BULLETS for BREAD!

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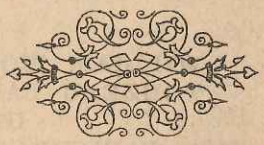
THE FEATHERSTONE MASSACRE.

WE WOULD RATHER
BE SHOT DOWN
THAN HUNGERED
TO DEATH.



One Penny.

THE FEATHERSTONE MASSACRE.

Mr. Asquith is a great favourite not only with official Liberals, but also with those Labour members who cling on to the skirts of the Liberal Party. To listen to these gentlemen you would imagine that this promising young Minister intended to make a clean sweep of all the evils of modern society, and become the saviour who would lead the people into promised land. Up to the present, however, Asquith, like most politicians, has been more remarkable for his promises than performance. Let us give a sample of Asquith's proposals for the good of the workers. Among the "dressers of flax and hemp," the average age of the workers is some 30 years. The dust from the work fills the lungs and produces chronic bronchitis, a man who attains 45 years is looked upon as a living wonder, but it is terrible to listen to his breathing. Some time ago Mr. Asquith instituted an inquiry into this and other unhealthy trades, and recommended that in future the men engaged in this work should wear a respirator!

Mrs. Partington and her broom are not in it with Mr. Asquith. Have courage ye suffocated and poisoned workers, though disease and death dog your footsteps, though you go down to the grave before your time, yet cheer up you can always "take arms against a sea of troubles," and by opposing end them by a bullet or a muzzle. This "respirator" is very much like the whole of Mr. Asquith's factory legislation.

But though Mr. Asquith's legislative achievements have not been remarkable, yet has shown that in one respect he understands the art of government. He will do nothing for the workers himself, yet he takes good care that they shall not do too much for themselves. So when men come out on strike for better wages or shorter hours, he is always ready to supply their masters with plenty of police and soldiers to bludgeon them or shoot them down.

Mr. Asquith's crowning achievement in this way was the brutal massacre of miners at Featherstone, but he led up to this glorious slaughter by a variety of performances of similar character, and we must first glance briefly at these.

The year 1892 was remarkable for labour troubles both at home and abroad. Europe was plunged into a terrible commercial crisis and intense starvation and suffering among the people produced strikes and riots in all "civilized" countries. England was no exception. In 1892 there were great strikes of Durham miners and Lancashire cotton operatives. Peaceable

enough but involving terrible sufferings to thousands of women and children. But a Liberal Government had attained office. Asquith sat in the seat of Matthews, and the new Home Secretary was surely a man who loved the people. Did he not defend Cunningham Graham, when, with John Burns, he took his trial at the Old Bailey, on a charge of "unlawful assembly" in Trafalgar Square? Did not Mr. Asquith in his speech show great indignation at the conduct of the police on that memorable occasion? Did he not tell, with the piteous pathos of an expert Old Bailey practitioner, how the people were bludgeoned and trampled down by Sir Charles Warren's mounted men? Who could doubt that Mr. Asquith had popular sympathies? The time had come to prove it, and this Mr. Asquith was soon to do.

There were strikes at Bristol in December 1892. Strikes among the dockers, deal porters, and kindred trades; and it was proposed to hold a demonstration on the night of December 23rd, when the men would march through the city in procession with Chinese lanterns In these Chinese lanterns the local authorities scented possible incendiarism, and in the march through the city, who knows what dreadful possibilities might lurk. So the "Chinese lanterns" and the procession were prohibited by a Watch Committee largely composed—our authority is Mr. Ben Tillett—of timber merchants whose men were on strike. The men gave up the "Chinese lanterns" but declared thy would have their procession. Whereupon the local authorities shrieked out that riot and pillage were imminent, and demanded troops, which were at once supplied from Aldershot by the worthy Home Secretary. Huzzars and Dragoons rode into the city. The procession started, but was charged on its route by police and dragoons and completely scattered. At the meeting in the Horsefair, at which 50,000 people were assembled, "the dragoons were ordered to charge, and rode furiously at the platforms, sweeping all before them, forty or fifty people fell, and were sabred and lanced as they fell beneath the horses feet. The bru ality was appal ng, and women and children who rushed into doorways for shelter were bludgeoned by the police or sabred by the horsemen."—*Freedom*, Jan. 1st, 1893. For two hours continual charges were made upon the people. A brutal magistrate, named Willis, urged on the soldiers to fresh outrage. "What must we do, sir?" asked an officer as the troops faced the people. "When I say charge! charge," cried this ruffian, "and never mind the Riot Act."

