

GENTLEMEN,

During the past year many strange and unexpected events have occurred in the mining, the political, and the social world. The various parties in the State have sought to bring about certain conditions which, in their judgment, would benefit mankind at large, and the occupants of this island in particular. The late government have been seeking to ameliorate the condition of the workers in various ways, both in regard to men employed under Government, and to men employed by private individuals, as well as those who do not consider themselves anybody's workpeople, viz., the unemployed classes of this country. It is admitted on all hands that the late government during their term of office brought about many reforms in the various workshops, arsenals, and other departments managed by the State, alike in regard to hours of labour, wages, and general conditions of service. It is well known that the late government commenced reducing the hours of labour to eight per day, and that they re-arranged the work in almost every Government department during their term of office. Although it may be said that in regard to one point that the late Postmaster General did not grant the Post Office servants some of the reforms which they strenuously asked for, yet we have been informed that since the present government came into power they have accepted the decisions arrived at by the late Postmaster General. With regard to the late government generally, they have done their utmost to pass into law a Bill affecting all classes and conditions of workpeople, especially in the dangerous trades, viz., by carrying into law the Employers' Liability Bill, which would have done very much to have improved the surroundings and conditions of all workers in the category I have referred to. The late Home Secretary also introduced a Bill dealing with coal mines and matters relating to the administration of the law affecting mines. The present government have, on all occasions, intervened in such a way and manner as to prevent the consummation of the desires of the Liberal party in this connection. Other parties in the State have been seeking out new modes of dealing with all questions affecting workmen.

GOVERNMENTS.

During the past year the country has had two shocks in the political world. The first was that of the defeat of the late Government on a measure which was considered, no doubt, to be an important one, but still, not one that would in any sense or degree cause the Government to resign in the way and manner they did. The next shock arose from the fact that the General Election made it impossible to have a continuity of late government. The promises held out by the Tories to the working classes with a view to induce them to cast their votes in their favour were certainly large, varied, and cosmopolitan. In order that working men might be persuaded to vote the Tory Card, cotton-spinners were promised the abrogation of the Indian cotton duties. Those who believed in Bimetallism were promised that there should be an inter-

ation in finance on the Silver question. Farmers were told what great alterations would be made in the re-adjustment of rates and local taxation, thereby causing them to think that more money would be placed in their own pockets through the action of the Tory party. Working men were led to believe in almost every County and Borough in the Kingdom, that if the Tory party were placed in power the trade of the Country would be so expanded and wages would so increase as to almost bring about the millenium—they were told that instead of working four, two and a half, or one and a half days' a week, they would be actually working five and six days a week. They were also informed with regard to Old Age Pensions that in some way or other the Tories, if put in power, would provide Old Age Pensions in the sense that if a man was disabled from work he would get so much per week, or if he was sick and ill he would have so much per week, and that too without paying anything into any fund whatever—that in fact that either employers of labour, the local rates, or the consolidated fund would have to provide the means for the object referred to. In some places it was suggested that in the future workmen would have no need to show any thrift in saving money to buy a house, because if the Tory party came into office free houses would be provided for the people. Now as to the results. I have no need to draw deductions with regard to this matter, but with respect to the results following the victory gained one can freely say that all the prophecies with regard to trade, wages, pensions, bimetallism, Indian cotton duty, and free houses for the people have been repudiated from Dan to Beersheba by those people high in the counsels of the present government from the very moment that power was given to them by the country.

IMPENDING WARS.

Further, it may be safely said that instead of having peace and goodwill on earth, the country has been plunged into an awful crisis such as this nation never experienced within the last 25 years. Our foreign relationships under this Government appear to be of a very disturbing character. First we have the Armenian question remaining unsettled, which was in existence during the tenure of office of the late Government, and which at that time gave promise of being promptly settled. Then we have the other and greater question which overshadows everything else, viz., impending war between this country and America. And why has it thus come about in the way we have experienced during the last four months? We have heard of ultimatum after ultimatum to this small state and the other small state, until we are heartily sick of hearing of them, and now we are turned round upon and instead of us employing a threat as to what we should do, we find the Turk actually defying us, and the American President bombarding us with such an ultimatum or message as never emanated from a previous President of the United States. We know that John Bull can boast, but we also know that our American brethren can go it thicker than we can; and if it is to be a question decided by heads of departments and not by the people of the country, then working men everywhere should take hold of these matters, and, if possible, bring about a refor-

mation as to the conducting of business by this and other countries. The reason why I allude to these matters in this place is because I think that working men everywhere should take a determined stand and declare that they are not going to be at the beck and call of men holding high positions in the State, while it is a well known fact that the people who suffer the most from the scourge of war are the working classes of every country. We, as miners, have a fair representation in the army, in the navy, and in the volunteer forces; and I think that every man in a responsible position should have something to say in regard to this matter, and should declare with no uncertain voice that no Government, however strong or powerful it may be, should have the right in a free and democratic country to say when and how the blood of the people should be spilt. With this view I wish to call upon working men everywhere to say that their blood shall not be spilt unless they have a voice in determining when, how, and where the tragedy shall take place.

PARLIAMENTARY WORK AND NEW MINES BILL.

