

LETTER V

Ill health, the usual attendant on old age, has interrupted, and must again, occasionally, interrupt, the series of letters which, brethren, it is one of the highest consolations of my remaining days to address to you. In Associated Labour, I anticipate a happy destiny for my fellow-creatures which the energies of man's intellectual powers are preparing for the human race, and I rejoice in the prospect. The selfish tyranny which has implanted and encouraged the separate and petty interests that set men and bands of men in enmity against each other, is giving way before the knowledge we are rapidly acquiring, and before the plenty we are continually producing. Unhappily the interests – the mistaken and perverse interests – of that false greatness, of that personal wealth and of that pompous state authority, which seized upon us and enslaved us in the days of our abject ignorance, are still strong and extensively prevalent. The rich and the proud and the mighty are determined, brethren, to keep you shackled and depressed, struggling upon the very lowest limit of want and misery, while they tear from you the produce of your labour, and waste it in ostentatious luxury. Yes, as much as they can, they would make of the whole human race, whom God made equal, two distinct and separate classes, the enjoyer and the producer, the grower and the feeder, the weaver and the wearer. But they begin to count your numbers; they observe your increasing intelligence; they see your Unity! They feel conscious that concessions must be made to you, and that each concession must lead to further concessions, until the capital and labour of society shall enter into one general consolidated Union, not upon the narrow speculative basis of individual profit, but upon the great and generous plan of general benefit. They will oppose, for some time, this community of interests; they will struggle long to retain their miserable distinctions, they will fight for what they call their property and their privileges; but you, brethren, you will be ultimately successful, for you have knowledge, and numbers, and plenty on your side; and all the wonderful improvements and acquirements which have so justly been the boast of the last fifty years, must be overwhelmed in renovated ignorance, utterly destroyed and buried in oblivion, before your benevolent views can be defeated or you can again be subjected to the toil and starvation of servile labour.

You have seen, brethren, in the newspapers, what has taken place in France, both at Lyons and in Paris;¹⁰ you have also read of the lamentable affair at Oldham, and you have observed the machinations of our adversaries at Exeter. Your eyes are open, brethren: you want no explanatory comments on these occurrences. They speak plainly enough; and you are prepared to meet with unflinching firmness all the consequences of these, and of similar occurrences which weak and selfish men have in preparation against you. You hear their threats, but you know that while you act with unanimity you can at any time paralyze their boasted strength, founded as it is in the brutal force of their armies, and maintained out of that plunder of your industry which it is everyday in your power to render unavailable. They are nothing, absolutely nothing, without you; while you are every thing without them: aye, the fewer you have to maintain by profits, rent, tribute, or taxes, the better. They had their origin in conquest, in robbery, wholesale robbery, in fraud, in the fraudulent abuse of your religious confidence; they sprang into existence in the midst of blood and devastation; they crawled into being from the dust and filth of superstition; they owe their useless or noxious lives to the pride and corrup-

¹⁰ A major outbreak of industrial unrest amongst textile workers occurred in Lyons in this period which was crushed, with loss of life, by the military.

tion of courts, and to the errors of an ill-contrived legislature! Such, my brethren, are your opponents. On the other hand, look at yourselves. You owe your existence to God alone. The energies of mind and labour constitute your strength. You boast not of blood and rapine, nor do you cry out with the proud lords of the land, “The hands of our ancestors were imbued in slaughter and therefore we have a right to maintenance and respect.” Your rights, brethren, are not the rights of the sword: they are not the rights of the sceptre over the weak, or of the crozier over the ignorant, No; your’s are the rights of honest toil; the just, the indisputable rights of the labourer to the bread produced by the sweat of his brow. Their system had its rise in the curse of man against man, and has existed, and will continue to exist only as long as men will suffer themselves to be preyed upon, and, under the lacerating demands of profits, rents, tribute, interest, and taxes, let themselves be devoured to the very bone by the vermin in their own shape whom, in the blindness and carelessness of their ignorance they have permitted to grow and multiply among them. Your system, my brethren, is founded upon the curse – shall I not rather say the blessing? – which God pronounced when, expelling man from Paradise, he condemned him, not to vicious indolence, but to the virtuous and invigorating exertion of labour. It was by those exertions, and by those alone, that the mental and bodily faculties could be called forth; that man could learn his dependence upon man, and after a long unhappy period of error and iniquity, could discover that his welfare upon earth consists in that true Christian charity, that real love of his neighbour, which is nowhere to be found but in Associated Labour!