Thus all scenes of Bloody Sunday were reproduced at Bristol, under the auspices of a gentleman had been so severe upon the misdoings of Mr. Matthews in Trafalgar Square. But Asquith soon had another chance of showing his sympathy for the workers. In the beginning of April, 1893, the war against capital and labour broke out again at Hull. The employers had de-

clared war upon the unions, and with a Home Secretary in power, who could be depended upon for an unlimited supply of troops, masters felt safe in swamping the docks with "free labour." Prominent in this good work was Mr. Charles Wilson, M.P., one of the pleasant little party who joined in that friendly game at "baccarat," at Tranby Croft, in company with his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales. Mr. Charles Wilson, M.P., could not afford to pay his dockers 6d. an hour. He wanted the money for the gambling table. Friends like the Prince of Wales are very expensive. So as "free labour" is cheaper than union labour, Mr. Charles Wilson introduced a plenteous supply of it. The Dockers Union called out their men, and Charles Wilson appealed to the Watch Committee, and to his right honourable friend Mr. Asquith for assistance.* He got it. On April 5th, police and soldiers poured into the town, amid great public excitement. Mr. Asquith's "friend" was hooted along the street and applied for police protection. Wilson's blacklegs had as a guard of honour the Scots Guards from York. Not only were cavalry and infantry marched into Hull, but Asquith in his zeal, also sent two gun boats to take care of his friend's property. Yet, up to the arrival of the soldiers, there had been no rioting. There were soon lively scenes, blacklegs were brought into the place in swarms, under the protection of the police and military. A few stones thrown by the strikers were met by bayonet and baton charges. The strike extended throughout the docks; but the strikers places were quickly taken by "free labour." The men driven to desperation fired timber yards and saw mills, but all in vain. Thanks to Asquith, his "friend" was quite successful in "smashing the union," and the dockers were forced to submit.

Asquith was questioned in Parliament as to the action of the Government in allowing troops to be used in breaking up Trade Unions, and in a debate upon the subject, he admitted that he had sent the troops on the application of the local authorities. The local authorities, as John Burns pointed out, comprising a number of ship owners concerned in the struggle. But Mr. Asquith declared that "He did not see how the Government could take upon itself the responsibility of rejecting a demand, declared by the local authorities to be urgently necessary." This means in plain English, that a gang of capitalists who want to "smash unions," can be supplied with as many soldiers as

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[1] Mr. Asquith stated at a Liberal Meeting in Hull, in January, 1895, that he did not think "there could be a more typical representative of capital in Hull, than his friend, Mr. Charles Wilson." Observe Mr. Asquith calls this purveyor of blacklegs his "friend." For once we agree with Mr. Asquith, Charles Wilson is a "typical representative of capital," and Mr. Asquith does well to call himself his "friend." They have many qualities in common. See *The Clarion*, Feb. 2nd, 1895.

they like, to butcher those that object, by a Home Secretary, who afterwards calmly disclaims all responsibility for the action of the "local authorities." We wonder if someone supplied a murderer with a knife, well knowing the use he was going to make of it, if Asquith or his judges would admit the plea of the accomplice, that he was not responsible for the action of the murderer. Asquith seems sometimes conscious of the weakness of this plea, and so he frequently states that he has no discretionary power, but must supply troops if he is asked for them. But this is not true Asquith has got discretionary power, not only to refuse troops, but to withdraw them. If he has not, why did the Aberdare magistrates *petition* him to allow the troops to *remain* in that district during the Great Coal War of 1893.

Asquith should be frank like his friend Charles Wilson. That "typical representative of capital," told the Hull strikers that "the 'free labourers' "would stay, whatever the result of the strike might be, *and that he would* "*make the strikers curse their leaders before long.*" Whereupon the dockers burnt Wilson in effigy. If Asquith had not a legal genius for lying he might also have been doomed to the flames.

But the capitalist Plan of Campaign against the unions was soon to have a still more startling development. The citidal of the new unionism was now to be attacked. The Miners' Federation had been among the first to adopt the new method of gigantic strikes to wring concessions from the masters. These gentlemen saw plainly enough that this Great Federation was a danger to them and their class. At the International Congress of Miners, held at Brussels, on May 22nd, delegates represenitng 530,000 British miners, mostly belonging to the Miners' Federation, declared with the Continental delegates for an International Strike, if the Governments would not grant an Eight Hours Day. Revolutionary propositions of this kind were dangerous, and organizations that proposed to put them into practice must be smashed without mercy.

As usual, the masters at first attacked the miners in detail. Mr. Pickard had told at the Conference how wages had been already reduced in South Wales, Scotland, Durham, and Northumberland, and the masters were then evidently contemplating a general attack upon the Federation, on the pretext that they could not compete with those districts in which wages had been reduced. At this Congress, Mr. Pickard and his friends urged the men to stand together and battle for a "living wage," a phrase that soon became very popular. The attack came soon. On June 23rd the owners demanded a reduction of 25 per cent., thus, at one fell swoop, sweeping away nearly all that had been gained since '88. Miners, whose wages had been raised from £1 to £1 8s., saw that the coal owners proposed to sweep 7s. of this into their

pockets. Therefore, it is no wonder that the miners refused to agree to this modest proposition and preferred to be locked out.

On July 27th, 350,000 men laid down their tools, and the battle began. For a time all went quietly. In South Wales there was trouble, but nothing very serious. Though a conflict in Ebbw Vale between the strikers. and some men who had remained at work, was made the pretext for garrisoning the place with 1,000 soldiers. But the coal owners had big stocks of coal in hand, and prices were going up, and they could look on, while the men starved, with great complacency. The strikers, however, hoped that the Northumberland and Durham miners would join them. But on August 16th, the Northumberland miners declined to do this by a majority of 1,000. And while 20,000 of the Durham miners declared for the strike, 19,704 were against. So as a two-thirds majority was required before the men could strike, the proposition fell to the ground. It was said on the London Coal Exchange at time, that if Durham struck there would be a panic, and then a settlement would quickly follow. This was the opinion of practical business men. Why was it that Durham did not strike? And who was responsible for the suffering and starvation that followed?

