

better.' Perhaps 'the most unkindest cut of all' is the closing sentence of his letter. He gently hints that the monetary proceeds of the proposed public discussions 'would be better expended in paying a special school-children's missionary for each of the chief centres,' and that 'as a beginning,' the salaried politician of the League 'might go halves' in this work with a namesake of his who has for many years been doing earnest and useful work, in an unostentatious way, among the Protestant State school children in Dunedin.

Freemasonry

Foreign Freemasonry we know—by its words and works. And since the disgraceful revelations of espionage and persecution carried on by it in the French army, there is none so poor to do it reverence. But by many outside the Craft Freemasonry under the British flag is regarded as an association of well-meaning and, perhaps, somewhat peculiar citizens who vary the profession and practice of philanthropy with occasional bouts of good-humored horse-play and practical joking and hanky-panky mystery behind the closed and guarded doors of the lodge. Some old-fashioned and unsuspicious folk in England were, therefore, somewhat startled a few weeks ago to learn that the influence of the Craft was used, in connection with the Holborn (London) municipal scandals, to defeat the ends of justice. A special Investigation Committee of the Council had recommended that one of its officials 'be proceeded against under the Statutory Declaration Act, 1835, and that it be referred to the Law and Parliamentary Committee to take the necessary steps.' It so happened that the official in question was a Freemason. When the matter came before the Council, Dr. Smith (chairman of the Committee) declared (according to the report in the 'Westminster Gazette') that 'the greatest pressure had been brought to bear upon individual members of the Council' by the Freemasons 'in relation to the subject—"not only personal influence, but influence of an association which ought never to have been brought into any question of this kind."' 'I am a Freemason myself,' said Dr. Smith; yet he 'deprecated and condemned in every possible way' the pressure that had been brought to bear by the 'brethren of the mystic tie' to defeat the recommendations of the Committee. But it was in vain. The lodge had done its underground work, and done it well. The high official of the Holborn Borough Council stands unmolested. He was not invited to make his bow before the 'beak.'

Lear once spoke in the bitterness of his heart:—

'Plate sin with gold;
And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks'
Arm it in rags, a pigny's straw doth pierce it!'

In our day the place of the corrupting gold that once shielded many from 'the butt-end of the law' seems to be taken by the oath-bound fraternities that work, not in God's open daylight like men, but in the dark like rats in a cellar. And if they use the cloak of night, even in England, to hide their friends from the pursuit of the law, may they not, with equal ease, work the ruin of unprotected innocence? United States President John Quincy Adams protested in his day against the evil influence of the Masonic fraternity upon the course of justice in the United States. And in England, Sir James Crichton-Brown put to a well-known Mason some years ago the following pointed reminders which have never yet been answered: 'If Masonry has a secret, the knowledge of which would benefit all mankind, then for Masonry to keep such knowledge to itself is immoral. If, on the other hand, the "secret" is not for the benefit of mankind, in professing it to be so, Masonry is again guilty of an immoral act. If you Masons say that it is only to benefit certain persons who are prepared to receive such knowledge, then there is an end of the universality of the brotherhood of Freemasonry.' We leave these nuts strewn about for the brethren to crack—if they can.

Vulgar Displays

The possession of wealth often brings its disillusion. Even Huck Finn found this out for himself. 'Being rich,' said he to Tom Sawyer, 'ain't what it's cracked up to be.' Without desiring to be as rich as Monte Cristo, most people would, nevertheless, cheerfully resign themselves to their fate if some fairy Robin Godfellow were to drop a modest £10,000 into their lap. The real trouble does not, as Buras seemed to think, lie in the unequal distribution of the motor-cars, the velvet-pile carpets, and the fat banking accounts. Such things must to some extent ever be, despite the bard's complaint:—

'It's hardly in a body's power
To keep at times frae being sour,
To see how things are shared;
How best o' chiefs are whyles in want,
While coofs on countless thousands rant,
And ken na how to wair't.'

Mere inequality of possession has never by itself alone created a social or political revolution. But great social upheavals have been caused by vulgar displays of wealth and the flaunting of bulging money-bags in the faces of people who felt the pangs of hunger unappeased. The French Revolution was not originally a revolt against the monarchical principle. It was in its first inception the wild anger of people who were fed—or starved—on buckwheat bread, and clad in rags and lived in windowless, chimneyless hovels, against the monstrous expenditure and the fantastic display of wealth and gaiety of the Court of Versailles.

The demon of this form of discontent, like many another demon, sometimes climbs in by the ears. But he commonly enters by the eyes. Of late years the upstart rich and others of the wealthy lower orders in English society have been making, right in the heart of London, those displays of vulgar ostentation that may yet bring dire, accumulated vengeance on their order. And the incidents of Mafeking day—when, for a time, a mob held London at its mercy—serve to show how near and real the danger may at any moment be. The latest of these afflicting aberrations of vulgar wealth and evil taste was a fantastic and (if we may use the expression) barbarously costly 'gondola' dinner given to a few guests in the courtyard of a London hotel, which was turned for the occasion into the counterfeit presentment of one of the canals of Venice. Champagne dinners to dogs are another phase of the craze for display by the gilded oafs who (to use Chesterfield's words) squander, without credit or advantage to themselves, more than men of sense would spend with both. Great wealth may be made a great blessing to a man, but (as Neuchatel says in 'Endymion') it becomes so only to him who knows what to do with it. But there are so many that do not know what to do with the shekels that fortune or inheritance has placed in their hands. The jewelled lower classes that gorged in the London gondola, with a trained elephant as waiter, belong to the same social category as the upstart governor of Brazil who had his horse shod with gold, and the rough Ballarat miners who warmed their limbs and lit their pipes with blazing banknotes, and took their morning tub in Moet and Chandon, and played games of ninepins with bottles of champagne—the player that broke fewest paying for all. They are all 'birds of a feather.'

Some poet—we cannot at this moment give him a local habitation and a name—has said:—

'When from a thousand, one alone
In plenty rolls along,
While others starve and faint for bread,
There must be something wrong.'

In the very city where the knot of beetle-headed plutocrats were devising new and fantastic means of idle display, there are 127,623 paupers—a number that equals the total population of the cities proper of Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, and Dunedin. No fewer than