

THE FIRST PHASE—1911

PART THREE

WAGES, 1911-1921

“Labour is prior to and independent of capital. Capital is only the fruit of labour and could never have existed if labour had not first existed. Labour is the superior of capital and deserves much the higher consideration.”—ABRAHAM LINCOLN (Message to Congress, 1861).

Chapter VI

THE FIRST PHASE—TO 1914

IT is now my proud privilege to unfold before your eyes the struggle, which was to go on for years, of shop workers to improve their economic position in the State ; which was to embrace all sections of shop life in its endeavours ; to pulsate from Land's End to John o' Groat's ; to have its ups as well as its downs, its victories and defeats, its exaltations and its sacrifices. From 1911 the first phase gathers force until the climax of 1921, when the first of the three great Tory conspiracies to save their own persons, privileges, and powers at the expense of the working people of this country, brought it to a temporary halt. That movement, nevertheless, was to persist in spite of the plots of 1926 and 1931, until at first voluntary and afterwards legal machinery eradicates under-payment and lays the foundation for a better condition of things. The canvas is indeed a vast one, for do not forget that those whose heroic struggles are portrayed against it numbered, in fact, one-sixth of the wage and salaried workers of the land. Never forget, either, 'twas but a span since the time when shop assistants wore a top hat and frock coat.

But let me justify my accusation of Tory plots. In case there be any who say I ought not to intrude high politics in this survey, I answer, if you are to understand the struggle properly you cannot omit from your consideration those activities and decisions which surround it, influence it, and maybe decide it.

In 1921 commenced the after-war slashing and cutting of national expenditure, social services, and wages, with the "Geddes Axe" as one of the discriminatory sharp-edged and ruthless weapons. Then in 1925 Churchill, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, put us back on the gold standard, i.e., back to 1914. Afterwards he could say he had been wrongly advised, but it led to a shameful reduction

in miners' wages, and to the General Strike of 1926, with further reductions all over the land. Those two movements cut off national development and reconstruction, like a withering frost on crops in spring. British industry was not to recover until to-day. Mass unemployment was continuous and cancerous. The lowest recorded was 1,210,000 in 1928, and the highest 2,980,000 in 1933. In 1938, the year of rearmament, it was 1,831,000, to which, however, must be added 30,866 agricultural workers, 9,013 juveniles under sixteen, and those in receipt of indoor and outdoor relief numbering 557,294. It is a horrible picture. Whole towns stood idle, not for one year, but for many: whole towns of skilled men deprived of work and all that goes with it.

The nation was in decline. By 1931 the trade balance had a gap of £180,000,000. Labour, which was then the Government, in a minority position without power in Parliament, was called upon to reduce the pay of the unemployed. In my hearing, Dr. Sprague, of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, who was adviser to the Bank of England, said that wages in Great Britain and the U.S.A. must suffer an immediate reduction of 15 per cent., and must eventually be brought down to the level of agricultural communities. The Government sought a loan in America to stop the gap. Now let the Rt. Hon. Tom Johnson, M.P., speak. This quotation is taken from *Hansard* of September 25th, 1931. "One of the memories in recent months that abides with me, and I hope I shall never forget it, is that of twenty men and one woman, representing the Government of this country, standing one black Sunday evening in a Downing Street garden, awaiting a cable from New York as to whether the pound was to be saved or not, and whether the condition would be insisted upon that the unemployed would be cut 10 per cent."

So what the Labour people refused to do the Tory Party did with positive gusto. The third post-war slashing took place, the House of Commons leading off with a cut of 10 per cent. in their own salaries.

There, then, was the Tory plan in operation, a plan not of organised reconstruction of the national life based on

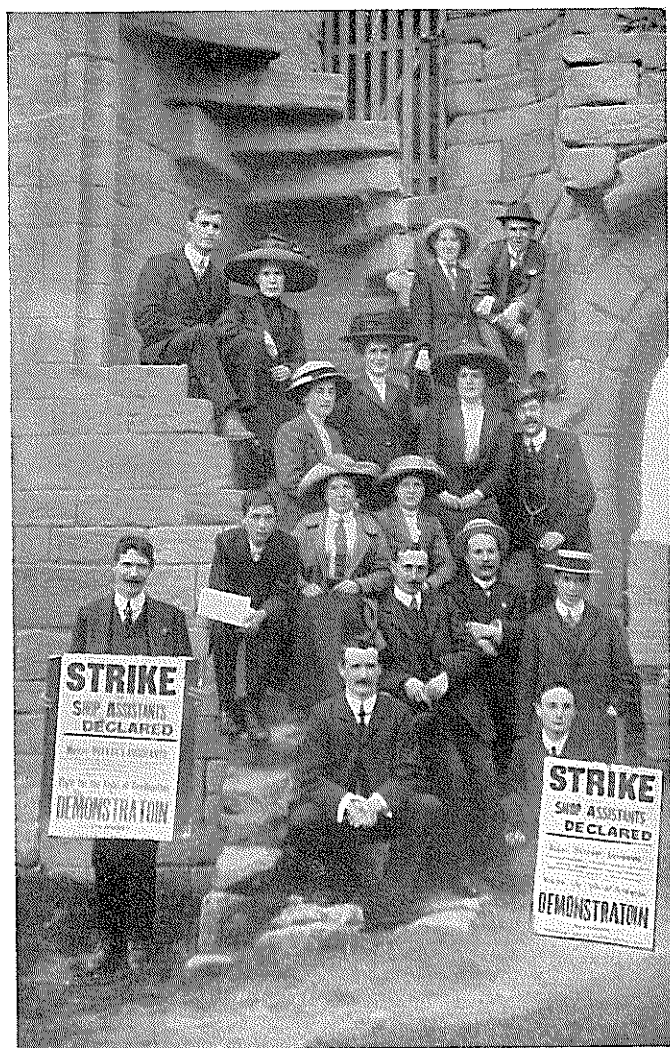
increased production and fair shares, but a sordid destruction of a very considerable section of the population so that the others could have more abundantly of what there was. "Let the best man win," indeed!

