

SO THE RAILWAY KINGS ITCH FOR AN EMPIRE, DO THEY?

By "A RED-HOT STRIKER."

(Being a letter to Mr. W. M. Grosvenor, whose slander of working-people in the "International Review" has stirred me up mightily.)

SCRANTON, PA., September 15, 1877.

COMPLIMENTS to Mr. Grosvenor.

So you and Jay Gould want an Empire, do you?

I'm glad you've shown your hand. It's what I've been expecting that some of you fellows would do.

You run up Tom Scott for "perpetual President," do you?

"Railway managers not to resist, but to *run*, the government," are they?

"Despotism," is it?

Jay Gould will give a million, will he?

And you and Tom will go him one better, I suppose?

And there are a few others—you say "in every land the *rich* are the few"—that will go and do likewise?

And you think you and these few will get what you want? I suppose you argue that these owners of "four thousand millions of capital" can play the devil with the country, unless they have their own way. They've already done it in many States, you say. They can buy up or crush Congress as they please, same as they have done the Legislatures. They "can make and unmake Senators and Representatives," can they?

Well now, after all this, ain't you ashamed of yourself to go talking about "free institutions" and the "hope of patriotic citizens?"

Hope?

Your hope?

Tom Scott's?

"Patriotic citizens"!

—Merciful God!

Devil take me if I don't think such damned rascality ought to be investigated!

A sweet mess of it could be pumped out of you fellows, once get all of you before one of them Congressional Committees where you'd have to squeal on one another or sleep in a jail. I hope to thunder somebody'll start that sort of a thing after you. Ben Butler would go for you hot. Then we'd see the fun. "Four thousand millions" of ill-gotten gains squirming like lamprey eels!

Ha!

Now I've read your article through from beginning to end. I don't know as you're a Railway owner or not, but I can see well enough that you *belong* to the Railway. You're trying to put its best foot foremost. If this is its *best* foot, what in the name of thunder must t'other one be? I blush through all the cinders and sweat my face ever carried to think an American citizen could produce an article like that, and that it could get a place in a respectable American publication.

I suppose you are, with your own sort, a fair sort of a man. I'm willing to think so. And Tom Scott is. Every body is, — with their own sort. "There's honor 'mong thieves," they say. I've had my eyes open, and know pretty near how such matters go. The rich few ain't so cussedly bad at heart, when you can get at their hearts. The slave-holders wa'n't. They back up the churches, give a little — or a good deal, it may be — for the poor, take good care of their own families, and look after, like as not, a lot of poor relations. All of which would be a feather in their cap, if every body else didn't do the same thing, far as they can, and sometimes better: the woman that Jesus told about, for instance, who put in her mite, — *all she had*. It wa'n't enough to build a cathedral with, but she did more'n A. T. Stewart's done, if it wa'n't. I say the rich few are good enough to their own sort. But they think people that work for day-wages are run in a different mould. I remember my father got devilish mad when Southerners used to talk of "greasy mechanics," and set themselves up for gentlemen. But I see now-a-days the same

stuck-upishness all over the North. The churches have got it bad. They're full of it. And when it gets in them, it's a sure thing; it's in everywhere. They say a stream don't rise above a fountain, and, if religion ain't the fountain of the stream of human decency, what is? What sets people up is great riches. The more riches, the more religion of the fashionable sort. It gets first-class pews, first-class houses, first-class turn-outs, and first-class every thing. That's what makes the meanest cuss going first-class. But it isn't so much they care about the first-class thing of itself. Oh, no! just let every body else be able to buy the same, and you'd see they'd much prefer a pew in church further back, where they wouldn't have to break their necks looking up to the preacher. It's to keep up a distinction between them and the rest of mankind. If there wasn't "greasy mechanics" and common workmen to look up to them; if there wasn't a rivalry going on between themselves to outdo each other in making a show,—why, as the Bible says, they'd let the bigger part of their riches "take wings and fly away"—and good riddance, too. A rich man is one who is a darn sight better off than every body else in the eyes of most of the world. As you say, "the rich in every land are the few." If things took a turn, and the *poor* in every land was the few, it would be a great calamity: one fellow would be as good as another; and that would stop the wheels of civilization quicker!

