

THE DUBLIN STRIKE.



BY "Æ" (GEORGE W. RUSSELL).

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I. A PLEA FOR THE WORKERS.

A Speech delivered in the Royal Albert Hall, London,
November 1, 1913, to an audience of 12,000 persons.

I stand for the first time on a public platform in this country. The great generosity of English to Irish workers has obliterated the memory of many an ancient tale of wrong. I come from Dublin, where most extraordinary things have been happening. Humanity long dumb there has found a voice, it has its prophet and its martyrs. We no longer know people by the old signs and the old shams. People are to us either human or sub-human. They are either on the side of those who are fighting for human conditions in labour or they are with those who are trying to degrade it and thrust it into the abyss.

Ah! but I forgot; there has sprung up a third party, who are super-human beings, they have so little concern for the body at all, that they assert it is better for children to be starved than to be moved from the Christian atmosphere of the Dublin slums. Dublin is the most Christian city in these islands. Its tottering tenements are holy. The spiritual atmosphere which pervades them is ample compensation for the diseases which are there and the food which is not there. If any poor parents think otherwise, and would send their children for a little from that earthly paradise, they will find the docks and railway stations barred by these super-human beings and by the police, and they are pitched headlong out of the station, set upon and beaten, and their children snatched from them. A Dublin labourer has no rights in his own children. You see if these children were even for a little out of the slums, they would get discontented with their poor homes, so a very holy man has said. Once getting full meals, they might be so inconsiderate as to ask for them all their lives. They might destroy the interesting experiments carried on in Dublin for generations to find out how closely human beings can be packed together, on how little a human being can live, and what is the minimum wage his employer need pay him. James Larkin interrupted these interesting experiments towards the evolution of the

underman and he is in gaol.* You have no idea what the slums in Dublin are like. There are more than 20,000 families, each living in one room. Many of these dens are so horrible, so unsanitary, so overrun with vermin, that doctors tell me that the only condition on which a man can purchase sleep is that he is drugged with drink. The Psalmist says the Lord gives sleep to his beloved, but in these Dublin dens men and women must pay the devil his price for a little of that peace of God.. It maddens one to think that man the immortal, man the divine, should exist in such degradation, that his heirship of the ages should be the life of a brute.

I beseech you not to forsake these men who are out on strike. They may have been to blame for many an action. The masters may perhaps justifiably complain of things done and undone. But if the masters have rights by the light of reason and for the moment, the men are right by the light of spirit and for eternity. This labour uprising in Ireland is the despairing effort of humanity to raise itself out of a dismal swamp of disease and poverty. James Larkin may have been an indiscreet leader. He may have committed blunders, but I believe in the sight of heaven the crimes are all on the other side. If our Courts of Justice were courts of humanity, the masters of Dublin would be in the dock charged with criminal conspiracy, their crime that they tried to starve out one-third of the people in Dublin, to break their hearts, and degrade their manhood, for the greatest crime against humanity is its own degradation.

The men have always been willing to submit their case to arbitration, but the masters refuse to meet them. They refused to consult with your trades union leaders. They would not abide by the Askwith report. They refused to hear of prominent Irishmen acting as arbitrators. They said scornfully of the Peace Committee that it was only interfering. They say they are not fighting trades unionism, but they refuse point blank to meet the Trades Council in Dublin. They want their own way absolutely. These Shylocks of indutsry want their pound of flesh starved from off the bones of the workers. They think their employees have no rights as human beings, no spirit whose dignity can be abased.

You have no idea what labour in Ireland, which fights for the bare means of human support, is up against. The autocrats of industry can let loose upon them the wild beasts that kill in the name of the State. They can let loose upon them a horde of wild fanatics who will rend them in the name of God. The men have been deserted by those who were their natural leaders. For ten weeks the miserable creatures who misrepresent them in Parliament kept silent. When they were up for the first time in their lives against anything real they scurried back like rats to their hole. These cacklers about self-government had no word to say on the politics of their own city, but after ten weeks of silence they

came out with six lines of a letter signed by all the six poltroons. They disclaimed all responsibility for what is happening in the city and county they represent. It was no concern of theirs; but they would agree to anything the Archbishop might say! Are they not heroic prodigies! Dublin is looking on these men with alien eyes. It was thought they were democrats; we have found out they were only democratic blathers.

We are entering from to-day on a long battle in Ireland. The masters have flung down a challenge to the workers. The Irish aristocracy were equally scornful of the workers in the land, and the landlords of land are going or have gone. The landlords of industry will have disappeared from Ireland when the battle begun this year is ended. Democratic control of industry will replace the autocracy which exists to-day. We are working for the co-operative commonwealth to make it the Irish policy of the future, and I ask you to stand by the men who are beginning the struggle. There is good human material there.