The Parliamentary work during last session has not been very fruitful with respect to much legislation being accomplished. The late Government did bring in a bill dealing with compensation for injuries to workmen, and actually passed the same through the House of Commons. The House of Lords rejected the main principle of the Bill with scant courtesy, and amended it in such a guise that when it returned to the House of Commons the Home Secretary refused to accept their lordships' amendments. Therefore the Bill was lost, and was not re-introduced during last session. A new Mines Bill was brought in by the late Home Secretary, but it never came to a second reading. Deputations met Mr. Asquith on the subject. I, along with others saw him, and we arranged that the Bill be discussed by employers and employed in order to find out if possible whether we would agree upon a Bill, for if so, it would pass more readily through the House of Commons than otherwise it would have done. Representatives from Durham, Northumberland, and South Wales attended, along with the representatives of the Federation of Great Britain, and met the coal owners from every part of Great Britain. The Bill was gone through, and many points were agreed upon. A most important clause was adopted, viz., that of giving power to create a Coal Mines Board. I think, however, before I point out what was actually agreed upon, that I should say that the clause as originally drafted suggested a joint Board for the whole of the country, and which was to be composed of three persons only, viz., a chairman, a representative of the workmen, and a representative of the coal owners respectively. However, it was ultimately decided, and I believe the Home Secretary would have accepted the suggestion, that instead of one Board for the whole country there should be district boards in every mining district. Now, so far as we understand, if the bill had passed into law there would have been district boards for the various mining communities, composed as follows:—It was to consist of three

persons. First, the chairman, who was not to be a person who is or has been an owner, agent, or manager of a mine, or a proprietor of a mine, or a director of a company being the owner of a mine, and he was not to be a miners' agent, or employed in or about a mine. Another member was to be a person who is or has been an owner or manager of a mine, or proprietor of a mine, or a director of a company being the owner of a mine; and the third member was to be a person who is or has been employed in or about a mine, and is not and has not been an owner or manager of a mine, or a proprietor of a mine, or a director of a company being the owner of a mine. The Chairman of this Board was to be appointed or removed by the Home Secretary. The coal owners of the district would have power to appoint and remove, with the approval of the Home Secretary, the person who represented them upon it; and the miners in the district would also have power to appoint and remove, with the approval of the Home Secretary, one of their number as a representative on the Board. The workmen's representative would be appointed or removed by a majority ascertained by ballot of the workmen employed in or about the mines of the district, and the provisions of the principal Act, and of the Coal Mines' Checkweigher Act, 1894, shall apply to any such appointment or removal in the same manner as to the appointment of a checkweigher. Another important clause was suggested, viz., that of making deductions for dirt, which your representatives could not in any sense or degree accept. The coal owners would not do anything other than agree to the following clause, and the subsections included:—

Any agreement to vary wages in accordance with the amount of stones or substances other than the mineral contracted to be gotten, or in accordance with the mode of filling any tubs, baskets, or hutches, shall be treated as an agreement for deductions under section 12 of the principal Act.

In estimating any deduction under that section, regard may be had not only to the amount of the stones or substances aforesaid, or to the nature or extent of the improper filling, but also to the diminution in the value of the coal, or to any additional expense caused thereby.

Any such agreement for deductions, and any deduction made in pursuance thereof, shall be illegal, null, and void unless —

- (a) The agreement is evidenced by a memorandum in writing signed by the workman; and
- (b) The deduction authorised by the agreement is reasonable, having regard to all the circumstances of the case.

Any deduction made in pursuance of any such agreement shall not be lawful unless particulars in writing, showing the nature and items of the deduction, are supplied to the workman on each occasion when the deduction is made.

All I can say in regard to this important section is that I would have been no

party to giving the men's wages away wholesale as this clause would have done if it were passed into law. I said before the coalowners at the time that if it became law I would advise the miners to refuse to carry it out either in letter or in spirit, and to fight it on every occasion, whatever the consequences might be, because I felt that if such a vile proposal could ever be decided upon, the life of the miner, almost intolerable now, would be one of the most cruel and hopeless lives ever known. In the next clause we really had a good suggestion—that of the appointment of a checkweigher and deputy checkweigher. It provided for the appointment of a substitute or assistant checkweigher, giving him all the rights to act on behalf of the workmen equal to those possessed by the checkweigher himself. This section reads as follows:—

The power conferred by the principal Act on the persons employed in a mine and paid according to the weight of the mineral gotten by them, of appointing a checkweigher shall include the appointment of a duly nominated deputy to act in the absence, through illness or other unavoidable cause, of the checkweigher, and the expression "checkweigher" when used in the principal Act and in this Act shall include such deputy checkweigher, but such deputy checkweigher shall only be entitled to act and to exercise the powers given to a checkweigher in the absence as aforesaid of the checkweigher.

Now with regard to the points suggested in the Mines Bill of the late Government there is no doubt we should have to take into consideration some of these, as in my judgment they are an improvement even on our own Bill. The Bill which your sub-committee re-drafted incorporated points very much like those in the late Home Secretary's Bill, and also included the suggested amendments made by the Enginemens and Topmen's Association. No doubt during your debates on these Bills the points I have suggested will be brought out, and before the Bill is again submitted to Parliament probably a conference of the miners of the United Kingdom will be called together to find out if we can agree upon a bill to be passed through the present Parliament. If such an agreement can be arrived at, we shall go a long way towards securing our success.