These things deserve to be told here, not only because of the undoubted ill effect they had upon the struggle of shop workers, but because, unless it is told again and again, the people may forget, and those who have grown up and come into shop life and industry since may never learn. The Tory Party should be scourged with these facts, so that never again shall millions of our fellow-citizens be made into a sacrificial atonement for the sins of us all. To watch those "best men" winning from this distance of time is not at all a nice spectacle.

Piled up in front of me on the table at which I am seated, are forty-two years of bound volumes of the *Shop Assistant*. They are a gift to me, since I commenced to write, from a very old friend and colleague, W. E. Lockett. He joined the Union in the 1890s, in Leicester. He is now, at 75 years of age, still an active member, a commercial traveller, and still working. His valuable gift has made my task much less difficult than it would have been, and so I would like here to acknowledge my indebtedness to him.

I have gone through those volumes one by one and page by page. I have made notes of the matters which are required for the purpose of this survey, and have slipped pieces of paper in between the pages with further notes upon them. Those pieces of paper confront me now. They are sparse indeed up to the years 1904-7, when they begin to bunch thickly, thin out again to the year 1911, when they gradually increase in number till 1919-20. In those years the slips are so thick they seem to be between every page, and then it is as if a knife had pared them off and whole years pass by with never one slip to indicate a crucial activity. The onward march had come to a sudden halt. The resurgence had abruptly ceased. The "best men" had won—for the time being.

Without this explanation the subsequent *dénouement* of the struggle towards economic emancipation on the part of



*Employees of Beavans of Byker,
Drapers, on strike for Trade Union
recognition, 1912*

shop workers does not make sense. From 1911 it should have continued steadily, or more accurately perhaps (since these movements are not even and symmetrical) eased forward by fits and starts, until to-day. It should have gathered magnitude as it went. It had all that pregnant promise. But after ten years of restive advance it stopped suddenly.

That the movement was a positive uprising on the part of shop workers is shown by the number of strikes which took place. There were a dozen strikes altogether against "living-in." Apart from the "living-in" strikes there were 8 from 1904 to the war of August, 1914, and 58 from 1914 to the end of 1920. There were 7 from 1920 to the time the tide turned in 1935, and 12 from that year to 1939.

The first recorded strike in which the Union was called upon to take a part, was that of 33 out of 37 entering clerks employed at Pawsons and Leafs, St. Paul's Churchyard, wholesale textile warehousemen, a firm whose name is a household word throughout the drapery trade. The year was 1899. The staff were not members of the Union. They came to the Union after they struck. The *Star* newspaper opened its columns, not only to report the stoppage fully, but to raise funds on their behalf. The Union did the rest. There was considerable public sympathy and support, for the strike was a first-class sensation.

Entering clerks worked at that time in basements of the City warehouses—rather smelly, ill-ventilated places, with gas as the illuminant all the year round. In the season very long hours were worked, and they were known as "City Lighthouses." Their goods were "entered" and invoiced to customers. Many is the time I had to wait smelling that quite unique odour composed of textiles, close-by lavatories and what not, hearing the clerks call out to other clerks, seated high up on pews or desks—"thirtie-seven - eight - twentie - one - farthing - Foulard - Sam - Lewis-Holborn-all." A beautiful sing-song. Anyway some of Pawsons' clerks were so thoroughly fed up that they sent in a petition to the firm and when two of the petitioners were sacked the rest ceased work, and with no resources it was a remarkably plucky thing to do.

A meeting was organised at the Y.M.C.A., Aldersgate Street, City, with John Burns, M.P. (six years later he was to be the first working man Cabinet Minister) as the chief speaker. It was at that meeting he spoke of shop workers who were expected "to dress like dukes on the wages of a dustman, be eternally young and infernally civil, and to have the polished manners of a Cabinet Minister combined with the salary of a footman."

