

Charles McDonald
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LEAFLETS FOR THE PEOPLE.
No. IV.

For God and Home, Humanity and Fatherland

THE
VILLAGE 
 COMMUNE

A LABOUR POEM
BY
ALARIO.

BRISBANE:
PUBLISHED BY THE QUEENSLAND SOCIAL-DEMOCRATIC FEDERATION.

Queensland Social-Democratic Federation.

OBJECTS.

1. To publish and disseminate literature on social-economic subjects with a view to educate the people upon the true principles that should govern society.
 2. To do such other work as may appear necessary for the advancement of Socialism.
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Literary contributions on social-economic subjects will be received and published if approved of by the Committee, Q.S.D.F.

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LEAFLETS FOR THE PEOPLE

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DEDICATION.

THIS POEM IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED TO
WILLIAM LANE,

For he, above all others, has laid broad and deep the foundations of New Unionism in Australia. He gathered together in the Australian Labour Federation the flower of the Queensland Labour Knights; and I, a member of the Order, deem it but right to dedicate to him my humble lay. He goes to build a living poem in the Argentine—a Commonwealth and Temple of Humanity. It will be printed on the everlasting rocks; its binding will be the eternal woods; the wide-extending fields its pages; free men, not slaves, its living types.

Though beaten in many a conflict, the chivalry of the Order will gather again its scarred and battered legions. Nor will the fight ever cease until the Citadel of Capital is stormed, and from its highest turret floats the blood-red banner indicating that Government is by Labour, for Labour; for God and Home, Humanity and Fatherland.

Much as we regret the vacancies in our Table Round, which the withdrawal of so many Knights will create, much as we should prefer to see the settlement located in Queensland, I but voice the feeling of the Order when I wish him and his comrades God-speed in their effort to found New Australia over the seas. Long may it endure, a monument of their zeal and devotion to the Cause. This is the heartfelt wish of

Yours fraternally,

For the Emancipation of Labour,

ALARIC.

"WORKER" Office,
5th September, 1892.

THE
VILLAGE COMMUNE.

A LABOUR POEM, BY ALARIC.

Part I.

Oh, Sons of Toil!! was it a dream unreal
When Christ proclaimed the Brotherhood of Man,
And sought to bind our souls with chords of love
Until the human race should be one family
Encompassing the earth? One family,
One soul, one heart, and our affections so
Inwrought, that, like the interweaving vines,
The many are but one. Oh, mystic Brotherhood!
Which kindles in each heart Love's holy fire
And hallows earth, our common fatherland.
But brother mine! since Christ proclaimed
The Social Age, two thousand years have passed,
And still upon the firmament of time
We see not yet the glad sunrise when Strife
Shall cease and Love be lord of all.
For when amidst the carking care and strife,
Which ever form life's foetid atmosphere,
That tender seedling, Love, would timidly
Put forth the young green leaf and bloom, the frost
Of fratricidal strife seals up the fount
Of human sympathy on which it feeds.
For, orchid-like, Love strikes no root in earth,
But lives upon the dew and balm of heaven,
Those sweet and subtle sympathies that spring
From secret wells within a good man's heart.

And thus a lawless competition reigns
 And roots up all that is most holy, pure,
 And lovable in man. Until above the whirl
 Of grinding mills, where poor humanity
 Is ground, like grist, between the mighty stones,
 There rises from the hearts of men, stone-ground,
 This great and bitter cry—

It is the sin of sins
 That one must ask another's leave to toil,
 And Labour oft must starve when wanting work.
 It is the wrong of wrongs that any man
 Should seek to profit from another's toil,
 And Living Labour, made in God's own image, be
 Considered but a CHATTEL to be bought and sold—
 To-day be hired and to-morrow cast aside.
 Nor less a bitter wrong it is, that he
 Who owns the instruments creating wealth
 Can starve his brother into bondage,
 But thinly veiled when masked with Freedom's name.
 For Capital, more strong than governments,
 Holds arbitrary power of life and death,
 And for a mere caprice, a trivial fault,
 Or to entrench itself 'gainst glut, or loss,
 May close the factory, shut down the mine,
 And bar the means of work against the serfs
 Whose toil created them, and who—if right
 Were done—would own them still.
 And thus the chattel slave of olden time
 Becomes the wages-serf of modern days.*

Though He, who never rests, but ever steers
 The stately caravels, whose silent keels
 Plough heaven's blue immensity, decreed
 The sacredness of Labour, made the earth
 A workshop which our toil must sanctify,
 This sacred Living Labour is esteemed of far
 Less worth than Capital, a thing inanimate.