EMPLOYERS LIABILITY BILL.

With regard to the Employers' Liability Bill, it appears to me that a very stiff fight must be made by the workers in the kingdom if they intend to prevent the present Government passing a measure into law containing the contracting out clause. Judging from the remarks made by Sir Matthew White Ridley when the deputation connected with the trades of the country met him on November 13th, the present Government intend to bring in a Bill, and to insert in it a clause similar to the one moved in the House of Lords by a noble peer who is supposed to be a large employer of labour, and which made it possible for colliery owners and the employers of labour everywhere to contract out of its provisions. When

the right hon. gentleman had concluded his remarks, I considered, along with others, that he had not made the position of the Government clear on the point of contracting out. Therefore I put to him this question. I remarked that the deputation would very much like to know what was the opinion of the Government with regard to the cause relating to contracting out. The Home Secretary replied—"I had hoped that in my remarks I had made it sufficiently explicit, and I think it hard'y necessary I should repeat that in any Bill which the Government brought in they would at least go as far in the protection of the Mutual Insurance Societies as they did when they were in Opposition. There would be no idea of bringing in a Bill which should have any injurious effect upon the Mutual Insurance Societies, which were thought to be protected by the amendment of the House of Lords, and I think Mr. Pickard must feel from the position which we then took up, that it is impossible for us, even if we desired it, to recede from that position." I then put the following question:—"Then, I may take it that the present Government have no intention of having a clause forbidding contracting out in the Employers' Liability Bill which they will introduce?" His answer to this mutilated question--because my question, if it meant anything at all, was to the effect, and the answer to it really meant that they would not have a clause allowing contracting out--but the reply to the question already given was this—"Certainly." The reply to the question as printed is that the Government is committed to the principle of allowing contracting-out of the bill.

Now I wish to lay down here what I have been contending for ever since this question came before the country. The working men have never asked for compensation pure and simple. What they have asked for was a provision which would act as a deterrent to reckless employers of labour. Our object has been the protection of life and limb, and not to seek for money value simply and purely on the ground of irritating employers of labour. I have already stated, my colleagues have already stated, again and again--the late Mr. MacDonald and others stated over and over again--that what they wanted was that employers of labour, good and bad alike, should be made responsible for the safe surroundings of those under their employ--that every protection known to science should be applied in enabling them to do their daily work so that they might feel safe in their working places during the performance of their daily toil, whatever it was. We say that no money value can compensate for the loss of limb and the loss of life, and we have further contended that if employers of labour take the precautions necessary for the safe working and conduct of their business, thereby fulfilling the requirements of the Acts of Parliament dealing with the subject, no compensation could be obtained if such provisions were duly carried out. It is a well-known fact that Trades Unionists, so far as I know, have never sought for compensation where materials have been provided and necessary precautions taken in any dangerous work or in any occupation where men have been injured or have lost their lives; and I say to-day, and I have no doubt you will endorse it, that where employers of

labour found all necessary material to carry on their work safely under the provisions of any Act now in force, or which may be brought to bear to compel owners to do so, cases will never be taken into court for the mere purposes of litigation. What we want is safe working places, so that men can go to and from their work with perfect safety, and return home to their wives and families in health and strength, so that they may enjoy themselves like other people. However, when you come to the question as to what this Government is prepared to do in regard to Employers' Liability, it is quite clear that they intend to have a provision in the law which will protect insurance societies and greedy employers of labour in preference to looking after the lives of the workmen who run such serious risks in obtaining a livelihood. I hope that the working men of this country are of the same mind to-day on this question as they were 15 years ago, and that they mean to have and will agitate until they obtain it, a bill giving that protection which they have always demanded, and that that bill will not continue the practice of allowing contracting-out either through insurance or any other societies.

EIGHT HOURS BILL.

In regard to the Eight Hours Bill, I feel that I have very little to say, except this—During last session we were very unsuccessful in the ballot. Therefore we did not get a place in order to obtain a second reading of the measure. I see our opponents are yet fighting us both above and below ground. Mr. Emmerson Bainbridge wrote a terrible tirade against us. Sir Joseph Pease and other large employers of labour spoke very strongly against us when they met Lord Salisbury, the Duke of Devonshire, Mr. Balfour, and Mr. Chamberlain. As you are aware, a deputation of this Federation waited upon Lord Salisbury and Mr. Balfour, and the consolation derived from that meeting can, I think, be safely considered small. However, they were not at that time in office and in power, and whether their answer will be very different now that they are in office when we meet them as the representatives of the Government remains to be seen. You desired that I would ask the Right Hon. Sir Matthew White Ridley to meet a deputation. I did so on the 13th November, and understood from him that he would be prepared to meet us close upon the meeting of Parliament. Since then I am pleased to inform you he has decided to meet a deputation from this Federation on the 10th of February, therefore I don't think it wise at this juncture to say very much more on the Eight Hours question, but to inform you that during the sitting of the conference you will have to determine who shall be the deputation, and whether or not you will ask any outsiders to join you in meeting the Home Secretary to hear what he has got to say to us with respect to this burning question as considered by these working miners who are in favour of this bill being passed into law. With regard to the application from South Wales to meet us and debate measures of a legislative character, I think the wisest course would be to have a conference in London, say on the Thursday or Friday prior

to the opening of the House on the 11th of February, and so be prepared by meetings of those in favour of the bill to lay our views before the Home Secretary.

