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ONE PENNY.

JOHN E. WILLIAMS,



AND THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE

Social - Democratic Federation ;

WITH HIS OWN ACCOUNT OF THE MONTH'S IMPRISONMENT HE
SUFFERED FOR SPEAKING IN DOD STREET, LIMEHOUSE.

1886.

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BORN 27 years ago within a short distance of the spot where he has been so unjustly imprisoned and shamefully maltreated, John Williams has from his earliest years had to battle with the world as an unskilled labourer. Left as an orphan when a mere child, the education he possesses he owes almost entirely to his own industry and self-denial. Out of his slender wages, earned by work which has often lasted for sixteen and seventeen hours a day, he has always spent far more than he could really spare on books and journals. Returning to his ill-furnished single room

on Saturday night, weary and worn, he has devoted his leisure time either to earnestly putting forward his opinions in working-men's clubs, or to getting up the facts for his next day's open-air addresses. This has gone on for nearly twelve years; and neither poverty nor sickness nor persecution has ever checked him in his persistent endeavours to improve the lot of his fellow men, to stir them from the apathy into which they have been sunk, and to lay before them those truths of Socialism which now, in great part owing to his courage and tenacity, are making way in every quarter of England.

It is true that John Williams does not speak with mincing accent and delicate pronunciation; true also that he does not always use his words in their right meaning, or stop to weigh the full force of his phrases. But his rough and homely diction, his vigorous illustrations drawn from facts which have been only too real for him, go right home to the hearts of his audience, and have roused feelings among the workers which may yet have their outcome in deeds. A man who has been driven to fight at the dock-gates for a job at starvation wages, who has known what it is to be homeless and workless for weeks together, and yet has never lost his independence or self-respect, is surely worthy of all the honour that can be paid to him, not only by his fellow-Socialists, but by every man and woman who can appreciate honesty and unswerving fidelity to the cause of the people.

Since he became one of the founders of the Social-Democratic Federation in January, 1881, John Williams has seen an advance in the cause of Social Democracy, such as he could barely have hoped to witness in his life-time. As an active worker in the Anti-Coercion and Anti-Crimes Act movement, as a persistent organiser and agitator with every association that strove for the nationalisation of land and capital, as well as for the most advanced political measures, John Williams is known to every working-men's club in London, and in many provincial towns. Even during the four weeks during which he has been in gaol, he has the satisfaction of knowing that he has done more than all his comrades to bring our great cause before the workers of England and Europe.

Though for many years John Williams had been working both independently and with the most thorough-going political bodies then in existence, his first connection with an avowedly Socialist organisation was in 1879, when a few London working men, with the aid of some of those who had been forced to take refuge in England from the tyranny of their own governments, had established the International Club in Rose Street, Soho.

In 1880 the outlook was dark and dreary for all who had the welfare of the workers at heart. A Liberal Government had been returned to power with an overwhelming majority, which was to be the "great instrument" for fulfilling the high-sounding promises of the Midlothian speeches. Those who took the name while abandoning the ideas of Cobbett and Lovatt, so far forgot the old meaning of the word Radical as to pledge themselves to the infallibility of a party leader who had only a few months before himself denounced the claim of any human being to infallibility. In London there were a small body of working-men who were not tied to party but devoted to principle, not blinded by the adoration of any man, but earnest in forcing on their fellows the discussion of genuine measures for the real of material and moral improvement of the people. Few in numbers, and scantily provided with money, they were unable to effect much by themselves, and appealed in vain to the Radical Workmen's Clubs, who had completely forgotten

the teachings of the noble men of the last generation who had gone down to unremembered graves, broken and disheartened by the failure of the great revolutionary movement of 1848. The few who were mindful of the lessons of the past, and determined to be no longer the tools of the tricksters of the two political factions of the great party of Privilege, which was still the only one represented even in the new House of Commons—these few hailed with surprise and joy the offer of aid from a few middle-class men for the formation of a new organisation and the commencement of a vigorous campaign in favour of genuine Democratic principles. A memorable meeting indeed was the first at which were met men who had battled with enthusiasm for the victory of the Liberal party in the delusive hope that thus would the workers come by their own again; others who with truer instinct had seen the wolf through his sheep's clothing, amongst them some older men who had worked and fought side by side with Ernest Jones and Frost, William Lovett and Bronterre O'Brien and once again dared to hope that the workers might achieve their own emancipation. At the first meeting at the Westminster Palace Hotel, Joseph Cowen was in the chair and there Professor E. S. Beesly in vain poured cold water on the movement, by urging that the time had not come for starting a working class movement independent of the Liberal Party. In spite of this the Democratic Federation was founded on the most advanced grounds on which common agreement could be obtained. Work began in earnest, and the whole world soon knew that after a generation of apathy the workers of Great Britain were earnest in the determination to obtain control of their country, in the interest of the labouring classes alone. That the ruling classes appreciated the full significance of the fact was shown by the persistent vilification heaped on the movement, and its originators, by the Liberal press. The kindest word said for it was that a knot of mad men had joined together to be scattered again in a week. If the wishes of the prophets could have secured the fulfilment of their prophecies the Democratic Federation would not have flourished as it has done. In spite of the detraction of the press of all shades of opinion the work continued, and a representative conference was called to discuss the programme, H. M. Hyndman being in the chair. The more advanced clauses were enthusiastically greeted by the many working men present but proved too much for some of the middle-class men. No sooner had a majority of the delegates present voted in favour of including "Legislative Independence for Ireland" than Professor Beesly, the ardent supporter of the workers in the evil days of Trade Unions, moved a resolution declaring the time not ripe for an independent working-class party. He failed, and the meeting carried the programme which was unanimously adopted at crowded meetings in nearly every large town in England, and, dissolved, pledged to earnest endeavour to overthrow middle-class rule in these islands.