The terms of settlement, though a victory for the men, the *Star* and the Union, are an indication of the conditions then prevailing. "During the busy season no entering-room clerk to work longer than twelve hours a day, or later than 1.30 p.m. on a Saturday. Shipping clerks to do no home trade work to fill up time in slack season."

But why strike at all? To say that all strikes are a breakdown of reason is an over-simplification. They are that, but much more than that. Positively they are an assertion of human right: the right to be a man, a human being, and not a grovelling beast. The propertyless man gathers strength to assert himself, in the company of others in like case with himself. The conspiracy of which Thorold Rogers so eloquently and powerfully wrote consisted in denying man the company of his fellows and the power which arose therefrom. For such is the power and strength of property, and such is the poverty and weakness of the propertyless, that they become in outlook and in life two worlds, and the only way a partial restoration of the balance between the two worlds can be secured is in the strength the propertyless acquire through association with their fellows. Clashes occur from this assertion of strength. The wise amongst employers deal with it on the basis of reason; the obstinate on the basis of force.

In 1919 the staff of the Army and Navy Stores in London to the number of 4,000 came out on strike. During the negotiations, which lasted nearly all night, I asked Admiral Hamilton, the chairman, how it was they allowed things to get to such a pass as to make a strike inevitable. Said he, "We did not think our employees had the necessary guts." There then you have another reason for strikes—the philosophy of "guts." Now this philosophy is much

more prevalent than you might think, for it is a fact that employers will give under the threat of force that which they would not give as a process of reason. For every strike of shop workers that took place there were a dozen cases of a strike all but happening, with concessions at the eleventh hour and the fifty-ninth minute. Some employers will not concede to a demand unless they are certain the employees are strong enough to compel them to yield.

An application for the operation of a programme of wage rates and working conditions was sent to Peter Keevil's, the well-known wholesale grocers and provision merchants. Peter Keevil sent for Congerton, the chief Shop Steward. Congerton was employed at the bacon stoves—both he and old Peter were great cards. Every now and then Peter would sack Congerton. Peter, seeing him about, remarked, "I thought I sacked you last week." "Yes," replied Congerton, "I decided to come back." On this occasion he sent for him and said, "I've got this demand from the Union, Congerton." "Yes, sir." "Are they all in the Union, Congerton?" "Yes, sir." "Are you the Shop Steward?" "Yes, sir." "And they are all organised?" "Yes, sir." "Well go and disorganise them, Congerton." "What, tell 'em to leave the Union, guv'nor?" "Yes, Congerton." "What, now, sir?" "Yes, Congerton." "Right, sir." Away goes Congerton, and after a while comes back. "Well, Congerton?" "It's no go, guv'nor." "What do you mean, Congerton?" "They won't leave the Union, sir." "They won't; then they are disloyal to me, Congerton." Congerton, in a pained tone, answers, "Don't say that, guv'nor. They're loyal to both."

Here is another example of this frame of mind. We put in a claim on behalf of the staff of Woolland Brothers, Knightsbridge, the high-class drapers. The general manager was Mr. Vick, who was the under-manager of Peter Robinson's when I was employed there. He knew me quite well, of course, for he often used to come into the silk department and "chip" me about the Union. When he got our claim he called all the staff together in the Costumes after business one evening. He extolled himself and the firm as employers, he decried Trade Unions as anti-patriotic,

and their members as not quite nice people to know. He asked them, "Do you intend to follow that German or me?" No one answered. "Hands up those who support me." No hands went up. Then there stepped forth the staff superintendent, who said: "It's no use going on like that, Mr. Vick, no one here will say or do anything, our case is in the hands of the Union." Here again the staff had gained guts. So I was sent for, and came away with more than we had asked.

A claim had been submitted on behalf of the warehouse staff of the Star Tea Co. The general manager sent for George Wright, the secretary of the wholesale grocery section, and said: "Look here, Wright. I've got that claim, but I won't pay until I have to—you have them all out on strike and if they will all go out and stick out you win and I'll pay." So George whistled for them to come out, and out they came, and the blockade became so effective that nothing got past the pickets, the only thing allowed in being some cases of eggs, the straw of which was well saturated with sea water. Nice little potential bombs! That did it. The firm paid, and George went about for a long time like a dog with two tails.

Here is just one more instance. The staff of the Civil Service Supply Association (now the Civil Service Stores, the Strand, London) were all in the Union, so the usual application was put in on their behalf. The general manager, Colonel Watts-Allen, refused the application, but agreed to concede to it if the staff by secret ballot decided to vote for a strike. The ballot was taken on the premises and resulted in an overwhelming majority in favour. Negotiations took place and a settlement was reached. Of course, it takes guts to strike. Look what there is to lose! Nevertheless, the fact that between 1904 and 1939 there were 97 strikes, some of them large and of major importance, reveals a determination on the part of shop workers to win their way to freedom.