I have often despaired over Dublin, which John Mitchel called a city of genteel dastards and bellowing slaves, but a man has arisen who has lifted the curtain which veiled from us the real manhood in the city of Dublin. Nearly all the manhood is found among obscure myriads who are paid from five to twenty-five shillings per week. The men who will sacrifice anything for a principle get rarer and rarer above that limit of wealth. I am a literary man, a lover of ideas, but I have found few people in my life who would sacrifice anything for a principle. Yet in Dublin, when the masters issued that humiliating document, asking men—on penalty of dismissal—to swear never to join a trades union, thousands of men who had no connection with the Irish Transport Workers—many among them personally hostile to that organisation—refused to obey. They would not sign away their freedom, their right to choose their own heroes and their own ideas. Most of these men had no strike funds to fall back on. They had wives and children depending on them. Quietly and grimly they took through hunger the path to the Heavenly City. They stand silently about the streets. God alone knows what is passing in the heart of these men. Nobody in the Press in Dublin has said a word about it. Nobody has praised them, no one has put a crown upon their brows. Yet these men are the true heroes of Ireland to-day, they are the descendants of Oscar, Cuchulain, the heroes of our ancient stories. For all their tattered garments, I recognise in these obscure men a majesty of spirit. It is in these workers in the towns and in the men in the cabins in the country that the hope of Ireland lies. The poor have always helped each other, and it is they who listen eagerly to the preachers of a social order based on brotherhood and co-operation.

I am a literary man and not a manual worker. I am but a voice, while they are the deed and the being, but I would be ashamed ever in my life again to speak of an ideal if I did not stand by these men and say of them what I hold to be true. If

you back them up to-day they will be able to fight their own battles to-morrow, and perhaps to give you an example. I beseech you not to forsake these men.

II. AN OPEN LETTER TO THE EMPLOYERS.

By "Æ."

SIRS,—I address this warning to you, the aristocracy of industry in this city, because, like all aristocracies, you tend to grow blind in long authority, and to be unaware that you and your class and its every action are being considered and judged day by day by those who have power to shake or overturn the whole social order, and whose restlessness in poverty to-day is making our industrial civilisation stir like a quaking bog. You do not seem to realise that your assumption that you are answerable to yourselves alone for your actions in the industries you control is one that becomes less and less tolerable in a world so crowded with necessitous life. Some of you have helped Irish farmers to upset a landed aristocracy in this island, an aristocracy richer and more powerful in its sphere than you are in yours, with its roots deep in history. They, too, as a class, though not all of them, were scornful or neglectful of the workers in the industry by which they profited; and to many who knew them in their pride of place and thought them all-powerful they are already becoming a memory, the good disappearing together with the bad. If they had done their duty by those from whose labour came their wealth, they might have continued unquestioned in power and prestige for centuries to come. The relation of landlord and tenant is not an ideal one, but any relations in a social order will endure if there is infused into them some of that spirit of human sympathy which qualifies life for immortality. Despotisms endure while they are benevolent, and aristocracies while "noblesse oblige" is not a phrase to be referred to with a cynical smile. Even an oligarchy might be permanent if the spirit of human kindness, which harmonises all things otherwise incompatible, is present.

You do not seem to read history so as to learn its lessons. That you are an uncultivated class was obvious from recent utterances of some of you upon art. That you are incompetent men in the sphere in which you arrogate imperial powers is certain, because for many years, long before the present uprising of labour, your enterprises have been dwindling in the regard of investors, and this while you have carried them on in the cheapest labour market in these islands, with a labour reserve always hungry and ready to accept any pittance. You are bad citizens, for we rarely, if ever, hear of the wealthy among you endowing your city with the munificent gifts which it is the pride of merchant princes in other cities to offer, and Irishmen not of your city, who offer to supply the wants left by your lack of generosity, are met with derision and abuse. Those who have economic power have civic power also, yet you have not used the power that was yours to right what was wrong in the evil administration of this city. You have allowed the poor to be herded together so that one thinks of certain places in Dublin as of a pestilence. There are twenty thousand rooms, in each of which live entire families, and sometimes more, where no functions of the body can be concealed, and delicacy and modesty are creatures that are stifled ere they are born. The obvious duty of you in regard to these things you might have left undone, and it be imputed to ignorance or forgetfulness; but your collective and conscious action as a class in the present labour dispute has revealed you to the world in so malign an aspect that the mirror must be held up to you, so that you may see yourself as every humane person sees you.

