending to speak to him.

All around them, pandemonium reigned supreme. They were in the vicinity of the Slave Market, near the Fountain, on the Grand Parade, where several roads met; there was a meeting going on at every corner, and a number of others in different parts of the roadway and on the pavement of the Parade. Some of these meetings were being carried on by two or three men, who spoke in turn from small, portable platforms they carried with them, and placed wherever they thought there was a chance

of getting an audience.

Every now and then some of these poor wretches--they were all paid speakers--were surrounded and savagely mauled and beaten by a hostile crowd. If they were Tariff Reformers the Liberals mobbed them, and vice versa. Lines of rowdies swaggered to and fro, arm in arm, singing, 'Vote, Vote, Vote, for good ole Closeland' or 'good ole Sweater', according as they were green or blue and yellow. Gangs of hooligans paraded up and down, armed with sticks, singing, howling, cursing and looking for someone to hit. Others stood in groups on the pavement with their hands thrust in their pockets, or leaned against walls or the shutters of the shops with expressions of ecstatic imbecility on their faces, chanting the mournful dirge to the tune of the church chimes,

'Good--ole--Sweat--er

Good--ole--Sweat--er

Good--ole--Sweat--er

Good--ole--Sweat--er.'

Other groups--to the same tune--sang 'Good--ole--Close--land'; and every now and again they used to leave off singing and begin to beat each other. Fights used to take place, often between workmen, about the respective merits of Adam Sweater and Sir Graball D'Encloseland.

The walls were covered with huge Liberal and Tory posters, which showed in every line the contempt of those who published them for the

intelligence of the working men to whom they were addressed. There was one Tory poster that represented the interior of a public house; in front of the bar, with a quart pot in his hand, a clay pipe in his mouth, and a load of tools on his back, stood a degraded-looking brute who represented the Tory ideal of what an Englishman should be; the letterpress on the poster said it was a man! This is the ideal of manhood that they hold up to the majority of their fellow countrymen, but privately--amongst themselves--the Tory aristocrats regard such 'men' with far less respect than they do the lower animals. Horses or dogs, for instance.

The Liberal posters were not quite so offensive. They were more cunning, more specious, more hypocritical and consequently more calculated to mislead and deceive the more intelligent of the voters.

When Barrington got round to the back of the platform, he found the man with the scarred face standing alone and gloomily silent in the shadow. Barrington gave him one of the Socialist leaflets, which he took, and after glancing at it, put it in his coat pocket without making any remark.

'I hope you'll excuse me for asking, but were you not formerly a Socialist?' said Barrington.

Even in the semi-darkness Barrington saw the other man flush deeply and then become very pale, and the unsightly scar upon his forehead showed with ghastly distinctiveness.

'I am still a Socialist: no man who has once been a Socialist can ever cease to be one.'

'You seem to have accomplished that impossibility, to judge by the work you are at present engaged in. You must have changed your opinions since you were here last.'

'No one who has been a Socialist can ever cease to be one. It is impossible for a man who has once acquired knowledge ever to relinquish it. A Socialist is one who understands the causes of the misery and degradation we see all around us; who knows the only remedy, and knows that that remedy--the state of society that will be called Socialism--must eventually be adopted; is the only alternative to the extermination of the majority of the working people; but it does not follow that everyone who has sense enough to acquire that amount of knowledge, must, in addition, be willing to sacrifice himself in order to help to bring that state of society into being. When I first acquired that knowledge,' he continued, bitterly, 'I was eager to tell the good news to others. I sacrificed my time, my money, and my health in order that I might teach others what I had learned myself. I did it willingly and happily, because I thought they would be glad to hear, and that they were worth the sacrifices I made for their sakes. But I know better now.'

'Even if you no longer believe in working for Socialism, there's no need to work AGAINST it. If you are not disposed to sacrifice yourself

in order to do good to others, you might at least refrain from doing evil. If you don't want to help to bring about a better state of affairs, there's no reason why you should help to perpetuate the present system.'

The other man laughed bitterly. 'Oh yes, there is, and a very good reason too.'

'I don't think you could show me a reason,' said Barrington.