How is it that with all the thunderous agitation which surrounded the questions of hours, "living-in" and radius agreements, hardly anything is heard about the subject of wages? There were continual references, naturally, to the

low wages being paid to shop workers. The answer is that there was no policy. I rather think that, just as was the case with "living-in," the subject loomed so large and awesome that the workers preferred to dance around the subject with vague generalities, waving their tomahawks in the shape of scathing resolutions. After all, as I have indicated before, the question of closing was the paramount question absorbing their energies and attention. Then, with half-a-million shop workers outside Scotland "living-in," the subject of wages lacked a deal of reality when so much of what was earned was paid for in food and shelter. Even a policy in respect of wages had to grow. It cannot be culled with magician's wand from out the circumambient air. Admitting the radical evil of abominably low wages, what were they going to do about it? And echo answered—What? And it went on echoing that answer for nigh on twenty years.

It is all very well, with policy found, with the main obstacles to the application of that policy removed, to wonder and to give a slightly superior grin at their naiveness and simplicity. You know all about it—now. They didn't. They were few in a hostile world. They had to create, mould and shape a groundwork upon which was to be built the edifice of their dreams. Rather shy discussions went on over the years. It always was a shy question, this one of wages. Assistants did not tell one another what they were getting. If in a burst of confidence a whisper revealed the guarded secret, then it was a stipend recklessly swollen to that figure it was thought the company would bear. Employers fostered the secrecy. "Don't you tell any of the others, mister," was insisted upon when a rise was given or when the salary was first fixed. It encouraged the idea that each in his turn was being paid more than the other. They would like others to think they were better off than they really were. At least they were rather ashamed of what they were being paid, for, after all, they had their pride. If the wage was light and the work was heavy, the frock-coat at least was highly esteemed and satisfyingly genteel. Proper deference was always paid to silk-faced respectability. Money was not everything.

Please do not laugh at those who indulged themselves in this make-believe. If they tried to lift themselves with illusions, at least they tried to lift themselves. They were not the only ones who considered the body less than raiment,

THE LATE SHOPPER



Half-an-hour after closing time : " How very inconsiderate these people are ! "

who sought because adorned to become adored. They disregarded what they had the least of, but guarded with jealous mien what they could make the most of—appearances' artful aid. Actually they were soul-hungry and were striving to satisfy their craving. With so much sordid

and smelly poverty surrounding them they loathed the very thought of the gutter. Will you find it in your heart to blame them if they turned their eyes to what they thought were shining stars, even though the stars were a fake?

In that pregnant year, 1907, the Executive Committee of the Union tabled a resolution on the subject for the annual meeting, and circularised the branches for their ideas and for information. Note from the questionnaire how the controversy had raged, and gather how complicated the subject then seemed, though it seems so simple now. Was there to be a minimum wage (they had got as far in their minds as a minimum, not a standard wage) for all trades, or for each trade? For all grades? For all districts, or separate district rates? The same rate for men and women, or a separate rate for women of 21 and over? Was the rate to be calculated by the hour or by the week? Was the rate to apply to adults only? And so on. The fact is the whole subject was still considered an impractical one and was a matter for academic debate only. So, as is the way of the British at all times in rather difficult or annoying matters, they shoved it on to a committee. But the committee, surprisingly, took itself seriously.

If the subject at last got itself into the realm of practical things then I am bound to confess, reading back the pages of history, that it was due to the pertinacity of the members of that committee. They acted as heralds of the new era to be ushered in when the infant policy was born. They glowed with prophecy and waxed eloquent in the vision of a splendid future. At the annual conference the subject was debated through the whole of one afternoon. The long period of gestation was over and a healthy, kicking, squawking child was born. Thus in 1910, nineteen years after the formation of the National Union, the principle of minimum rates of wages for all shop workers was agreed upon. Branches and districts were given power to fix rates not lower than the national rate, subject to endorsement by a special permanent committee of four appointed to encourage and supervise operations.

They now had reached the stage when, for the first time, a minimum wage policy for shop workers was enunciated and

machinery erected for its achievement. What were the minimum scales and how had the committee reached their decision? That they had done their job well, is shown by the fact that their thesis has been generally accepted and has lasted to this day.

There was nothing slap-dash about the way a minimum wage scale was arrived at. A green booklet was published, which ran through several editions, called *The Case for Minimum Wages in Distributive Trades*. Let me epitomise that booklet and give their line of reasoning.

The limited return they got from the inquiries amongst the members of the Union nevertheless showed that 3,171 persons over 16 to 50 years of age, received an average of £1 8s. 6d. per week of from 47 to 91 hours.

An analysis of those figures reveals an utterly confused and anarchic state of affairs. Thus, of men and women in all trades between 21 and 22 years of age, 2 per cent. of women earned less than 10s. per week, 16 per cent. less than 16s., 39 per cent. less than 21s., and 43 per cent. less than 29s. In the case of men, 5 per cent. earned less than 19s. per week, 41½ per cent. less than 24s., and 53½ per cent. less than 29s. To show confusion still worse confounded, adult male drapery assistants received from 2d. to 1s. 0¼d. per hour in the provinces, and from 2½d. to 1s. 4d. in London, women receiving from 1d. to 7¼d. in the provinces, and from 2½d. to 6¼d. in London. Grocers' and butchers' wages varied from 2¾d. to 8¾d. Women's wages in confectionery varied from 2d. to 4½d. in the country and from 2¼d. to 3¾d. in London. The report says: "The reason why such a state of affairs exists is firstly that many do not know what their labour is worth. Secondly, economic conditions operate to force the unemployed assistant to sell his labour for anything he can get provided employment is secured immediately—he cannot wait."