There was hard work before them. When Mr. Gladstone came into power in May, 1880, famine was abroad in Ireland and had it not been for the relief afforded by the Mansion House Committee supplemented by the Land League of which Michael Davitt was the founder, the trap coffin of 1847 would have been at work again. Mr. Gladstone's government made provision for famine according to the well established precedent of English political parties. The leaders of the Irish people were to be prosecuted for daring to assert that the Land was the People's; Mr. Parnell and others to be tried for sedition, and a Government prosecution to fail for the first time in Irish history. On January 6th, 1881, Parliament opened an Irish session—Coercion first and Land

Reform afterwards. The Democratic Federation strove hard against the suppression of constitutional government in the sister isle. Night after night meetings were held and John Williams with the rest returned to his work in the morning, only to come out again in the evening at the street corner or in a public hall to protest against Coercion for the unhappy country that had struggled in vain against tyranny for centuries. The London Workmen's Club (with the exception of the Patriotic Club) were silent, and the Coercion Bill of 1881 was passed after such a dogged struggle as Parliament had never before witnessed without a word of protest from the English Radicals, the very men who are still posturing as the friends of freedom.

Besides their struggle against Whig tyranny in Ireland, the members of the Democratic Federation were not behind in advocating the interests of the working classes of England and all other countries. A large and enthusiastic meeting was held in London in favour of the Abolition of the House of Lords soon after the formation of the organisation. In 1882 H. M. Hyndman reprinted the lecture delivered in 1797 by Thomas Spence, of Newcastle, entitled "A plea for the Nationalisation of the Land," and in 1882, after the meeting of the Trade Union Congress in London, a large audience thronged St. Andrew's Hall in Newman-street to hear (for the first time since the days of the Chartists) the right of the people to collective ownership of the soil of their country, championed by the same men who were constantly being held up to execration as Tories in disguise by the Liberal and Radical press.

When the Russian despot met a richly merited fate at the hands of the noble band of men and women who only asked for freedom of speech and press, the Liberal Government, conscious that Alexander's crimes against his subjects were not blacker than their own against the liberties of the Irish nation, seized the German revolutionary paper *Freiheit*, and arrested its editor, Johann Most, on account of the publication of an article applauding the Nihilists for the execution of the Czar. Some of the Englishmen at the Rose-street Club, headed by Frank Kitz, brought out several issues of an English *Freiheit*. The first contained a translation of the article which was made the pretext of Most's imprisonment. It was, of course, "boycotted" by the newsagents, but John Williams stood outside the Old Bailey and sold large numbers of the paper while Most was being tried within the Court for the same offence. No notice was taken of this daring challenge to the Liberal Government, which was evidently afraid to deal out the same injustice to an Englishman as to a foreign refugee. Public meetings in defence of Most were also organised by the same men. At one of these, on Peckham Rye, the Radicals combined with Tories, opposed the speakers, and were only prevented by force from seizing the platform and thus aiding their masters to suppress freedom of speech.

In the autumn of 1881 a bye election took place at Tyrone, and the Rev. Harold Rylett, a Nonconformist minister, who strongly sympathised with the Irish people, was put forward as a candidate against a Liberal hack. The handbill issued by the Democratic Federation or this occasion denounced the tyranny and treachery of the Liberal Government in so uncompromising a fashion that many of the so-called Radicals who had hitherto accorded the Federation a half-hearted support now withdrew, and have never since ceased to protest that a body of men who could speak so plainly of despotism when adopted by Mr. Gladstone must be working in the Conservative interest.

In 1881, also a deputation from the Democratic Federation crossed St. George's Channel with the object of letting their countrymen at

home know the true state of affairs in Ireland—among them H. M. Hyndman and many others. After three weeks' stay they returned and addressed enormous audiences throughout London and the provinces, besides issuing thousands of pamphlets descriptive of their experiences and horrible sufferings of the Irish peasantry. Lectures were being given throughout these months at the workingmen's clubs in the Metropolis by H. M. Hyndman, Herbert Burrows, John Williams, James F. Murray, and many others, and the truths of Socialism being expounded, and the frauds and fallacies of the different political reformers vigorously exposed. Indeed, the meat offered was too strong for the weak stomach of certain Radical clubs from which the lecturers were religiously excluded. Newcastle, Liverpool, and other provincial towns were visited and branches formed.

The energies of the Federation were, however, destined to be turned for a time into another channel. The failure of the Liberal policy in Ireland was too obvious for concealment. The Land League had become all-powerful. No rent could be obtained by the landlords, and the land which was cleared by wholesale evictions was left on their hands owing to the strength of the popular organisation. Mr. Forster's "village ruffians and midnight marauders" increased in numbers and determination in spite of the fact that in every week of his administration scores of men of upright character and stainless lives were thrown into gaol on mere suspicion, without accusation, investigation, evidence or proof. The unheeded warnings of the men and women of the Federation were amply fulfilled. The Coercion policy was an absolute failure. Suddenly a change was announced. The prison doors were to be unbarred, the Land Act was to be completed, and "Buckshot" Forster recalled in disgrace. But one Sunday morning London awoke to learn that on the previous evening (6th May, 1882) the new Chief Secretary for Ireland, Lord Frederick Cavendish, with Mr. F. H. Burke, had been stabbed on the high road through Phoenix Park. The horror of the public knew no bounds. Everywhere employers of labour began to discharge their Irish hands. Almost every Englishman denounced the whole Irish nation, forgetting that the responsibility for this, as for every one of the grossly exaggerated outrages which were reported in the English press, lay with the Government, which had wrested from Ireland all hope of redress for the wrongs of her people by peaceful means. The popular revulsion against the Irish enabled the Government to introduce into Parliament a measure of Coercion frankly declared to be unparalleled even in the long and bloody annals of the despotic repression exercised for generations by the English garrison in Ireland. Nor were the liberties of the Irish alone suppressed, but the extension of the Alien Act for England and Scotland placed the freedom of Britons as well as foreigners at the mercy of policemen and magistrates, and abolished the right of asylum, which had placed our country in the proud position of being the refuge sought by Mazzini, Kossuth, and the hosts of indomitable rebels who had sought on our shores security from the brutal tyranny of continental despotisms. Such was the rancour expressed against the Irish by all sections of English opinion that it required immense courage and devotion for a handful of enthusiasts to stand by the principles of freedom after the Phoenix Park tragedy. But the men of the Democratic Federation had not lightly pledged themselves to work for the emancipation of the workers of the world. Nothing daunted, they threw themselves with determination into the tremendous task of rousing London to a sense of the enormities about to be perpetrated by the Liberal Government, which had already