It is well known that the leaders of the Durham men used all their influence to keep the men from striking. Why should they do this? Was it merely because of the old quarrel with the Miners Federation concernining Miners Eight Hours Bill? Is it likely that they would have lost, on this account, a splendid chance of winning back the 10 per cent. reduction which they had been forced to submit to in 1892? Was there not some reason for this, beyond a petty personal quarrel?

The leaders of the Durham Miners have always been devoted members of the Liberal party, and a General Strike would have embarrassed that party considerably. If the Coal Owners had not yielded, not only riot and revolt, but revolution! would have stared the Government in the face. Without coal, factories and foundries would have been closed and silent, throughout the length and breadth of the land, and the middle class would have been face to face with a starving and desperate people.

These men would not have starved in quiet, and it would have been impossible to have crushed the universal revolt in torrents of blood. For a discontented army, continually breaking out in mutiny, could not be depended to butcher the people wholesale. The soldiers would have gone with the people, and middle class society would have fallen before the popular storm.

Is it any wonder, if all the influence at the command of the Government was brought to bear upon the leaders of the Durham men to prevent

this catastrophe. And who so likely to command this influence as Mr. Asquith, who has even hypnotised John Burns, and turned a fiery Social Democrat into a meek and lowly follower of the Liberal party. Those who have anything to do with political parties, know that an intrigue of this kind is not only possible, but probable.

And there can be but little doubt that the Government, which crushed strikes by bludgeons and bayonets at Bristol and Hull, did its best by underground intrigue to break down a popular movement, which threatened the destruction of modern commercialism. So the Durham Miners did not come out, and the Miners Federation was left to fight the battle alone.

The men held together steadily, but suffering and starvation began to tell upon them. The struggle was bringing desolation to many homes. In the words of a correspondent of *The Sheffield Daily Telegraph:* "Women with pinched wan faces, that tell of a whole world of woe, crying "children becoming more and more attenuated every day, and famished "men wearing the sharp look associated with a keen desire for food," were to be met with everywhere. But while the people starved, the coalowners were making money, selling their "smudge," the dust and rubbish of the coal pit at famine prices. It was stated at a meeting at Leeds, on Sept. 9th, that huge stacks of coal, at Topcliffe, for which the coal owners had paid 2s. per ton, were being sold at 22s. per ton. On Aug. 26th, at Barnsley, the centre of the Yorkshire coalfield, coal had risen from 14s. to 18s. per ton, an unprecedented price in Barnsley. While a Lancashire firm was selling "smudge," which could be bought at 1s. per ton before the lock out, at 6s. 6d. These were glorious times for the coal owners.[2] Yet many of these gentlemen had been making nice little dividends of 12½ per cent. only a little before the lockout, and 40 and 50 per cent. had been made in times of prosperity. No wonder, men with hungry faces looked angrily upon the pits, when labourers were shovelling masses of "smudge" into wagons, while in some pits deputies and black legs were hard at work getting up coal. Gold poured in merrily, while coalowners drank the Great Lock Out in brimming bumpers of Champagne.

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[2] Mr. Pickard stated, in October, that a colliery near Featherstone had made £14,000 out of the lockout. While the firm of Newton Chambers & Co., of which Mr. A. M Chambers, the Chairman of the Coalowners Federation is a member, were content with a paltry £60,000. In Durham, the Marquis of Londonderry made £3,000 a week during the Coal War. It was an excellent thing for the Durham Coal owners, many of whom, like Charles Wilson, are honourable friends of Mr. Asquith, that their men were kept at work. And this money was watered with the tears of starving women and children, and drenched with the blood of murdered men.

A spark will kindle a vast conflagration in times like these. And on Aug. 30th, at Killamarsh, in Derbyshire, where suffering was intense among the starving people, the presence of some navvies loading wagons with coal roused the crowd to fury. Men, women, and lads, rushed on the colliery, the navvies flying in panic before them, while the trucks were overturned, and the colliery windows smashed with showers of stones. The infection quickly spread. At Hornsthorpe, some railway trucks were sent crashing down upon the line. While at Markham, the men who overturned carts, and smashed windows, hoisted as a signal of revolt, the red flag.

At Manvers Main, at Wath, a report spreads that colliery officials are working coal. Two hundred women march on the colliery. The managers son laughs and sneers at them, but a volley of stones from the sturdy arms of these Amazons shatter the windows and the young gentleman beats a speedy retreat. The leaders endeavour, at a public meeting held a short time afterwards at Manvers Main, to get the men to condemn the riots, but they sturdily refuse and declare they do not regret what has happened.

At Kerby, a locomotive belonging to the colliery is overturned by 200 men, who search the pit for blacklegs. At the Garforth Collieries, near Leeds, blacklegs fly before a mob of strikers, and a colliery manager is stunned with a cudgel. Two colliery officials at Wombwell are set upon, and severely beaten by the crowd.