The confusion could be overcome only by putting a bottom to wages below which they shall not be allowed to go. The range upwards depended upon such factors as class of trade being done, the kind of trade engaged in, the grade and position occupied. There was to be a floor, but no ceiling. What ought the minimum scale to be? If a

wage of 32s. at 21 years of age was to be demanded in the grocery trade in London it would affect 100 per cent. of the membership in that trade, whilst a 29s. minimum would affect 62 per cent. In the provinces a 27s. rate would affect 86 per cent., and a 24s. minimum would affect 62 per cent. Other trades were somewhat the same. What had to be borne in mind was that members not in receipt of the rate could be supported by the funds of the Union until the rate was secured. Therefore, whilst the rate must be one to lift a substantial body of the members, it must not in doing so prove an unbearable strain upon the funds. It was found there was sufficient variation of earnings being paid between groups of trades to warrant variation between rates. Moreover, it was found that such schemes as improvership after apprenticeship delayed the operation of full adult rates until 28 years of age.

The Board of Trade Cost of Living Index revealed, accepting 100 as the index number of the middle zone of London, that there were variations down to 81 in the case of Macclesfield. In cash that meant a fluctuation from a difference of 7s. per week at Macclesfield to 1s. 1½d. at Greenock. The war of 1914 was to smash those differences, but they were not to know that then. So with these facts in mind the following conclusions were reached. The rate must be a practical one, which could be won at reasonable cost. It must be different for groups of trades, it must vary with the locality, and must reach its altitude at an age well over 21 years.

The national scale is too large for reproduction here. I will give two examples to aid understanding :

For drapery, in the provinces, 26s. for men and 20s. for women at 21, rising to 32s. and 26s. at 28 ; in London, 31s. and 23s., rising to 37s. and 29s.

In the grocery and provisions it was 24s. at 21 years in the provinces, and 29s. in London, rising to 30s. and 35s. at 28 years of age.

In fact and in practice the report was an eminently sensible one. The interest of the localities was aroused because of the responsibility passed on to them, and with much of "living-in" and radius agreements out of the

way, and the half-day settlement in sight, the path was clear for a big step forward in the field of wages.

In 1911 negotiations commenced in various parts of the country for the adoption of the Union scale of wages. But before developing this theme there are one or two matters that deserve to be mentioned. There is, first, that strike in Cash and Co. (drapers), Cork, in September, 1904, in which the Irish Drapers' Assistants Association, as well as ourselves, were involved. It seems that a Mr. O'Dwyer, who had acted as spokesman for the staff on various internal matters with the firm, was sacked, whereupon thirty of the staff came out on strike without consulting their Unions, being afterwards joined by twenty-two apprentices, who went home asserting that they were not being taught the trade as those who could teach them were no longer there (a delightful Irish touch). They paraded past the shop in single file during the day distributing handbills, and were at night joined by assistants from other houses, thus making a very big procession indeed. The firm tried to bring staff from their Glasgow shop, which was prevented in large measure by the Glasgow branch of the Union. Some did get through, but owing to public hostility the firm had to keep them in an hotel. A meeting called at the assembly-rooms was so large that the 8,000 people who came had to be addressed by the speakers from the windows, and the traffic was held up. The Lord Mayor of Cork interested himself in the dispute, which was ended with O'Dwyer being given a better position in another branch and all the staff being reinstated.

It was four years (1908) before there was another strike, this time at a grocer's—J. & A. Fergusson, of Glasgow. The strikers numbered seven men, three girls, and four boys. Their grievances, which the firm refused to redress or arbitrate upon, were that the men worked 79 hours a week, the women 74, inclusive of mealtimes, which hours extended to as many as 100 during busy seasons. There was no tea-time, so some men were without food from 12 o'clock until after 8.30 p.m. On Saturdays they never got out for meals, but received tea with an egg in lieu of dinner, and the same fare for tea. The assistants used to get three nights off at

6.30 p.m. fortnightly, but this had been discontinued the previous summer. After five weeks of great excitement, during which three men were arrested, though the magistrate inflicted no penalty, terms were arranged under which they reverted to the three nights off at 6 p.m., no overtime exceeding half-an-hour, half-an-hour to be allowed for tea off the premises, wages to be paid on Fridays instead of Mondays, and blending of tea and necessary work to be done during regular working hours.