Now, Mr. Grosvenor, Tom Scott, Vanderbilt, and the rest of you who are "the few," let us come to the point. I will examine Mr. Grosvenor's production. It's called "The Communist and the Railway." It's written "by the light of flames at Pittsburgh." I must make allowance for that, I suppose. Once I went to a theatre to see a play where they had a red light turned on, and every thing looked different. I suppose it did to Tom Scott. And it didn't only *look* so,—it *was* so. No wonder Mr. Grosvenor exclaims, "The Communist [or the devil] is here." Yes, Mr. Grosvenor, it *is* here. You may call it "Communist," or whatever else you please; I call it something that *means business*: and, though it's poor, it's got pluck and big endurance. It has undertaken to deliver this land, and to keep it *for ever free from the curse of poverty*. It means there shall be

one land where the rich ain't the few. And it intends to "fight it out on that line," if it takes a hundred years.

Smoke *that*, sir!

In order to put what I have to say better, I will set my thoughts down in one, two, three, striking order.

1. You say, "Enemy of all government, Communism is the most dangerous to free government." Now, I want to settle first what the Communist is, for, if he is the infernal machine you say he is, that's enough; nobody wants any thing to do with him. But you call him the "gaunt Communist." Thereby I suspect something. If you had said he was fat and sleek-looking, well-fed and full of wine, I would have said to myself, he must be a thunderin' villain to go about making "flames at Pittsburgh" and other places, pillaging and murdering, &c. But when you say he is *lean*, or "gaunt," why, sir, I settle down and chew that kind of a cud for a few minutes in this fashion. *Gaunt*, is he? And he "has placed his foot on *American* soil"! Well, sir, it's *too bad*. I say it, and I mean it. There oughtn't to be a "gaunt" man or woman in the whole American country! There may be them that is so by nature, but that ain't the sort you mean. You mean them that have got "gaunt" because they haven't got rich. You mean people who ain't half fed or half clothed: and there's plenty of 'em; for, as you remark, in every land the *rich* are the *few*." Now, the Communist is "gaunt," and the railway manager isn't. Don't this show the way the wind blows? He is a Communist *because* he is "gaunt," isn't he? Well, a man that is "gaunt" will do a good many things a fat man wouldn't. He gets unsettled, crazy-like, and he ain't so responsible for his deeds as a full-fed, fat fellow is. So you must knock off a little on that score, mustn't you? To think that such fellows are in America anyhow, after all the blessings of our "free institutions"!—well, it goes agin' the grain; it makes a fellow squirm inwardly. I mean people who are poor, and have always got to stay so; and, when a scrimping-time comes, have got to scrimp down to hard-pan, and nothing in it to fry! They're the "*gaunt*" fellows that make up the Commune, that's giving you that are *fat* just now such a scare. Brutus Booth played Cæsar once in the town where I worked, and a fellow that heard it told me that Cæsar was afraid of certain chaps in those days that was

"lean-looking." So I suppose, being a smart man, he could put two and two together as well as you fellows who're after an Empire now-a-days. You want an Empire because of the "Commune;" and this "Commune" has come into existence because the great majority of the people are "lean-looking," and have such a hard time to get along in the world and make both ends meet. In short, the Commune represents the poor. (Just keep in mind, it isn't my word, but your's. I let you name it, and take the name because it's as good as any other.) I know every paper I take up most has a lot to say about the French Commune, and its getting started here in America; and the picture painted is frightful. Now, I don't know all about the Commune in France, but, since my attention's been turned to it, I've been reading up some, and I have read enough to be willing to bet a hundred to one, if I had it, that the French Communists have been lied about unmercifully. Things got done in their frenzy that wa'n't right, but that's nothing against the principles they stand by. Only an enemy will judge a cause by the evil that gets done, not set down in the bill. But I don't care what is done, or how wrong the ideas the people start with; what I look at, and what I know, is, they've got a good cause, and sooner or later they'll hit the mark and do the right thing. It ain't to be expected that they'll do every thing as it should be at the start. Who ever did? You challenge me to compare "the Communist and the Railway." The way to do it is, first, to see what is the idea of both, what each of them demands. Now, I say, — and I challenge you, or any other fellow like you, to show I'm not right, — I say the "Commune" represents the cause of the poor in this: that its object is to give every human born into this world a chance to live; live long, and die well. And I say of the "Railway," it represents the few rich who don't want everybody to have a chance for a decent living, but intend to grind out of the rest of the world all the wealth possible for their own special benefit. I say this, and don't fear you can show the contrary. The difference is, the one is struggling to make it possible for all the world to get on; the other is doing its damndest to make it impossible for anybody to get on, save the few rich it represents. Let the public judge which side is most worthy, — as it will judge in good time, and don't you forget it.

