

THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS.

FACE TO FACE ONCE MORE.

Now we are coming face to face with the programme of the Conference, and fortunately for me and for yourselves I have not had the opportunity of preparing any annual address. Therefore there is none printed and ready for circulation and I don't know that there will be. I wish, however, before the Press are asked to retire, just to say a few words on one or two of the points that we will have to deal with. I wish first of all to allude to the fact that with very few exceptions we are as many in numbers to-day as we were a year ago. We have lost a few of our old friends,—one whom we have just passed a resolution upon,—and others we have lost because they have not continued paying their quota to the Federation. Some districts have gone down to some extent and others have gone up a little. At the same time I wish it to be clearly understood that this is a time when we should have no one running out of the Union. We have never been working better for several years past than during the past year, and I will only say, as a word of warning, if we go down in good times, what may we expect in bad times. With regard to the Federation and its work, there has been so much said during the past three or four years that it almost becomes stale even to those who try their level best to put a new view on some of the old points, and I have no doubt to those of you who don't write books and who don't try to ferret up or ferret out information, it seems stale when you see so many blue books, so many references to this, that, and the other with regard to our own trade, and you would rather have a little holiday now and again than take up the deeper thought and more exhausting work even of a Trade Union leader. Well, the eight hours question is still as bright with us as ever. So far as I look at it, we ought to strike out new lines if necessary in order to secure its accomplishment. We are told by critics to-day that our work is useless, we are told that we are worn out and effete, we are told now by men who are supposed not to be wealthy men, good Tories, good Radicals, men who have not yet made their fortunes, that they believe honestly that the work of the Trade Unions to-day is not what it ought to be. Some people say we are all useless, others say we are too aggressive. I don't believe there can be a Trades Union in its entirety unless it is an aggressive Trades Union. The man who fights and runs away lives to fight another day, says the old adage, but he is not a real Trades Unionist. Once having set his hand to the plough, it is the duty of the Trades Unionist to go to the end of the furrow in order to accomplish what he sets his hand to. With regard to our own questions, many things have been said to try and damage us, many awkward things have been referred to in order to prevent us making any headway and accomplishing our objects. As far as the eight hours question is concerned, I believe this

Federation, having set its hand to the work, will go on until the die is cast, and the workmen in the Federation realise the eight hours day by law. I am more than ever convinced this is the right course to take, rather than a course similar to the one which is now raging in the country. Everyone seems now to have come to the conclusion that sufficient work can be done, and done well, to meet the world's requirements in eight hours. Certainly in a coal mine we believe six hours at the coal face is quite long enough. They tell us it takes an hour to go down and get to the working place, and an hour to get back. Well, I would say this, if it takes an hour to get there, unless it is in a place where a man wants to fill an extra tub, it wont take an hour to come back. When a man has done his work in the pit there is nothing will stop him from getting home but the cage at the pit bottom. There is no reason for any delay with our men in going to their work because everyone knows it is piece work, everyone knows a man gets what he earns. If he is not stripped and at it when he gets there, and getting some coal into the corves and some weight to the surface, there is no brass for him at the end of the week. The machines trouble us a little, not much. We will fight this question as it arises, and get prices such as are worth having when the machines come in. But with ordinary work a man goes into a working place, and very often has his clothes off throughout the day, and yet we find such ladies as Mrs. Henry Ward having a great deal to say about us in a novel she wrote some time ago, and when she opened a bazaar in Derbyshire. Well, all the novelists I know appear to be Tories, anti-Trades Unionists, and it makes me ask sometimes when I get to certain passages, Why do we buy a book like this? These people, somehow or other, everyone of them, are anti-Trades Unionists, anti-humanitarians, and they don't care who goes to the deep if they swim on the top of the sea. I am told the man who wrote "The Christian" was to make £20,000 out of that venture. This was given in to the Press by Mr. T. P. O'Connor, M.P., in one of the papers. Well, I am not going to let these novelists alone. If they write books, and write for all sorts and conditions of men, they have as much right to be criticised as even a Trades Union leader, and when it is a well known fact that so many people read their books, it seems that if we were to boycott them it would be rather a serious matter for them and their novel. With regard to other critics, we are told now that in this great engineering dispute by men whom you never knew before, men who are posing before the world as great persons, but who never lived ten minutes outside their own doors, who never read a book bearing on the great work of Trades Unions, who never saw real active work in their lives, and who never would consider it necessary to enter a workshop to work—they might go to criticise—that the workman might do a little more than he was

