

Mr. HARVEY then read Mr. Pickard's Address:—

GENTLEMEN,—The experiences of the past year, in the light of what we see to-day, have been somewhat surprising, and in some respects disappointing. I do not intend on this occasion to make a very elaborate speech, but to leave Delegates of the Federation to use their best ability to find out the means of dealing with many of the suggestions made to us since October of last year.

For many years South Wales has been under a sliding scale. Their wages under that scale have been, as some think, regulated well; while others believe they were not regulated well. Everybody knows that advances and reductions under the sliding scale were as sure to follow on certain conditions as night follows day. A sliding scale was one of the buttresses of the Coalowners' great ideal of keeping men in subjection. It proved a great failure in many ways. Sliding scales do not prevent strikes or lock-outs—in fact one of the biggest stoppages that ever took place in South Wales occurred under the sliding scale. So far as the effects of such stoppages are concerned, it is not my business just now to deal with them, although it may be said that that stoppage showed the daring,

pluck, and courage of the South Wales Miners individually and collectively. In that regard no doubt South Wales showed great pertinacity and some skill in trying to find out what was and is good for themselves.

The sliding scale having now gone, the next question is—what has been put in its place? A new scheme was adopted, and a Board of Conciliation formed, with a wage arrangement and a maximum and a minimum. No one 25 years ago, or indeed at a later date, would have anticipated that such a scheme could be arranged in South Wales. Everyone said there would never be a Board of Conciliation there—however, it is now an accomplished fact, and there is no doubt that the South Wales people are highly delighted with the achievement, because when all is said and done, to abolish the sliding scale and establish a new scheme in its place with a maximum and minimum wage, is one of the greatest events in the history of any Trades Union; and it is a fact that few Trades Unions have secured what is called a maximum and minimum wage rate. A great deal can be said on this matter, because the Federation itself, before securing a maximum and minimum rate under its scheme, had a great battle to fight. The battle was won, and eventually what is known as a living wage was secured. The existence of a minimum and a maximum principle holds up the fact that the living wage has been obtained. So far as the Federation is concerned, from the year 1893 the principles I have referred to were not merely secured then, but have been upheld and maintained ever since. Some other trades have followed in the wake of the Federation, and have obtained what they considered to be the maximum and minimum rate. Trades Unionism is the only means by which such conditions have been secured.

With regard to the Wage Question, two events have occurred—one that the workmen asked for, but did not obtain, a ten per cent. advance, and the other that the employers also asked but did not obtain, a five per cent. reduction. Lord James of Hereford, although it was clearly proved in his presence that the owners were totally wrong in their figures, when in the previous year they sought for and obtained a ten per cent. reduction, refused to give the ten per cent. back to the men. During this Conference there must be a statement made in regard to the Wage Question. I do not feel inclined at this early stage to proceed to make that statement, but it is quite clear that the owners are far from satisfied with the present condition of things. So far as I am informed, the owners have been making good dividends up to date, but dividend or no dividend it is quite clear the owners in the Federation Area are going to ask for compensation which they are not entitled to.

Another suggested change of enormous importance has been made by the Tory Government. It was thought at one time that all or nearly all the members of the Government were Free Traders,

and that on no consideration would they barter any position where Free Trade was in question. Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, the late Colonial Secretary, has taken upon himself to say there must be a change—that the day has arrived when there must be an alteration, not merely in regard to preferential tariffs, but also that a food tax must be imposed. His point is that first of all there must be a tax on food stuffs generally, and then retaliatory tariffs in regard to other nations if this country is to live; and the bold statement has been made that unless this is done the country will fall to pieces. It is rather a singular thing that during the last forty years this country, although not possessing complete free trade, has experienced great prosperity—so much so that trade has vastly increased in volume, and the enormous figures relating thereto show a great advance on the condition of things forty years since. Besides this, if we look at what has been called the unearned increment, the increased value is simply fabulous, and the figures are so large that our tongue can scarcely be brought to lick round the sum. We are told by those who ought to know that if a food tax is imposed, and retaliatory tariffs are adopted, we shall within a year or two lose very much of the large sums that we have secured through the influence of free trade. If such be the case, why in the name of common sense are the working classes allowing this matter to go almost by default? Why do not they arouse themselves and point out that while, as Mr. Chamberlain says, they will be most affected by the change, the fact is that they will not receive any advantage from it? In my opinion, gentlemen, the only people who will receive any benefit will, from the nature of the case, be the employers and the wealthy classes.