2. Now, sir, I have shown what I think the main idea of the Communist is. I have put it up against the idea of the Railway. And I swear the one is for humanity, and the other isn't. Now then, which of the two is most dangerous to free institutions? I needn't argue the point: your own confession condemns your side outright. You say in so many words: "The necessity of self-protection against the Communistic spirit in Congress will band together instantly all railway owners and managers, not to resist, but to *run*, the Government." "Four thousand millions of capital" will destroy "free institutions" to perpetuate its chance to impoverish the world! Col. Tom Scott shall be "perpetual President of the United States with powers of dictator!"

Ain't you smart?

But you hope that "another alternative may be found." Yes, you hope the people will settle down and let your kind of capitalists have things all their own way. You hope they will vote such "free institutions" as will let the "Railway" scoop up this country for its own. If they don't (and I don't guess you much think they will), then Mr. Dictator Scott will take hold and "run the government" himself. Now, if you think you can frighten these United States by such threats, let me tell you, you are swollen up in your own conceit mightily: the United States don't scare worth a cent. But I'm damn glad you've made them. The country can see now without blinders, for you've pulled 'em off. It can see sideways as well as ahead, and that's what won't, in the long run, be good for you. We're going to see all round this question before the end comes.

Mind that, will you?

— Which is most dangerous to free institutions?

Not the "Communist." Oh, no, honey!

The most dangerous?

The "Railway," — beyond the shiver of a doubt.

The "Communist" is the Nation. It includes all the people, you and Tom Scott to boot. It stands for fair play and fair business.

The "Railway's" motto — "In every land the rich are the few" — goes by the board.

The "Communist's" motto — "In every land the rich are all that labor" — is coming to the front.

You don't like that.

Why?

It'll rob you of your power to plunder.

I've been told that this country was bought of the Indians for a few beads and bad whiskey. There was some sense in that, for the Indians didn't own the country anyhow. But to buy labor for a song, as the "Railway" wants to do, don't go down any longer. I heard a fellow say, "It takes a great many poor men to make one rich man." But there'll come an end of that.

You bet! Stick a pin there, will you?

You pretend to think free institutions are in danger. That ain't your sorrow. It's that free institutions don't jibe with your notion about the "rich few." The freer they are, the worse you'll be off. The fact is, you don't like free institutions. It's all a pretence, in hopes you can make an end of 'em. If you can only scare the people with your cry of "Commune," you imagine they'll give up every thing, — liberty and all.

They won't.

Your next move is a standing army. Get that big enough, as Cæsar did, and Napoleon, and as MacMahon has, and then you think you'll be almighty.

You'll never get it.

If you do, there'll be a sorry day for this country, and for you chaps in particular.

You'll pretend to protect life and property, and keep order for the "dear people."

It won't go down.

Cæsar cried "Commune," or something like it; Napoleon cried it; MacMahon is crying it; and now Tom Scott is going it.

Well, sir, Cæsar is dead; Nap—both Naps are dead; MacMahon is dying; and Thomas Scott never'll be crowned!

The game's been played once too much, even in France.

Please to warn him. With all his property, he'll be only poor, feeble, used-up Tom, if he ever butts agin' the United States!

Enough on that score.

3. You have gone into figures. I suppose you think figures won't lie. It depends on who uses 'em, I'm thinking. But let that be as it will,—all your figuring won't convince anybody things are right, or anywhere near right, or ever have been right.