shown that it was ready, when in office, to betray every principle on which they had traded for popularity two short years before. It was determined to call a monster meeting in Hyde Park on Sunday, 11th June, 1882. The offices of the Federation were thronged from morning till night with the members, preparing banners, making up rosettes, drawing up handbills. The following was issued in thousands:—

FELLOW CITIZENS,

Once more the Liberal Government, backed up by Tory reactionists, has been false to every principle of freedom. Another Coercion Bill is being forced through Parliament far more tyrannical than the one which has so utterly failed. The public horror at the murders in the Phoenix Park has been used to establish a despotism worse than anything known in these Islands since the days of the infamous Star Chamber.

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS IS AT AN END,

FREEDOM OF THE PERSON IS AT THE MERCY OF THE PAID INFORMER,

THE RIGHT OF PUBLIC MEETING IS SUPPRESSED,

TRIAL BY JURY IS REPLACED BY A NOMINEE COURT,

EVERY HONEST MAN WHO IS OUT AFTER DUSK MAY BE THROWN INTO PRISON BY THE POLICE.

These powers, given for three whole years, may, within that period be in the hands of the present Opposition. As it is, they are to be used by a nobleman, best known to his own countrymen by his crafty seizure of the common land of the people. All this is done, we are told, to put down secret societies and to check outrage.

Fellow Citizens, tyranny as surely breeds secret societies as unjust evictions and class greed engender outrage. Suppress open agitation, and desperate secret conspiracies always follow. Not one of the great military powers of Europe, Germany, Russia, Austria, France, but has tried stringent measures without success. The cordial aid of the mass of the people can alone help to restore peace and prosperity in Ireland. Do you think the suppression of all freedom will bind the two peoples together now or will stren then your own liberties in the future? In view, therefore, of the shameful continued action of the governing classes, we call upon the workers of London to show by meeting in thousands in Hyde Park, on Sunday, the 11th June, that they have neither part nor lot in this tyranny, and that they are now, as in the past, opposed to the injustice which is being done in their name,

In addition to this it now also became necessary to reach the people by open-air meetings at the corners of the street, a method of propaganda which has since been utilised by the Federation with a persistence and success that has extorted the admiration of its bitterest opponents. It was arranged that the procession should assemble at Trafalgar Square, at 3.30 p.m. Long before that hour crowds had assembled, in spite of the heavy rain, and it was estimated by the hostile papers that not less than 80,000 persons were present when the procession moved off, headed by bands and interspersed with banners inscribed with such mottoes as "Force is no Remedy," "Labour makes Capital, Capital robs it," and others showing the number of evictions that had taken place during the year. The fact that comparatively few Irishmen were present showed that the Federation had roused the mass of the working men of London in spite of the apathy of the Liberal clubs. The vast concourse streamed into Hyde Park where it was addressed from six platforms, every speaker being greeted with enthusiastic applause. Before the resolution, denouncing the action of the Government, was put, amendments were asked for but in no instance were the supporters of Coercion daring enough to proclaim themselves, and the resolutions were carried by acclamation. Thus ended one of the largest demonstrations held in our generation in London and one that was thoroughly genuine in its character, very little money being expended.

Shortly after another meeting was held in Trafalgar-square to protest against the abolition of the Right of Asylum. Both these protests were unheeded by a Cabinet which trusted to the forgetfulness of the nation to save it from the obloquy with which it will be regarded by future generations.

Comparatively few of the original founders of the Democratic Federation had remained faithful to the only organisation in Great Britain which had through good and evil repute steadfastly held by the principles which alone can destroy the system of wage-labour and class robbery which causes our social ills. But if their numbers were reduced, the faithful few now knew each other and started the work of education and organisation with a will. Their rapid success fairly frightened the upholders of class domination who have constantly striven to distract the attention of the toiling millions from Socialist theories by advertising various nostrums as a panacea for poverty. It has been the proud boast of the Democratic Federation that they have met and defeated every such attempt.

The first was made by Samuel Morley, M.P., who fathered a scheme invented by the Rev. W. L. Blackley, for preventing pauperism by fining the workers in early youth. In anticipation of one of their meetings the following handbill was issued by the Federation:—

FELLOW CITIZENS,

A PUBLIC MEETING will be held in the HOLBORN TOWN HALL, on TUESDAY NEXT, DECEMBER 19th, at Eight p.m., in favour of the Prevention of Pauperism by Compulsory Insurance out of the insufficient wages of the Working Classes. We ask you to be present on that occasion, and show the wealthy gentlemen who want to shift on to your shoulders the cost of your maintenance when you have worked yourselves into sickness and disease for their profit, what you think of this new scheme of parsons and employers for the benefit of the rich.