In regard to retaliatory tariffs, if these be persisted in, instead of more work there will be less work, which means a lessened income, and more poverty among the poor. Mr. Chamberlain says that the workers will receive higher wages. I should like to ask my friends here and the workers generally, if ever they found the colliery owners voluntarily advancing wages on the ground that they had received additional revenue? I think the first instance of that is to come. If Mr. Chamberlain as an employer ever did it, clearly he might expect others to do it, but as a matter of fact he never did it himself; and if it is a fact that putting a tax on food and creating retaliatory tariffs, which means that the workmen will have more to pay,—if it is a fact that this sort of business will bring us higher wages, then the working classes of this country, and of every other country as far as that is concerned, will be glad to receive it, because no one more likes a little more luxury than the workers of this and all other countries.

If you take Germany, Austria, France and Belgium, as fair samples of what Protection can do, it will be found that instead of securing higher it produces lower wages for the working man. A comparison between these countries and this shews that the

English workmen in our mines, and I believe this holds true of other industries, receive from 3s. to 4s. per day higher wages than in the countries named. Now, if without protection the English workman is enabled to receive that amount more than the foreigner, how comes it to pass that any reasonable man will, as Mr. Chamberlain said, put himself on the floor, and take it laid down. This, in fact, is what certain classes have been telling the working men for many years, that they will not do a day's work if they can help it, and that they do not work enough for the wages they receive, these and similar statements being almost as fabulous as the Seven League Boot story.

No, gentlemen, I have come to the conclusion that whilst it is possible one or two trades and industries have been affected by this continuous running out of trade, the general trade of the country is much better—taking it all in all—than at any period in our history. We have heard tell of certain trades in the country being destroyed owing to, as it is wont to term it, the keen competition caused by foreign countries, but the fact remains that whilst in some districts a particular trade dies out from one cause or another, a new industry is started which employs more people than the old trade. Whilst a certain manufacture, owing to want of modern machinery, and other causes, is affected, a new trade is often started, which in the end is better for that particular district than before. Take the case of a certain important industry in this country. Some ten years ago almost absolute failure was written on that concern. A new company got hold of it, and from that day to this hundreds of thousands of pounds have been made. Why? Simply because those who took it over put in new machinery—machinery up-to-date, and they have gone on until, as I am informed, they not merely own the large mills connected with the business, but also the mansion and other property which belonged to the former owners. I do not feel inclined to dwell at any length on other portions of this subject—It is sufficient to point out the more salient points in regard to it, but to tell me or any other hard headed man that this new cry of Protection is going to do a great deal of good is utter rot. We have been told that Canada is in favour of this scheme, but my information is quite to the contrary effect. In September last, at the Trades Union Congress in this country a resolution was carried denouncing these proposals, and agreeing to resist them in every possible way. Just lately in the Dominion of Canada, the Trades Union Congress of that country have passed a resolution on the same lines as their English brethren. The Trades Unionists of Canada are, I understand, the biggest party in the State, and they have emphatically declared that they have no desire for any impost which in any way would prejudicially affect the workers in the mother country. There is no doubt that Canada has never been more prosperous than during the last five years, and that the people there have experienced a flourishing condition of things during that period.

