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A WINTER SONG.

[Translated from the German.]

How calmly dost thou lie
In white-robed purity,
Thou sleeping Earth!
Where are the songs of Spring—
Where Summer's painted wing
And all her mirth?

No blossoms wreath thy brow;
Thy hills and valleys now
Are bleak and bare;
The little birds are dumb;
The bees no longer hum;
Yet thou art fair!

Thy boughs and branches shine
With radiance divine,
So pure and bright
Who hath prepared thy bed,
And decked thy sleeping head
With crowns of light?

The Father from above
Thy snowy vesture wove.
The weary he
Unto his rest doth take,
Until he bids them wake
To ecstasy.

Soon at the springtime's birth
Thou shalt arise, oh, Earth!
With strengthened powers,
The Father's sunlight shed
On thee shall wreath thy head
Again with flowers.

ELLEN THORNEVORST FOWLER.

LETTER FROM SWITZERLAND.

The eyes of Europe are at this moment resting upon Berlin. On the fifteenth of March a conference will be held there which by many is supposed to be the foundation of a new era in politics and political economy. To this conference delegates from the various powers of Europe are invited, and the object is to discuss the labor question, with a view of bettering the conditions of the laboring classes as far as practicable.

It was a grand idea which led to the invitation to this conference. Cardinal Manning, the great oracle of the English Romanists, says it is the grandest idea ever conceived by the German emperor, and I suppose the emperor is anxious to have all the credit for the initiative. But everybody knows that there is no credit whatever due to him. The

initiative was taken not by the German emperor, nor by any other crowned head, but by the clear-headed, liberty-loving government of republican Switzerland. Whatever credit is due for the initiative does, therefore, rightly belong to Switzerland, not to Germany.

It is no secret that the Swiss government some time ago sent an invitation to the various powers, including Germany, asking them to send competent delegates to Berne, in the month of May, for the purpose of discussing the labor problem. The German rulers, grasping the idea, and perhaps thinking it below their dignity to send delegates to Berne, at once went to work sending out invitations to a conference in Berlin, to be held in March, and to cover the same ground, practically, as the proposed Swiss conference. By this manoeuvre the honor of the initiative and of the conference itself was transferred from Switzerland to Germany. It will easily be perceived that this way of gaining honors, although very questionable, is emphatically a German one.

For my own part, I do not believe the conference will be of much practical value, and with the exception of those who always are at hand to blow the horn in front of the modern Nimrods, there are very few who believe in the solution of the labor problem at the conference in Berlin.

In the first place, that problem is one of those which will have to be solved in some way other than by words. The troubles of the laboring classes have their roots too deep in the present social conditions of the world. Trimming off a little here and a little there will not cleanse the field from the troublesome weeds which smother the wheat. There needs to be a thorough ploughing over of the whole field, and this turning the whole ground upside down no monarch will ever be willing to accede to, much less propose. The Persian despot who conceived the grand idea of bringing the waves of the ocean into submission by whipping them, and the creatures which obeyed his orders with regard to that singular proceeding, because he was a despot, were nothing but fools. But it would probably

be just as easy to scare the ocean into obedience by a cat-o'-nine-tails as to subdue the waves of popular sentiment by any number of words.

In the second place, there is too much jealousy among the powers to admit of any cordial, *bona fide* consultation about matters of international importance. England does not hesitate to say that she has nothing to learn from Germany. France openly declares that Germany has beaten her both in the political and the industrial field, and that she now aims at beating her on the battlefield of political economy. "The year 1890," says *Le Siècle*, "will be the social Sedan of France." The apparently friendly tone of Italy is more a matter of politeness than real confidence in the success. The social questions of Italy are not the same as those of Germany, and a conference about German social difficulties is thought to be of no practical value in Italy. Now, it may reasonably be asked, what practical results can be expected from a conference the delegates of which necessarily meet with so different, or indifferent, or even secretly hostile feelings? None whatever.

Then, it is no mere pessimistic disposition to entertain the fear that the whole scene is only meant for a good dramatic entertainment.

"Reforms from above" have always had more or less of that character. Wild beasts are "tamed" by first being starved and then petted a little, and those reforms "from above" have more or less of that taming method in them. But there is a great difference between wild beasts and the laboring masses of the nineteenth century. These last ones have learnt that they are human beings, and as such are entitled to live and enjoy some degree of happiness. They cannot any longer be tamed by the alternate starving and petting process.

The programme of the conference is the best justification of the criticisms bestowed upon it. It proposes: 1. To regulate the labor in the various mines, and to discuss how far women and children can be employed in work. 2. To regulate Sunday work; to say what can be done on a Sunday, and what can not. 3. To discuss how far children can be employed in any in-