"The Prevention of Pauperism," Fellow Citizens, which they now urge you to undertake, means the protection of their own pockets. If they really want to prevent Pauperism, let these self-seekers give up trading upon your bitter competition for starvation wages. There are hundreds of thousands in this rich England of ours living in squalor and misery to-day in order that landowners and capitalists may flourish in luxury and ease. All men and women who work for a master give back to their employers the value of their wages in the first two or three hours of the day's work. All the rest of the production is taken for nothing by the classes who live in idleness on the fruits of your toil. These classes now call upon you who labour to nullify the ancient laws of this kingdom, which force the rich to provide a scanty pittance for the poor, and to save their vast riches untouched while forcing from the poor a bit of their daily bread.

Look, Fellow Citizens, how the produce of your toil is divided:—

TOTAL ANNUAL PRODUCTION OF UNITED KINGDOM	£1,200,000,000
TAKEN BY LANDLORDS, CAPITALISTS, AND MIDDLE CLASS	900,000,000
LEFT FOR THE PRODUCERS	300,000,000

Study these figures, and then adopt, if you can, proposals for further robbery.

Prevention of Pauperism! Tell these wealthy hypocrites to give up their profitable monopolies; tell those who spend on cigars more than you get in wages—tell them that Compulsory Insurance must be carried out at their expense.

Fellow Citizens, there would be no pauperism, there would be no unemployed, if the means of production were used for the benefit of all instead of being handled for the enrichment of a class.

Speakers from the Federation attended, and urged on a crowded meeting an amendment declaring that the resumption by the workers of the control of the means of production was the only preventive of pauperism. This was carried by a large majority, and so hostile was the temper of the meeting to the conveners, that these reverend and worthy gentlemen have never since dared to call a public meeting in London.

Early in the year 1883 a series of conferences were arranged at the offices of the Federation, in which the various points of a thorough Socialist programme were discussed and agreed on. After the annual conference and the strengthening of the Executive by the election of H. H. Champion, J. L. Joynes, James Macdonald and William Morris, a manifesto entitled "Socialism made plain" was issued, and over 50,000 copies circulated in a very short time. A recent re-issue of this

trenchant pamphlet shows that it has lost none of its power, and it will become a historical document as the first declaration by a body of working men in England—the very lair of capitalism—of their determination to form an international combination for the overthrow of the system of class robbery. It called forth the invectives of the press as usual, and was discussed at great length in the *Quarterly Review*.

Meanwhile throughout the summer months a band of trained speakers had taken up positions in the parks and open spaces round London every Sunday, and carried on the work of education by explaining the truths of Socialism on an open platform. Thus occurred the first conflict with the authorities, who endeavoured to suppress the right of public meeting on Peckham Rye and Southwark Park. In spite of threats and summonses H. M. Hyndman, John Williams, H. H. Champion, H. Quelch, and others spoke Sunday after Sunday on the debatable ground, and forced the Metropolitan Board of Works to give way by sheer persistence. During the autumn, open-air meetings were held regularly in the miserable streets of East London, and the enthusiastic reception Socialism everywhere received roused the middle classes to the fact that the apathy of the starving millions was due not to content, but to despair, was but the heavy silence which might be followed by the roaring hurricane. They resorted to the tactics which had served them so well in the past. Peers and philanthropists hastened with suspicious zeal to advocate state-aided emigration, as men wish to remove barrels of gunpowder from a magazine in which sparks of fire were blowing about. The following resolution was passed by the Executive Council on August 7th, 1883:—

RESOLVED.—

That this Meeting of the Executive Council of the Democratic Federation is strongly opposed to State-Aided Emigration as unnecessary and harmful, and pledges the Federation to agitate against the measure for the following reasons:—

- 1.—That the vast extent of uncultivated and waste Land in Great Britain and Ireland should first be colonised and developed with the funds that would be spent on emigration.
- 2.—That Nationalisation of the Land should precede State-Aided Emigration, seeing that in the opinion of the highest Agricultural authorities, Sir John Lawes, Sir James Caird, and Lord Leicester, at least twice the amount of labour might be employed profitably, even upon the Land now in cultivation, and twice the present quantity of Food raised from it but for the restrictions imposed by landlord-made law.
- 3.—That the present production of wealth in Great Britain and Ireland is quite enough to enable all to live in comfort or moderate luxury, though little more than one-fourth of the people are actually engaged in useful work, if the fruits of labour were justly divided and exchanged among the inhabitants.
- 4.—That State-aided Emigration would lead to the removal from our country of the strongest and most vigorous of our people, leaving behind the weakly, the sickly, and the very poor, whom the United States and our own Colonies have already refused to receive.
- 5.—That State-aided Emigration, if tried at all, should begin with the useless class of landlords, capitalists, and their hangers-on, who produce nothing whatever; but devour the fruits of the labour of their industrious countrymen.

At a meeting held at the Mansion House to advocate this new method of punishing poverty by transportation for life, John Williams obtained entrance, and plainly telling the assembled bishops and capitalists that their scheme was abhorred by the workers, challenged them to argue the matter before a working-class audience. For very shame the challenge was accepted. The following handbill was issued:—

This Emigration of the poor is the old cry of the classes who get rich out of other men's labour, and turn the workers adrift to starve or go to the workhouse when no further profit can be made by employing them. Millions of Englishmen and Irishmen have emigrated during the last five-and-thirty years. Still we are told that there are too many workers; though three-fourths of the population live upon the labour of the one-

fourth who are engaged in useful work. Even as it is, if none toiled more than eight hours a day, there would not be a single unemployed man or woman in the country.

Fellow Citizens, there are too many idlers, not too many workers in this England of ours. Whilst your comrades stand idle, because the landlords and capitalists will not give employment save at a profit to themselves, thousands of acres of good land lie untilled around us, and hundreds of thousands of people want the bread, the clothes, the houseroom which their labour properly organised would readily supply. Such is the social anarchy which our "governing classes" call order. Worse than this: while men and women eager to work are starving, a mere handful of lazy people, or 220,000 families who never work at all, own SIX THOUSAND MILLIONS STERLING on which they take their yearly profit out of labour. Each of these families of wealthy idlers own no less than twenty-six thousand pounds sterling—think of that ye who toil and suffer—whilst men fight daily at the dock-gates, like wolves, for the privilege of earning a few pence.