EMPLOYERS AND WORKMEN.

Now, with regard to the other events of the year, I may say that employers of labour show the same disregard of the rights of the workmen as they have ever done. In many mining communities advantage has been taken of the weakness of the men, and reductions have been demanded to such an extent that even some colliery owners themselves have declared that it was unfair to take such a course. In all other trades employers have been adopting the same policy, and when we remember even down to the end of the year, the tremendous struggle taking place between those who have money to build ships and those who do the work in building them, we are bound to come to the conclusion that employers believe that might is right, and that right has no place whatever in the councils of the employers in determining what is a fair living wage for the men who do the work.

PRICES AND PROFITS.

Now, in regard to prices and profits, one would think on reading paragraphs in the daily or weekly press that employers of labour at the end of the nineteenth century are not making profits, and that every trade and every employer in that trade was going to the dogs. I think if we just glance for a moment or two at the present condition of things we shall find that instead of the trade going to the dogs, or the prices going to the bad, that just the opposite state of affairs exists. We will take, for instance, the great armour-plate works known by the name of Sir Wm. Armstrong, Mitchell, and Co., at Elswick, Newcastle, and which occupy a mile of frontage to the Tyne. Now, their own estimate is at the end of 1895 that their condition never was so strong or so prosperous as now, and when we remember its origin and how it stands now, one is more than convinced that this being a fair sample of the progress of wealth in this country, and connected with what is said to be fair profits, it must be admitted that it proves trade to be in a highly satisfactory state, seeing that values have so much gone up that it has been decided to add £1,000,000 to the capital account. After paying large dividends at this firm for many years, they have to resort now to a readjustment of the shares, and the readjustment is really something marvellous. I don't think any words of mine can embellish what the secretary says in the following letter:—

“Elswick Works, Newcastle-on-Tyne,

21st December, 1895.

“Sir or Madame,—The valuations referred to in the directors' last annual report have been completed, and, as then anticipated, they show that the value of the company's properties is greatly in excess of that at which they stand

in the books of the company. In these circumstances it appears to be desirable to increase the nominal capital of the company to an amount more closely approximating to the actual value of the capital employed in the company's business, and the directors have, after full consideration, decided to recommend an increase of £1,000,000. This will bring the Ordinary Share capital up to £3,000,000, the Preference Capital of £1,000,000, of which £387,775 has been issued, remaining at its present amount. The £1,000,000 of additional capital will be allotted as fully paid to the holders of the existing £2,000,000 of ordinary stock in proportion to their holdings, each holding of £100 being thus converted into one of £150, and at this rate of all holdings throughout. The holders of Preference Shares will have the option of being paid off at a premium of 10 per cent. as provided by the resolutions under which those shares were created, or of taking fresh Preference Shares, bearing the same rate of interest. The directors are advised that the best mode of effecting these arrangements consistently with legal requirements is by a formal reconstruction of the company, and they recommend the adoption of the course. Annexed you will receive a notice of a meeting to be held on the 31st December, for the purpose of passing the necessary reconstruction resolution. When these resolutions have been passed and confirmed, the registration of the reconstructed company will be proceeded with. I am, your obedient servant,

J. N. FALCONER, Secretary.

From this letter it would appear that the actual business value had increased to the extent of £1,000,000, which had to be disposed of in one form or another, I take it, to ease the consciences of the directors and wealthy shareholders; therefore they set to work and they apportioned it in the following manner:—The directors thought it desirable to increase the nominal capital to an amount more nearly approximating to the actual value of the capital employed in the business and recommended therefore that it be increased by £1,000,000. This would bring the ordinary share capital up to £3,000,000, the preference capital of £1,000,000 (of which £387,775 had been issued) remaining at its present amount. The effect of this would be that each holding of £100 ordinary stock would be converted into one of £150. The holders of preference shares were to have the option of being paid off at a premium of ten per cent., or of taking fresh preference shares bearing the same rate of interest. The actual resolution was moved by Lord Armstrong himself, who was received with applause. He said they were met for a very important object—that was, the reconstruction of the company, in order to enable the shareholders to extend the capital of the company to the extent which they had heard and read of. Ever since the commencement of the company, through a variety of circumstances, the property had been on the increase, and after the revaluation, and a very careful investigation of the company's resources, they had come to the conclusion, acting under the best possible advice that could be obtained, that the circumstances fully justified an extension of the capital from £2,000,000 to £3,000,000. This must be very gratifying to all of

them. The Chairman moved the following resolutions which, he said, after having been seconded and discussed, would be put to the vote:—

1. That it is desirable to reconstruct the company, and that with a view thereto the company be wound up voluntarily, and that Sir Andrew Noble, K.C.B., and William Donaldson Cruddas, Esq., be and they are hereby appointed liquidators, for the purpose of such winding up.
2. That the said liquidators be, and they are hereby authorised to consent to the registration of a new company, to be named Sir W. G. Armstrong and Company, Limited, with a memorandum and articles of association which have already been prepared with the privity and approval of the directors.
3. That the draft agreement submitted to this meeting, and expressed to be made between this company and its liquidators, of the one part, and Sir W. G. Armstrong & Company, Limited, of the other part be, and the same is hereby approved, and that the said liquidators be, and they are hereby authorised, pursuant to section 161 of the Companies Act, 1862, to enter into an agreement with such new company (when incorporated) in the terms to the said draft, and to carry the same into effect, with such (if any) modifications as they shall deem expedient.

