

they said, "if we can get nought to eat?" Five hundred starving men paraded the town, chanting a litany of sorrow and begging for bread. Babes died on their mothers' withered breasts, and men were nerved to desperation by hunger. "I wish they would hang me," said one, "for two days I have lived on cold potatoes, and to-day have eaten one raw."

"Let us be patient lads," said a pious stockinger, "surely God Almighty will help us soon."

"Don't talk about thy Goddle Mighty," was the sneering rejoinder, "there isn't any, or he wouldn't let us suffer as we do."

Cooper's Sunday evening discourses became more fierce and bitter. He drifted more and more toward Socialism. Let us not blame him too harshly. His soul yearned for the suffering poor. The workhouses were crowded with paupers, while the British Bread Tax, the hated Corn Laws enriched the landowners at the expense of the very flesh and blood of the British serfs. Cooper became a preacher of the People's Charter, the granting of which it was fondly hoped would bring political and social regeneration, and above all cheap bread to the starving multitudes. He was elected a delegate to the great Chartist Convention at Manchester in 1842. A "sacred month" was proclaimed, during which no work should be done, in the hope that the social cataclysm would wrest the Charter from the governing classes. The country was convulsed. Soon for fifty miles around Manchester not a loom was at work. The Staffordshire colliers were on strike. Wild torchlight processions and tumultuary gatherings made hideous the night; and in the agricultural counties the midnight glare of burning ricks told that the demon of destruction was abroad. Armed collisions between Chartists and the authorities took place. Cavalry and artillery patrolled the streets. A reign of terror prevailed. Many innocent persons were slain. Birmingham after a riot resembled a city sacked by a merciless foe.* A monster petition, bearing over three millions of signatures was carried on the shoulders of a dozen men,

* "The Duke of Wellington stated in his place in the House of Lords, that in all his military experience, he had never known a town taken by storm to be worse treated by the troops than Birmingham had been by the mob."—*Molesworth's History of England*. Vol. ii., pp. 280-281.