Just note those terms of settlement again and consider them a moment ; they will show you the conditions under which some shop workers were employed and the utter carelessness and callousness in respect to the treatment of their labour. That last item in the terms of settlement alone reveals what was common enough—work, which could be done in business hours, was not allowed to be done until after the shop closed. One of the largest of the multiple grocers in the land had a rule until comparatively recently that the window was not to be taken out on a Saturday night until after the shop closed ; then it had, along with the counters, to be scrubbed down, and stock had to be taken ; so if the shop closed at 9 p.m. at what hour did they expect the staff to get away ?

During 1911 began the movement to secure a minimum scale of wages. The favourite method was to approach the local Grocers' Association without waiting for complete organisation and discuss the matter with them. The grocery trade Press becomes full of reports on the subject. The *Grocer* had, in fact, been running leading articles from time to time. The articles were not very "leading," but rather reflected the prejudice of the small grocers. Thus " a minimum wage for the grocery trade is not practicable, being based on the age of the assistant instead of their ability." Though who was to do the measuring of ability, and how it was to be done, no one from that time forth has ever said.

Nevertheless, the discussions in chamber and Press familiarised the employer and employed with the subject. And some—those with consciences, or those who were rather in doubt as to their own ability to measure ability

—paid to scale. The scale, in fact, became a very useful guide. Shop assistants, when applying for a berth, asked for some such sum, for at last they knew what they ought to get. Many employers kept the scale in front of them as a guide to what they ought to pay. So that in spite of the negative attitude of grocers in meeting, and of officialdom, progress was made.

The whole of shop life was debauched with cheap and plentiful labour. In the drapery, employers have shown me waiting lists of young girls whom fond mothers, with misguided affection, offered up to the Moloch of Respectability. They did not ask for pay; they paid for their children to enter the portals of the "rag trade." It was so clean and refined!

Yet it was with a drapery firm that the Union made its first agreement on wage rates. This was with McIlroys, of Hanley, Staffs, in 1911. The staff numbered eighty-four. They lived in, the wages were from 2s. to 8s. a week. The highest-paid girl was the one getting 8s. a week. Sleeping in was abolished, and when other firms in Hanley agreed to do away with meals in, McIlroys abolished it, too.

The clause in the agreement dealing with wages reads as follows:

Assistants up to 21 years of age (or with seven years' experience) to be paid wages based upon the following schedule as a minimum, all premiums for assistants thus affected to be suspended:

Age 17 or with 3 years' experience,	7s. 6d. per week
„ 18 „ „ 4 „ „	10s. 0d. „ „
„ 19 „ „ 5 „ „	12s. 6d. „ „
„ 20 „ „ 6 „ „	15s. 0d. „ „
„ 21 „ „ 7 „ „	17s. 0d. „ „

1. Above to be considered as a minimum without prejudice to higher wages which may be justified by longer experience or special ability.
2. Assistants provided with meals during business hours to continue to receive same in addition to wages as above.
3. Improved heating of shop in winter.

4. Three-quarters-of-an-hour for dinner in place of 30 minutes (except Saturday and Monday).
5. Weekly payment of wages with weekly notice.

That was the first agreement embodying minimum rates of wages ever obtained by the Union.

I draw your attention to the fifth item in the agreement—weekly payment of wages. This is a matter to which I have not before referred. Most firms paid weekly. Where "living-in" existed payment was usually monthly. But, hardly believable as it may be, some firms paid at all sorts of odd times, and there were those who never had a settlement until a member of the staff left. They were allowed subs, goods on tick, but the complete accounting came only at the end.

The next agreement, in March, 1912, was with Teetons, drapers, of Hanley. The staff had meals in, and the wages paid to women were as follows :

Seven women	17-19 years	4s. to	6s. per week
Five	„ 20 „	5s. „	7s. „ „
Six	„ 21-22 „	6s. „	9s. „ „
Six	„ 23-25 „	9s. „	12s. „ „
Five	„ 26-35 „	12s. „	16s. „ „
Two	„ 33 „	25s.	„ „

Unfortunately a strike took place ; it lasted a fortnight and was very bitter—bitter because some of the staff stayed in and expressed themselves as " perfectly satisfied with their wages." Evidently they thought ill of their ability if they thought so well of the reward they received for it. However, the strikers won, the firm agreeing to do away with meals in and pay the same minimum rates as McIlroys. Membership of the Union was to be no bar to employment nor entail different treatment, and a writ for libel issued against the printer of the strike handbills was withdrawn. In the same year the staff of Boots (Cash Chemists) warehouses in Nottingham, numbering 250, secured the adoption of minimum rates. An agreement was also reached, after negotiations lasting some months, with Cadbury Bros. for their stockroom and export packing staff. For the first time in any agreement secured by the Union there was

stipulated a 48-hour week, with time-and-a-quarter for overtime.

In 1913 the pace quickened somewhat. Glasgow hair-dressers achieved a remarkable success. Over a period of some months, during which strike notices were threatened, some 310 employers signed agreements conceding minimum rates of 28s. at 21 years. This agreement, which took infinite patience to secure, covered more than 500 workers. Each employer had to be interviewed separately, sometimes several times. A terrific job. It was the first agreement on wages ever secured in the hairdressing craft. Driver's, of Bradford, multiple grocers, with more than twenty branch shops, in July conceded under pressure the Union scales for managers and staff.