But it is time to consider the subject in a more practical point of view. Events are crowding thick upon us, and we are called upon by common prudence to take the position which promises us most security from the designs of those who are desirous of interrupting our progress. Our proper position, my brethren, is that of defence – of firm, calm decided, defence. The circumstances and events of the times are all in our favour. It is these circumstances that are stinging our opponents to madness. The energies of industry cannot be retarded; there cannot be profits and rents in a state of increasing and accumulating national plenty, without a frightful enlargement of pauperism and poor rates. When profits and rents are tottering as they do at present, what security is there for the state revenue, including the pay of the army and the interest of that debt for which the Parliamentary landowners in both houses pledged their lives and fortunes? Verily, my brethren, if the fund-owners had in them a few grains of real prudence, they would sell out their stock for what they can get for it, while they can get anything for it, and bring it as capital to our associations. But they will not take this advice; and the less will they do so at the present time, when the plenty which we are creating is making the interest of their stock more and more valuable, and will continue to do so, in spite of the shouts of the landlords and the manufacturing-lords for a tax upon dividends. Tax dividends, indeed! Violate public credit! No, not for the throne of King William; or what is perhaps more precious, not for the order of Earl Grey!

Thus, in a few, in a very few lines, may be pointed out the chief of those circumstances which are fighting for us, brethren, with more certainty of victory than we could do ourselves, were all our mighty numbers drawn out in array with arms in our hands. Formidable, dreadfully formidable, would be the appearance of the labouring bees of this mighty hive, calmly swarming, by the law of nature, for the general turning out of the drones. But no, brethren, we have no such instinctive animosity. Let the drones not insult us; let them array no armies against us; let there be no excitement of policemen; no spies; no plot-instigators; no busy, meddling, and bustling magistrates; no male nor female intriguers and sowers of sedition sent forth by the drones; but let

all go on quietly according to the natural and regular progress of events; let this be the case, and all we aim at, brethren, will be effected in peace. But this will not be. The selfish herd – oh, what a swinish herd it is – have got an army and have got a police; and the police and the army are very desirous, it is said, of “giving proofs of their loyalty!”

In this country, not only will the state power, though strongly urged by the selfish, the foolish, the vicious, and the illiberal, to have recourse to the military, be much more reluctant to such a measure, than the government of Louis Phillippe, but the army itself, in England, differs materially from the army in France in its connexion with the manufacturing operatives. The proportion of the manufacturing productive power to other labourers is, in France, as one to two, while in England it is as two to one. Again, the unity of interests between the manufacturing producers and the agricultural producers is scarcely understood and not at all acted upon in France, while we see it perfectly admitted among us, so as to constitute the ground of our sympathy with the Dorsetshire victims. Hence in France there are four men to one in the army who have no family or social tie of any sort with those on whom they are commanded to fire; while the proportion of men in the army drawn out of our populous manufacturing districts is not only more than the reverse of this, but even those taken from agricultural towns and villages have relatives who are unionists themselves, and who are closely identified in views and interests with the manufacturing unionists. Military discipline and obedience are very powerful in the British army, but the military sentiment has not, thank God, so completely supplanted or been substituted for the sentiment of country of kindred here as it has amongst our neighbours. Besides, the nature of our claims is generally and well understood in the army, and the feelings of a great portion of the soldiery is in our favour, as the Secretary of War is aware. Again, it cannot be proved, by any perversion of our publications or proceedings, that there is the slightest degree of disloyalty in our views or intentions. We have worked with hand and mind. The greatness of the King and the kingdom is the result of our labour, and all that we ask for is, to secure to ourselves and our families for the future a just share of the plenty we produce. No, my brethren, we have little to apprehend from the King or the army; and the ministers will, I am persuaded, be very reluctant to play the game which the French government is so lamentably playing. In our London police and our London and provincial magistracy there is more danger to be apprehended. They are instigated by mistaken and malignant people to urge you to acts of violence, or to find some unconstitutional flaws in your proceedings, but, my brethren, you have been in a state of watchful endurance too long to be likely to fall into their snares.

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