Discussion followed on the above resolutions, after which the proposition was put to the meeting and carried unanimously. Now, it is quite clear that if within a few years a firm like this, after paying from 10 to 15 per cent., can find its business so good as to be multiplied by one third, it means that any business of this character ought, under good management, to be in a similar condition. In order not to be invidious, I should like to take another concern which is connected with the mining trade, viz., that of Messrs. Henry Briggs, Son, & Co., Limited. I find from a report in the "Leeds Mercury" of November 21 a most marvellous statement in connection with this firm. Much to the surprise of the shareholders, they are to be put into possession of some £75,000, either as shares in the Goole Steam Shipping Company or by actual money value into their pockets. I see it is stated that £15 shares were to be made into £18 shares, or the shareholders would receive 12½ per cent. dividend in cash. Now, when we come to remember the dividends paid by this firm since its commencement and the original share capital and compare the present values, then I think it will be seen this company almost equals that of Sir Wm. Armstrong, Mitchell & Company. Speaking generally, the idea of colliery owners declaring they were making no profits when, as you well know, we can turn to the statistics given from time to time in the financial press and find that almost every trade is prospering and the profits are good. I would ask any of you living in your own localities to go back three generations in order to draw a fair comparison as to whether collieries pay or do not pay. Most of us have no need to

go back three generations. If we take the last 30 years as a fair datum to guide us in our comparisons we shall find that men with scarcely a sixpence in their pockets are to-day enormously wealthy. If I wished to mention instances it might be considered offensive and invidious, but without being offensive and without giving names I may simply say that men have won their way from the lowest rung on the ladder to almost the topmost rung within the last 50 years. No doubt they may have worked hard—they have used skill and energy and exercised their brains in such a way as has brought about success, but if collieries could not be made to pay, if the working of coal seams never brought in profit whatever—and that has been the story told ever since I was a lad—then where in the nature of things has the wealth come from. We know that Mr. Smiles in "Self Help" has referred to small beginnings and the way of getting on, and we know that other great writers have written about men with the proverbial penny in their pocket and the check neckerchief slung over the neck, and in many cases you find these in half a generation able to retire with their £100,000, their £200,000, and £300,000, and with these enormous sums made one would like to know how it comes to be repeated again and again that collieries do not pay. What used to be considered a fortune 50 years ago—say £20,000—is now but a drop in the bucket where fortunes go. Nothing under £100,000 or £150,000 is considered worth referring to—even millions are hinted at; and without doubt millions are often made in the coal trade, and I have again to repeat, as I have done before, I know of no colliery where, working under ordinary conditions, that profits and large profits have not been made. The Armstrongs and the Briggses are fair samples of what is done when the public have a knowledge granted them by law as to what are the receipts of such great undertakings.

GENERAL COMPETITION.

With regard to competition, this appears to be still going on in such a way and manner as one is almost bound to designate as drastic. From information in my possession, it appears that the colliery owners met and agreed to sell coal at 7s. per ton, or 6d. per ton below the rates ruling for the previous half-year. The Board of Trade returns demonstrate very clearly that the Export and Import Trade of the country does not flag, does not diminish, but actually increases. With regard to the Coal Trade, everyone knows that that has been increasing year by year, with rare exceptions, ever since the Coal Mines Regulation Act was passed in 1872. In that year the output was 123,497,316 tons; in 1894 the output was 188,277,525 tons; or an increase of 64,780,209 tons—or, in other words, an increase in the 22 years of upwards of 52 per cent., or an average increase at the rate of 3,000,000 tons a year. Now, if coal could not be sold at a fair profit except under keen competition, how comes it about that the colliery owners, who, if they like, can regulate the output, seeing they have the power in their hands—how is it they continue to increase the output at such a tremendous rate? The cost of coal in this country, as compared with other countries, con-

clusively proves that the foreign element, which is so often introduced, is simply a bogey which no one really ought to take any notice of. When it comes to be reported that the coal in Russia costs so much per ton, that the coal in Prussia costs so much per ton, and that the coal in Germany costs so much per ton, and which is said to be raised and placed on the market at a certain price per ton—yet with these prices and costs of production placed before us, the coal producers in England can more than compete with any nation in the world, even in their own markets. Whatever Mr. Bainbridge, or any other mining expert, may have to say, the Consular Reports from various countries clearly demonstrate this; and if we had nothing else before us to show this, it was clearly established during the debate in the French Representative Assembly, when they were passing new tariffs into law and seeking to exclude British coal. With all due respect to our friends Monsieur Basley and Monsieur Lamendin, and the arguments they addressed on the subject, we think it is hardly the right thing for these gentlemen to go in for Protection on this particular question of foreign coal when, at the same time, they are meeting us in International Congresses with a view to break down the barriers between nation and nation. Leaving that aside, however, all the information we possess in regard to the exportation of coal from this country leads us to infer that British coal fears no competition with foreign markets; and it is quite clear that those who sell the coal to the foreigner know well that it pays, otherwise they would not go on exporting it to the extent they do.