* What little real difference there is after centuries upon centuries of so-called "progress" can be seen by contrasting the condition of the English agricultural labourer, or the workers in the match factories, with that of the worst type of Roman slavery, as described in Columella, *De Re Rustica* i. 8.

Humanity, which ever lives and learns*
 And carries in its bosom all the hope
 Of progress for our race in future years,
 Is valued less than minted gold;
 And men before the Golden Calf of Capital
 Bow down like serfs, like serfs adore.
 Whene'er depression comes, Humanity
 Must first be starved, or turned adrift,
 Before the "sacred rights of Capital"
 To interest and profits are denied.
 'Tis strange the "sacred rights of Labour" are
 So seldom talked about—the right to earn
 A sustenance for wife and child, to build
 A cottage home and live a human life.
 For God, we're told, so loved accumulated wealth
 That He created all the vast expanse
 Of this revolving globe for Capital alone,
 And then created *man*, its humble *serf*,
 To minister unto its luxuries.†
 Upon the anvil of Despair, bedewed
 With sweat and tears of toiling multitudes,
 Must Labour forge the mighty dollar for its use,
 And swell its hoards while toiling millions starve.
 Thus Capital neglects its sacred aim,
 To be the heart of Industry and pump
 The life-giving corpuscles of warm blood
 Through all its veins; to foster, not exploit.
 But, like the octopus, it spreads abroad
 Its suckers, seeking whom they may devour.

And Interest is an anti-social force
 Which rends the golden bonds of brotherhood—
 That sacred brotherhood of man Christ preached—
 And crushes Labour to support in luxury
 The few who neither toil, nor spin.
 Grim Architect of Poverty, it gives
 To wealth created in the time of Noah
 Immortal life and power in perpetuity

* Dante, *De Monarchia*.

† "The Church has been, since the days of the first Edward, the willing servant of State-craft, and has rarely raised its voice against wrong-doing" (Thorold Rogers's "Six Centuries of Work and Wages"). In Queensland to-day this is only too true.

To suck the veins of Living Labour;
Nor ever shares the loss arising from
Vicissitudes of seasons, drought and flood.

In plenteous years,
When Nature whispers to the bursting seed
Awake!! put forth each tender leaf and shoot
And robe the earth in loveliness;
In cloth of gold where waves the rip'ning corn,
In mingled green and gold where zephyrs sport
Among the tasselled maize; and richest green
Where over hill and dale the pasture spreads
Its rolling billows; deck its breast with ships
Where daisy-craft unfurl their painted sails of pink
And white and gaily ride at anchorage,
Moored side by side with clover blooms that toss
And heave whene'er the fitful summer winds
Bend low the supple masts;—then and then
Alone may Capital claim interest
In fair proportion as its use did tend
To raise the harvest. Most unjust it is
If Capital demand its pound of flesh
In years of iron skies, or devastating floods,
When all the earth is one vast wilderness.
In seasons such as these must Labour bow
His haughty head to Capital for bread,
And one by one the smiling homesteads fall
Into grim Shylock's greedy maw, and then
The independent yeomen cease to be.

And ev'n the mind of man
That, like the eagle, seeks to soar and scan
The whole circumference of this round earth
And all the worlds beyond—e'en that
Is shackled. Who may articulate the wrongs
Of his dumb, suffering brother in words that burn
Like living coals, made incandescent with
The sense of grievous wrong, but Capital,
Wide-minded Capital, will boycott him
And call him "agitator," worse than thief,
And sentence him to starve while tantalised
By looking at the wealth he may not earn?
But still each one must fight as Nelson fought,
His blind eye on Expediency, his eagle gaze

On that far-distant signal-post in heaven
Where Duty's signal flies. Nor cease till Death's
Cold fingers run the shot-torn ensign down
And waft the hero-craft into those silent ports
Where, after turmoil, there is peace.