There is land enough, machinery enough, capital enough, in these islands to give plenty to all. But greedy land-grabbers and greedier capitalists monopolise our whole country for their own gain.

There is no need for emigration, Fellow-Citizens. These hypocrites themselves do not propose that any of you should leave until the Spring. How then will the workless and the poor pass through the winter? Never since 1834 were the Poor Laws—that miserable pittance of justice forced from the rich by fear—never were the Poor Laws so stupidly, brutally, and cruelly administered as they are to-day. The unemployed are treated as if wilfully idle: the homeless are criminals in the eyes of the luxurious and the overfed.

Demand then justice, not charity, here and at once, from those who never cease to rob you when you labour, and are eager to transport you when you are out of work. Tell the Sham-Republican Baronet who promises you a "Commission of Enquiry," whilst the wives and children of your brethren are crying for bread, that you will no longer be put off with fine phrases or be deluded by courtly tricks. If none were overworked, even in the State Service, there would not be enough idle "hands" in East London to fill the places. Claim then Home Colonisation and State Employment and Short Hours of Labour in England. Demand that the wealth which you alone produce shall be used to employ your brethren before you and they are crushed down into hopeless misery.

They lie to you who tell you there is work for all in the Colonies and America. Depression reigns there as well as here. There as well as here landlords and capitalists are robbing and enslaving and starving their fellow-men. Even now State-Aided labourers are forced to return home hopeless. Better then, surely, demand and obtain your rights before you start. Show in force! Act together! Let employed and unemployed ask plainly for the fruits of their own labour, and proclaim the right of all to work for a fair return, at home.

At Stepney Hall and the Haggerston Workmens' Club, Williams, Macdonald, Hyndman and James Murray, by the force of their eloquence and logic, carried amendments against emigration by such majorities that the "National Association for the State-aided Emigration of Labour" has never since dared to hold an open meeting in any quarter of London.

With the commencement of the year 1884, the weekly journal *Justice* was established. A reference to its pages shows the immense progress which has been made since the early spring of that year, when Charles Bradlaugh came out in debate against the delegate of the Federation. The importance the movement has assumed has also forced the daily press to bring before the notice of all the more stirring incidents of the struggle which has now resulted in the formation of an active and enthusiastic Social-Democratic party in this country.

JOHN WILLIAMS IN HOLLOWAY GAOL.

(Reprinted with additions from the PALL MALL GAZETTE.)

He arrives at Holloway, is stripped and weighed.

I think it was about four o'clock in the afternoon that I arrived at the gates of Holloway Gaol in "Black Maria" with some others. We were taken into the Receiv-

ing Department, fifteen of us, and set in single file with our faces towards the wall and our hands crossed, the right over the left. Here any money or "valuables" which we might happen to have on us were taken away and put into little bags. I was then taken into a room in which was a warder. He bade me strip, and he examined me all over, looking closely for any marks on my body. He then weighed me. From the warder I was taken to the prison bath. There are seven iron baths in the room, each seven feet long, with dirty sides, stained with marks of soapsuds. The baths are in a row, and divided from one another by a wooden partition. I shivered, and my teeth chattered as my feet felt the touch of the stone flooring; but there was the bath and the nine inches of water, and there was the warder, and stripping myself of my clothes, which I put outside the door, I got into the bitter cold water and took my first bath, and my only one during my sojourn at Holloway. There was soap and a moist, dirty-looking towel, with which I dried myself as well as I could. Looking up I heard the noise as of something thrown down at the bath-room door.

The Blue Shirt and the Belying Moleskins.

It was my prison clothes, a shirt and a pair of moleskin trousers. The shirt was like a dishcloth which had been washed in greasy slop water, the blue pattern having almost faded by much usage. The moleskin trousers were twice too big, belying out before and behind, and one had constantly to hold them up, for no braces or belt is allowed, only a strap. In my dirty blue shirt and my belying moleskins, with teeth chattering with the cold, and fingers numbed, I was taken to the prison doctor. (My own clothes were bundled up and shoved into a net, from which a ticket hung, with "Williams—one month," on it.) "Let down your trousers till they fall on your feet, pull your shirt over your head, and stand still, man," said the doctor. And I did as I was told. Then he sounded me and looked for marks, asked me questions, and then told me had done with me. And I pulled up my trousers, tucked in my shirt, and was taken out of his sight. I was then told to take a pair of socks from a bundle. I could find no pairs, all were odd ones, and most of those full of holes. And if they aren't full of holes they are darned, but with the bad darning you might as well walk with peas in your shoes. What happened to me happened to the rest of us. We were attended by prisoners who had earned a stripe, and were told off for such duties. Then I got a coat and waistcoat given me, and my hair was cut (though it was only four days before that I had been to the barber); and I'll warrant you something more than hair was cut, for the prison barber has not a professional touch.

C I 38 is introduced to the Cook and the Cell.

There we stood with right hand on left, and listened to the prison regulations being read to us. "If you have any complaints to make about your meals or your treatment, make them to the warder. Frequent complaints are punished as an offence." Ah! thought I, that is a hint that you must not complain at all. The names were then called over, and we filed past the warder; our identity henceforth sunk in numbers. I was C I 38. We marched along, our footsteps echoing along the cold corridors, until we came to the prison cook, who was waiting. To each of us he said, "What have you got?" If you answered, "A month," you got served out to you an eight-ounce loaf. If you said, "Two months," you got a six-ounce loaf and a pint of gruel. The longer you are in for the more you get. Then we marched on to the chief warder's office and were made to halt with our faces to the wall—seventeen of us. Here two sheets apiece were served, soap, a Bible, and a prayer-book. Then further, and into a narrow passage running past the cells. I walked on not noticing the numbers, but a gruff voice cried, "Now then you, where are you a-goin' to? Don't you see your number? You didn't know! I'll soon let you know. Why, you've been here afore, ain't you? Not bin in afore? Well, now, you turn round and look at that. What's that? Your number—C I 38, and don't forget it!" And in a minute the iron door had closed in on me, and I saw a prison cell for the first time.

