

THE EQUALIZATION OF ALL ELEMENTS OF SOCIETY IN THE SOCIAL SCALE SHOULD BE THE TRUE AIM OF CIVILIZATION.

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## LABOR PORTRAITS.

"Men who, in advance of law and in opposition to prevailing opinion, have forced into national recognition the hitherto disregarded rights of labor."

JOHN NORMANSELL,  
SECRETARY SOUTH YORKSHIRE MINERS.

John Normansell was introduced to the world without leave being asked or consent given, at Torkington, near Stockport, Cheshire, in December, 1830. He was not born into the lap of luxury, and therefore, as a matter of course, had no silver spoon in his mouth. He was the oldest of four children, two boys and two girls; and, as his father was a banksman at the pit at half-a-crown a day, no doubt all of them fared hardly enough, even without that wasteful indulgence usually charged against colliers.

Things, however, in this world are never so bad but they may become worse; and such turned out to be the case with the Normansell family. Their mother died in her 25th year. Two years after this, their father followed her, and the young brood was left, even without the daily half-crown, to fight their way as best they could in a world too busy to be minutely careful about the fate of those that hunger in its forsaken nests. The inheritance of labor was not at that time rich in comfort of any kind. The elder Normansell, for his daily 2s. 6d., had to leave home at four in the morning, and did not return till between six and seven in the evening; so that young Normansell had no bad example in laziness, or indulgence of any kind, set him by his father, so long as he was permitted to work for his children and to suffer with them. It is fortunate that the poor are frequently very kind to the poor, and this family found it so. An aunt and grandfathers and grandmothers took upon themselves the burden under which Normansell's father sunk. Where they now are beyond the grave, we can at least hope that such acts will not be forgotten!

At the age of seven, John Normansell was called on to enter what political economists call "the labor market;" and the estimated value of his commodity, so much of it as his child's limbs contained, was set down at 6d. per day. To earn this, he had to rise at three in the morning and go to the pit; his hour for getting home being from six to seven in the evening. During the day, his employment was to push corves or tubs along the roadway in the mine by pressing them forward with his head, another little fellow making up the team. He can remember still the unpleasantness of this childish occupation on the part of himself; and he sometimes wonders what sort of figures some of the members of the Houses of Lords and Commons, and certain of our newspaper critics, would cut had their start in life been of a like kind. However, for colliers' children there was then no help; and therefore he and his juvenile workmates had to go on in the best way they could. Sometimes, however, Normansell worked on the bank; and then he had the pleasure of seeing the grass, and catching a glimpse of the clouds as they passed idly over his head along the sky.

At fourteen, he gave up this privilege and descended the pit to work there constantly. His schooling during this time was what his aunt caused him to receive at a Wesleyan Methodist Sunday School, where he got through the alphabet, and where a little reading of rather a puzzling and difficult kind was the highest scholastic accomplishment he managed to acquire. His wages when he was at this age rose to 8s. a week; and, by the time he was eighteen or twenty, he was in receipt of 2s. a day,—a mine of wealth when contrasted with the sixpence with which he started. It must not be supposed, however, that he had a large balance of this to spend in luxuries, or in enjoyment of any kind. There are many things to be done in the poor man's houses that cost money, and of which slight account is taken by those statistical people who jot down, for the benefit of a curious public, the items of

working-men's incomes and expenditure. And a succession of those kept his exchequer below the point where luxuries may be indulged in. Death found a good deal to do with those belonging to him. The baby, happily for itself, went first. At seventeen his brother went, and his sister at nineteen. And to make as nearly as possible a clean sweep, Normansell lost about the same time his two grandfathers and grandmothers. It may look foolish to count such deaths losses; but when nearly all kith and kin go, and we are left standing alone in the world, one feels queer at the moment, and is likely enough to feel the unhappiness of the situation for a long time.

However, the world has its own ways and men must conform to them; and, as a matter of course, having three shillings a day, Normansell decided to take a wife. This important event made one fact very painfully plain to him. He could not sign his name to the marriage register, and his wife signed it with what appeared to him a wonderful degree of skill; but he had to content himself with the simple contrivance the cross—X—which so many of the working men and women of England has to confine themselves to, even a long time after the schoolmaster was said to be abroad. To put this right, he made it part of the duty of his married life to go to a night school; and there, in due course, he picked up the art and mystery of writing, and from that time ceased to be troubled with crosses when called on to sign his name. This new acquirement may have put the spirit of adventure into Normansell's head, as soon after, he started for Derbyshire and worked for two years and a half, when, the spirit of unrest again troubling him, he set off for Yorkshire, where he worked for three years at Wharfedale Silkestone Colliery.