Take your best showing, and I've only got to turn from it to the way things are to upset the whole of it. Your slate, over which you have scratched your head for hours and days may be, is as useless as a last year's wren's nest. It don't touch the real point anywhere, which is, under no system Tom Scott will devise will the "Railway" come to honest terms. That ain't the "Railway's" desire, for, if it was, "in every land the rich" *wouldn't* be "the few." In other words, the few capitalists will never yield, and never have yielded, more to workmen than they're obliged to. So long as they can say the men are not *actually starving*, they think the public will tolerate their iniquity.

Your figuring comes to this: wages have increased over wages paid before the war from thirty-five to ninety per cent.; and the cost of living has not gone up in the same proportion. Prices have gone up some, but not so much as wages. Well, I don't care to dispute that. It's no matter. It may be as you say, or, as Mr. Arthur says, just the contrary; but no matter. Gone up or down, three things are as plain as a nose or a man's face:

1. Wages never've been equal to the needs of the working-men.
2. They're not now.
3. The "Railway" don't mean they ever shall be.

I shan't have space enough to go into this, but only to state it. But right here comes in as well as anywhere a reply to your silly talk about the "favorite theory" of Communists that "the world owes every man a living." You call this "a pretext for indiscriminate pillage."

Shame on you!

You're a liar, sir! I say it boldly, for it's better to call you that than a fool. Now listen to a little reason.

They say,—it's been said by most every body for thousands of years,—God said it to the first man,—"The world owes every man a living." It's a short way of saying, every man and every woman has a right to have a chance to earn a comfortable living. The only ground you have for saying "pillage," is that the "Railway" has *pillaged* until Tom Scott is fat and his workmen are lean. It's the effort to put a stop to this that you call "hatred of the rights of property." I thank God there is such a "hatred," and that it's spreading, too. Hatred of the rights of what

you *call* property. What a man *carns*, if that is property, *nobody* hates that, — except the “Railway’s” would-be-flourishing capitalists.

(In my heat I called you a liar. I’ll take it back. You’re not a fool either. You’re only *ignorant*.)

You object to a man’s “having such a living as suits his tastes and habits.” Don’t Tom Scott? Don’t you, or don’t you want to? Do you and Tom Scott earn it any more than the “workman of to-day who thinks he must have, if not his cigar, his beer, or a warm dinner at an eating-house, a great many other things which did not enter into the cost of living twenty years ago”?

Bully for that workman! He “must have,” and he *will* have. That’s where we’re coming to. We’re not going back on this one step. We’re going ahead.

Put Tom Scott in a coal-mine for the space of twelve months, and see if he wouldn’t think he ought to have “a glass of beer and a warm dinner!”

Go there yourself!

You say the strikes of the last few years brought around for a time higher wages. “Wages were secured for a time such as were never paid before, in this or any other land, for similar service.” And then you say, “As long as this basis yielded champagne for the ordinary miner and silk for his wife, there was peace.”

Why shouldn’t the “ordinary miner” have “champagne” as well as Tom Scott?

Or you?

Is he a slave?

Somebody’s got to do the work he’s doing. He’s got head enough on him to do it, and to know he wants champagne and his wife wants a silk dress. And if anybody in God’s world deserves such things, *he* does!

“Room higher up,” you say, for those things.

Is there?

How many Tom Scotts can this world support?

Then, *what’s* “higher up”?

I say, Tom Scott ought to take his turn in a coal-mine!

Would he be *lower down*?

No, sir! for he’d then do an honest day’s work. And “an

honest man,” I’ve heard it said, “is the noblest thing God’s done.”

I say, if any man’s to be paid for hard and honest work that’s doing the rest of the world good, it’s the workers down in the coal-mine.

“Ordinary miners”!

If I cried “shame” as often as you deserve, it’d be all the time.

There’s a good deal more in your article I’d like mighty well to overhaul, but “time’s up.” I don’t want to stop, though, till I’ve freed my mind a little as to what is to be done in the future.

Well, sir, in the first place, the end of “striking” isn’t yet. And there’ll be rioting most likely on to the end of the old chapter.

These things will be, because they’re the natural effect of the “Railway’s” folly. You may argue till doomsday that it ain’t right, but you won’t stop it. You may roll up your army till it’s big as MacMahon’s, — you’ll only keep it under, till some fine day when you’ll see again “by the light of flames at Pittsburgh.” You are wasting time discussing the *right* of “strikes” and of “mobs.” Take ‘em alone, and they *ain’t* right. But put ‘em down in among what you call “civilization,” with property all in the hands of the few, and the rest on a sliding scale from living hand-to-mouth down to crazy hunger and filthy nakedness, and they look just about right. People say, “Oh, you shouldn’t do so! You’ve got the ballot; why don’t you act in a *peaceable* way?”