doing for the money he got. Those who criticise us should work in a coal mine for a time. He should like to see a few of them stripped and working at it. It would be the best correction of their bad impressions so far as we Trades Unionists are concerned. Another set of critics are the millionaires. In one of my annual addresses I think I told you how the great Armstrong firm was turned over into a new company after increasing share capital in such a way as to make it appear that whereas they were getting from 25 to 30 per cent dividend on the original capital they capitalised a certain sum of money in such a way that it will give now something like 10 per cent. dividend. I believe something like that occurred also to the firm of Messrs. Briggs, connected with the coal trade. Now, gentlemen, the men who have made millions out of the engineering trade, and whose families, as had been said, for the next fifty generations were provided for,—these men are telling the workers that if they come down to an eight hours day trade cannot live. Why, out of the accumulated profits of the past twenty years they could go on paying the wages they have been paying for the next two hundred years. Therefore I can tell these men and Colonel Dyer that if that is to be their little game in the future, if we are going to have the Pinkerton system from America to watch and beset Trades Unions throughout this country, there will a day come when there will be a set-off Pinkerton, for the people of this country will not stand it. All I can say is with regard to all this business that so long as we keep on right and proper lines, so long as we agitate fairly and earnestly, and keep within the present law, no one should attempt to make us afraid of doing our duty. If they do they have as much right to be pulled within the law, prosecuted, and sent to gaol, as an ordinary workman of this country to-day.

EQUAL LAWS.

The time will come when there will be a law of equity throughout the land, instead of one law for the rich, whereby wealth can secure privileges and facilities which the workmen are denied. The time will come when we will have Judges in the land who will deal uprightly; when there will not be Recorders of York having the impertinence to lecture people, instead of attending to his judicial work. Such critics as those meet with my disapprobation. If they want to send a man to gaol, let them send him. Some of them send him, however, whether there is law, equity, or fact. Some of the judges believe in law, some in equity, and some in facts, and when the facts are spoken to by a limb of the law, the man has to go to gaol; but when it comes to a man with £40,000 a year, all the rigour of the law is abandoned. It is not long since a certain lady who did an abominable thing, and was prosecuted and convicted, was sent to

a State Prison. I don't call them prisons when you can have a separate room, have food sent in, everything nice and comfortable, fires, arm chairs, sofas, and anything that is desired. They call that equity, they call it law; I call it unfair play. Whether rich or poor, the wrong-doer should be punished equally. Well, now, gentlemen, with regard to a good many other critics which one could mention, it would probably be unfair to go to the newspaper Press. We find some leader writers saying the most harsh things about the engineers and Trade Unionists generally. What are the engineers aiming at? they asked. To manage the whole of the industrial workshops of the country. Well, we throw that back in their teeth.

WHAT TRADES UNIONISTS WANT.

