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**DISTRESS AMONGST THE OPERATIVES
OF BRITAIN.**

Recent accounts from Europe, and in particular from Great Britain, furnish abundant evidence of the fearful state of want and sore distress amongst the operative mechanics and labourers of the manufacturing districts of London and other localities. Reports of Relief Officers, Newspaper Correspondents, Clergymen and others, show that in many of the districts inhabited principally by operatives and labourers, from two fifths to five-sixths of the whole are out of employment, with no means of support but the public and private charities of their respective parishes. This deplorable state of things appears to have been brought upon them, in a great measure, by their own imprudent action, or that of the various trades' unions, in organizing strikes in the several branches of the iron and building trades, during the existence of extensive home and foreign contracts, which in consequence could not be completed. In the iron trades, especially, has this been the case; so much so, that it is said to have been the means of causing many orders to be sent to Belgium, instead of England, with the former of which these periodical strikes do not occur, and no fears are entertained of orders being unfulfilled at the time contracted for. The lower rate of wages paid in Belgium—said to be about one-half what are paid in England—also enables the Belgians to successfully compete with the English manufacturers.

The great want of the English operatives appears to be an efficient educational system (compulsory, if needs be, as with the factory act). The London *Engineer* says, "Education is amongst the social reforms we want. Much more than votes, do our operative classes require systematic elementary instruction." Were the operative classes better educated, they would not be controlled as they now are, to their own injury and the occasional distress and starvation of their families, by Committees of Trades' Unions, or other evil influences. The intelligent mechanic would be able to trace cause and effect, and to understand the consequences to himself and his country of having foreign contracts unfulfilled through the ever recurring con-

flict of labour *versus* capital, and to see that the interests of both are identical—that one cannot suffer without seriously affecting the other.

A proper appreciation of this principle is, as necessary, on the part of the capitalist and employers, as to the labourers; and until this is fully understood, complete harmony will not be restored between these *apparently* rival interests.

We are glad to learn from the speech of Her Majesty the Queen, at the opening of the present session of the Imperial Parliament, that a Royal Commission has been appointed to enquire fully into the working of the Trades' Unions in England. It is time that such an enquiry should be made—the operative classes have too long been the dupes of lazy demagogues and designing schemers, who in too many cases are leading lives of ease and comparative affluence, through the misplaced confidence of the less intelligent. The journal already referred to says, "When we look at the desolating systems of strikes, we cannot but regard Trades' Unions as standing evils scarcely mitigated by their action as relief clubs;" and when we consider that it is through the action of these unions that "work is leaving the country," and large numbers of mills are closed, we cannot but conclude that the writer's view of the evil is the correct one.

If then it is true that Trades' Unions and strikes are evils, and that labour does require to be protected in some measure against capital—a proposition we do not dispute—how is such a result to be attained, and so as to operate to the interests of both capitalists and labourers?

At present we see but one way of satisfactorily solving this troublesome problem; and that is, on the co-operative plan now being adopted by some few large firms in Britain and elsewhere—the principle of which is well illustrated in the following extract from an article in the *Trade Review*, and copied on page 27 of the present volume of this Journal:—

"Mr. Fawcett, member for Brighton, lately made a speech at Leeds on the Co-operative Coal Company of Messrs. Briggs, in which he pointed out the great difficulties that surrounded the commercial position of England from the unsatisfactory relations existing between the classes of labourers and capitalists. He also pointed out what he believed to be the only certain way of palliating, if not remedying this evil, namely, by the growth of associations such as Messrs. Briggs' Coal Company, in which the interest of the capitalist and the labourer are to a certain extent identical, and in which the wages of the labourer, if too low, are supplemented by a share in the profits. The plan of the Coal Company is to pay, first, the regular rate of wages in the district, then 10 per cent. on all the capital of the company, and