What tongue can voice
The children's wrongs when Capital kidnaps
Them from their play and forces them to toil
And sweat in grimy factories before
Their lives, like tender buds, can well have spread
Their opening petals to the breeze?
The Arab slaver well may smile and deem
His crime but as a sin most fashionable
When "Christian gentlemen" can interweave
In spools of yarn the threads of children's lives.
The thread is long, for God upon the reel of life
Spun years a full three score and ten,
But factory shuttles flay the bobbin bare
In life's young spring, in reckless greed for gold.
And then a little starveling finds a grave
Among the many nameless graves which mark
The paupers' only resting place on earth.

Ah! once I dreamed
That Capital, in lieu of human serfs,
Essayed to harness eagles to its car.
The harness was of finest silk, embroidered o'er
With precious stones, and decked with waving plumes.
But they, the free-born wanderers of the sky,
Repulsed with scorn the gilded chains and scoffed
At wages-slavery. "Harness the winds," they cried,
"That whip the ocean surges into foam,
Bridle the mighty coursers of the deep
That lash their snow-white crests against the crags;
And cage the hurricane; but leave the eagle free."
Yet one of them, ensnared by cunning wiles,
Was harnessed to the car. In vain it lashed its wings
And tore the galling chains with beak and claws.
Then realising that it was indeed enslaved,
It drove its beak into its mighty heart
And tossed its life-blood to the winds, and cried,
"Bear witness, ye, before the mountain crags,

And hymn it to the rocks that I chose death
Itself to slavery." And ever since
The traveller in the rocky pass may hear
The storm wind sing—

The fetters of the slave
Must by himself be wrought;
Heroic men and brave,
Heroes of deed and thought,
Prefer a freeman's grave,
And on the dead men's plains
They spurn the slaver's chains.

Ah me! If men were men with lion hearts
And eyes that glow with Resolution's fire,
Like sunken coals, undimmed, unquenchable,
Oh! what a band of Labour Knights would ride
Abroad to rend Oppression's chains and hurl
That tyrant, Capital, from its despotic throne.
Then would the hearts of men be temples meet
For Liberty to dwell, nor be defiled.
Behind each brow would glow the noble light
Of God-like consciousness, and crown the face
With manly beauty, pow'r, and will.

Part II.

THE VILLAGE COMMUNE.

[The word "commune" is used here in its economical sense. It means a State entity, that is, a district endowed with wide powers of industrial, political, and judicial local self-government. It is by no means synonymous with Communism.]

But hark! amid the clanging of the chains
There sounds the magic watchword of the FREE!
Oh, Sons of Toil! from mountain peaks of Thought
The clarion voice of Liberty proclaims
That UNION alone can burst the chains
Of wages-slavery. Linked heart to heart
And hand to hand, with golden chords of Love
And Brotherhood, long-suff'ring Labour can

Dethrone that tyrant, Capital, and found
On earth the reign of Love and Peace.
Oh, brother mine! alone, on Competition's sea,
You drift, a human waif, tossed here and there
Like chips of straw, brow-beaten, buffeted,
By every wave of chance and circumstance.
But in the Village Commune—mark it well—
Freedom of Contract can no more forge gyves
Of your necessities, to make you slaves
And bend you to its arbitrary will.
Ah! once upon a mossy bank I dreamed
Of Queensland in the days to come, and saw
The vision beautiful of that fair time
When Labour holds the sceptred sway.
The Golden Calf of Capital, to which
We sacrifice our manhood, liberty,
And happiness, and even sell ourselves,
Our wives and children, as wage-slaves, was ground
To powder. On the ruins stood, erect
And tall, a "breathing marble," in three groups.
The first is Labour chained, his brow is wrung
With anguish, on his face is writ a look
Of dumb and ox-like suffering and toil.
The next, a poet, eyes and face aglow
With Revolution's fire, thrills his harp,
And hymns to Liberty a song aflame
With hatred of oppression. And, methinks,
The quivering chords still echo with his lay—

SLAVES! yet sons of Saxon sires,
Hark! the poet's thrilling lyres
Hymn the songs of new desires,
Wage-slaves, rend your chains!

