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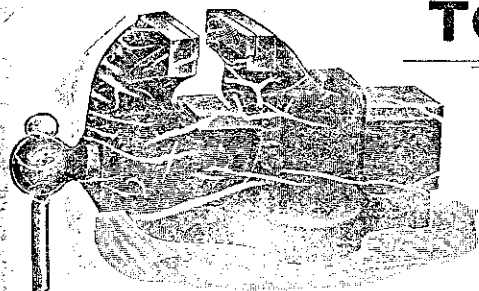
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## Passing Notes.

BY JACQUES.

Laugh where we must, be candid where we can.—Pope.

### KINGS AND PRINCES I HAVE MET.

#### EMPEROR O'BYRNE.

I had heard so many strange and disquieting reports of the vagaries of this powerful ruler, that it was with some trepidation that I hesitated outside his palace, and gazed on the imperial coat-of-arms emblazoned on the window—a fallen log, with a go-slow axe suggestively embedded therein, the whole surmounted by the motto: "Aut O'Byrne, aut nullus." I dreaded the ordeal before me, but my diplomatic mission must be discharged, so hiding my fears under an assumption of respectful nonchalance, I won my way to the august presence of this famous autocrat. When my eyes had recovered from the first dazzling effects of the brilliant splendour of his court, I saw before me a man of commanding physique, weighing probably a quarter of a ton or so, and whose massive chest had expanded until it reached below the bottom of his vest. His face, to my surprise, rather expressed benevolence, though there was a lurking something in his eye that hinted at awful possibilities if the imperial fur were rubbed the wrong way. His manner was extremely gracious, and (to put me at my ease, no doubt) he murmured something talismanic about "a spot"—to which I readily acquiesced, and in a few moments we were engaged in quite an amicable conversation, the Emperor showing such compliance and condescension as to seem, for the nonce, just an ordinary, natural man. At first the conversation took a genealogical turn, my imperial host assuring me of his descent from the illustrious Brian Boru, who, as everyone knows, was king of the whole world a few years back. "If you take his name and mine," said the Emperor, "and shake 'em up a bit, alter a few letters, look at 'em upside down and sideways, and give your imagination free play, you will detect a resemblance that will convince you of our relationship." Then after touching lightly but sadly on certain more intimate details of the family history—such as the lamentably sudden and violent deaths of some of its members through wearin' of the green, and other similar incidents—the Emperor confided to me that for some time past his realm had been agitated by violent factional wars. The two most powerful factions he designates the Employers and Employees. The latter, it seems, are moderately loyal to his person and throne, and therefore stand fairly high in the imperial favour—except such as neglect to pay their taxes, or "dues," as he calls them. The Employers have, however, of late displayed marked Bolshevik tendencies, and have complained bitterly and rebelliously of the Emperor's arbitrary laws. To check the spread of this revolutionary spirit it had been necessary to adopt Draconian measures, such as taking the control of their properties and industries into his own Imperial hands, fixing salaries and wages, limiting working hours, closely defining other conditions, and otherwise making life as nearly like hell to the Employers as was possible. Other minor regulations—such as compelling Employers to raise their hats when addressing Employees, and to refrain from "back talk" when the Employees abused them the right to breathe God's air to the Employers' recalcitrancy. Still, his natural inclination, he assured me, was towards mercy; this had been shown by his permission to the Employers to retain for themselves a living profit—though without any H.C.L. bonus. But they must not construe his mercy into weakness; if they did he would bring them to their knees, even if he had to obliterate the rest of their profits, and withhold from them the right to breathe God's air to do so. "Rebellion," he said "must be strangled with a firm foot." He hoped, however, that the wiser heads would recognise the position, and that their sane counsels would result in a general submission to his authority on the part of the Employers. In such an event, he was prepared to extend their privileges (they had no rights, he explained), to a point that would make life tolerable. Later, when their loyalty was thoroughly established, he might even go to the length of permitting them to go to a picture show now and then—though this must not be interpreted as a definite promise. But if they remained obdurate, well—and here his eye glittered ominously as he quoted—

"I am monarch of all I survey,  
My right there is none to dispute."

While he was quoting this I made my escape, thanking God that I was not among the Employers.

Position affects disposition. The worker, as an employer, is a far worse skinflint than the tyrant capitalist. Let us consider the sawmill workers, for instance. Some little time ago Mr O'Byrne, their secretary, succeeded in obtaining for them a H.C.L. bonus on the minimum wage of 1/3 per diem, or, roughly, 10/- per week. This was just as it should be, and filled them with gladness. But when, at one meeting of the same sawmill workers, it was proposed that, as an act of common justice, and an expression of their appreciation of the secretary's efforts on their behalf, his salary should be increased by the same amount, there was quite a storm of indignant protest, and the proposal was turned down with really unnecessary enthusiasm.

Mr Statham has verified the proverbial difficulty of catching a weasel asleep. His plans had been carefully made; and with a fighting platform of most excellent principles—including the electoral executive—he had hopes of leading his "Progressives"—with the aid of the Opposition—to victory over the reactionaries. Alas! he was badly outgeneralled from the start. The wily William forestalled the move, and by judicious bribery, I mean arrangement of portfolios, reduced his rival to impotence. Mr Statham made the tactical blunder of pinning his faith to principles and pledges. But what are principles and promises compared with portfolios? Mr Massey held in his hands the means of luring the wandering sheep back to the fold. Some of the excuses and explanations put forward by the deserters do not make nice reading. Said Mr Anderson: "Before I went to Samoa I wrote to Mr Statham and told him that the whole thing was over and everyone should take what he could get. . . . I urged Mr Statham to attend the first caucus and to accept a position if offered it, and I urged Mr Massey to offer him one." Sauve qui peut, with a vengeance. Mr Anderson's solicitude for Mr Statham looks as though it were prompted by a desire to save his own face. Anyway, the squabble revealed something of political method, and served to justify old Walpole's cynical dictum that all men have their price.

One of the most sinister signs of the times is the growing habit of organised labour in all countries, to "down tools" to force governments and communities to its own sweet will. Quite a number of instances have occurred near at hand within the last few months, the most noteworthy, perhaps, being the refusal of the Union Company's firemen to work the boat on which Sir George Clifford was an intending passenger. We may leave aside the question of the justice or otherwise of the jockeys' claims and the employers' attitude towards them; what most concerns the general public is the rapidly increasing tendency towards irresponsible mob rule. Had not Sir George Clifford generously foregone his undoubted right to take a passage for which he had paid, the action of the firemen in refusing to take the ship out might easily have resulted in considerable loss and grave inconvenience to scores of people utterly innocent of any part or parcel in the dispute, but who would be penalised to the same extent as the supposed culprit. The position is becoming altogether intolerable. That there is a proper place and purpose for industrial unionism in our social scheme none will deny; but when the unions step outside their legitimate sphere and usurp the powers and functions of Government, they become a menace to the common weal, and, as such, should be fought tooth and nail. There is a healthy old legal maximum it is better that ninety-nine guilty men should escape than that one innocent man should suffer. The unions—at least those that act as the Union Company's firemen did—seem bent on reversing this, and belabouring ninety-nine innocent men rather than let one sinner go unpunished.

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