

WORKERS ABROAD.

THE INDUSTRIAL CLASSES IN FRANCE AND SWITZERLAND.

From the Pall Mall Gazette.

In France—at any rate, in Paris—the workman makes the Government under which he lives, and lives in a great degree on the Government which he has made. His dependence begins in the earliest stages of life, before he is aware how much he is discounting the power which he will hereafter exercise. His infant days are passed in the crèche, where public or private charity affords him shelter and attendance without trouble to either of his parents. From the crèche he passes to the salle d'asile, where it is only a question of pride or meanness on the part of his parents whether his first education shall be wholly or partially gratuitous. Be it remembered that the salles d'asile are not confined to Paris; for in 1866 not fewer than 432,000 children were educated in these institutions altogether. From the salle d'asile he is transferred to the école primaire, where, for the highest number of years, he receives more thorough instruction than the sons of many English brokers and merchants receive in "Establishments for Young Gentlemen." In 1866 more than 1,732,000 boys and 1,578,000 girls attended these schools throughout France. Beyond these, again, are different superior schools, culminating in the most ambitious of all, the Conservatoire des Arts et Metiers. Up to this point little has been done by the French workman, but everything for him. Henceforth his attempts to help himself are aided by the benevolence of a paternal Government. There are about 500 savings banks in France, with deposits to the value of twenty-three millions sterling. Then there are the Annuity Societies (Caisse de Retraite pour la Vieillesse), which enable a workman, by the investment of two sous a day, to obtain an annuity of £20 on attaining his sixtieth year. Lastly, there are the Societes de Secours Mutuels, or Friendly Societies, which perform functions nearly identical with those in England. They furnish temporary assistance to their sick or infirm members, and provide the funeral expenses of those who are dead. All these societies, in fact, infer from the general tenor of the report, are more or less watched by the Government. They are controlled by official pressure into a conformity of practice with principle, and are not allowed to expend 80 per cent. of their receipts on the salaries and feasts of their committees. From all these circumstances one might infer that the French workman is a well-trained, disciplined, and contented man, thrifty in the accumulation of funds which can be so well economized, and grateful to the Government which thus stimulates and rewards his thrift. He who would make such a supposition would find himself strangely mistaken by facts. The French artisan in general, and the Parisian artisan in particular, is neither grateful nor contented. The wages which he receives are on a level with those of his English compeer. But, in Paris at any rate, he does not save or invest more largely than the Englishman. He does not, it is true, guzzle and squill away his earnings as too many London workmen do. But he is not a whit less extravagant in his own way. He expends a large proportion of his wages on what he calls his pleasures. Fetes, cafes, dancing-saloons, music-halls, singing-rooms, in which the indecency is more striking than the melody or the wit, make as great a drain on his resources as the alehouse and gin-palace do on those of the London mechanic. And the women are not behind the men in their love of pleasure. Many a wife of a Parisian laborer earning high wages goes into some kind of service, not to make the pot boil at home, but to provide for her plaisir abroad. A working population which thus provides for its own pleasures, and has its education and protection provided for it, ought to be cheerful, and even jolly. But the working population of Paris, though often excited by gaiety, knows nothing of permanent contentment. As Mr. Malet says, "No private indulgence, no public legislation, can eradicate from their mind the idea that the capitalist is a vampire feeding on their blood. In the workshop the discipline may be complete; beyond it the employer is treated without respect, and his word is without influence. His efforts to make little arrangements which may be useful are treated not as boons, but as devices to bribe them to additional labor. A large manufacturer, by way of doing a kindness to the hands in his employment, turned on a tap of hot and cold water outside the manufactory, at which any of the families living about could come and help themselves. A workman, on being asked whether the innovation was well received by his fellows, replied simply, without the slightest intention of giving offense, that it appeared to be only a small part of what was due to them. \* \* \* No indulgence appears to them in the light of a spontaneous act of benevolence. They say again and again, it is only part of what is due to us." It is not a pleasant reflection that thousands of French operatives go through their lives imbued with these opinions, which they leave to their children and successors, to be cultivated and developed by the sermons of Socialist teachers every town. It is a dreary piece of good fortune which forbids a Parisian workman to have grandchildren; otherwise this teaching would fructify more rapidly than it has done hitherto. To the alternate excitements of indulgence and insurrection is due a result which proves the unwholesomeness of Parisian life, and precludes the hereditary transmission of an inexorable communism in the same families.

We turn from France to Switzerland. Here, at all events, the life of the operative should be at once happy, contented, and self-dependent. He is the citizen of a country which has general national traditions in all of which all the inhabitants are equal. Neither is political equality marred by those inequalities of fortune which make American republicanism such a ludicrous mockery. The only plutocrats are the bankers and the hotel-keepers; and even their interests are often identified with those of their poorer neighbors by the prevailing spirit of association. Where people are politically equal, and where primogeniture does not exist, one would expect to see all equally dependent on their own exertions. But this is not the case. There is unmistakably a poor class in all parts of Switzerland, and in some parts this is very poor indeed. For this both the cantonal and the communal authorities exert themselves to provide education, to aid employment, and even furnish cheap food. In the forest districts the communes generally distribute wood gratuitously. Mr. Bonar writes:—"There is not a single family throughout the canton of Argovie which does not receive annually from 120 to 180 cubic feet of wood." After following the very minute details of the aid liberally given by local authorities and rich men in Switzerland to their poorer fellow-citizens—details on which Mr. Bonar dwells with animation—it is impossible to read the following sentence without a smile:—"Not only are the indus-

trious classes specially favored by accidental circumstances of climate, etc., but their natural self-independence of character enables them to form a powerful link by their numbers in that firm chain of brotherhood which, etc. Many a true word is spoken in jest. Probably the substitution of the word "self-independence" for "self-dependence" was not wholly unintentional. Certainly Mr. Bonar's whole description is that of a people who, though industrious, and in some cantons very laborious, are altogether more dependent on others than on themselves. That men who work so hard as the Swiss laborers, and who, like them, often have land of their own, should not be able to subsist exclusively on their own toil, is strange enough. But it is yet more strange that they should dip their fingers into the public purse, or into the pockets of their richer neighbors, for the acquirement of education, of fuel, and of food. When we see communism of so advanced a kind practised by two nations like the Swiss and the French, in each of which equal division of property is recognized, and primogeniture repudiated, we may approximately reckon the distance of time at which similar practices will become familiar to ourselves, who have already increased the power and diminished the taxation of our poor, who have opened free dormitories to the more adventurous of our roving mendicants, and who still retain a monopoly of land which is especially objectionable to that numerous class which thinks that all property is a mistake, if not a crime, and that the only good of the rich is to give money to the poor. Only we may venture to hope that, when that time comes, we shall have learned to call things by their right names, and that the sovereign proteaire, while he maintains himself entirely on the involuntary contributions of oppressed opulence, will not insist on being complimented in the reports of foreign diplomats for his thrift, prudence, and self-dependence.

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