Why be slaves to any lord,
Sweat and toil to swell his hoard,
Grim starvation your reward?
Wage-slaves, rend your chains!

Let the hoarse and sullen roar
Echo back from shore to shore,
"Labour is enslaved no more."
Wage-slaves, rend your chains!

Thunder! blow thy bugle harsh
From the top of heaven's arch,
Wake the dead to join the march.
Wage-slaves, rend your chains!

Lightning! coursing through your veins,
Heat red-hot the galling chains:
Till they *burn* if shame remains.
Wage-slaves, rend your chains!

Leap like bloodhounds from the leash,
Rage like lions in the breach,
Fight till Freedom's won for each.
Wage-slaves, rend your chains!

If ye fall, by glory led,
Ye but bivouac with the dead,
Where the patriots' tents are spread.
Wage-slaves, rend your chains!

But Liberty, with finger pointing to
The slave, and on her noble face a look
Of holy sympathy, demurs. Rash youth,
Forbear! His strength is that of Samson in
His prime, but *educate* him, and, like Samson, he
Will rend his chains!

The last is Labour educated, free!!
The face majestic, god-like, breathes the pow'r
Of thought. The light of Knowledge burns behind
The spacious brow, which, like the lanthorn's shade,
Subdues, but never can conceal, the flame;
The eyes, no longer dull, are windows of
A living soul; the muscles, taut, outcropping o'er
Both neck and arms, as sinewy, fibrous stems,
Of creeping plants encircle trunks of trees,
Bespeak the man of toil who holds that God
Has consecrated both the work of brain
And hand, and deems his manhood much enriched
By manual work. Sweet mannered, gentle in
His home with wife and child, considerate lest
His strength undisciplined should ever bruise
A weaker vessel; but when fighting for

His home and fatherland, an eagle-eyed
And lion-hearted man, who mocks at fear,
And on the pedestal I read inscribed,
In letters of pure gold: "True Progress makes
For Righteousness." And on the other side:
"For God and Home, Humanity and Fatherland."

And then a voice said: "Look around! behold
Production without glut, or anarchy;
And heaped-up Wealth without grim-visaged Want;
And Capital the friend of Labour in
His need; the world a hive of industry;
The palace is not levelled with the hut,
But we have made the hut a palace and
The world an Eden. Prisons and law courts
Have ceased to be. Christ's gentle words of love
And peace and brotherhood our only law.
The prick of conscience is the monitor,
And stern Remorse the sheriff grim, of those
Who break the moral law."

I looked around in mute astonishment.
The earth, arrayed in bridal dress of green
And gold, was smiling in the summer sun.
The gentle summer wind was perfumed with
The fragrant scent of wattles in full bloom.
From countless trellised vines the luscious grapes
In pendent clusters hung, and orange-groves
Were wreathed in blossom. All the fields were white
With ripening wheat; and here and there a patch
Of lucerne seemed a small green island, girt
About with seas of golden corn, whose waves
In rustling billows beat upon its shores.
Large flocks of sheep browsed o'er the meadowland.
The lazy kine were grazing all around,
Their udders, full of milk, ran cream for wine.
The isolated huts selectors built
Of slabs of wood, piled end on end, and thatched
With sheets of bark, had vanished, save a few
Preserved as relics of a barbarous past.
But in the middle of the homestead stood
A goodly pile—a central hall, and round
About a nest of little cottages.

For there a family ne'er separates,*
 But all united by "the crimson tie
 Of common kin" together dwell and form
 A Household in fraternal love and union.
 "The family divided has more pain
 Than joy," the proverb says. Each Household tills
 Its land in common for the members' use.
 Ten Households form a Tithing, and, in case
 Of need, co-operate to render mutual aid.
 Ten Tithings constitute a Hundred, and
 Ten Hundreds form the whole Commune. And thus
 The unit in industrial life is not
 The helpless individual, as with us,
BUT ALL THE COMMUNE, one vast family,
 Linked heart to heart, and hand in hand.