LOCAL COMPETITION.

With regard to Local Competition, it is a well-known fact that, instead of trying to sell coal, owners give their agents power to give it away unless they can get rid of it within a limited period. Then we are told that in order to keep the pits going the coal must be taken away so that the men can work a day or two more a week. Now, Gentlemen, my information leads me to believe that coal is not sold in such a way with the object of men having an extra day in the week. Only recently it was declared in the public press that a certain firm in Yorkshire took a contract from the North-Eastern Railway Company at 7s. per ton, or 6d. below the price ruling during the last half year. It has come to my knowledge that Messrs. John Brown & Co. are not the only persons who should be referred to as having taken similar contracts, and it is always said that this is done in order to keep the trade in South Yorkshire. Now, if any firm employing about 2,000 hands can increase their trade by giving 100 tons away per week at 6d. less than what everybody believes to be the normal price for coal, it strikes me that these particular men are not going to work many more days a week by keeping such contracts—namely, by having 100 tons distributed among 2,000 men in any particular week. Now, it appears to me that colliery agents do their business in a very particular way, especially in regard to corporation gas works. Here are specimens of how colliery owners

allow their agents to be knocked about from pillar to post. Without naming the town or the firm, I had better read one particular letter emanating from a gas company. The pith of it is:—"My Board yesterday, at which I reported that several contractors had in consequence of the recent settlement of the miners' wages reduced their prices for coal offered to this company. I am instructed, therefore, to inform you and to give you the opportunity" (and I wish that word to be particularly remarked) "of making any alteration in your tender before the same is considered and decided upon by the Board, which, I hope, will be an early date. Please let me have an early reply." Now this is simply a specimen of several other letters which I hold, and it clearly proves that colliery owners, when demanding a reduction in wages in 1893 were in a position to pay the wages and to make good profits. It will also be seen that competition is at the root of all the mischief in the coal trade. Where colliery owners can afford to receive 3d. per ton reduction in workmen's wages and give away to gas companies and traders from 6d. to 1s. per ton on the average, it clearly indicates that when such a condition of affairs exists profits either must be enormous or the competition is so ruinous that they don't mind whether the pits pay a profit or the workmen receive a wage. I have noticed in the daily papers a long statement in regard to the British and foreign coal trades, and the writers thereof sum up by stating that we in this country cannot compete with foreigners seeing the wages are so low abroad as compared with those in England. As I have already stated, we have nothing whatever to fear either in regard to profits or trade in this connection. We have demonstrated some time ago by actual examinations that the coal in France, in Belgium, and in Germany cannot possibly be got at a price which will compete with the English coalfields. With regard to all these statements I have alluded to, which are simply jeremiads of some local colliery owners living not a thousand miles away from Sheffield, and who probably own about three millions of share capital in coal mines, ironworks, and other industries, well, in my judgment, such weeping willows would be as well divested of what they now possess in order to find them scope for their talents in getting fortunes from other sources. As a matter of fact their own balance-sheets wherever published tell a story against themselves such as nothing else can do. The reports in the press to which I have referred convince one after examination that the statements now made as to the bad state of trade have been got up for a special purpose. Any one to take the printed statements of share values in 1888 and compare them with share values in 1895 will come to the conclusion that whatever else has been done collieries that were not paying any dividend before the advances took place have been paying dividends almost without interruption ever since, and are paying dividends to-day.

SHARE LISTS AND QUOTATIONS, 1888 AND 1895.

Let us take a few firms at random. Take Andrew Knowles & Co. Their share value was declared in 1888 at £20 to £23 per share, whilst in 1895 it is

