MASTER AND MAN.

I.

As I glide over the hilly landscape, blurred with smoke, of Lancashire, it is wonderful to think how little London knows about these forests of chimneys; these hundred-windowed mills; this vast district, where there is no silent solitude; for the burr of working wheels and cranks, following the traveller over hill and valley, never deserts his ear during a single minute. Dry figures and descriptions of machinery have travelled hence all the world over. Vast are the blue-books about cotton supply. But I am to do without tables. The law of supply and demand is not to fall under my critical eye. It is my simple business to keep my eyes wide open.

I taper the point of my pencil hopefully, as I sweep along the iron high road, to which every cotton-spinner owes a liberal gratitude. At every little station eager men leap out of the train, and hurry towards the mills; at every station the hedges are ragged with flakes of cotton. Men nod rapidly to one another; jump unceremoniously from the railway-carriage without saying good morning to a friend, and hand their tickets to the porters with their teeth, while they grasp their luggage. They have, probably, just half an hour to spend in the town they have reached, and, during this time, have to make heavy bargains. It is two o'clock: by six they must be a hundred and twenty miles off. Time is too valuable to be spent on ceremony; and so ceremony is put aside, while the good feeling which is at the back of all wholesome ceremony is kept in the heart. The black coat does not secure reverent eyes. A gentleman, driving through Accrington in a gig, asked a factory lad the road to Bacup. The lad looked sharply at his questioner. He must have value received for any information he afforded:

"Give me a lift and I'll show thee," said the lad.

The gentleman agreed to the bargain, the lad climbed into the gig, and, his arms akimbo, looked proudly about. Presently he passed a factory companion.

"Why, what art doin' there?" cried the lad in the road.

The lad in the gig bobbed his head towards the gentleman at his side, and answered:

"Only showin' this fellow here t' Bacup."

A great cotton-spinner, who was guiding me over his mill, was accosted by one of the operatives. The man wanted to speak with his employer.

"In five minutes," said the employer.

"That'll do," answered the man, with the air of an owner who was granting his slave a respite. I shall presently see my independent friend at a public meeting, and hear him discuss a statement of prices.

"Heh!" cries a Lancashire friend of mine, "but there is a sorry time coming for us. We are busy now, but wait till trade slackens. Now, the men are our rulers. Mills are building in all directions; and even as it is, there are not enough hands to work all the looms in the great weaving sheds we have. Let the operatives have a little more power, and remain no better affected towards their employers than they are at this present time; and, alack! dark days will be passed in Lancashire."

My early impression as I wander through a Lancashire town of cotton-mills for the first time, is, that this off-hand manner of masters and men covers enmity. In the great carding-rooms, and spinning-rooms, in the weaving-sheds, and where the "devil" first beats the cotton from the bale, the master passes with his guests, unheeding the weavers and spinners; these, unheeding him, or glancing coldly —perhaps scornfully—at the party. Both interests are powerful: each is suspicious of the other. Last year, a certain master of my acquaintance gave all his hands—some eleven or twelve hundred—a treat. At his sole expense this great party was conveyed to Liverpool and back, and liberally regaled. The treat had a bad effect upon the operatives: they met to discuss the reason for the master's liberality. Had he devised some cunning scheme by which he might get an advantage at their expense? This suspicion was his sole reward. The treat was not repeated in the following year. The omission became a grievance, and the master remains unpopular in his mills.

There is the other side of the question. Masters are sometimes cunning too. They sometimes scheme to get more work, for a stipulated wage, than is due. They are sometimes keen framers of arbitrary mill laws. And so, when there is work and plenty of it, the operatives turn the screw upon the masters, and when work is scanty the employers turn the screw upon them. The day comes when it is advantageous to the master to close the mill. The bear is fat, and can live, self-sustaining, through a long winter; but woe unto the bears that are lean, woe unto the working bears when the frost sets in!

This is sad; but I hope Ralph and Johnny, whom I am to meet, when they have "cleaned themselves up" some night, after seven, will be able to give me some cheerful news. I hope Tobias Deloom, Esquire, of the Grange, under whose ample roof I am presently to find myself (Tobias was Toby, and wore wooden clogs, and threw the shuttle when he was twenty, and he is now "in the habit of buying estates"), I hope my host will have stories to tell me of gentle things said and done by him to abate the hostility of the two great armies that front and menace each other, with every change of the sky, in the rich north-west of England.