What we want is fair hours, fair wages, fair contracts, fair living, and fair treatment. Do we get it? Do we get it on the railways? Do we get it in the mines? Do we get it in the factories and workshops? Where do we get it? We get it where we have a strong Union. Where we have the men and women combined we get something that is fair and reasonable. I am one of those people who are said to be old fossils, who do not believe in the new Unionism, and who do not know how to think for themselves—I am told that I am so free from independence that I knuckle down to every globe-trotter whoever comes in my way. Well, gentlemen, I don't think I do. I don't think I will. But what I will do is what every Trades Union leader ought to do, and the rank and file also. If a man is a Trades Unionist let him make up his mind that he will have what is right and fair, and won't allow all the profits to go into one pocket," but that he will have a share of them so that he might live and might enjoy life. Whether that is to manage a concern or not let us do our duty like men, stand shoulder to shoulder, and whenever a colliery owner dares to say to us "You shall work for that," with a full knowledge that men cannot earn a living at it, do as the owners are doing to day—boycott that particular place, lay it idle. Let men live, as Mr. Barnes says his men ought to live. While this engineering business is going on there is an object lesson on two points. The first is the eight hours question. We have been told by employers in the House of Commons that we must get this by Trades Union effort, that they won't support us in getting it by law. Well if it is embodied in a bye-law it will be eight hours. If it comes by Trades Union effort it will be eight hours - the result in either case will be the same. Therefore I can't understand the employers saying "Get it by Trades Union effort," unless they honestly believe they can beat us in that attempt. I think they believe they can do that, and that the men will never fight successfully in that connection. Then in regard to our Trades Unions, are they about to be knocked down never to rise again? Well, Trades Unions

have been knocked down before to-day—they have been but a spark in the world. In Yorkshire we have been knocked down, in Lancashire we have been knocked down, in Scotland we have been knocked down, in fact we have been knocked down right throughout the length and breadth of the country, but Phoenix like, out of its ashes a larger Phoenix has arisen. How do we stand to-day I say you can't kill Trades Unionism. You may hinder its progress, you may persecute men and women, and prevent them being men and women, you may say for a time "You shan't be in a Trades Union," but you can't kill the principle. Sooner or later it will burst out afresh. Whenever the owners in any given district or locality have for the time being knocked on the head Trades Unionism, it has become stronger and the owners have had to pay for every penny they have extracted from the workmen's pockets. They are doing it to day, and will do it for ever. Trades Unionism will have its ups and downs, and if the engineers are fighting the principle to-day we ought to look at it from that standpoint and if possible shoulder the difficulty, and if occasion arises, if it is to be that we are to be killed as a body it will be necessary for every Trade Society in this country to say—and I say this deliberately, after seriously thinking it over—it will become necessary for every Trades Unionist in this country to say "If we are to die we will die in a heap." If we believe our condition is not such as it ought to be we will tender a notice which will practically mean that the owners cannot give us what we want and that will bring us out. The whole country should be laid idle together, so that if capitalists can live without workers and workers can live without capitalists, if everyone of us who are poor have to go to the Workhouse and colliery owners to Penitentiaries, all I can say is let the thing be done gloriously, because they say it is murder to kill one man, but all Bishops agree it is glorious to kill numbers. Now I wish to say the trade of the country being so good and prosperous we ought to make a spurt to get every man into the Union.

WORKMEN'S COMPENSATION ACT AND PERMANENT RELIEF SOCIETIES.

There is one thing certain with regard to this Compensation Act. We don't believe in contracting out, we don't believe that the Permanent Relief Societies should interfere in our business; and let me give a word of warning to Permanent Relief Societies. If they make it impossible for the workmen to hold their own against contracting out—I will put the worst side of it—we who belong to the Trade Unions, we who have the larger number of men within our ranks, will tell the Permanent Relief Officers straight "You are not going to manage it. Every one of you shall go and have a retiring fee if you can