The conception of yourselves as altogether virtuous and wronged is I assure you, not at all the one which onlookers hold of you. No doubt,

you have rights on your side. No doubt, some of you suffered without just cause. But nothing which has been done to you cries aloud to Heaven for condemnation as your own actions. Let me show you how it seems to those who have followed critically the dispute, trying to weigh in a balance the rights and wrongs. You were within the rights society allows you when you locked out your men and insisted on the fixing of some principle to adjust your future relations with labour when the policy of labour made it impossible for some of you to carry on your enterprises. Labour desired the fixing of some such principle as much as you did. But, having once decided on such a step, knowing how many thousands of men, women and children, nearly one-third of the population of this city, would be affected, you should not have let one day have passed without unremitting endeavours to find a solution of the problem.

What did you do? The representatives of labour unions in Great Britain met you, and you made of them a preposterous, an impossible demand, and because they would not accede to it you closed the Conference: you refused to meet them further: you assumed that no other guarantees than those you asked were possible, and you determined deliberately, in cold anger, to starve out one-third of the population of this city, to break the manhood of the men by the sight of the suffering of their wives and the hunger of their children. We read in the Dark Ages of the rack and thumbscrew. But these iniquities were hidden and concealed from the knowledge of men in dungeons and torture-chambers. Even in the Dark Ages humanity could not endure the sight of such suffering, and it learnt of such misuse of power by slow degrees, through rumour, and when it was certain it razed its Bastilles to their foundations. It remained for the twentieth century and the capital city of Ireland to see an oligarchy of four hundred masters deciding openly upon starving one hundred thousand people, and refusing to consider any solution except that fixed by their pride. You, masters, asked men to do that which masters of labour in any other city in these islands had not dared to do. You insolently demanded of those men who were members of a trade union that they should resign from that union; and from those who were not members you insisted on a vow that they would never join it.

Your insolence and ignorance of the rights conceded to workers universally in the modern world were incredible, and as great as your inhumanity. If you had between you collectively a portion of human soul as large as a threepenny bit, you would have sat night and day with the representatives of labour, trying this or that solution of the trouble, mindful of the women and children, who at least were innocent of wrong against you. But no! You reminded labour you could always have your three square meals a day while it went hungry. You went into conference again with the representatives of the State, because, dull as you are, you know public opinion would not stand your holding out. You chose as your spokesman the bitterest tongue that ever wagged in this island, and then, when an award was made by men who have an experience in industrial matters a thousand times transcending yours, who have settled disputes in industries so great that the sum of your petty enterprises would not equal them, you withdraw again, and will not agree to accept their solution, and fall back again on your devilish policy of starvation. Cry aloud to Heaven for new souls! The souls you have got cast upon the screen of publicity appear like the horrid and writhing creatures enlarged from the insect world, and revealed to us by the cinematograph.

You may succeed in your policy and ensure your own damnation by your victory. The men whose manhood you have broken will loathe you, and will always be brooding and scheming to strike a fresh blow. The children will be taught to curse you. The infant being moulded in the womb will have breathed into its starved body the vitality of

hate. It is not they—it is you who are blind Samsons pulling down the pillars of the social order. You are sounding the death-knell of autocracy in industry. There was autocracy in political life, and it was superseded by democracy. So surely will democratic power wrest from you the control of industry. The fate of you, the aristocracy of industry, will be as the fate of the aristocracy of land if you do not show that you have some humanity still among you. Humanity abhors, above all things, a vacuum in itself, and your class will be cut off from humanity as the surgeon cuts the cancer and alien growth from the body. Be warned ere it is too late.

Dublin, October 6th, 1913.

III. AN APPEAL TO DUBLIN CITIZENS.

The following letter from "A.E." appeared in "The Times," of Nov. 13th, 1913, after being denied publication by the Press of Dublin:—

It may seem an audacity on the part of one whose views on the politics of this city are obviously unpopular to attempt once more, through you, to influence public opinion. But the most unpopular council is not necessarily more filled with unwisdom.

The masters of Dublin I have addressed in vain. I now ask the citizens of Dublin to consider what effect the policy of the masters is going to have. What has been gained by this resolute refusal of the federated employers to meet the only body with which negotiations can be carried on? Have they proved their wisdom? Are we any nearer a settlement? Are not the forces on the side of labour becoming more resolute and exasperated week by week?

Nobody in Dublin seems to realise the gigantic power the masters have challenged. As a disdainful attitude is manifested on the one side, the leaders of labour have settled into a grim determination never to submit.

The labour leaders, men who have it in their power to do what they threaten, declare that they will rather hold up the industrial system of these islands than see the humiliation of the men completed. Are the citizens content? Do they think it right they should sit silent and have all this brought on them because the masters are too proud to meet the representatives of labour in Dublin.

These people seem to read nothing, know nothing, or think nothing of what is happening with respect of labour elsewhere in the world. They do not know that organized labour has become one of the great powers, that its representatives are met by the representatives of capital in industrial countries with the respect that the delegates of great nations meet each other.