The many grievances felt daily by colliers at this time were forcing on them a sense of the necessity for union; and what Normansell had seen and suffered, as well as what he saw others suffering, caused him to become active in promoting it. The history of these efforts we shall not attempt to sketch here, though not lacking interest or instruction. When the colliers thought they had discipline enough to enter the field, they started an agitation for check weighmen. The custom then was for weighmen employed by the mineowners to set down whatever weight he thought proper, and quantity sent up for which the workmen were to be paid. In this way, any number of hundreds became a ton, up to thirty; and this the men determined to put a stop to by appointing a weighman of their own, and paying him themselves, as a check on the employers' man. The men gained this important advantage, and John Normansell was appointed to the position of cheque weighman in 1857. In 1863, the employers discharged him; but, as the practice, in the meantime, had got the sanction of law, a suit at law on his case was raised by the men and gained with costs. Still the employers refused justice being a difficult thing to enforce if interest opposes it. The men, however, were determined not to submit, and therefore removed it to the Queen's Bench, where it went over two terms, the lawyers not being as industrious as colliers, notwithstanding how precious a thing justice is, and how active men should be in digging for it. They did, however, get through the matter; and, after an arrangement with the employers, John Normansell went back to his weighing after being out seven months. This most important point was thus gained, and is now part and parcel of the law of the land, and likely to continue so until that indefinite time arrives when our coal fields shall be exhausted.

The men now saw, without possibility of mistake, the benefit of union. Another lesson, however, came soon after. In 1864, a lock-out was resorted to by the employers. Two collieries were on strike; and, to cripple and defeat the men, a general lock-out was resorted to. The South Yorkshire colliers fought the battle nineteen weeks;

and, though they had only 2,000 men in union, whilst 3,000 were locked out, by the discipline and firmness of their union men they won the fight. The pits were reopened, except the two original offenders; and these, after struggling for 43 weeks, had to strike their flags and submit to a defeat they never could have suffered had the men not stood together as an organized body, animated by the same thought, and directed by leaders who understood and performed their duty.

After this John Normansell was appointed agent for the Barnsley district, and that position he continues to hold. And now, out of the experience he has gained in this position, and the knowledge he has of the progress of their association, we will say a few words which perhaps may have a tendency to give encouragement to those who, as working men, have not yet sufficient faith in union to do as they have done. When he commenced his labor, they had under 2000 financial members, or members who, by the regular and full payment of their subscriptions, were entitled to the benefits of their association. Now they have 20,000 men in this position. They were then £500 in debt; they have now large funds, more than sufficient to meet all the claims of sickness, death, widowhood, orphanage, superannuation in age, and trades purposes generally.

John Normansell has been examined before the Parliamentary Committee; namely, the Mine Committee of 1867, Master and Servants Committee, Trades Union Commission, and Coal Committee; and he makes bold to say that, with great intelligence and good intention must, as a rule, be conceded to such gentlemen as compose these committees, and whilst full acknowledgment is made of the good done by such inquiries, and the legislation they have led to, the conviction has grown in him, and is strengthened day by day, that the working men must place their chief reliance on themselves, must shape and mature their own thoughts, must fashion their own plans, and must, by their own strength, wisely directed, bring about such changes as their industrial, social, and political circumstances require. Mr. Normansell is one of the men spoken of by the Earl of Stamford the other day as evil-disposed, and as disturbers of society. We think, nevertheless, that our duty to our fellow-workers, and our right to perform it, are far clearer than any right of any kind possessed by his lordship. What Mr. Normansell said in his evidence the other day before the Coal Committee, we give in substance here from his own pen. "I recognise no right in any class of men which the colliers are not entitled to. I admit no exclusive class claims on the good things of this life. My own children are as dear, if not dearer, to me than those of any other man; and I should regard myself as a deserter from duty if I passively allowed them to be excluded by law or custom from any good life can give. Whatever nobleman at a distance may think, my fellow-townsman, who know me, have elected me as a member of their Town Council, whilst my colleague, Mr. Philip Casey, another demagogue, has been elected a member of the School Board; and I may add, that to qualify me for the office I hold my fellow-workers placed £1,000 in the bank, a mark of respect which gives full compensation for the sneers and slanders of noble lords and very ignoble newspaper critics. Of one thing I am certain, and in this I rest content; they cannot rail the love of union out of the hearts of our people. They cannot prevent them from feeling and understanding the good it has done. And, above all, though they may hate it in their ignorance, they cannot ignore the immense and continually increasing power it has given to working-men. When they become wiser as to the objects and intentions of working-men and their agents, it is to be hoped that our dignified and even our undignified censurers will gratefully acknowledge the beneficent results of the great work in which we, as trades unionists and trades union agents, are engaged."—*The Bee-Hive.*

## THE POST OFFICE EMPLOYEES.

The oracle has spoken, and, so far as the Government can prevent it, the postal employees of the minor establishment will never receive an increase to their pay. Mr. Monsell has been very kind to the rural messengers. For weeks and months past, according to his own account, he has been continually considering and raising their pay, and now—name it not in Gath—some dozen or so of these ingrates actually receive 16s. to 18s. per week for seven days per week. These are the Aristos of ruraldom. Happy are they who ever reach such an apex of worldly ambition, from the summit of their cone of vantage they are able to look down upon their less fortunate brethren who are receiving only 9s. to 15s. per week. Happy Aristos, even Mr. Lowe might envy you. It cannot be possible that with such a field of promotion open, you can possibly require more. The agitation for an increase of pay for the minor employees of the Post Office has at length become a fierce fight. The Government are determined not to grant justice. They will not hear the voice of reason. The deference shown by the employees to them seems to have no weight with them, cogitation is useless. Nothing can be done but continue the warfare a *outrance*. No quarter will be given by the postal authorities to the employees known to be leaders in the movement. None must be given to them, or to the Government. The honourable members themselves remarked the curt manner in which Mr. Monsell answered the just complaints of the postmen's friends when this subject was before the House on Monday night. They also took cognizance of his contemptuous manner when he turned his heel on them and sat down. They must have thought he was fast becoming an adept under Ayrton's tuition. The postal employees know by his actions that nothing would be gained "without his hand was forced."