"We don't do quite enough for the men from whom we get so much," Mr. Deloom has already allowed. And he has given me some experiences of his, showing the advantage the master has in approaching his operatives on friendly terms. He had experienced the evils of a strike some years ago. After the men had returned to work he suggested that they should meet him once a week. He and they would jointly form a Mutual Improvement Society, and they would discuss capital and labour questions. The experiment redounded to the honour of the operatives. The employer was impressed by the great intelligence and the "unadorned eloquence" of the employed. "I told Cobden," said Deloom, "I had a man in my employ I would match against him any day upon a platform."

Is this unadorned eloquence to be devoted to the cause of prosperity and order, or to that of ruin and disorder? I ask myself the question with a certain tremor; for, on all sides, the mills are being newly winged, and vast weavers' sheds, like the larger courts of the old Crystal Palace, are rising. I ask myself this question with particular emphasis, as I trudge along the black road, past miners or colliers who look like Ethiopian serenaders in undress, from Burnley to unquiet Padiham. It is pleasant to be clear of Burnley. The clatter of its machinery—the cranks, and wheels, and greasy piston-rods that are plunging and groaning at every window of its wheel-worn, uneven streets—have churned my brain. A weary trudge up a steep hill, past donkeys tugging at loaded coal-carts, and men dragging trucks of cotton bales through the dusky mud, only leaves me in sight of bricklayers, still rearing more red brick mills in the adjoining fields. I look towards the valleys: they are bristling with chimneys, thick as the barrel of a musical box bristles with tuneful spikes. By the sweat of his brow, from six till six, doth every man, woman, and child hereabouts eat bread.

As I approach Padiham, Stubborn Fact points to a noble domain, where dwells the kind master of the district. He is a politician as well as an employer. "He," cries Stubborn Fact, in my ear, "gossips with an operative as familiarly as with a peer. Not many days have passed, since he called some of these black

colliers from the high road into yonder hall, and spent five hours with them. This five hours' friendly talk has prevented yon gates that, down a muddy lane, lead to a mine, from being closed."

I have promised not to plunge into great, vexed questions. I shall not answer Mr. Ellis's query, "What is competition?" I want to feel the human pulse throbbing here: not to frame periods about supply and demand. Does competition lower wages? I have met only two beggars since I have been in these parts; and I count already some ten days here. But, as I lean over the parapet of the bridge that spans the Calder, and see the new mills creeping up the hills from the banks of the lively river; as I mark a few very solid mills raised by clubs of some six or seven operatives each, and then calling to mind the prodigious array of carcases I saw some five minutes since in a butcher's shed, it strikes me that here, at least, up to this hour, competition has not brought beggary and ruin.

There is a kind of competition, however, from which many men foretel a deadly and desolating conflict. Bad passions competing against bad passions; tyranny at the weaver's loom and the grinder's hearth competing against tyranny in head offices; masters' arrogance competing against men's arrogance; lock-outs competing against operatives' intimidation. Of bad blood warring against bad blood, what good can come?

II.

It was a bleak March morning—the wind was north and the rain was fine—when I started on a journey of three miles, to breakfast with a mill-owner, whose mill, I was assured, was a model one. I had been disturbed at grey dawn by the patter of the operatives' wooden shoes, or clogs. The streets were deserted, save by a few old operatives, with grey shawls drawn over their threadbare coats, and hats that looked like shapeless lumps of coke. These old men stared vacantly after me, and muttered. Children paused in their play, to have a peep at me; I was a stranger within the gates of the town, and what could my errand be? Wherefore was I on my way to Old Fox's mill? As I dashed past the mill gates, the porter peeped out to see who was riding to the master's house. A broad, handsome pebble road, skirted by young lime and chesnut trees, destined, if all go well, to give grateful shade to Old Fox's grandchildren, winds up the hill to a plain, substantial mansion, the windows of which command a view of hills thirty miles off, now frosted, at the summit, with lingering snow. From the snuggest of breakfast-rooms, I peep out of window, where the mills lie panting and smoking in the valley. The landscape, far as the eye can reach (save where the snow crowns of high ranges cap the scene), is scratched with railways, and blotched with red mills. Church is stretching out its arms to Accrington—Accrington is making overtures to Burnley—Burnley is approaching Blackburn. With a calm eye mine host surveys the scene this bleak March morning. It is ten o'clock, and I am reading last night's debate in the Commons—a round two hundred miles away from St. Stephen's. The mills below have been busy for the last four hours.

