

I cannot convey the strange excitement I felt. It seemed as though these words suddenly opened a whole new world around me—a world I had heard about for years, but never entered. And the tone in which he had used the word "capitalist!" I had almost to glance around to make sure that there were no ravening capitalists hiding behind the trees.

"So you are a Socialist," I said. "Yes," he answered. "I'm one of those dangerous persons."

First and last I have read much of Socialism, and thought about it, too, from the quiet angle of my farm among the hills, but this was the first time I had ever had a live Socialist on my arm. I could not have been more surprised if the stranger had said, "Yes, I am Theodore Roosevelt."

One of the discoveries we keep making all our life long (provided we remain humble), is the humorous discovery of the ordinariness of the extraordinary. Here was this disrupter of society, with his man of the red flag—here he was with his mild spectacled eyes and his furry ears wagging as he walked. It was unbelievable!—and the sun shining on him quite as impartially as it shone on me.

Coming at last to a pleasant bit of woodland, where a stream ran under the roadway, I said:

"Stranger, let's sit down and have a bite of luncheon."

He began to expostulate, said he was expected in Kilburn.

"Oh, I've plenty for two," I said, "and I can say, at least, that I am a firm believer in co-operation."

Without more urging he followed me into the woods, where we sat down comfortably under a tree.

Now, when I take a fine, thick sandwich out of my bag I always feel like making it a polite bow, and before I bite into a big brown doughnut, I am tempted to say, "By your leave, madam," and as for mince pie—Beau Brummel himself could not outdo me in respectful consideration. But Bill Hahn neither saw, nor smelled, nor, I think, tasted Mrs. Ransome's cookery. As soon as we sat down he began talking.

From time to time he would reach out for another sandwich or doughnut or pickle (without knowing in the least which he was getting), and when that was gone some reflex impulse caused him to reach out for some more. When the last crumb of our luncheon had disappeared, Bill Hahn still reached out. His hand groped absently about, and coming in contact with no more doughnuts or pickles he withdrew it—and did not know, I think, that the meal was finished. (Confidentially, I have speculated on what might have happened if the supply had been unlimited.)

But that was Bill Hahn. Once started in his talk, he never thought of food or clothing or shelter; but his eyes glowed, his face lighted up with a strange effulgence, and he quite lost himself upon the tide of his own oratory. I saw him afterward by a flare-light at the center of a great crowd of men and women—but that is getting ahead of my story.

His talk bristled with such words as "capitalism," "proletariat," "class-consciousness"—and he spoke with fluency of "economic determinism" and "syndicalism." It was quite wonderful! And from time to time, he would bring in a smashing quotation from Aristotle, Napoleon, Karl Marx, or Eugene V. Debs, giving them all equal values, and he cited statistics!—oh, marvellous statistics, that never were on sea or land.

Once he was so swept away by his own eloquence that he sprang to his feet and, raising one hand high above his head (quite unconscious that he was holding up a dill pickle), he worked through one of his most thrilling periods.

Yes, I laughed, and yet there was so brave a simplicity about this odd, absurd little man that what I laughed at was only his outward appearance (and that he himself had no care for), and all the time I felt a growing respect and admiration for him. He was not only sincere, but he was genuinely simple—a much higher virtue, as Fenelon says. For while sincere people do not aim at appearing anything but what they are, they are always in fear of passing for something they are not. They are forever thinking about themselves, weighing all their words and thoughts and dwelling upon what they have done, in the

fear of having done too much or too little, whereas simplicity, as Fenelon says, is an uprightness of soul which has ceased wholly to dwell upon itself or its actions. Thus there are plenty of sincere folk in the world, but few who are simple.

Well, the longer he talked, the less interested I was in what he said and the more fascinated I became in what he was. I felt a wistful interest in him: and I wanted to know what way he took to purge himself of himself. I think if I had been in that group, nineteen hundred years ago, which surrounded the beggar who was born blind, but whose anointed eyes now looked out upon the glories of the world, I should have been among the questioners:

"What did He to thee? How opened He thine eyes?"

I tried ineffectually several times to break the swift current of his oratory, and finally succeeded (when he paused a moment to finish off a bit of pie crust).

"You must have seen some hard experiences in your life," I said.

one!—and then the story would die back again into quite narrative.

Like most working people, he had never lived in the twentieth century at all. He was still in the feudal age, and his whole life had been a blind and ceaseless struggle for the bare necessities of life, broken from time to time by fierce, irregular wars, called strikes. He had never known anything of a real self-governing commonwealth, and such progress as he and his kind had made was never the result of their citizenship, of their power as voters, but grew out of the explosive and ragged upheavals of their own half-organized societies and unions.

It was against the "black people" he said that he was first on strike back in the early nineties. He told me all about it, how he had been working in the mills pretty comfortably—he was young and strong then, with a fine growing family and a small home of his own.

"It was as pretty a place as you would want to see," he said; "we grew cabbages and onions and turnips—everything

"the woman was a good manager"—until one day he had the misfortune to get his hand caught in the machinery. It was a place which should have been protected with guards, but was not. He was laid up for several weeks, and the company, claiming that the accident was due to his own stupidity and carelessness, refused even to pay his wages while he was idle. Well, the family had to live somehow, and the woman and the daughter—"she was a little thing," he said, "and frail"—the woman and the daughter went into the mill. But even with this new source of income they began to fall behind. Money which should have gone toward making the last payments on their home (already long delayed by the strike) had now to go to the doctor and the grocer.