And each commune
 Has its own parliament, endowed with power,
 Almost unlimited, to govern all
 Its own affairs. 'Tis called the Folk-Moot,† and
 Is subject only to the Witenagemote,‡
 Or senate of the nation. All the lands,
 The forests, mines, and water-rights are vested in
 The local parliament of each commune.
 It levies taxes and constructs all public works,
 Allots the land, administers the law,
 And deems it but its simple duty to
 Provide machinery and factories
 Of every kind to work the lands and mines
For use, not profit, for the Commonweal.

And then I saw
 How basely we pervert God's bounty, till
 The very gifts which He designed to make
 This world an Eden, by man's greed
 Are made an instrument of hurt—for now
 Machinery displaces Labour, grinds the mass.

* The Gwentian, Dimetian, and Venedotian codes all represent the homestead (tyddyn) as a family holding. De Laveleye remarks the same of the Servian Zadrugas existing to-day. It will, doubtless, develop into that here when village settlements are organised upon Socialistic principles.

† The meeting of the people.

‡ The assembly of the wise.

But in the Village Commune—mark it well—
 The water-sprites that play with huge mill wheels;
 The elves of air, who fan themselves with windmills' sails:
 That sturdy giant, Steam; and Electricity,
 That rides upon the lightning, work for Labour, not
 Against him.

And money there fulfils its proper use—
 A medium and counter of exchange—
 Their sages writ in books: "Creations of
 The hand and brain will perish with the years.
 Then why should gold, which is but Labour in
 Another form, be made immortal, and,
 Like grain that's sown upon the fields of Time,
 Increase, through interest, from year to year?
 'Tis thus that Fortune, blind, predestines babes,
 Within the womb of Time, to affluence,
 To purple and fine linen, *without toil*;
 And those *who toil* to Want, to Slavery,
 And 'looped and windowed raggedness.'"

But greatest boon of all
 Is this: Communes awaken in the hearts
 Of men a love surpassing words for home
 And fatherland. And thus each Household is
 A bright example of the golden truth:
 "The family is the Heart's own fatherland,"*
 A small republic of fraternal love
 And happiness, content and industry.
 The wolf of famine there can never crouch
 Among the dying embers of the hearth;
 The young maintain the old in honoured rest,
 For Wisdom comes with Winter's snows.
 There Charity incarnate dwells and soothes
 The pillow of the sick with loving hand.

Ah, brother mine!
 And you, my comrades in the west, who roam
 The endless plains from year to year and never drink
 The sparkling wine of woman's love, or in
 The early morn see violets unfold

* Mazzini: "Essay on the Duty of Man."

Their deep-blue petals in the children's eyes,
 Is this a phantasy, a poet's dream?
 Philosophers, whose teeming brains fashion
 Communities, shape laws for men, first build
 Their worlds with bricks of thought; first print
 Their books with metal types, and then the settle
 Becomes the book, printed on rock with living ty
 Of men and women. Thus our Saxon fathers
 Printed this—the book upon the old Communes—
 And christened it the Book of Freedom.
 Its binding was the eternal woods, its pages were
 The wide-extending fields; free men, not slaves,
 Its living types. And I, the poet of
 A slavish day, but reconstruct, in dreams,
 The fair Co-operative Commonwealth
 They built in oak when men were truly free.
 The secret was the Brotherhood of Man,
 The reign of Love, Freedom, Equality.

Then oh, my brother! feed the lamp of Love
 And Brotherhood, and gently tend the flame,
 For Love must be the rock on which to build
 The Commonwealth and Temple of Humanity,
 For ever to endure.

Let lust for gold and Competition cease,
 That each of us, all baser elements
 O'erthrown, may be a living, Christ-like soul.
 Let Labour's Cause, the service of humanity,
 Be unto you the end and aim of life;
 Be Labour Knights, and serve the Cause till death,
 Where'er the bugle sounds to free the slave,
 Where'er the blood-red banner waves, and Christ,
 The Socialist, is marching on, spur, lance in rest;
 There let the war-cry of the Order peal—
 For God and Home, Humanity and Fatherland.