The man with the scar laughed again, the same unpleasant, mirthless laugh, and thrusting his hand into his trouser pocket drew it out again full of silver coins, amongst which one or two gold pieces glittered.

'That is my reason. When I devoted my life and what abilities I possess to the service of my fellow workmen; when I sought to teach them how to break their chains; when I tried to show them how they might save their children from poverty and shameful servitude, I did not want them to give me money. I did it for love. And they paid me with hatred and injury. But since I have been helping their masters to rob them, they have treated me with respect.'

Barrington made no reply and the other man, having returned the money to his pocket, indicated the crowd with a sweep of his hand.

'Look at them!' he continued with a contemptuous laugh. 'Look at them! the people you are trying to make idealists of! Look at them! Some of

them howling and roaring like wild beasts, or laughing like idiots, others standing with dull and stupid faces devoid of any trace of intelligence or expression, listening to the speakers whose words convey no meaning to their stultified minds, and others with their eyes gleaming with savage hatred of their fellow men, watching eagerly for an opportunity to provoke a quarrel that they may gratify their brutal natures by striking someone--their eyes are hungry for the sight of blood! Can't you see that these people, whom you are trying to make understand your plan for the regeneration of the world, your doctrine of universal brotherhood and love are for the most part--intellectually--on level with Hottentots? The only things they feel any real interest in are beer, football, betting and--of course--one other subject. Their highest ambition is to be allowed to Work. And they desire nothing better for their children!

'They have never had an independent thought in their lives. These are the people whom you hope to inspire with lofty ideals! You might just as well try to make a gold brooch out of a lump of dung! Try to reason with them, to uplift them, to teach them the way to higher things. Devote your whole life and intelligence to the work of trying to get better conditions for them, and you will find that they themselves are the enemy you will have to fight against. They'll hate you, and, if they get the chance, they'll tear you to pieces. But if you're a sensible man you'll use whatever talents and intelligence you possess for your own benefit. Don't think about Socialism or any other "ism". Concentrate your mind on getting money--it doesn't matter how you get it, but--get it. If you can't get it honestly, get it dishonestly, but

get it! it is the only thing that counts. Do as I do--rob them!
exploit them! and then they'll have some respect for you.'

'There's something in what you say,' replied Barrington, after a long
pause, 'but it's not all. Circumstances make us what we are; and
anyhow, the children are worth fighting for.'

'You may think so now,' said the other, 'but you'll come to see it my
way some day. As for the children--if their parents are satisfied to
let them grow up to be half-starved drudges for other people, I don't
see why you or I need trouble about it. If you like to listen to
reason,' he continued after a pause, 'I can put you on to something
that will be worth more to you than all your Socialism.'

'What do you mean?'

'Look here: you're a Socialist; well, I'm a Socialist too: that is, I
have sense enough to believe that Socialism is practical and inevitable
and right; it will come when the majority of the people are
sufficiently enlightened to demand it, but that enlightenment will
never be brought about by reasoning or arguing with them, for these
people are simply not intellectually capable of abstract
reasoning--they can't grasp theories. You know what the late Lord
Salisbury said about them when somebody proposed to give them some free
libraries: He said: "They don't want libraries: give them a circus."
You see these Liberals and Tories understand the sort of people they
have to deal with; they know that although their bodies are the bodies

of grown men, their minds are the minds of little children. That is why it has been possible to deceive and bluff and rob them for so long. But your party persists in regarding them as rational beings, and that's where you make a mistake--you're simply wasting your time.

'The only way in which it is possible to teach these people is by means of object lessons, and those are being placed before them in increasing numbers every day. The trustification of industry--the object lesson which demonstrates the possibility of collective ownership--will in time compel even these to understand, and by the time they have learnt that, they will also have learned by bitter experience and not from theoretical teaching, that they must either own the trusts or perish, and then, and not, till then, they will achieve Socialism. But meanwhile we have this election. Do you think it will make any real difference--for good or evil--which of these two men is elected?'

'No.'