"We had to live," said Bill Hahn.

Again and again he used this same phrase, "We had to live!" as a sort of bedrock explanation for all the woes of life.

After a time, with one finger gone and a frightfully scarred hand—he held it up for me to see—he went back into the mill.

"But it kept getting worse and worse," said he, "and finally I couldn't stand it any longer."

He and a group of friends got together secretly and tried to organize a union, tried to get the workmen together to improve their own conditions; but in some way ("they had spies everywhere," he said,) the manager learned of the attempt, and one morning when he reported at the mill he was handed a slip asking him to call for his wages, that his help was no longer required.

"I'd been with that company for twenty years and four months," he said bitterly, "I'd helped in my small way to build it up, make it a big concern, payin' 28 per cent. dividends every year; I'd given part of my right hand doin' it—and they threw me out like an old shoe."

He said he would have pulled up and gone away, but he still had the little home and the garden, and his wife and daughter were still at work, so he hung on grimly, trying to get some other job. "But what good is a man for any other sort of work," he said, "when he has been trained to the mills for thirty-two years!"

It was not very long after that when the "great strike" began—indeed, it grew out of the organization which he had tried to launch—and Bill Hahn threw himself into it with all his strength. He was one of the leaders. I shall not attempt to repeat here his description of the bitter struggle, the coming of the soldiery, the street riots, the long lists of arrests ("some," said he, "got into jail on purpose, so that they could at least have enough to eat!"), the late meetings of strikers, the wild turmoil and excitement.

Of all this he told me, and then he stopped suddenly, and after a long pause he said in a low voice:

"Comrade, did you ever see your wife and your kids sufferin' for bread to eat?"

He paused again with a hard, dry sob in his voice.

"Did ye ever see that?"

"No," said I, very humbly, "I have never seen anything like that."

He turned on me suddenly, and I shall never forget the look on his face, nor the blaze in his eyes:

"Then what can you know about workin' men!"

What could I answer? A moment passed and then he said, as if a little remorseful at having turned thus upon me:

"Comrade, I tell you, the iron entered my soul—them days."

It seems that the leaders of the strike were mostly old employees like Bill Hahn, and the company had conceived the idea that if these men could be eliminated the organization would collapse, and the strikers be forced back to work. One day Bill Hahn found that proceedings had been started to turn him out of his home, upon which he had not been able to keep up his payments, and at the same time the merchant, of whom he had been a respected customer for years, refused to give him any further credit.

"But we lived somehow," he said, "we lived and we fought."



Lancashire Agricultural Society's Pavilion. Used as a hospital for wounded soldiers.

"That I have," responded Bill Hahn, "the capitalistic system —"

"Did you ever work in the mills yourself?" I interrupted hastily.

"Boy and man," said Bill Hahn. "I worked in that hell for thirty-two years—The class-conscious proletariat have only to exert themselves —"

"And your wife, did she work, too—and your sons and daughters?"

A spasm of pain crossed his face.

"My daughter?" he said. "They killed her in the mills."

It was appalling—the dead level of the tone in which he uttered those words—the monotone of an emotion long ago burned out, and yet leaving frightful scars.

"My friend!" I exclaimed, and I could not help laying my hand on his arm.

I had the feeling I often have with troubled children—an indescribable pity that they have had to pass through the valley of the shadow, and I not there to take them by the hand.

"And was this—your daughter—what brought you to your present belief?"

grew fine!—in the garden behind the house."

And then the "black people" began to come in, little by little at first, and then by the carload. By the "black people" he meant the people from Southern Europe, he called them "hordes"—"hordes and hordes of 'em"—Italians mostly, and they began getting into the mills and underbidding for the jobs, so that wages slowly went down, and at the same time the machines were speeded up. It seems that many of these "black people" were single men, or vigorous young married people with only themselves to support, while the old American workers were men with families and little homes to pay for, and plenty of old grandfathers and grandmothers, to say nothing of babies, depending upon them.

"There wasn't a living for a decent family left," he said.

So they struck—and he told me in his dull monotone of the long bitterness of that strike, the empty cupboards, the approach of winter with no coal for the stoves and no warm clothing for the



Interior View of Lancashire Agricultural Society's Pavilion. Showing wounded soldiers and nurses.

"No," said he, "oh, no. I was a Socialist, as you might say, from youth up. That is, I called myself a Socialist, but, comrade, I've learned this here truth: that it ain't of so much importance that you possess a belief, as that the belief possesses you. Do you understand?"

"I think," said I, "that I understand."

Well, he told me his story, mostly in a curious, dull, detached way—as though he were speaking of some third person, whom he felt only a brotherly interest, or but from time to time some incident, or observation would flame up out of the narrative, like the opening of the door of a molten pit—so that the glare hurt

children. He told me that many of the old workers began to leave the town (some bound for the larger cities, some for the Far West).

"But," said he with a sudden outburst of emotion, "I couldn't leave. I had the woman and the children!"

And presently the strike collapsed, and the workers rushed helter-skelter back to the mills to get their old jobs. Begging like whipped dogs," he said bitterly.

Many of them found their places taken by the eager "black people," and many had to go to work at lower wages in poorer places—punished for the fight they had made.

But he got along somehow, he said—