Fox's mill is a model mill. There are architectural pretensions about it. The lodge is ornate. The entrance is broad and pleasant. On the left there is a reading-room for the hands—an elegant, cozy apartment. But it is not frequented; and sundry observations, to the disadvantage of the hands, are hereupon made. But I see very human and acceptable reasons why the hands—the twelve hours' work done—wander freely hence into the free air—to read, or smoke, or take their mug of ale, where the humour leads them. In this reading-room the hands may not smoke, for instance. Now mine host, wandering to his mill after breakfast, enjoys his cigar. In his evening hours, when the blinds are closed, and the London paper is dropped into his hands, he takes a cigar again, and it gives zest to his enjoyment. I ask him to see that this evening ease is as dear to the hands as to himself. Bottom is essentially an independent personage now-a-days. He will read where he is free to quaff his "humming ale," to blow his cloud, and speak freely of men and things of the neighbourhood. I prefer reading my own rumpled copy of Rabelais, or my shilling edition of Locke on the Human Understanding, in the humble little apartment where I keep my handful of books, to sitting under the majestic dome of the British Museum before the finest editions of the above two authors. In the same way, Bottom prefers to thumb the Lancashire Thunderblast in the chimney corner of his little home; when he has taken his pipe from the cupboard, and his wife has found *his* 'bacco-box. He prefers this, to the ornate little reading-room at the mill. I am sure that I am the last man in the world to blame him for the preference.

If philanthropists would believe that men who have worked hard for twelve hours cannot be brought to understand that it is their bounden duty to proceed direct from their work to hear Figgins on the Pilgrim's Progress, Higgins on the Bards of Scotland, Stiggins on the Microscope, and Biggins on a drop of water, they would be much more useful members of society than they are now. The Reverend Job Cockcrow bewails the empty lecture-room when his venerable friend Bulrushes descants on the Pilgrim Fathers; and Job perorates, in shrill falsetto, on the abject condition of the public that crowds the same room when besotted serenaders chant the praises of the Yaller Gal. Zounds! my Reverend Job, if you want to "elevate the masses," don't try to pull them up by the roots of their hair. When you have been preaching all day, you don't preach to yourself in your sanctum when you get home. A man whose attention has been fixed on the flying shuttle from sunrise to sundown, whose mind has been a prisoner for twelve hours, must suit his humour, and nibble in the fields of knowledge where he lists. He naturally declines to sit upon a form, under freezing re-

gulations, to read the precise book it may please you to place in his hands.

Let us to the mill.

The great engine, the power of which moves all the machinery that is in the vast building, that gives life to the "devil," and speed to the shuttle; that lifts bales of cotton in ascending rooms—that is, in short, the nervous centre of Old Fox's establishment—this most useful and noisy monster is in a cool and pleasant chamber, and is protected by handsome panels of stained woods. The weaving shed, with its bright north light, is as airy as a birdcage. The flying bands, the rattle of two hundred looms, the wild varieties of motion shown in the distance by the working looms, the little tramways along which boys push waggons of cloth on their way to the measuring department, make up a scene of activity over which the eye anxiously ranges in search of an image that will realise to the outer world the marvellous order, that looks like chaos, of a great modern weavers' shed. A hundred spring rattles would not realise the noise. Twelve hours in this rattle and bustle! Twelve hours in a paddle-box would be retirement in comparison.

I observe that every weaver's attention is concentrated upon his looms; that he can hardly lift his eye from them; that he has barely time to say a word. Swiftly fly the shuttles; delicately as a lady stops her silk skein wheel doth the iron loom halt when a frail thread is broken. He must watch the shuttle, and see that the cloth is coming straight and sound. And all this rapid movement is under his searching eye from sunrise to sundown. If I watch it for five minutes my head swims. I turn to my host, and ask him whether the weaver who bears this anxious, exhausting watchfulness all day through, can be reasonably expected to deny himself his pipe in the evening. When the secretary of the Mechanics' Institute, close at hand, tells me that a solemn professor exhibited an air-pump and Leyden jars, a night or two since, to a select audience of seven adults and two children, and deduces from this thin attendance a conclusion highly unfavourable to the operatives of the district, I am inclined to drag him into this weavers' shed, to tie him to a couple of looms for twelve hours, and then to carry him, bound hand and foot, to his own lecture-hall, where some solemn personage should be ready to administer to him a two hours' very dry discourse.