get it; you are not going to try and kill our Trades Unions and get the men into Permanent Relief Societies and smother every attempt to get compensation from employers under a law which we were told the men were to have without asking for it." I want that to be a word of warning for Permanent Relief officials who are sneaking about from place to place holding private meetings. I want it to be clearly understood that those men who are asking to do this will find they are the Jonahs in the ship and they will sink it rather than swallow the whale. Durham sent an emmissary along with myself, under the old National Union into Lancashire in 1880, what to do? To advise the Lancashire men not to contract out of the Act of 1880. To-day, from what I can gather through the Permanent Relief Societies, they are whining and crying to avoid litigation and avoid a little hard work, a little Trade Union work. What is the proposal? It is to contract out of the Act through Permanent Relief Societies, paying a little here and a little there, paying for this, that, and the other in order to give some tangible appearance to anything they are doing. Well, gentlemen, I don't mind whether it is a Trades Union leader, a Permanent Society official, or a colliery owner who wants to evade the Act, he has not my sympathy. We have said ever since the days of Mr. Macdonald, our great leader, who taught us these great principles, that the safest way is for a man to accept the law rather than to evade the law. The owners will always beat us if it is a question of evading the law, they will have schemes which you and I cannot approve of; they will have schemes which Mr. Chamberlain and his Act of Parliament will give us no power to interfere with. The Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies to-day is one of the best officials we have under the law, and probably while he has the position he will allow nothing to be done but what is fair and right, but other Joseph's may arise who will take different views—perhaps we may have a Recorder of York put into the place—and what would we have then? We should get everything that the law would give us so far as we could compel it.

WAGE QUESTION.

I simply wish to say further with regard to our meeting here, that we are going to debate the wage question. Now, gentlemen, this is rather a thorny question, it is rather a delicate question, a question which is perhaps under the rose rather than in bright sunlight. At the same time I don't know that I, knowing a little bit about the wage question, should shirk saying a few words on a matter of such great importance. It is the easiest thing in the world to get a man to go in for an advance of wages. Any man, however poor he may be on a platform, however bad he may be in principle, whether he is a Unionist or a non-Unionist, may easily urge men to go in for an advance of wages, because a non-union man has neither anything to lose, nor anything to disgrace himself with, but has everything to gain.

He may gain a little notoriety, people may see that he has made a speech, men may look at him, and very likely some will say "Where has thou been during the last ten years?" Every man here on this question has an opinion of his own, or if he has not he has borrowed one from somebody else. Well, your own opinion and the borrowed one often go well together. I tell you with regard to this wage question that trade never was better. Workmen now are doing better than for a long time past where they are not overcrowded; where they are overcrowded probably men are doing as badly as they were in 1888. On the other hand the trade of the country has so far improved that our colliery owners and coal sellers really don't know what to do with it. They are in this awkward position, they either have to sell it or give it away in order that they don't have to pay for excess of truck hire and all the rest of it. They will send a telegram sometimes to London—"50 trucks of coal; what will you give for them?" As you know, those of you who have watched the export trade, we have been going on at a terrible rate during the last 23 years, and we are exporting as much coal, sending as much coal and patent fuel out of the country within ten million tons of the output as was the aggregate output of the country in 1850. Over 44,000,000 tons of coal are sent out of this country to-day. What for? What is the object? They are sending it out to-day in my judgment to foreign countries, where they are working up raw material and bringing into this country manufactured articles, and competing with our people at such a rate that we have complaints in Bradford and Manchester, and other places, that they can't make a living. That being the case, I have to say now that although trade has improved, the conditions surrounding us are not so good as we would like to see, and although there is so much coal sold at certain prices which realise to-day large profits in my judgment to colliery owners, I don't think in January we are at the right point to take a new departure. With all other matters affecting other trades in the country, I don't think the present juncture is the right time to take decided action, but I do think we might fairly discuss all sides of the matter. I do think we might look from the ends of the earth even back to our own country. and try and find out if there are any means whereby we can better our condition, so that if an opportune time serves we can go in solidly for something which may be, and probably will, be to the betterment of the condition of the toilers underground. That being so I simply say, let us in all these matters, whether it be Compensation Bills, Coal Mines Regulation Amendment Bills, or other matters affecting our wages and our interests in Bills in Parliament—let us do our level best as a united body, through our Federation, to bring about such a condition of things as will not revolutionise, but evolutionise, and which will be as sure and as solid as if brought about by other means. My advice is, looking at these questions, let

us begin another year by putting on the armour, let us make up our minds as to what is our duty, and when we have determined that, let us fight like men until we find ourselves either vanquished or victorious.