In Great Britain the Press, representing all parties, unite in condemning the policy of the employers. What is the position of the men? They have declared always that they wanted arbitration boards such as exist in hundreds in industrial centres where the representatives of organized labour and the federated employers could meet, and to which disputes over labour could be referred. Agreements entered into after frank and free discussion as between equals the men will keep. They will not keep agreements into which they consider they are forced. Labour has a sense of honour of its own which is as high as the honour of the masters any day.

I will be met by the famous outburst about contracts and the nether world. That sentence was never uttered in the sense in which it was reported. Mr. Larkin was speaking, not with reference to the contracts between masters and men, but about the masters' complaints that owing to strikes they could not carry out their contracts. It may have been an unfeeling remark, but it was not the defiance of all honour between master and employee that an abbreviated report made it.

Sir, if you will permit me to say something which may irritate the

Irish Press, but which, I think, is true and necessary to be said, if the Dublin journals had not been so manifestly biassed on the side of the employers, reporters would not have come to regard their work, not as the true gathering of strike news, but the making up of a case against the men. Nor would it have been so necessary for me to emphasize one side, as I did in my Open Letter and the much abused speech at the Albert Hall.

I am charged with being a revolutionary; I who for seven or eight years past have week by week been expounding an orderly evolution of society. I am charged with being against religion; I the sole poet of my generation, who has never written a single poem, which did not try to express a spiritual mood.

But I am not with those who wish to bring about in Ireland a peace of God without any understanding, and I and all free spirits will fight with all our power against the fanatics who would bludgeon us into their heaven, to bow to their savage conception of a deity. The deity of the infuriated bigot, call him by what holy name they choose, is never anything but the Old Adversary, who can put on the whole outward armoury of God.

I have known, worked with, and loved many noble men, true priests of Christ, and they would not, I am sure, assert that the spirit which drives a mob to bludgeon and kick parents before the eyes of their children is the Spirit which is present at the elevation of the Host. What I say here of the hooligans of religion in Dublin I would say with equal sincerity of the hooligans of religion in Belfast.

But I do not wish now to explain or defend myself, but to point out the danger of allowing the present policy to continue. I tell the citizens of this city that, if the civil authorities, the masters, and their allies in the Press had been trying deliberately and of set purpose to make of Dublin another Barcelona, with the bomb of the Anarchist a frequent blazing terror in the streets, if they wished to empty the churches and make of Dublin another Paris, they could not devise a policy more certain to bring about the result.

The Irish are a gentle people, but history is thronged with evidence that in long-exasperated men, suffering from real or fancied injustice, gentleness turns to ferocity. To know that is true we can find ample proof in the story of our own race, whether we begin with the mythical Cat Head, in the far-off uprising of the common people in Ireland, or come nearer our own time to the Dynamitards.

I ask my fellow-townsmen to think whether it would not have been better for the masters of Dublin to have met organised labour, and argued out the rights and wrongs than to have had months of bitter and futile revilings, with such hot words out of a hot heart as I myself have uttered? Would it not have been better for the masters to treat the men as human beings who could be reasoned with than to issue ultimatums like despots to subjects who must be coerced without discussion?

I ask whether it is most likely agreements will be kept and good work done if the men are starved into submission, or if they are made after the most open interchange of opinions?

The State has set up a tribunal which has given its judgment. Ought not public opinion to insist on the recommendation of the Askwith Committee being tried? How can the masters complain of the lawlessness of the workers when they themselves set an example by ignoring the verdict of the only legal tribunal which has tried the case?

Dublin seems to be stumbling darkly and blindly to a tragedy, and the silence of those who foresee and do not speak is a crime. It is time for the Chorus to cry out to warn the antagonists in the drama.

BOOKS by "Æ" (George Russell)

**Which can be had from "Irish Worker" Library,
Liberty Hall, Dublin.**

Homeward Songs by the Way.	Some Irish Essays.
The Earth Breath.	Deirdre.
The Divine Vision.	Co-operation and Nationality.
The Mask of Apollo.	The Hero in Man.
The Nuts of Knowledge.	The Renewal of Youth.
By Still Waters.	Collected Poems.

"Æ," George Russell, is in his own person a prophecy of what an Ireland free of oppression could give to the world—a combination of the prophetic wisdom of the seer and a thorough grasp of actual realities—each tempering and aiding the other. He has shown that the dreamer and the worker may co-exist in the one individuality and in the one nation. Ireland is proud of him, because in him she sees herself at her best.

Information upon the prices, etc., of Mr. Russell's works can be had at

"Irish Worker" Office, Liberty Hall, Dublin.