declared at £26 to £30 per share. If you take the Arniston Colliery Company, their share value has gone up from £14 5s. 0d. in 1888 to £25 17s. 6d. per share in 1895. Take Cammell & Company, their value per share was £84 10s. 0d. in 1888; it is now £117 10s. 0d. per share on £80 shares paid up, and all their other different classes of shares show a proportionate increase. Consider the case of the Fife Coal Co., whose value in 1888 was £15 15s. 0d. per share, and now stands at £19. Then take the Hamstead Coal Company, their shares were quoted at £4 5s. 0d. in 1888; they are now quoted at £17 17s. 6d. Then if we take another colliery company which I have already named — that of Messrs. Hy. Briggs, Son, & Co., Limited, they paid no dividend in 1888, but ever since then, so far as my memory serves me, they have been paying not merely dividends, but large dividends. In 1888 their “A” shares were quoted at £5, and their “B” shares at £2 17s. 6d.; now, in 1895, their “A” shares were quoted at £15 10s. 0d., and their “B” shares at £10 10s. 0d. In the case of Messrs. John Brown & Company, Limited, shares quoted at £10 5s. 0d. in 1888 are now quoted at £12½. The Lofthouse Colliery Company, which has paid at times both dividends and bonus, were quoted in 1888 at £4 10s. 0d.; they are now quoted at £3. In 1888 Messrs. Newton, Chambers, & Co.’s ordinary shares were quoted at £11 15s. 0d.; they are now quoted at £17. Their preference shares were quoted at £17, and are now worth £21 5s. 0d. Take next the New Charlston Colliery Company. Their shares were quoted at £8; they are now quoted at £15. The shares of the Park Gate Iron Company were quoted at £42 10s. 0d. in 1888, and are now quoted at £46. Take Sandwell Park Colliery Company, Limited. In 1888 their quotation value was £9 5s. 0d. per share, and it is now £18 15s. 0d. The Sheepbridge Coal and Iron Company was considered at one time a company not likely to pay any dividend, and in 1888 their share value was described as nil, and only the preference shares had a look in at all. What is the result now? In 1888 the shares were quoted at £5, and now the “A” shares are quoted at £16½; their “B” shares, which were worth £2 15s. 0d., are now £6 5s. 0d.; their Preference shares, quoted then at £20, are now quoted at £27½. Take the South Wales Company, Limited—their “A” shares, quoted at £1, are now £10 10s. 0d.; their “B” shares, quoted at £2½, are now worth £4 10s. 0d.; and another class of “B” shares, quoted at £1, are now quoted at £2 10s. 0d. Take another large firm, the Staveley Iron and Coal Company, their “A” shares, worth £48 10s. 0d. in 1888, are now worth £81; their “B” shares, then worth £8 15s. 0d., are now given at £13 5s. 0d.; their “C” shares, worth £54 in 1888, are now worth £83 10s. 0d.; their “D” shares, returned at £9 1s. 8d., are now quoted at £13 10s. 0d.; and their 5 per Cent. Preference shares, quoted at £20 15s. 0d., are now quoted at £23 10s. 0d. Take, again, the Tinsley Rolling Mills Co. Their shares were quoted at £4, and are now worth £9 10s. 0d. The shares of Messrs. Vickers, Sons, & Co., Limited, were quoted at £6½, and are now returned at £15 10s. 0d. Their Preference shares, quoted then at £95, are now worth £116. In the case of the

Yorkshire Engine Company, Limited, the quotation in 1888 was £7 15s. 0d.; in 1895 it was £17 10s. 0d. In the case of the Birmingham Waggon Company they had no quotation value in 1888, but in 1895 it was returned at £14. In a second issue of their shares, quoted $1\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. discount, they are now quoted at £5 $\frac{3}{4}$, whilst their 6 per Cent. Preference shares, which had then no quotation, are now returned at £14. The Bristol and South Wales Waggon Company's shares were quoted in 1888 at £4 15s. 0d. They are now £5 $\frac{3}{4}$. Take the Bristol Waggon Company, Limited, their shares, which were returned at £10 $\frac{1}{2}$, are now quoted £17; a second issue worth £6 $\frac{1}{2}$ is now quoted £10; a third issue, worth £2 $\frac{3}{4}$, is now £4 $\frac{7}{8}$; and a fourth issue, quoted £ $\frac{5}{8}$, is now returned at £3 5s. 0d. The Metropolitan Waggon Company's shares were quoted in 1888 at £5 10s., and are now quoted at £10 5s. 0d.; whilst the Midland Waggon Company's shares had risen in value from £6 in 1888 to £10 10s. 0d. in 1895.

Thus it will be seen from these quotations that nearly every well-known firm in the country has largely increased its share out of revenue account, and when you come to contrast how they stood in 1888 with 1895, writers in the daily press and those who write in magazines also seem to forget that they belong to companies where their accounts are made public, and where I along with you may from week to week learn whether they are also making accurate or incorrect statements in regard to the trade and the profits of the said companies. No one denies the increased volume of trade; no one denies the increased exportation of coal; no one denies that profits have been made and are being made in collieries, iron works, and waggon companies. Therefore writers in the papers who declare that no profits are being made, and are not likely to be made unless a substantial reduction in wages takes place, must be regarded as like the ostrich which, having sunk its head in the sand, whilst in this case people come up, take hold of the legs, and pull them out of the dilemma and show them that they have got their heads upon their necks and not upon their shoulders.

BOARD OF CONCILIATION.

With regard to the future of the Board of Conciliation, much has been said during the past six months as to what action the Miners' Federation will take when the day dawns on which they might, if opportunity served, ask for an advance in wages. People have considered this was a secret, and that they ought to be let into it. Writers in the newspapers, colliery owners, and others interested in dividends and large profits, have been longing for the day to come when they, too, would have a chance to deal with the wage question. Why colliery owners in the Midland Federation area should wish for the termination of the agreement entered into in 1894 I cannot understand, and to desire this seems to one to be very doubtful wisdom. Colliery owners in South Wales, Northumberland, Durham, Scotland, and other localities have been realising such a wish during the whole of last year, viz., that of being in a position to give their coal away

at a lower price in order, as they believed, to stimulate trade. Now, what has been the result? Wages have been reduced, prices have gone down, still the cry is on the part of these people "We wish to be placed in a position to still further lower the prices of coal." Why? Because they have not realised their hopes according to the wishes they have expressed, viz. that of getting more trade and making more profit. How can it be otherwise? If collieries did not pay in August 1894 at the prices then ruling, it seems true that certainly since then, seeing that prices have gone down so much more in proportion to the rate of wages, that capital must really have been given away; and yet if we listen to what the South Wales owners and workmen have got to say we find they have only been working short time. The same can also be said of Northumberland, Durham, and of Scotland. They have been working short time. In fact, I make bold to say that, with the exception of a few small districts, colliery owners in the Federation have worked as good time and certainly (judging from the balance-sheets) have made as much money as the colliery owners outside that area. Then I ask, and I think you will agree with me it is a pertinent question, too, why colliery owners in the Federation area are putting themselves once more at drawn swords against their workmen? Having lived up to now well and luxuriously, and many of them having been able to put away for generations unborn, why, I ask, do they desire to terminate a condition of things which has done well for them and the workpeople?