Seventy-six Screws and Thirty-six Rivets, a Plank, and a Three Legged Stool.

I shan't forget the inside view of that door. It was held together by seventy-six screws and thirty-six rivets. My cell was about twelve foot long by seven wide, and thirty-six whitewashed bricks high. The furniture was a three-legged stool, a plank in a corner, a tin dustpan and washing bowl, a pannikin for the water, and a table let in the wall. It must have been six or seven o'clock by this time, anyhow it was dark enough, but a jet of gas burned outside in the passage, and threw a dim light into the cell through a thick piece of rough glass. There was another window above the table, with twenty-seven panes of glass, four-inch ones, but thick too like the other, and not letting too much daylight in. I had forgotten there was a mattress too. But presently came a knock at the door, and some one shouted, "How long?" "A month." "Then bring out that mattress." And I had to give up the mattress.

Musings on the Three-legged Stool.

I sighed, sat down again on my three-legged stool, and wondered what was the next move would be, and I thought of my luckless lot. Here was I, a poor labouring man, shut up in this cold cell like a common felon, like a burglar or garroter, for what seemed to me no offence. I thought of the stripping, and of the search for marks, and the icy water, the stone floors, and then looked round on the cold, whitewashed walls and the plank reared up in the corner, and I thought how the rich made the poor build them prisons to live in. I thought of the powers of an organized officialdom instanced by what I had just seen—the grim warder, the obedience to orders, the rigid system, and thought what a lesson it should convey to my own class. How could they hope to wrestle with such an organisation until they organized themselves? Mere preaching and talk can do nothing of themselves. Here were men many of whom, one could see, had had a hard struggle for existence. Their ages varied from fourteen to old men of seventy-five, and in the face of the latter, were unmistakable traces of starvation. Next door to me was an old man, who, when I was called in to show him how to scrub out his cell, told me that he had failed to get employment, in search of which he was walking from Birmingham to London. In want of food he picked up some old iron lying beside a ditch, and before he had an opportunity of offering it for sale, was taken before a magistrate and sentenced to one month's hard labour. Society looks upon such a man as a felon. Broken down by years of hard toil, too old for the capitalist class to make a profit out of him, his choice lay between stealing or begging—and being imprisoned as a rogue and vagabond. The cell on the other side of mine was occupied by a lad of fifteen, who had been sentenced to three months for "loitering." His father had for months been out of work; he could get none himself. Society refused him shelter and food, denied him access to the means of useful work, and made a felon of him for standing about the street and having no visible means of subsistence. As I looked at him I thought of others, riding in Rotten Row, or idling the live-long day in mansions in Belgravia, or the clubs in Pall Mall, and trusted the day might soon come when such persons who have "no visible means of existence," *except the labour of others*, shall come under the Rogue and Vagabond Act, instead of such lads as this.

The Bed and the Bedding.

I was soon disturbed by some one at the door. The iron disc which covers the small circular glass window let into the door was lifted up and the warder (you can't hear them come along, for they wear slippers) cried, "Now then, don't you know it's bedtime? Be quick, I want to turn out the light." I said, "All right, but where's the bed?" "There up in the corner, don't you see? You're trying it on." And I looked up in the corner at the plank! And now I will tell you what the bed is like, and how comfortable it was likely to be, even to a poor chap like me who had never slept on feathers. There were three pieces of board about a quarter of an inch apart, and the three together about 20 inches wide by 6 feet. It might have been a good "plank" when it was new, but now the two outside ones are higher than the middle. So that it just caught one in the small of the back. For a pillow another piece of wood was nailed on at the head. However, I took the bed down, and being green, I goes to work and strips off my clothes, laid a sheet on the plank, and then rolled myself up in the blanket and quilt. It was bitter cold, and I got no sleep that night, and when the first bell rang in the morning I was right joyful, though my bones were that sore I could scarcely walk, and I am not telling a word of a lie when I say that I never got more than two or three hours sleep on one night during the time I was in prison, except once, and I often used to get up in the middle of the night to walk about and stamp my feet and shake myself, but it was no go. It was not until another prisoner had put me up to the wrinkle in chapel that I could get even two or three hours' sleep. "Fold your coat up, put it under your hips, fold your trousers under your shoulder blades, and make your waiscoat and cap into a pillow."

The Three Rags, the Bag, and the Whitening.

Well. The first bell sounded at a quarter to six, and the warder came past to see if I had turned out. I had a wash in my tin basin and putting my slops outside waited for events. The door unlocked and the warder looked in and said: "Now then, why ain't them bedclothes rolled up? And d'you see them three rags in that bag and that whitening? well, just you scour yer pannikin and yer basin." Then he turned to the bedclothes again and said, "Get them things rolled up—d'you mean to say you don't know how to do it?" I began to roll them up awkwardly enough perhaps, but he stopped me: "Now you do that properly." I said I didn't know how to do it. "You don't know what? We'll soon show you how." Then he called a prisoner in to show me how to do the job in a regulation manner. You take your sheets, quilt, and blanket and roll 'em up roly-poly fashion, that's how I call it. They left me then, and I swept out my cell and inspected the three rags and the bag and the whitening. It wasn't a nice idea to brighten the pannikin I drank from, the bowl I washed in, and a urinal tin

with the rags from the same bag. But I had to do it. The time passed on, and two more bells sounded, and at a quarter to eight the warder came round with the breakfast.