The fire spreads apace, and on Sept. 5th, riots break out in every district. A demonstration is held at Wombwell, and the men pass a resolution that they will march to the pits and "persuade" the men who are at work to stop coal filling. Five hundred men march on Hoyland Silkstone. With a savage roar the crowd rushes on 25 men, who are filling railway wagons, and the blacklegs run for their lives with broken heads and bleeding faces. The colliery offices are stormed by a crowd of frantic men armed with bludgeons, windows and lamps are smashed, the books are torn to pieces, their leaves scattered to the winds, and the manager is beaten and left half-dead. Growing in numbers the mob swarms on to Rockingham Colliery. Here they overturn coal trucks by hundreds, while they pour petroleum over wagons and stables, and a broad sheet of flame flares up to the sky. In Sheffield, at the Nunnery Colliery, carts bringing coal from Durham are overturned, while at the Waterloo Main, near Leeds, mobs of strikers are scattered by police, armed with cutlasses. The famished people driven mad with hunger have revolted, and the rich robbers, who feasted while children cried for bread, tremble at the storm.

On Sept. 6th, a crowd with a red flag advances from Wombwell to Wath Main. The colliery is occupied by the police, who charge, but are utterly routed by the mob, and the colliery offices and stables are soon in blaze. At Earl Fitzwilliams pits, the mob burnt the colliery offices under the eyes of the police, who were quite helpless.

Panic reigns in Sheffield. At Neepsend a mob of thousands stop the cartage of coal. Another mob at Broughton Lane, drive the police before them, and burn six carts and the weigh office. A strong force of police arrive, after the row is over, and fall with great brutality on a crowd of harmless spectators who are watching the fire. So panic stricken are the magistrates at Rotherham, on hearing that some coal carts have been overturned, that they implore the Home Secretary to send troops, which is done. At Heckmondwike, the mob flung corves down the pits mouth, and the police were forced to fly with showers of stones. A colliery manager's house, at Birstall, near Dewsbury, is bombarded with stones, and all the furniture smashed. The houses of blacklegs are stormed and utterly wrecked. The police are beaten, and two sergeants' heads broken.

There is a fierce fight at Watnall Colliery. The mob burn trucks and buildings. The police arriving on the scene are greeted with volleys of stones. A magistrate reads the Riot Act, and a strong force of police charge the mob, who hold their ground, but fly at last. Twelve injured constables are carried off to Nottingham Hospital.

Everywhere is riot and revolt, the miners are desperate, for starvation stares them in the face. While the tumult is at its height, the last of the strike pay is given out! The coalowners have driven the men frantic by hunger, they are now to complete their work by murdering them.

Lord Masham's colliery, at Featherstone, had been invaded, like many others, on Sept. 5th, by a crowd of men and women, who advanced upon the men who were loading "smudge" for sale, and ordered them to leave their work. There was no disturbance for the labourers bolted directly they saw the crowd, and the people went with them. Lord Masham's manager, Mr. Holiday, persisted in carrying on the sale of "smudge," but afterwards promised a deputation of the miners, that no more "smudge" should be sold, but that he would only use it for the pit engines, etc. "How are the people to be sure of this?" asked the men. "We will only load cart waggons belonging to the colliery, and not the railway wagons" said Mr. Holiday. Strange to say, after this promise, some blacklegs were caught by the miners filling railway wagons with "smudge" labelled "Bradford." This naturally provoked the people, and on Sept. 7th, the

colliery was again invaded, and six wagons were overturned. But on Mr. Holiday declaring that the smudge was not meant for "Bradford," but for the colliery engines, the crowd went peacefully away. Another crowd coming afterwards found a number of railway wagons loaded with coal. They accused Holiday of breaking the agreement, and unloaded the wagons upon the railway. But, "there was no smashing of windows or destruction of property."[3] This trifling disturbance provoked by a flagrant breach of faith by Lord Masham's manager, who had been "amusing the men by promises," sent that gentleman off to Wakefield to see the Chief Constable, and to ask for "protection." While Holiday was talking with the Chief Constable, Lord St. Oswald, who owned a pit at Nostell, a few miles from Featherstone, entered the room and joined with Mr. Holiday in demanding troops and police. According to the Chief Constable, Captain Russell, Lord St. Oswald stated that he "preferred soldiers." The noble lord, who is a magistrate! as well as a coalowner signed a requisition for troops, and a telegram was at once despatched to the officer in command of the troops at Bradford for 50 infantry. Lord St. Oswald then quite "satisfied" went back to his colliery, with "a light heart," to read the Riot Act. After conspiring with his brother coalowners to famish the people, he was quite ready to shoot them down.

The military authorities at Bradford, acting under instructions from the Home Secretary, sent 52 men of the South Staffordshire Regiment, with 80 rounds of ball cartridge, to Wakefield; 25 men were sent to Lord St. Oswald, at Nostell Colliery, and the rest went under the command of Captain Barker to Featherstone.