'Well, you can't keep them both out--you have no candidate of your own--why should you object to earning a few pounds by helping one of them to get in? There are plenty of voters who are doubtful what to do; as you and I know there is every excuse for them being unable to make up their minds which of these two candidates is the worse, a word from your party would decide them. Since you have no candidate of your own you will be doing no harm to Socialism and you will be doing yourself a bit of good. If you like to come along with me now, I'll introduce you to Sweater's agent--no one need know anything about it.'

He slipped his arm through Barrington's, but the latter released himself.

'Please yourself,' said the other with an affectation of indifference.

'You know your own business best. You may choose to be a Jesus Christ if you like, but for my part I'm finished. For the future I intend to look after myself. As for these people--they vote for what they want; they get--what they vote for; and by God, they deserve nothing better! They are being beaten with whips of their own choosing and if I had my way they should be chastised with scorpions! For them, the present system means joyless drudgery, semi-starvation, rags and premature death. They vote for it all and uphold it. Well, let them have what they vote for--let them drudge--let them starve!'

The man with the scarred face ceased speaking, and for some moments Barrington did not reply.

'I suppose there is some excuse for your feeling as you do,' he said slowly at last, 'but it seems to me that you do not make enough allowance for the circumstances. From their infancy most of them have been taught by priests and parents to regard themselves and their own class with contempt--a sort of lower animals--and to regard those who possess wealth with veneration, as superior beings. The idea that they are really human creatures, naturally absolutely the same as their so-called betters, naturally equal in every way, naturally different from them only in those ways in which their so-called superiors differ

from each other, and inferior to them only because they have been deprived of education, culture and opportunity--you know as well as I do that they have all been taught to regard that idea as preposterous.

'The self-styled "Christian" priests who say--with their tongues in their cheeks--that God is our Father and that all men are brethren, have succeeded in convincing the majority of the "brethren" that it is their duty to be content in their degradation, and to order themselves lowly and reverently towards their masters. Your resentment should be directed against the deceivers, not against the dupes.'

The other man laughed bitterly.

'Well, go and try to undeceive them,' he said, as he returned to the platform in response to a call from his associates. 'Go and try to teach them that the Supreme Being made the earth and all its fullness for the use and benefit of all His children. Go and try to explain to them that they are poor in body and mind and social condition, not because of any natural inferiority, but because they have been robbed of their inheritance. Go and try to show them how to secure that inheritance for themselves and their children--and see how grateful they'll be to you.'

For the next hour Barrington walked about the crowded streets in a dispirited fashion. His conversation with the renegade seemed to have taken all the heart out of him. He still had a number of the leaflets, but the task of distributing them had suddenly grown distasteful and

after a while he discontinued it. All his enthusiasm was gone. Like one awakened from a dream he saw the people who surrounded him in a different light. For the first time he properly appreciated the offensiveness of most of those to whom he offered the handbills; some, without even troubling to ascertain what they were about, rudely refused to accept them; some took them and after glancing at the printing, crushed them in their hands and ostentatiously threw them away. Others, who recognized him as a Socialist, angrily or contemptuously declined them, often with curses or injurious words.

His attention was presently attracted to a crowd of about thirty or forty people, congregated near a gas lamp at the roadside. The sound of many angry voices rose from the centre of this group, and as he stood on the outskirts of the crowd, Barrington, being tall, was able to look into the centre, where he saw Owen. The light of the street lamp fell full upon the latter's pale face, as he stood silent in the midst of a ring of infuriated men, who were all howling at him at once, and whose malignant faces bore expressions of savage hatred, as they shouted out the foolish accusations and slanders they had read in the Liberal and Tory papers.

Socialists wished to do away with religion and morality! to establish free love and atheism! All the money that the working classes had saved up in the Post Office and the Friendly Societies, was to be Robbed from them and divided up amongst a lot of drunken loafers who were too lazy to work. The King and all the Royal Family were to be Done Away with! and so on.