Got the ballot, — fudge!

All the ballots in the universe can’t make a man decent who isn’t. We don’t want to go to law every hour in a day for a fair shake. What justice can an “ordinary miner” get in your courts with Tom Scott’s backing of four thousand millions of dollars against him?

No!

There’s something better’n law, — bigger, higher, more to the point.

It’s the square idea got into the people’s heads. And that’s what we’re working for. That’s what a “strike” means. It’s higher wages, if we can get it, and a rumpus till we do. It’s

the only way we can get the public by the ear. There's no newspapers that will publish our "stuff,"—that's what they call it. But they'll send reporters a million miles to report what we *do*. We mean to bring things to *judgment*.

We say, "Tom Scott, come into court!"

We've got him there now, and we mean to keep him there.

—But I must come to the end.

The future is sure.

These United States ain't going to peg out in consequence of "four thousand millions of capital in the hands of a few."

Free institutions will be saved, and made *freer* still. I go back to the beginning of your article:—

"In every land the rich are the few. But a republic is government by the many. That form of government will wither and die like a girdled tree, if the thousands who pay taxes get no protection from the millions who govern."

Now, it's too bad for the "few" to pay taxes and let the "many" govern. We propose a remedy for that. We want to fix it so the many can pay taxes as well as govern. They do now. Only, by the hocus pocus of "capital," the property they earn goes into the pockets of the few: so, of course, it's paid *by the few*, but *for* the many that rightly own it. It's no more'n fair the many should do their own tax-paying.

Now, I should say, if there's going to be any *withering* done, that form of government will wither and die like a girdled tree where the many who govern don't have the wherewithal to pay their *own* taxes.

But it'll wither in this way: it'll stop making laws to protect the few in controlling property they never earned, but *pillaged by speculation*.

A few less laws, not more!

We'll risk our hides, just call off the federal dogs,— "warriors," some call 'em.

It's a beautiful picture you draw. It makes one's eyes water, it's so beautiful:—

"Day after day [to all eternity, you should have said] all over this broad land, when men quite as industrious and worthy go gaily to their work, thousands of little tin pails glisten in the morning sunlight."

Oh! *how* touching!

Those "little tin pails,"— cold dinners!

You're so good at it, why didn't you draw another picture? I'm not so good a hand as you at it, but I'll try.

All over this broad land,—no, here and there, once in a while, over this broad land,—men not quite so industrious and worthy go gaily to their work,—I suppose it's "work" such as 'tis,—and—and "thousands of little tin pails"—no, I give it up; there's no "little tin pails" in *this* picture, but I shall keep gettin' 'em in.

Well, no matter. The fact is, the market for "little tin pails" is going to grow day by day beautifully less in the future.

What! you and Tom would have an Empire to save the "little tin pails"?

—All right!

—Try your luck.

—Agitate it.

—Have a "little tin pails" Convention!

—Do your biggest.

—It'll all work in.

—Write again for the "International."

—Tell Tom to keep it up in the "North American."

—It's all right.

—It'll come out square.

—We've got you fellows agoing.

—And that's why the "Great Strike" is a success!

Do you hear me?

All we wanted was to get you fellows talking,—put you on the defensive. We'll talk back, and everybody shall judge.

There's nothing like giving every thing an airing.

Let in the *light!* A *plenty* of it! We don't fear. We want it,—especially, *those boys down in the coal mines!*

That's been our trouble; we couldn't get a hearing. We had to "strike" for it.

Now, the country'll listen!

NOTE.—We beg to say, observing the highly judicious course of our venerable contemporary, the "North American Review," when similarly circumstanced recently, and quoting its words,—happy thus to avoid compromising even in the remotest manner our well-understood conservative position,—that "in this case, as in all others, the Editor disclaims responsibility for the opinions of contributors, whether their articles are signed or anonymous." *Tros Tyriusque mihi nullo discrimine agetur!*