Though the disturbances at Featherstone, previous to the arrival of the troops, had been so slight, that an experienced police officer in the district, Sergeant Sparrow, declared that he did not think the disturbances "serious" nor "expect anything more would happen," yet in the case of Nostell Colliery, still less had been done, for a crowd had merely visited the place and asked to see Lord St. Oswald who was away at the time. According to Sergeant Sparrow, Mr. Holiday had not been sufficiently alarmed to apply to local police for protection. Nor had the noble lord. No, police were not good enough for them, they "preferred soldiers." Asquith supplied them at the requisition of a single magistrate, who was also a coalowner, whose property was "in danger," and who had kindly

[3] See Report of the Government Committee, appointed to inquire into the Disturbances at Featherstone, Eyre and Spottiswoode, East Harding Street, Fleet Street, London, E.C., from which I have taken most of the facts concerning the massacre.

consented to read the Riot Act, if there should be any trouble. Fortunately there was no trouble at Nostell Colliery, or the noble lord in his zeal for rights of property, would have eclipsed Featherstone.

The arrival of soldiers at Featherstone was not marked at first by any startling incident. A few men and lads standing at the station gates received them with hoots and groans. But news of their arrival spread like wildfire, and when Mr. Holiday arrived on the scene, he found the streets filled with excited men and women rushing about, or hotly discussing the situation The people moved on to the colliery to look at this startling apparition of armed men dressed in red, and soon the cry arose: "You men in red coats will have to be shifted." Soon after the crowd entered the colliery, and asked to see Holiday. "Send the soldiers away," they cried. But this, Holiday, after a long parley refused to do. But the report of the arrival of the soldiers had spread through the country, and between six and seven a strange crowd armed with bludgeons and headed by a man with a bell marched into Featherstone. These men showed a very different temper to the men who had previously interviewed Mr. Holiday. They went for that worthy gentleman, who was still standing in the colliery yard talking to the police, with savage cries of "Kill the ——!" and Mr. Holiday had to beat a rapid retreat amid a volley of stones. He was glad to take refuge in the railway station.

The manager gone, the crowd turned their attention to the soldiers, who had been stationed in a room, on the first floor of the engine house. On they rushed to the engine house, and soon there was a tremendous crashing of glass amid the shouts and yells of the multitude. Captain Barker looked out of the window, and saw the yard suddenly filled; swarming with men and boys, nearly all of them armed with sticks and bludgeons, and throwing immense stones. It was some time before the crowd discovered the position of the soldiers, but some men climbed the pit head on the bank and caught a glimpse of their scarlet coats in the engine room. Then a storm of stones and pieces of iron came crashing through the windows. The soldiers were forced to retreat before this pitiless storm to the store room, where they endeavoured to obtain shelter behind some high shelves. But it was all in vain. The stones came crashing in; the door of the engine house was shattered into fragements, and the crowd swarmed up the stairs and confronted the troops. They ordered the soldiers out of the place, and informed them, that if they did not go, they should be "carried down." It was about this time that the cry arose, "We'll set the place on fire," and a man seized a flare lamp and applied it to some sacks at the bottom of the staircase. The sacks did not catch, they were only filled with cement or nails. But the example was contagious. There were great sacks of timber in the colliery yard, and these were fired, and the col-

liery was lit up with a sudden blaze. The joiners shops, and a large wooden tank also, burst into flame.

It was getting hot, and Captain Barker, alarmed at the desperation of the crowd offered to withdraw the troops, if the mob would also leave the colliery. The men who led the rioters put this proposition to the people, who received it with murmurs of assent. And soldiers came out of the engine room and marched down to the station surrounded by a dense crowd, who were on good terms with the soldiers, and were singing and rejoicing at their easy victory. A crowd of miners armed only with sticks and stones, had by sheer audacity forced armed and drilled men to retreat before them. Directly they had seen the soldiers into the station, the rioters with the bellman at their head marched away. They had attained their object, the troops had left the colliery. These miners had also promised to go, and they kept their word. They were common workmen, not military officers, colliery managers, or lawyers, they were destitute of the refined arts of civilized life, and had stupid prejudices about keeping their word and speaking the truth.

But they left behind them men filled with hate and a mad desire for vengeance. Holiday, the manager, who saw the result of all his lies and treachery, the colliery in a blaze before his eyes, and Captain Barker, the young military officer, enraged at the disgrace of being forced to retreat by the "rabble," were longing for vengeance, and this desire could only be satisfied in blood.

It was about seven o'clock, when the soldiers marched down to station, and they remained there till eight p.m., watching the flaming colliery. At eight a magistrate, Mr. Hartley, who had been sent for by Mr. Holiday, arrived. Mr. Hartley is an old man, a country magistrate of "great experience" with the usual hatred of the "mob" displayed by these venerable bigots, who often regret the good old days of Sidmouth and Castlereagh, when the "mob" were sabred and shot down without mercy. A brief consultation took place between Holiday, Captain Barker, and Hartley, and they decided to march the troops back to the colliery, and give the rabble a lesson. What passed at that conference we do not know, we can only conjecture from what followed.

