

WANTED, a GARDENER, an elderly man, without encumbrance.

Salary, £50 per year and kept. Good references required.

Apply

CONVENT, Nelson.

MARRIAGE.

STAUNTON—FURNSTON—On the 11th February, at St. Joseph's Cathedral, Dunedin, by the Rev. P. Murphy, Michael J. Staunton, of Clyde, to Florence A. Furnston, of Healsville, Victoria.

DEATH.

MAHONY.—At his residence, Vogeltown, Wellington, on Tuesday, February 5, Daniel Mahony, father of the Revs. S. and G. Mahony; aged 61.



'To promote the cause of Religion and Justice by the ways of Truth and Peace.'

LEO XIII. to the N.Z. TABLET.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 1901.

LABOR AND THE RECORD REIGN.



ANY phases of the record reign of the late Queen have been discussed by our secular contemporaries. They have talked

Of many things:
Of shoes and ships and sealing-wax,
Of cabbages and kings:

of the progress of science and invention and of personal and domestic and public comfort; of wars and crises and clapper-clawings between State and State; of the pushing back of the boundary fences of nations; of the increased trade in wool, frozen meat, pocket knives, iron pots, cheap calico, and tinned tacks. But they seem to have unanimously missed the most sweeping social and political change that was wrought during the longest British reign. We refer to what may be not unreasonably called the emancipation of British labor. The beginning of the late Queen's long term of rule saw the British worker plunged into the lowest depths of physical and moral degradation that has probably been ever witnessed in any age or clime. The close of the reign saw him raised to a condition which, though far from ideal, is yet an Eden of bliss by comparison with the inferno in which he was chained down for many years after the late Queen had assumed the orb of empire.

The debased condition of English labor dates back to the days of the great religious upheaval of the sixteenth century. The golden age of the British laborer and artisan extended from the close of the peasants' revolt in 1381 to the evil days of HENRY VIII. Prosperity was continuous and progressive. During a long period the working day was only eight hours. The workers were secured in their Sunday rest, their Saturday half-holiday, the Christmas and Easter holidays, and many other festivals scattered throughout the year; and the low fixed rents of the time contributed greatly to their prosperity. The distinguished Professor THOROLD ROGERS says of an Act of Parliament that was passed in the second year of HENRY VII. (1486): 'A schedule of wages is given which, considering the cheapness of the times, is exceedingly liberal. At no time in English history have the earnings of laborers, interpreted by their purchasing power, been so considerable as those which this Act acknowledges.'

The degradation and impoverishment of the working man began in England, as in Germany, with the Reformation. In one of his lectures Professor THOROLD ROGERS

points out the successive steps by which the beggary and ruin of the British worker were accomplished: by the extravagance of HENRY VIII. and his dissolution of the monasteries; by the confiscation of the guild lands, the issue of a debased coinage, and the re-introduction and legislation of slavery under EDWARD VI.; and by the shocking repressive legislation of ELIZABETH's days, which made England the hell of the working man from the time of the 'Virgin Queen' till the present century had almost reached its meridian. By what ROGERS terms the 'infamous' Statute of Laborers of the fifth year of Queen ELIZABETH the British worker 'was handed over to the mercy of the employer at a time when he was utterly incapable of resisting the grossest tyranny.' Justices were empowered to 'check any discontent, even the discontent of despair, and might be trusted, if necessary, to starve the people into submission.' Employers of labor were empowered by law to fix the rates of wages. They fixed them at starvation rates. And from their decision there was no appeal. Under the Elizabethan Act it took the English Protestant artisan a whole year's labor or more to procure necessaries which the Catholic artisan could have secured in two weeks' work under the Statute of 1495. At the same time the laborer was gradually deprived of his old and time-honored rights of a rent-free house, commonage, wood, and of herbage for his cow and a run for his poultry.

The evils that accompanied the introduction of machinery and the onset of what is termed the industrial revolution, form, perhaps, the darkest chapter in the history of labor. During the reigns of GEORGE III., GEORGE IV., WILLIAM IV., and the early years of Queen VICTORIA the working people employed in the coal mines, woollen, cotton, and other factories, felt the bitter brunt of the following crying evils: (1) Insufficient wages; (2) over-work—the hours of labor being lengthened to twelve a day and sometimes to sixteen or more; (3) fraud and exaction in the shape of fines, confiscation of wages, and the iniquities of the truck system; (4) utter insecurity for the future; (5) gross cruelty to children, of which DEVAS writes that it was 'horrible, incredible, unparalleled even in the history of pagan slavery'—many of the details are too sickening to even hint at here; (6) immorality: the mines and factories became, says the same well-informed writer, 'dens of iniquity,' in which abominations were practised on a vast scale and of such a nature that the Royal Commissioners rightly refrained from referring to them in their report. Effective combination was prevented by fierce and searching Acts of Parliament, and, says GIBBINS in his *Industrial History of England* (p. 192), 'the lowest depth of poverty [of the working classes] was reached about the beginning of the reign of Queen VICTORIA.'

The tale of the sufferings and grinding degradation of the British working classes is told in the Blue-books and Reports of the various Commissioners which were appointed to investigate the condition of industrial life in the workshops, factories, and mines between the years 1833 and 1842. The substance of those bulky volumes is compressed within the covers of ENGELS' *State of the Working Classes in England in 1844*—a heart-breaking story of the hell of the damned which callous legislators and grasping capitalists had combined to create for men, women, and children in the England of Queen VICTORIA's early reign. It is a sickening story of 'children and young people in factories overworked and beaten as if they were slaves; of diseases and distortions only found in manufacturing districts; of filthy, wretched houses where people huddle together like wild beasts. We hear of girls and women working underground in the dark recesses of the coal-mines, dragging loads of coal in cars in places where no horses could go, and harnessed and crawling along the subterranean pathways like beasts of burden. Everywhere we find cruelty and oppression, and in many cases the workmen were but slaves bound to fulfil their master's commands under fear of dismissal and starvation. Freedom they had in name—freedom to starve and die; but not freedom to speak, still less to act, as citizens of a free State.' 'In fact,' says GIBBINS, 'the material condition of the working classes of England was at this time [about 1845] in the lowest depths of poverty and degradation.'

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