In December, 1913, came the win for the staff of Albert Baker and Co., the tobacconists, who had 50 shops and 160 staff. Telegrams were ready to be sent out to the staff to cease work, and some, anticipating the receipt of this, had actually ceased work, when the firm agreed to terms which were afterwards ratified with enthusiasm by a staff meeting held at midnight on the Sunday. The terms are a revelation of conditions prevailing in London at that period, and therefore deserve to be given in some detail :

1. A moment's notice on each side (formerly one month).
2. Five-and-a-half-day working week of 66 hours inclusive of mealtimes. (Formerly seven-day week of unlimited hours, no half-day, some shops keeping open until one in the morning.)
3. Shift system to be investigated at once (hitherto relief was slipshod).
4. Menial work to be done away with in shops doing well, in other shops cleaning of fascias and ceilings to be abolished. (Note—assistants had previously to do it all, scrub floors, whitewash, and so on.)
5. Seven consecutive days' holiday with pay spread over the year, without prejudice to those getting more.
6. Those working Christmas Day or Bank Holiday to receive day off or day's pay.

7. Stocktaking: Managers to elect two or three from themselves to draw up with Union's accountant practical scheme.
8. Minimum rates: Managers, Class A Shop, £2 5s.; Class B Shop, £2; First Hands, 35s. Assistant, 21 years, four years' experience, 28s.; less than four years' experience, 25s.
9. All employees to join Union. (In fact, we supplied cardboard notices for display in the shop stating staff were in Union and that trade union conditions prevailed.)

The joy the terms of settlement gave to those concerned is hard to believe. I shall never forget asking the manager of that box shop outside Charing Cross Station, what he did with his first half-day off. "What did I do, HOFFIE? I went home and had a hot bath, the wife provided me with hot towels, and I steeped and steeped at my leisure; it was lovely."

Before the year closed, came a struggle with the butchers of Edinburgh. One would hardly connect the seat of Scottish learning, the home of Scottish princes, with striking butchers. However, the historically-minded would not be at all surprised, for more butchery went on in the wynds and closes of that ancient and fair capital than in most of the dwelling places of mankind. These butchers were the Fleshers, those who gladly sold the flesh of animals for human consumption when there were still in the land chops and steaks, collops and sirloin, undercuts, tenderloin and saddles, great ribs and spare ribs, and all their kind.

In December an application for the recognition of the minimum scale of wages was sent to the whole of the butchery employers, including the multiples. Assistants were very poorly paid, some adult men receiving as little as 18s. a week. The Master Butchers' Association unanimously decided not to recognise the Union, so not one single reply was received. Thereupon guerrilla tactics were resorted to. Union officers waited on employers at their shops, and if refused an interview, the staff downed knives and cleavers. Customers collected, police arrived, but just nothing could be done about it. There was nothing for it

but to come to terms, and to terms some of them came. Others, with fat oaths and hands waving the sharp and pointed weapons of their office, ordered the officials from the premises on their first visit, but having received strike notices thought better of it on the second. Attempts were made to bribe the assistants with more than the rates (always a happy thought of employers), but these did not succeed. Some started dismissing members of the staff so as to intimidate the rest. Down went the knives again, so that was scotched. In one case the deputation was shown to the door with a politeness only afforded ordinarily to carriage customers, when suddenly there appeared sandwichmen who paraded to and fro before the shop, and resistance collapsed. In another case notice was given to the Union men only on the staff, so all the others, vanmen included, promptly joined, and that was that. Employers faced with this determination and variation of tactics were kept on tenterhooks. Only one actual strike took place, but eventually agreements were signed covering more than 700 butchers' assistants.

Then early in 1914 began a struggle with the grocers of South Shields. The Grocers' Association of that North-East industrial and maritime centre would not agree to pay the rates because the state of trade did not warrant it. The state of trade never was to warrant it anywhere, anytime, anyhow. There never were to be any profits in retail trade, for traders, like farmers, lived on their losses. Unfortunately, shop assistants being ordinary mundane beings, had not the capacity to acquire losses to live on. It was found they were all being paid from sixpence to fourteen shillings below the minimum rates applied for.

Industrial Shields is one of those places where organised public opinion is too strong to be ignored by tradesmen. As the *Newcastle Evening Mail* said: "Perhaps, after all, the grocers of South Shields will save their bacon. Many of the firms down by the riverside have now conceded the better terms demanded by the shop assistants. This is as it should be, for one could not think of a rasher (no connection with the bacon aforesaid) action than that of provoking the 'king of the counter' to open revolt. So far there have



60-hour week demonstration, 1909

*On Strike at David Evans, Cardiff
January, 1914*



been twenty-five grocers who have seen fit to grant their employees what is after all but a bare living wage. There must be as many again, however, who flourish on the toilers' low-paid labour."

