THE EIGHT-HOURS DAY.

BY E. W. O'SULLIVAN.

Australia leads the world in Labour movements. Our achievements stand like beacon lights upon a coast, by which all the world may steer. It is a proud position for us to occupy, and we should take care never to lose its advantages which we have gained. I believe in evolution, not revolution, and would, therefore, not be a party to anything like violence. I have never promoted a strike in my life, though I have been President of more trade unions and I have underwritten more banners than any other man in Australia. All the same I am for a policy of progress in trade union matters as in all other things. If the unions were guided by me they would never go upon strike. That means that the capitalists will always beat them because the men have an army of women and children to feed, while the capitalists can sit down, hold tight, and wait for starvation to do its work.

This is Eight-hours Day, the great carnival of Labour in Australia. How was this great achievement accomplished? It is a story worth reading. For the real origin of the movement we have to go back to medieval days, when John Bull was really "Master Elizabeth." Then the old craft gilds enjoyed not only the eight-hour system, but the Saturday half-holiday as well. That half-holiday was supposed to be devoted to the practice of archery, but it became the only day of the week on which the workers, and their families, could take the field of the superior of any nation in the world when a clash of arms took place—Agincourt and Poitiers to wit. In proof of this let me quote Professor J. E. Thorold Rogers, who asserts that even in the golden age of labour, when the gilds were a reality, "It is plain that the day was one of eight hours." At page 175 of his "Work and Wages" he states—"The day was one of eight hours' work, and I grounded my opinion on the fact that winter wages were reckoned to be payable only in the months of December and January, and from the facts that extra hours, sometimes as many as 48 in the week, are frequently paid for by the King's agents when hurried work was needed." The artisan who is demanding at this time an eight-hour day in the building trades a simply striving to recover what his ancestor worked by four or five centuries ago. As Sidney Webb says:—"The modern idea of an eight-hour day is the half-forgotten survival from a long-cherished memory of a former shorter day. The golden age of labour did not long endure after the close of the fifteenth century. By the close of the reign of Elizabeth, the artisan and the labourer seem to have sunk into a condition of industrial subjection far worse than anything recorded in the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries. By the end of the seventeenth the work consisted of at least 72 hours." The dream of an eight-hour day, however, was reserved for the trade unions of Great Britain after the repeal of the combinations laws in 1824, and has come to the front at intervals ever since. Robert Owen, the socialist, and philanthropist, endeavoured to establish eight hours in 1817, but failed. Shorter hours of labour were sought for by various trades later on, and by bit by bit the advocates were concessions by means of which the hours for work were reduced from 12 and 14 to 10 and 9 hours per day. The Ten Hours Bill was a great factor in the movement for shorter hours of labour, and the Amalgamated Society of Engineers del Trojan service in this direction is in 1841-42 by their great strike. In 1850, London building trades began a movement for a nine-hour day, and to a large extent succeeded. By 1856, however, the Australian trade movement for a nine-hour day, and to a large extent succeeded. By 1856, however, the Australian trade unions had won their eight-hour day, and henceforward was the goal of the British trade unions, and is a today. With returning prosperity in 1860, the ideal of an Eight-hour Day seems to have become visibly expressed upon the minds of the workers of Great Britain; and there they are still agitating for what their forefathers enjoyed in the days of "�� the M years old England." Mr. Tom Mann helped in the work. In 1860, 1863, and 1880 Mr. Graham proposed an Eight-hour Bill for miners, but was defeated on each occasion. At various Trade Unions Congresses the question of an Eight-hour Bill was discussed, but nothing definite was done. Many collisions in the United States between capital and labour have occurred in the meantime with reference to an Eight-hours Day, in which the workers were mostly defeated.

In the meantime Australia had been acting. In the little province of Otago a number of workmen, who had evidential board of the struggle in the land, it was said, that a movement for an Eight-hours Day, had started an agitation so far back as 1846 for the eight-hours system. They received, and the news of their success was sent to Sydney, where in 1855 the men working on Tootah's brewery struck for the eight-hours system and obtained it. The next year the movement of Melbourne, led by Charles Jameson, and Mr. Cherry, the natural center, who "punched blueprints by day, and the aqueduct by night," also established the system, and it was celebrated with gala ceremony in that city on April 26, 1856, since which time the Eight-hours Day has always been celebrated on that date. Since then the movement for an Eight-hours Day has spread all over Australia, and it is now a generally recognized principle that no man shall work for more than eight hours, except in those callings in which it is impossible to work the eight-hours principle. On June 20, 1860, Sir W. C. Graham, the Premier of Queensland, introduced a bill, which stated that whereas it is desirable for the general welfare of the community that the hours of daily labour should be such that workmen may have a reasonable time at their own disposal for recreation, mental culture, and the performance of social and civil duties, and whereas it would be conducive to that end to declare by law the proper duration of a day's labour. An Eight-hours Bill has also been several times introduced into the Legislature of New South Wales, but so far it has not been adopted.

It is said that tradition assigns the starting of the eight-hour movement to the reign of King Alfred, whose celebration is now being carried out in Great Britain. He is said to have divided the hours of existence into eight-hours' work, eight-hours' sleep, and eight-hours' recreation. Whether this is so or not, the idea has taken root in Australia—a country free from all the principles and prejudices of the old world—that Eight hours to work, eight hours to play, Eight hours to sleep, and eight hours a day, should be the ideal model of which the working man dreams. The Eight-hours system has come to stay; it is one of the most typical of all the inventions of Australia—a necessity to men of all classes, as well as men of all nations, to come to our shores. We are establishing a higher civilization upon the shores of Australia, and though at times we may seem to be ahead of the old world never let us forget the encouraging lines which say:—

Though broken back in many a fray, Yet freedom's strength will never disappear And where the vanguard rides today The rear shall mount tomorrow.

These verses embody the feelings and the aspirations of the eight-hour men of New South Wales, and to-day we shall see them exemplified in the grandest
In the age of work and the struggle for eight hours a day we shall see them exemplified in the grandest procession of working-men that ever took place in New South Wales.

Medievalism on the Streets

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Author: R.W. O'Sullivan