The soldiers crossed the line and entered the colliery by the railway entrance. The stacks of timber and the work shops were well alight, and an immense crowd had gathered, attracted by the flames of the fire, which lit up the country for miles round. As the soldiers advanced, amid the glare of the flames, the people who were scattered all over the place, ran before the troops to the entrance in the Green lane, which bounds on the colliery on the north, and here the crowd halted and congregated together. The people were

taken by surprise at this sudden apparation of the troops, and huddled together in a mass they looked on in wonder. They were quite peaceful, not a stone was thrown. Mr. Hartley advanced and ordered them to disperse "in the name of the Queen." He told them he was a magistrate, and that if they did not go he would read the Riot Act. At this threat some pit lads hooted and threw a few stones, but the mass of the people, peaceful spectators remained quiet and indifferent in their places, fascinated by the blaze of the fire. They were doing no wrong. The strangers had set the place on fire, not them. A big fire was quite an event in that neighbourhood, pleasantly varying the monotony of existence in the Yorkshire coal field. Why should they go away?

It is a maxim with experienced magistrates, police, and military officers, that if there is not a riot you can always make one. The receipt is simple; set the police on to bludgeon a peaceful crowd; or order the soldiers to charge them with the bayonet. However good tempered a crowd may be, it will very probably become very angry under this treatment. Mr. Hartley as a "magistrate of great experience" knew this. So he read the Riot Act, and the troops fixed bayonets and charged the crowd. But even this did not irritate the colliers, they quietly got out of the way, but the pit lads were in their glory. On they rushed, screaming and shouting, before the bayonets of the gallant warriors. And when they had outstripped the soldiers, they turned round and pelted them with stones. It was rare fun, almost as good as the fire. Who would have thought that this roaring farce of gallant soldiers charging, with the bayonet, a crowd of children, was to be the prelude to an awful tragedy. After these lads had been sufficiently goaded by bayonet charges to give a pretext for firing, the soldiers fell back to their old position, at the Green lane entrance.

News of the fire had reached Pontefract, and a fire engine started for the colliery. Just as the soldiers had halted at the colliery entrance, the fire engine came tearing up the Green lane, dashing madly through the crowd that filled it, with a reckless disregard of life and limb. Some colliers declared at the iuquiry, that driver had a whip in his hand, and lashed fiercly at the crowd as the engine tore along. This naturally caused a few stones to be thrown at the engine. Another proof of a riotous disposition on the part of the people. Yet this crowd, which was so terribly riotous, did not attempt to interfere with the firemen when they tried to extinguish the flames, though they might easily have done so. It is remarkable also, that a crowd of miners who had approached the engine when at work, out of curiosity, went away quietly, when ordered by Inspector Prosser and half a dozen constables.

With a ferocious mob like this, severe measures were necessary. "Go

away or you will be shot down" shouted Mr. Hartley. And then came from the people a terrible cry—"We would rather be shot down than hungered to death." This cry tells us what drove the starving miners to revolt. It rings in our ears this cry of hunger and despair. Listen again, it is heartrending in its agony, in it you hear the wail of famished children, the shrill cry of the babe, whose mother nearly dying with hunger has no milk to give it, and the savage shouts of frenzied men and women, roused by these sounds and sights to fury and vengeance. But it had no effect on the hearts of the magistrate, colliery manager, or military officer, it is the trade of these worthies, to imprison, famish, or murder the people, and they decided "it was absolutely necessary to fire." But Mr. Hartley is an old man, and at the last moment his heart failed him, and he asked Captain Barker "to fire at first with blank cartridge." That invaluable young officer replied briefly "it was contrary to regulations," and directed the two soldiers who fired first "to fire very low," so that "they should not fire over the heads of the crowd." Captain Barker did not want to frighten, he wanted to kill.

It is against regulations to fire with blank cartridge against a riotous crowd. But how long has this been the case? In Scotland, at Motherwell, during the Great Railway Strike of 1891, a crowd of miners was dispersed by a volley of blank cartridge. Some railway men were evicted, and the miners came to the rescue, and gave soldiers and police such a warm reception that firing became "absolutely necessary;" but blank cartridge was used, and now it is "contrary to regulations." Have the regulations been altered since Asquith and his friends have been in power?

The soldiers fired, but the crowd thinking it was "blank" did not stir. Then the fatal volley rang out from the rifles of the troops, and a cry arose from the people "you have shot some of us," and a man advanced from the crowd, and showed to the soldiers a bullet wound in his thigh. They had "fired very low," and with deadly effect.

James Gibbs, a quiet peaceful young man, who had been attracted to the spot by the glare of the flames, was struck by a bullet, as he stood talking to his brother, and fell mortally wounded. James Gibbs was a Sunday School Teacher, who had a high character from Mr. Dyer, the curate of a church at Normanton, who also stated that several others who were wounded, from the same district, were also quiet and peaceable spectators.

James Duggin, another miner, was telling a friend that the soldiers had only fired "blank" when his knee was completely shattered by a ball; he died a short time afterwards. How many were wounded will never be known, so deadly was the fire. Two men were wounded by a single shot, in a colliery yard a quarter of a mile from Featherstone. Enraged at this butchery, the

people set fire to a wooden railway bridge belonging to the colliery. But the soldiers were not ordered to fire again. Those who had conspired to murder starving men, shrank from another butchery. Their hands were red enough already. The soldiers remained on duty from 9.15, when the massacre took place, till 11.15, when they were relieved by a stronger force from Pontefract. Then came a fierce burst of public indignation against the man most responsible for the massacre. Mr. Holiday was under police protection for days, and his house—Featherstone Hall—was guarded against the people, who threatened to burn it to the ground.