I have no need to say much in regard to the programme of business which is to be laid before you at this Annual Congress. You know the history of the Mines Eight Hours Bill, you know how we have been thwarted at every turn by men in the same condition of life as ourselves. In fact, the greatest opposition to the Eight Hours Bill in the House of Commons has not come from Members of Parliament as a rule, except such as are colliery owners and miners' representatives. This applies also to the Mines Employment Bill, which sought to remedy a state of things in which boys in the mines have to work much longer hours than adults. The same remark also applies to other similar Measures. The Mines Regulation Bill is particularly a Measure which we feel should be carried into law as speedily as possible. There are many sections in it which would prove a great boon to the employers as well as to the men, but our bitterest opponents are the employers themselves. These gentlemen state that they have a great desire to secure safety for life and limb, yet they put every obstacle in our way in any Bill by which the Federation seeks to promote this very protection of life and limb.

I am pleased to see a resolution on the Agenda calling upon the Federation to take action in regard to several measures before Parliament. The Compensation Act, as we all know, has caused more litigation in its short history than any other bill passed into law.

With respect to Foreign Labour, there is not the slightest doubt that Government should have dealt with it long ago. They have gone in for Protection so called, but they have not protected the real interests of the people. In America, if hard working English people go there they sometimes find themselves deported back to England in a very summary manner. Vide the case of the men from Morley as reported in the Leeds Mercury and other papers. Why, we have in Scotland thousands of Poles, whilst we have also large numbers in South Wales and in North Wales. In fact numbers of men are thus employed who cannot speak English or understand English, and who know nothing about the rules which they are supposed to carry out.

In respect to Labour Representation, I do not think it necessary to say much. I can only hope that no alteration will be made for a while in the scheme we have adopted, and that when it comes into operation it will prove as successful as all our schemes have done up till now.

With respect to a new Board of Conciliation we may take it for granted that an effort will be made to secure such a Board, but whether the term be long or short, it is in my judgment better to work under a scheme than without one. I hope the suggestion on

the Agenda that a new Board be formed will be debated fairly, and that the scheme as suggested will be adopted.

The Tariff Question is on the Agenda and must be debated, and you must form your opinion as to what you think should be the policy of the Federation.

A much more serious thing has happened during the year, and that is the ravages of the new worm disease. At the last International Congress the subject was fairly ventilated, and the information to hand went to show what a new, startling, and hurtful disease it was. In my judgment, however, this is no new disease, but that from time immemorial the same class of patients have been in our mines. I can remember long ago seeing these thin, emaciated, and weakly people among our mining population. The disease has developed in Germany, Belgium, Austria, and partly in France, yet it is quite clear the same class of victims have been produced in each country more or less through this disease called Ankylostomiasis. In some instances the number affected amounts to some 75 per cent. of the workmen employed at a particular colliery. The information we had in regard to Liege was something marvellous. Out of 5,000 persons employed, nearly the whole of the workmen were affected by this new worm disease.

Many inquiries have been made within the last month or two on these matters, and I am able to put before you certain information which I have received from the Continent, all of which has a tendency to show that this particular disease is severe in its effects. In fact, unless some steps are taken to stamp out this disease, it is possible certain mining districts will be stamped out.

Belgium, France, Austria, Germany, have all been trying to find means how to protect the miners of those countries in this matter, and this year our own Government have taken the matter in hand, and have tried to ascertain and locate this fearful curse because it is quite clear that it is as much a curse as any epidemic that may make its appearance from time to time. The reports which I place before you to-day, and which I have had translated from French and German, will show to you in a concrete and concise form what has been done up to the present, and I hope that the best intellects of our modern scientists will prove victorious over this awful calamity which affects the working classes connected with our mines. I am not going into any particulars, but I hope the mining population will study well this matter. As we are talking the subject over in Conference, we should do our level best on the subject, and I think we should call a National Conference of all the mining districts in the United Kingdom to discuss this question and also the question of Fiscal Policy. This matter affecting workers in mines and the mining population generally will I trust receive that full and fair consideration which it deserves.