THE NEAR FUTURE.

We are told that in the near future great changes must take place, because collieries are opening out which will assume vast proportions, and practically create one-third output more than we have at the present moment. Hence supply will forestall demand, so it is said; and if we are to judge by the statements made by some colliery owners, the future will bring about something like this—if the average of miners' wages on the continent is under 3s. per day, the workmen in this country are to be brought to the same level. It is never hinted that the profits of colliery owners in the future are to be interfered with or taken from them. It is only the pittance the workman receives that appears to be fair game for the heartless speculator. It is a fact that in the near future collieries will be opened out at which from which 6 to 8 tons will be lifted at every draw, which means about 2,000 tons per day being lifted at one colliery, and where upwards of 2,000 workpeople will be engaged. That being so, we as workmen would be bound to take this matter into consideration, and see to it that the near future is not to be a millenium of greed for mere speculators, but that the miners shall be placed to work where a living wage shall be earned, and where the greedy horse leeches shall be taught the lesson that working miners are human beings, and that they should be better cared for both in wages and home surroundings than ever before. In the near future we must make our position secure by being united in our efforts and joined together in

larger bodies than at present, so that when we decide on any action we shall be practically unanimous throughout the mining community of Great Britain. In the near future we must seek to assess our value as others assess theirs, such as the professional men, the doctors, the lawyers, and parliamentarians. We may take it for granted that in the future, as in the past, the real politician fixes a value upon himself. You would not expect Lord Salisbury to take 600 pence instead of £6,000 a year because of being Prime Minister of England. You would not expect the First Lord of the Treasury, although he has abundant wealth, to go and do the job for nothing. No. Politicians before he was born, or even before Lord Salisbury was born, fixed the value, and that value remains, and, so far as I can judge, is likely to be a permanent thing. So it is in the professions, and as I have been asked so often as to what a living wage is I have no hesitation in naming by comparison what I really think miners should aim at as a living wage.

LIVING WAGE.

I have been asked "What do you consider is a fair wage—a wage sufficient to enable a man to live as he is expected to live?" Looking through some lawyer's bills has given me an idea. You might call it an analogy if you like, or an *Æsop's fable*—one of those fables which were intended to be realised by and bye. I want to know whether miners have not the same sensibilities, the same proclivities, the same idealities, the same loving tendencies, the same hopes and fears, in this life and in the life to come, the same things to put up with, the same rates (pro rata) to pay, and the same liabilities in every direction as lawyers had. Lawyers have declared that a certain rate should be paid to them, and that they consider is a living wage. I have gone through bills where retaining fees to barristers were £100. That was the preliminary fee, after which he was paid a "refresher" of £50 for the day, and when there was a consultation there was another fee of £25. I have gone through accounts where the retaining fee was £55, the refresher about £25, and the consultation fee £16 5s. If that is the living wage of barristers, why should not miners at all events fix their own value, and say that they are entitled to so much. I suggest that the lawyer runs no risk, that he has not more hard work, and does not do more scientific work (as a rule) than the miner. I suggest that for the risk he runs in the mine a man is entitled to claim 5s. a day, and if he is killed at the end of 15 years, it would be none too much to keep his wife and family. For his work a miner should be paid 8s. for the normal day's work, and a consultation or preparation fee of 3s. a day. There are no workmen who have to do so much work at home as miners. They have to keep good fires for drying their clothes, and their wives have to do a great deal of dirty work for them. They should be allowed at least 3s. a day to provide for this work and extra clothing. Some might think these items are too big, but they only come to 16s. a day, and the total falls very much below a lawyer's fees, and

miners' children have as much right to be educated, and their wives as much right to dress well as a lawyer's wife or child has. A miner's family has as much right to be fed and have its home comfortably furnished as a lawyer has. A miner who goes down a pit and at the risk of his life sends up coal which moves the wheels of the world, and enables speculators to realise fortunes, has as much right to a living wage—if you like to a luxurious wage—as any man. I can use the same argument about any class of society as I have with regard to lawyers.

With regard to this point, I wish to lay particular stress on the fact that a living wage was obtained—that is, so far as the normal portion of it is concerned—in the great battles of 1888, 1889, 1890, 1891, and later on of 1893 and 1894. All this was accomplished by united effort, and if a living wage, even in its normal state is to be retained, the same industry, application, and effort must be exercised. The near future is to every miner a beacon light either of hope or despair. If the right steps are taken, if right actions are done, if men join their Unions and stand by them, if men are loyal to each other and determined to do the right with persistent energy and determined effort, there is scarcely any limit to their success in the near future. Now, what is the point to be made in the near future? Why this, that as we obtained the living wage without regard to prices, our watchword must be in the near future—Men must live by their labour, and the living wage must be paid if coal is got, whether in the near or distant future, and no speculator be allowed to manipulate prices so as to jeopardise this great, grand, eternal principle.

I wish you one and all a Happy and Prosperous New Year.