Owen made no attempt to reply, and the manner of the crowd became every moment more threatening. It was evident that several of them found it difficult to refrain from attacking him. It was a splendid opportunity of doing a little fighting without running any risks. This fellow was all by himself, and did not appear to be much of a man even at that. Those in the middle were encouraged by shouts from others in the crowd, who urged them to 'Go for him' and at last--almost at the instant of Barrington's arrival--one of the heroes, unable to contain himself any longer, lifted a heavy stick and struck Owen savagely across the face. The sight of the blood maddened the others, and in an instant everyone who could get within striking distance joined furiously in the onslaught, reaching eagerly over each other's shoulders, showering blows upon him with sticks and fists, and before Barrington could reach his side, they had Owen down on the ground, and had begun to use their boots upon him.

Barrington felt like a wild beast himself, as he fiercely fought his way through the crowd, spuming them to right and left with fists and elbows. He reached the centre in time to seize the uplifted arm of the man who had led the attack and wrenching the stick from his hand, he felled him to the ground with a single blow. The remainder shrank back, and meantime the crowd was augmented by others who came running up.

Some of these newcomers were Liberals and some Tories, and as these did not know what the row was about they attacked each other. The Liberals

went for those who wore Tory colours and vice versa, and in a few seconds there was a general free fight, though most of the original crowd ran away, and in the confusion that ended, Barrington and Owen got out of the crowd without further molestation.

Monday was the last day of the election--polling day--and in consequence of the number of motor cars that were flying about, the streets were hardly safe for ordinary traffic. The wealthy persons who owned these carriages...

The result of the poll was to be shown on an illuminated sign at the Town Hall, at eleven o'clock that night, and long before that hour a vast crowd gathered in the adjacent streets. About ten o'clock it began to rain, but the crowd stood its ground and increased in numbers as the time went by. At a quarter to eleven the rain increased to a terrible downpour, but the people remained waiting to know which hero had conquered. Eleven o'clock came and an intense silence fell upon the crowd, whose eyes were fixed eagerly upon the window where the sign was to be exhibited. To judge by the extraordinary interest displayed by these people, one might have thought that they expected to reap some great benefit or to sustain some great loss from the result, but of course that was not the case, for most of them knew perfectly well that the result of this election would make no more real difference to them than all the other elections that had gone before.

They wondered what the figures would be. There were ten thousand voters on the register. At a quarter past eleven the sign was

illuminated, but the figures were not yet shown. Next, the names of the two candidates were slid into sight, the figures were still missing, but D'Encloeland's name was on top, and a hoarse roar of triumph came from the throats of his admirers. Then the two slides with the names were withdrawn, and the sign was again left blank. After a time the people began to murmur at all this delay and messing about, and presently some of them began to groan and hoot.

After a few minutes the names were again slid into view, this time with Sweater's name on top, and the figures appeared immediately afterwards:

Sweater	4,221
D'Encloeland	4,200

It was several seconds before the Liberals could believe their eyes; it was too good to be true. It is impossible to say what was the reason of the wild outburst of delighted enthusiasm that followed, but whatever the reason, whatever the benefit was that they expected to reap--there was the fact. They were all cheering and dancing and shaking hands with each other, and some of them were so overcome with inexplicable joy that they were scarcely able to speak. It was altogether extraordinary and unaccountable.

A few minutes after the declaration, Sweater appeared at the window and made a sort of a speech, but only fragments of it were audible to the cheering crowd who at intervals caught such phrases as 'Slashing Blow', 'Sweep the Country', 'Grand Old Liberal Flag', and so on. Next

D'Encloseland appeared and he was seen to shake hands with Mr Sweater, whom he referred to as 'My friend'.

When the two 'friends' disappeared from the window, the part of the Liberal crowd that was not engaged in hand-to-hand fights with their enemies--the Tories--made a rush to the front entrance of the Town Hall, where Sweater's carriage was waiting, and as soon as he had placed his plump rotundity inside, they took the horses out and amid frantic cheers harnessed themselves to it instead and dragged it through the mud and the pouring rain all the way to 'The Cave'--most of them were accustomed to acting as beasts of burden--where he again addressed a few words to them from the porch.

Afterwards as they walked home saturated with rain and covered from head to foot with mud, they said it was a great victory for the cause of progress!

Truly the wolves have an easy prey.