At the inquest on the murdered men, Duggin and Gibbs, Captain Barker distinguished himself by the cool cynicism of his replies to the questions of coroner and jury. The rifle used, he informed them with the cool insolence of the aristocratic officer, was the magazine rifle, with the new bullet, the proof of which was 39 in., and which would pierce 35 in. of solid elm. "Who ordered you to bring such bullets?" cried an indignant juryman. But the coroner stopped any answer to this question by observing, with humour, that "They did not make bullets for pop guns." How noble and elevating is the law, whose functionaries can jest over the bodies of murdered men, amid the tears of those who loved them.

But though the coroner did his best to get the jury to return a verdict of "justifiable homicide," he did not succeed. On Sept. 12th, the jury brought in a verdict to the effect that "Gibbs was innocent of rioting, and expressed their sympathy with his relations and friends." They also declared "That as Mr. Holiday had sworn on oath, that there were no further disturbances, beyond stone throwing, after eight o'clock to the firing, and that the crowd was got off the premises, the jury deeply regret that such extreme measures were adopted by the authorities." This was about as near a verdict of wilful murder against the "authorities" as a respectable jury could go.

A few days before this verdict, Mr. Asquith was asked a question by Mr. Macdonald, M.P., concerning the London police, and the small army of soldiers he had sent into the mining districts. The police including a large number of the brutal ruffians who had bludgeoned to death three workmen in Trafalgar square, during the unemployed riots of '87. Mr. Macdonald asked whether the Government could not do nothing in this unfortunate dispute, but make "a display of superior force." Mr. Asquith replied, that "he could not assent to the description of the measures urgently necessary for suppression of *gross lawlessness* as a display of superior force." Undoubtedly Featherstone was then included among the measures urgently necessary for the suppression of "gross lawlessness." But at a debate in the House of Commons, on Sept. 20th, Asquith climbed down a bit, for not only Keir Hardie and the Anarchists, but even

staunch Liberal Labour M.P.'s, like Mr. Woods, were saying very rough things about him, and he felt bad. In his speech he admitted sending soldiers, at the requisition of men like Lord St. Oswald. "What could he do," he pathetically exclaimed, "he had had telegram after telegram from the local authorities that "the police was insufficient, and that unless some *special protection* was given "they could not be responsible for the public peace." Mr. Asquith said, "that "under the circumstances, he had felt it his bounden duty to supply the local "authorities with such a force, as was in their judgement necessary to supple-"ment the force at their disposal." After this speech, in which he openly avowed his responsibility for the Featherstone Massacre, the *Times* of Sept 12th, the organ of Piggotry and capitalism, patted Asquith on the back as a minister after its own heart. The *Times* was pleased to see that Mr. Asquith was not only "a keen politician, but was governed by a higher sense of responsibil-"ity in the exercise of his adminisfrative functions at the Home Office." There could be no question said the *Times* that "Mr. Asquith was right in giving "military assistance to the local authorities." That is, in plain English, supplying men like Lord Oswald and Holiday, with soldiers to butcher starving men, whom Holiday, like Foulon, had recommended to eat grass.

But Asquith decided to grant a "Commission of Inquiry" into the Featherstone Massacre. Nothing like a Commission of Inquiry to still popular clamour, especially when you can pack it with your friends. Asquith has studied Irish history to some purpose. "Don't hesitate to shoot," and "pack the jury" afterwards, have been stock maxims with the rulers of Ireland for generations. The Commission of Inquiry consisted of two political friends of Mr. Asquith's, Lord Bowen and Mr. Haldane, Q.C., M.P., and Sir Albert K. Rollitt, M.P., a Yorkshire Conservative. Bowen and Haldane are personal as well as political friends of Mr. Asquith, and Rollitt like all Tories could be depended upon in a matter of this kind. Of course the Commission "whitewashed," not only Asquith, but everybody. The unquestioning reliance which it placed on the statements of the official witnesses, capitalists, magistrates, soldiers, police officers, and firemen, might be envied by a metropolitan magistrate who "always believes the police." Holiday, Hartley, Barker, all swore that they were under a storm of stones, for an hour, so heavy that it was a wonder any of the little force of police and soldiers escaped alive, and they were obliged to fire in pure self defence. Policemen, firemen, and soldiers, backed up the statements with a unanimity which was delightful. Corporal Hickey had his cheek cut open by a terrible blow from a stone, it was "a nasty cut." Yet he did not go to the doctor, he healed it himself, and so "miraculously" that a few weeks after there was not even "a trace of the cut left." Another soldier, Private Robinson had "a small bone broken in the back of his hand." Other

soldiers, exhibited their arms and accoutrements, which were damaged. But, curiously, none had been damaged when they were stationed in the engine room, and were so bombarded with stones that they were forced to retreat to the railway station. For my part I am inclined to believe the statements of the miners, that there was no stone throwing, save by a few of the pit lads, after the troops had returned from the station to the colliery. It is a curious fact that all people killed or wounded by the troops were harmless spectators. If there was rioting ; how was it no rioters were shot ?