Bread and Water for Breakfast.

I didn't know it was breakfast, and took no notice, but the door opened and an 8 oz. loaf was slung in on to the floor. I picked it up and put it on the cupboard by the side of the one I had given to me for supper, for I had not yet got my appetite; indeed, I may say, from Monday night till Thursday only a few morsels passed my lips. I hadn't the heart to eat. At a quarter to ten the bell rang for exercise, and every door was again unlocked, and every prisoner stood outside his cell. When we were all out the warder cried, "Left turn!" and we marched into the yard for the hour's exercise which one has every day, sometimes in the morning, sometimes in the afternoon. This was recreation. And now I will tell you what it was like.

The Four Circles and the Oakum.

There are four large rings in the yard at some distance from each other, bricked inside and outside, I should think some ninety men were there—boys and men from fifteen to eighty. These were divided into four gangs, each one to a ring; and we marched slowly round the circles at a distance of about three or four feet from each other; for I needn't tell you that this is one of the principles of the silent system. But the silence is broken, nevertheless, and notwithstanding the band of warders who take their stand on a rise in the ground and keep their eyes and ears open for wagging tongues. I had walked round once or twice when the man in front of me (a regular old gaol bird) put his hand to his mouth as if to pull his beard or moustache, and in something between a half whisper and a half mutter I heard him say, "You're a green 'un. I can see that. How long have you got, matey? A month? Why didn't ye get six months, you fool? they'll starve yer." Even out of the hour the warders contrive to steal a few minutes. The men know this well enough, and when the time was up, and the warder gave the signal for return they used to take a sweep round to catch a glimpse of the clock if they could to see how many minutes of fresh air they had been deprived of. Then they gave me 2½ lb. of oakum to pick. (You know oakum is old ropes.) Now it was rather strange that I should have had to do this kind of labour considering that when my friends of the Social-Democratic Federation issued a hand-bill, stating that I was being treated as a felon, Mr. Saunders, the magistrate who sentenced me at Thames Police-court, declared my friends ought to be ashamed of themselves for making such a statement. Surely to have less food than the garrotter or burglar, and have to perform the same kind of work, was being treated as a felon. I leave it to the public to judge. Well, they had to show me how to pick this oakum, and on I went till twelve o'clock.

Stirabout and no Bread for Dinner.

Then the warder came round again, and I opened the door. He carried a tray, and I was glad to see potatoes and rice on it. I thought these were for me, but I was mistaken. My dinner was a pint and a half of stirabout. What's stirabout? Three ounces of Indian meal and three ounces of oatmeal, and that was my dinner; but I sickened at the sight of it. Then I put the stirabout with the two loaves on the cupboard. The old birds know well enough that the "last joined" don't often have sharp appetites, and try every wrinkle to get hold of the rejected food. You'll hear one say at exercise with his hand to his mouth, "I say, old 'un, have you ate your bread? Put it in your trousers and bring it into chapel." You talk about food? Now if I had had two months I should have had for breakfast one pint of oatmeal gruel and 6 oz. of bread; for dinner I should have had 8 oz. of bread and half a pint of peasoup, and for supper a pint of gruel and 6 oz. of bread. Had it been four months' imprisonment, I should have had 8 oz. of bread and one pint of gruel for breakfast, 8 oz. of bread, 8 oz. of potatoes, and 3 oz. of meat for dinner, and a pint of gruel and 8 oz. of bread for supper. Then I can tell you the tin dishes and pannikins in which the rations were served are filthy, with the greasy finger marks of their last users.

The Records of a Tin Platter.

They had, however, one consolation, for they afforded me some very pleasant reading. (It seems to be the habit of every prisoner, for prisoners are all alike, be they Baron Trenck or Monte Cristo, to leave some record of their names, their expectations, and their aspirations, even if it is only on a tin platter or a battered pannikin.) If I did not eat my bread or drink my gruel, I examined with much curiosity these interesting memoirs of prison life. I can remember a few if you like to hear them: "Arry Bennett in for 6 moons." "Arry had calculated how many chapels he would have to attend in that time, at the rate of four times a week, and calculated the hours of exercise. "Bill Ford, 2 months for nicking a drop of soup out of old Tollemache's at Stratford;" "George Smith, from Shadwell, nine moons, out February, 1885." "Lord Mansfield, from Holloway, six moons, Oh, what a glorious feed of beefsteak and onions I will

have when I get out!" This was scratched under a drawing of two cross pipes and a pot of beer. "Cheer up, the time will come for all." "Abandon not hope, all ye who enter here." Some draughtsman had drawn a likeness of one of the warders, and had written under it, "Now, move on there," and added, "Pity the poor prisoner." "One month up for George Talbot, I wish it was two, for I'm starving."

The Chaplain preaches on Social Democracy.