The hand of the Government will now be forced with a vengeance. Desperate diseases require desperate remedies. Not only should open-air meetings and demonstrations be at once held, so that the country and the Government may see that the men are in earnest in this matter, but organizations should be perfected so that the men can be called away from work after giving the due notice. The public, the press, and many M. P.'s acknowledge the justice of the cause of the postal employees. The Government is the principal antagonist, and if the men are true to themselves and to each other, if they remain firm and do not show the least sign of the white feather, the Government being led (as in the case of the compulsory registration) by public opinion will be compelled to give in.

In the annual report of the Postmaster-General for 1873, Mr. Monsell, quoting Mr. Boucher's words, states; "Attempts have been made by persons not connected with the department to excite dissatisfaction among the sorters and letter carriers; but I am happy to say that the men generally have acted in a very proper and praiseworthy manner, and have not given any encouragement to the agitation." Mr. Boucher tries to ignore the action of the society, but he well knows that it is the society that is the focus of the present agitation. He also well knows that the society is hard at work doing its best to ameliorate the condition of all postal employees, whether society or non-society men, and that although he tries his hardest he cannot get to the bottom of its resources.

"These persons," as Mr. Boucher calls them, "not connected with the department," could not excite dissatisfaction among postal employees if no real grievance existed, but when the prairie is dry a match will burn down acres. These "persons" have been postal employees, they know all the workings of its bad system towards the men; these "persons" have been discharged by the authorities for acting as men, for fighting for their rights, for endeavoring to act as free men, and not as slaves. That the postal employees have acted, in "a proper

and praiseworthy manner" it will be admitted; but in an entirely different "manner" to what Mr. Boucher means. Many of the employees have joined the society; they have collected amongst themselves large sums of money to support the movement, and they marched through the streets of London some 2,000 strong, they filled the great hall of Cannon street hotel under the auspices of their society, thereby proving they gave "encouragement to the agitation" and supported their leading "agitators," in spite of all Mr. Boucher can say to the contrary.

It is a good thing to see these serf-like postal employees ally themselves to the trades unionists of England, the blessings of unionism are fast being perceived by all classes of workers. Postal employees do not budge one inch; the authorities have thrown down the gauntlet, we must pick it up and cast it back in their teeth; act as men and you will have the satisfaction of being successful at last, even at some risk of inconveniencing our friends—the public.—*Bee Hive.*

## Labor Notes.

The coachmakers of Leeds presented to their employers, on July 1, a circular asking for an advance of two shillings per week on the then existing rate of wages, which has been granted throughout the trade without any hesitation on the part of the employers.

The cause of the Leeds cloth dressers' lock-out is that as a trade the men are paid less than any other trade in Leeds, and some of the men having struck work in consequence, the other employers decided to lock all the others out, which they have carried out, except about 12 firms out of 62. There is, therefore, about 1,000 men out.

The strike of riveters and finishers, of the Leeds boot and shoe trade, which has continued for about seven weeks, has just been brought to a close, the men resuming work upon the same terms that prevailed before they left it.

At Blackburn, on Monday, the 28th July, the operative joiners came out on strike, having failed to obtain an advance of wages to the extent of 2s 2d per week.

The trade dispute of the engineers of Lincoln is settled, the men having resumed work upon their old terms; in fact, it was no strike on their part, but simply a lock-out.

There is considerable commotion among the Knights of the thimble and needle of Hamilton at present, and it is said that a strike for higher wages is imminent. It is not long since a demand for an advance of wages was made, which was conceded by the employers. Another demand for an increase is now to be made, and if the demand is not complied with a strike will be the result. It is to be hoped, however, that the affair will be settled amicably between the parties interested.

The Ottawa *Free Press* seeks to surmount the difficulties of the "strike" by the introduction of female types, and brother Mitchell, writing to a friend recently, says he has a calico "foreman," two dainty "compositors," and the sweetest little "devil" in pink muslin to be found on the continent. Of course Mitchell don't want this to be told to everybody. He had better look after them closely while Nicolls is round there.

## HINTS.

Don't complain of the selfishness of the world. Deserve friends, and you will have them. The world is teeming with kind-hearted people, and you have only to carry a kind, sympathetic heart in your own bosom to call out goodness and friendliness from others. It is a mistake to expect to receive welcome, hospitality, words of cheer, and help over rugged and difficult passages in life, in return for cold selfishness, which cares for nothing in the world but self. Cultivate consideration for the feelings of other people, if you would never have your own injured. Those who complain most of ill-usage are the ones who abuse themselves and others the ofttest.