Yet, the originator of this mill had a fine Lancashire master's mind. With a strong love of the ingenious, he pursued every new idea in machinery, every household invention, with avidity. The lever corkscrew gave a zest to his wine. His dog-cart had peculiar shafts and peculiar wheels. An ingenious contrivance filled the troughs of his horses at will. By a cunning arrangement of a shaft, which dipped from the granary (of which he kept the key) and told the quantity of corn that passed through it, he could check the consumption of oats or beans. With refuse coke from the mill, he made dry and spacious walks about his mansion; and it was not enough for him that the mill machine drove the looms and carding and spinning-frames—it might carry bales of cottons from the ground to the airy eminence of the mill's third story — it might drive the devil, and do other mill work — but he must trouble it to step across to a little farm-yard and make itself generally useful there. I found it at work cutting chaff and turnips, and pumping the mill manure all the way up the hill that divides the farm-yard from Fox's mansion. This is not the place where power or refuse is thrown away. If there were the power of a bluebottle wasting, Old Fox would put his wits to work, to turn it to account. Little bridges span the farm-yard and dip into separate enclosures. Each bridge is for a distinct and exclusive breed of fowls. From these lofty and elegant eminences, pure Spanish, or prize Cochins, look proudly down upon the plebeian barndoor. The cows are in stalls, neat as parlours; Old Fox will not be satisfied until they are milked by the aid of cranks and bands. Three milkmaid power must be got out of the engine yet, before he has done with it. The man habituated to the direction of the labour of twelve hundred people, pressed by these people day by day to give higher value for their labour, accustomed to journey twice a week to Manchester to meet all the hard heads of Lancashire, and to make advantageous cotton bargains in the midst of rivals, of necessity becomes sharp. He calculates steam power to a nicety. He is great on economic boilers. He is ever on the look-out for improvements in machinery that may give him a temporary advantage over his neighbours. I have seen one of these acute gentlemen standing upon a very pretty iron bridge thrown across a lake in his park, to connect the mainland with an umbrageous little island. The acute gentleman in question glanced knowingly at me, and slapped the light railing of the bridge.

"Here," said he, "is the wreck of an old engine."

This clever economy of material, and this power of watching over little profits that would slip through the tyro's fingers, impress all observant visitors to the mills of Lancashire. Waste is unknown: the foul cotton, rejected by the carder, is thankfully accepted by the paper-maker. That which the printers call "fat" is unknown to the weaver and the spinner. The pound of flesh is weighed to a scruple; the steam measures the work done, as exactly as steam throws the shuttle. The conditions are hard on both sides; but hardest, it is obvious, for the operatives.

I contrast the little weavers' cottages opposite old Fox's mill (and they are snug enough) with old Fox's noble mansion that commands the country for twenty miles round. I cannot help taking a seat in one of these cottages. I want to feel myself in the position of one of Old Fox's hands.

I remember him when he was a young man, and his father had a bit of an establishment not worth talking about. I was in that little esta-

blishment. Well, my masters have become great, rich folk since then; and I, though a trifle more comfortable than I was twenty years ago, am substantially little better than when I started. The mill is vastly improved; work is lighter; I go to my looms through a filigree doorway—but I don't get on. Master is filling his vast granaries, while I am still working to get enough for the oven at the week's end. I am no more than a crank of the engine. I am part of the mill. I and the devil that beats the cotton, are on an equality. I must be pressed to work cheaply, as the cotton must be got cheaply. Old Fox must sell cottons for the Indians at the price his neighbour asks; or, if possible, at a price a little under that of his neighbour.

Now, in justice to wife and brats, I am bound to see that the value of my labour is not depreciated, in order to give Old Fox an advantage in the market. I and Old Fox are not on speaking terms; so I turn to my companions, and we concert together how we shall make our weight felt. And here we are, a little army looking jealously, day by day, at your castle. A new wing is about to be built; terraces are being raised; the old man is doing well. We, also, must get a grain or two more, now that the harvest is abundant. We have no compunction. Old Fox is not our friend, we take it.

In this fashion, the operative looks out of his cottage door, and talks at the owner's mansion, so that in this model mill, with its perfect ventilation and its wondrous machinery, I perceive something that is not perfect. The iron, and coal, and cotton are sound; the straps glide smoothly enough about the wheels; but there is a very complex machine at work hereabouts, that creaks, and jars, and gets out of gear, as, I think, I shall clearly indicate in future papers.

I am not unmindful, I trust, of my good host's hospitality, because I peep into his operatives' cottages, and ask them how it is with them in the world. I am told that the fathers of the majority of these great mill-owners had not a five-pound note when they began life. And I am told that they are the hardest masters who were once operatives, because, when operatives, they regarded masters as their enemies. Become masters in their turn, they are alive to the animosity of labour, and they resent it. All successful men have not the noble nature that made Stephenson shake hands with a lady in her carriage, and then with an old friend who was in her ladyship's livery.