I need not go over all the days I spent at Holloway, for one day was much like another. On the morning of the second day I should tell you that I was detained from exercise to see the chaplain, who called upon me. "What are you?" said he, "and what's your name?" I told him. He said, "Oh, you're Williams, are you? I've been reading about you, and wishing you'd be sent here." "Oh," I replied, "it's very kind of you as a Christian minister." "You're in for obstructing the street—what are you?" "A labourer," I replied, "and a speaker for the Social-Democratic Federation." "Why don't you attend to your business instead of meddling with such a society? You must be mad or a lunatic or out of your senses." "I am perfectly sane," I replied. "Social Democracy," he said; "well, you're going headlong to perdition. How long are you here for?" "A month." "Well, I wish it had been two." "You're very kind, sir." "Well, now, what is Democracy?" "I am not here to debate the question, sir, and I decline to answer." However, he repeated the question, and as he seemed so curious I determined to give him the root of the matter, and to satisfy him. "One thing it teaches, sir, is the right of people to govern themselves." "The right of people to govern themselves," he replied, "there are far too many voices already in the government of the land; their power should be taken away, not increased. Can you read?" "Yes." "Then take that tract off there and read a sentence." "I don't wish to read, sir." "I want to see if you can read." I read him a paragraph to please him. He then said, "Do you ever go to a place of worship?" "I sometimes go and hear them preach." "Whom have you heard?" "Stopford Brooke, Dr. Parker, and Stewart Headlam, and *any who are worth listening to.*" "Do you ever read your Bible?" "Yes, I do." "Do you believe in the soul?" "It doesn't trouble me just now, sir." He then called the warder in and said, "Warder, I am going to visit this prisoner three times a week. I see I can learn something from him." "Oh, you're past learning, sir, I can see." "Warder, put him down for me to visit." "Oh you need not trouble yourself," replied I. He took the hint, for he never called upon me till the day I left.

Sunday Chapel.—One Good from an Established Church.

On Sunday I went to chapel with the rest of the Church of England prisoners. We sat on forms, and were some distance from each other, for we were silent even in chapel, though the old birds used to get a word in edgeways, with their hands up to their mouths. It fairly made me laugh to hear them give the answers to the Litany: "Spare us, good Lord," "Good Lord, deliver us—out of here." I am not a member of the Church of England, or of any other Church, holding the belief that neither Atheists nor Churchmen do any good by talking. They should spend their strength on social questions. I say this to explain why I said I was Church of England when they asked me. "You'll get out of your cell four times a week and once of a Sunday if you say you're Church of England." One Sunday it was very cold, and I had gone to chapel, my hands numb, and shivering all over; and we were all shivering, and tried to keep ourselves warm by rubbing of our hands and moving our feet, for the day was bitter. I suppose the extra noise attracted the chaplain's sharp ear, for he singled out a few of us, and spoke from the pulpit about us, and prayed that when we went back to our cells God would soften our hearts and drive the sin of obstruction from us, for "never in all my experience have I heard such unseemly noise in chapel." I was no worse than the others, but a warder came into my cell afterwards and said, "Now, then, what do you mean by making a row like that?" and the next day I was taken before the governor. "Were you not making signs to another prisoner?" asked the governor. "No." "Now, tell the truth. Were you not talking?" "No. I was doing nothing, only rubbing my hands, it was that cold," and after more questionings was let off.

The Sermons.

The Chaplain seemed to take a delight in telling the prisoners time after time in chapel what wicked people they were, how every man of them had had a splendid chance in life, how they had missed grand opportunities; how, through not obeying their superiors, they found themselves in this miserable condition, impressing upon them to take no notice of the vanities of this world or of riches, that it was better to be poor than rich—though by the look of him, he evidently did not practice what he preached. He generally preached a sermon that he thought would strike terra into the hearts of his brethren. In ending his sermon on the first Sunday after I arrived, there he impressed upon the prisoners to take no notice of the questions of this world; as sure as they bothered about Social questions they would

come to grief. On the second he dwelt upon that passage in the Bible that relates to the handwriting on the wall. He implored of the prisoners to remember the handwriting on the wall, and told them it meant their time was come. Ah, thought I, as I looked at him, there is a hand-writing on the wall to-day, and day by day gets plainer and plainer. The interpretation of the writing means the utter downfall of the system you uphold, and ere long the class that I belong to shall speak with no unmistakable voice. It would be well for you and the class *you* represent, if you will try to interpret the hand-writing on the wall, which is as plain as plain can be and really means that the robbery of labour shall no longer go on; that such men as the prisoners, who are now before you, shall for the first time have a fair chance of obtaining a honest livelihood; and that the prisons, built by their hands, shall be no longer used to imprison those who are willing to labour, but shall be used for those only who rob and plunder the labour of others.

C I 38 becomes Mr. Williams.

The day before my time was up I was shifted to another cell, with a stone floor. This was a change for the better. My gas was inside instead of out, and I boiled my bread over the flame. Then they gave me an extra blanket, and I had my only good night's rest in the month. I had then got to be that hungry that I pounced upon even a crumb. The next day the parson came and told me to "turn over a new leaf" and give up Social Democracy. I got my net full of clothes, damp and wrinkled; they asked me if I didn't want some money to pay my railway fare to Bayswater, and packed me off three-quarters of an hour before my time, as they thought there would be a demonstration. And it was "Good-bye, Mr. Williams," from the warder. Some other poor devil is C I 38 now; I am Mr. Williams; and as I stepped over the threshold of the Prison Gates I turned my head and muttered my last words there, "Don't forget the Hand writing on the Wall."

THE SOCIAL-DEMOCRATIC FEDERATION.

OBJECT.

The Establishment of a Free Condition of Society based on the principle of Political Equality, with Equal Social Rights for all and the complete Emancipation of Labour.

PROGRAMME.

1. All Officers or Administrators to be elected by Equal Direct Adult Suffrage, and to be paid by the Community.
2. Legislation by the People, in such wise that no project of Law shall become legally binding till accepted by the Majority of the People.
3. The Abolition of a Standing Army, and the Establishment of a National Citizen Force; the People to decide on Peace or War.
4. All Education, higher no less than elementary, to be Free, Compulsory, Secular, and Industrial for all alike.
5. The Administration of Justice to be Free and Gratuitous for all Members of Society.
6. The Land with all the Mines, Railways and other Means of Transit, to be declared and treated as Collective or Common Property.
7. Ireland and all other parts of the Empire to have Legislative Independence.
8. The Production of Wealth to be regulated by Society in the common interest of all its Members.
9. The Means of Production, Distribution and Exchange to be declared and treated as Collective or Common Property.

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