The most remarkable fact brought out by the commission was that local authorities, who had told Mr. Asquith the police were "insufficient," could yet spare 50 policemen for Doncaster race course, in the midst of the riots, but the local authorities, mostly coal owners, like Lord St. Oswald, "preferred soldiers."

They wanted a massacre, and they had a willing tool in Asquith, the Home Secretary. He deserves the praises of the *Times* this cool blooded lawyer, with a skin of parchment, and a heart of stone, this man who refused to allow the friends of the Irish political prisoners to visit them, because they had told how cruelly these men were treated in the public press, and who at the same time as he shoots down hungry men at Featherstone, backs up the Manchester Corporation in suppressing collections in the public streets for their starving wives and families. Well, the Commission of Inquiry "whitewashed" Asquith and everyone concerned in the massacre. The Commissioners, like soldiers, "did thir duty." And then, there was a debate in the House of Commons, in which everybody sang praises to Asquith, and his impartial Commission of Inquiry, even John Burns joining in what the *Times* called "a chorus of approval.

One Liberal member, Mr. Dodds, did question whether firing on starving crowds "with rifles carrying three miles and killing at two" was the best method of settling labour disputes. He ventured very imprudently, to remark that "it was the duty of the Home Office, to ascertain whether there was any "real ground for calling out the military before sanctioning that course," and also pointed out that "at present a single magistrate could call them out." John Burns sat at the feet of Asquith and praised him to the skies. In Burns' opinion people who were shot down in riots "must take their chances in mat- "ters of that kind. He said the report of the Commission was "admirable," and would have an "educational effect" upon the country.

How John Burns would have gone for Asquith once. Have you not got a few of the flowers of rhetoric you used to bestow on Matthews in '87 honest John ? Parliament does make a man "respectable." Acclaimed by the assembled capitalists, and applauded by John Burns, Asquith was in his glory, by the device of a Committee of Inquiry he had saved himself from an embarr-

assing position, and he posed in his favourite character of a benefactor to the miners and labour generally. He had expected to be attacked, he was applauded. And of the labour members who spoke, not one raised his voice against the author of the massacre. They merely begged for compensation "for the relatives" of the murdered men. Compensation should be granted said the gracious Asquith. As to more merciful treatment of mobs, he was of an opinion that "there was nothing more contrary to humanity than to fire on "mobs with blank cartridge." In this the *Times* agreed with Asquith, for that paper declared it would be "cruel kindness." The "humanity" of the *Times* and Asquith reminds one of the humanity of that philanthropic chimney sweep in "Oliver Twist" who used to set fire to dry straw in the grate to bring his boys down the chimney. It was more "humane" than wet straw, because that sent boys to sleep, dry straw roasted their feet and made them struggle to "hextricate themselves."

There is some more of this peculiar humanity in the *Times*, which after thanking heaven for a Home Secretary who will preserve "order," warns "riotous crowds" that in future "they will be shot at, and shot at with ball cartridge, if they refuse to go."

After his acquittal Mr. Asquith considered the case of his victims, and awarded their relatives, the large sum of £100 as compensation! Human life is cheap nowadays.

On March 4th, 1895, the War Office issued some more "humane" regulations in which officers are informed that they need not wait for a magistrate in future before butchering the people and that "*to fire over the heads of a crowd engaged in an illegal pursuit would have the effect of favoring the most daring and guilty.*" But officers like Captain Baker, who tell their soldiers to "Fire very low" with bullets that pierce 35 in. of solid elm, and "fired at a short range would go through half a dozen people," hardly needed such advice. Like the gallant Captain in Australia, during the Great Strike of '90, Mr. Asquith cries "Fire low and lay them out," but that gallant captain, unlike Asquith, never talked of his "humanity," and never pretended to be a friend of the people.

John Burns is right "The Featherstone Massacre" is "educational." What lessons may we learn from it? Put not your trust in politicians who climb over your heads to power, and then shoot you down. We may learn too, that the real murderer of the Featherstone Miners was not Holiday, Barker or Hartley, but the man that gave them the means of committing murder. Not as Asquith the merciful but as Asquith the Assassin will he go down to history. You, who refused to open the prison doors for the Irish political prisoners whose minds had given way through the torture of their long imprisonment. They

were not mad, only on the verge of madness. If released they might recover. Was that your answer Asquith? You lying hypocrite, who gloss over your callous cruelty with sham humanity. We say to you "Thou art the man." The blood of the innocent cries from the ground against you, Cain where is thy brother?

Here is another lesson. At Featherstone some miners said, after the massacre, "We only made one mistake—that we did'nt take our guns up to they b——soldiers." There is something in this, as well. Let the miners ponder it. To defend your lives against armed assassins is no crime.

And finally, next time you strike, Strike all together! Men of the North, Scotland, Wales, and the Midlands, and strike not for the living wage, but to end the rule of the Kings of capital. Let us sweep the tyrants from the face of the earth; let us take the mines, land, and factories, from our masters, and use them to produce wealth, not for them but for us.

We shall need then no Rosebury Concilation Boards to swindle us out of ten per cent of our wages. We shall not then have the "free labourers" choice of starving in a land of plenty, or being shot down like a dog. We shall be free men in a free land, without masters or rulers.

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