Then the officials of the Union led deputations of customers to reluctant employers calling on them to pay. The Board of Guardians took away contracts from those who would not. In short, all means of public pressure were used in this worthy cause of removing sweating from the grocery trade in this area, and it succeeded so well that in three months telegrams could be sent saying: "Well done Shields!"

In April, 1914, came the precursor of organised uprising in the wholesale drug trade. This was impulsive and generous enough, as you will have noticed were so many such incidents in the past. An under-forewoman at a drug house in London is dismissed, so out come the girls. Their ages were 14 to 21, and their wages were so low they almost vanished as you looked at them—one girl, 14 years of age, got 3s. 6d. a week; another, 21, got 7s. 6d.; the highest wage was 8s. For these sums some of them put up poisons; that is, their job was to put poisons into bottles or packets. One girl was suffering from a burnt arm through continually handling carbolic acid.

The lack of consideration by those who employed them is revealed not only in the work those girls were called upon to do and the coppers doled out to them for doing it, but in the amenities afforded them. A room was provided to eat in, they ate what they brought from home, for they could not pay to have their food in an eating house or restaurant, but as no chairs were provided they sat on the floor. It was all in the day's work, part and parcel of the time they lived in. They were but of the working class and used to working-class clothes, working-class houses, working-class catering, working-class recreation, working-class education, all pretty shabby and shoddy—except the working-class funeral. That was a gorgeous display of long-maned, long-tailed, prancing black horses with black ostrich plumes, as well as trappings of black velvet with tassels flowing to the ground. If they lived poorly they

died richly, even splendidly. For the proudest boast of the matron of the crowded working-class home was that at the end nothing low or mean was done, for she always buried hers with ham.

So whilst they were out, having joined the Union, they tabulated their demands, which were modest enough. Reinstatement of forewoman, 1s. increase of wages, girls under eighteen not to put up poisons, seats in the dining-room, finishing at 6 p.m. instead of 7 p.m. Some of the points were won; they got the 1s., they got the seats, they got hours reduced. But those under eighteen still put up morphia and strychnine, and the forewoman decided to get married—but whether she lived happily ever after the story does not say.

In May of that same fateful year (1914) an agreement was reached with Galbraith's Stores, of Glasgow, multiple grocers. The agreement covered 130 shops, and all employees, numbering nearly 1,000. The scales for males were up to 36s. at 25, and for females up to 21s. at 24, managers and heads of departments 38s., and manageresses 24s. Wages were paid in full for six weeks during sickness, and ten days' holiday a year. This agreement was probably the most important thus far secured, covering as it did so large a number of employees.

Then in July, Wales comes into the picture. "Sospan Fach," Little Llanelly, has the honour of securing for a dozen grocery warehousemen the last agreement on wages before shooting begins and the world as we had known it gets battered about our ears, not to be mended properly again—certainly not in my life-time, though maybe, if you are wise and careful, in yours.

Before the 1914-18 conflagration burst upon a sceptically unprepared people on August 4th, the Union had started on the most ambitious and largest wage campaign of its history. Indeed, it was the most thoroughgoing attempt up to that time to bring about widespread reform. It was its misfortune, not its fault, that it bumped into the war, or would it be more correct to say, considering that the Home and Colonial Stores campaign was started first, that the war bumped into it? The Home and Colonial

Stores was established in 1888, and registered in 1898. At the time I am writing of they had 750 branch shops, of which 250 were in London. The digestive powers of the concern had already proved itself, for they had managed quite easily to swallow Shepherd's Dairies Ltd., and the Crown Dairies, as well as R. and J. Templeton's, of Scotland. They carried, except in three large stores, a limited range of merchandise. Butter and other fats were weighed and cheeses were skinned and cut in the shop. The coffee (with chicory) was ground in mills driven by a wheel turned by hand.

The tea was weighed and packed by boys and young men dressed in chefs' hats, standing in the window so all might see how everything was fair, square, and above board. It provided also a perennial source of delight, as well as an excellent test of their sex-appeal, for girls to look closely in at the window and enjoy the blushes of the boys and mayhap blush back as some less susceptible lad winked wickedly.

The buttermen, as those on the provision counter were called, were dressed in white jacket and apron and chefs' caps. The manager, as became the dignity of high office, was dressed in black cotton jacket and apron. The inspectors, warranted by their still higher rank, usually wore top hats. They had to open and close a shop each day. That is to say, they had to be there to see a shop was not opened after time in the morning or another closed before time at night. They made test purchases, usually giving a boy something with which to go in and purchase a half-pound of this or that. The experienced staff could tell at once a strange boy purchaser and would say, "Who sent you? that gent. standing over there?" and the boy might say, not being up to snuff, "Yus, sir, and 'e give me tuppence." This surreptitious snooping, this spying carried out by the inspectorate, as part of their routine was intensely resented by the whole staff. The branding of the employees as potential thieves was further emphasised by a clause in their agreement which read: "I will allow myself to be searched at any time by an authorised official of the company." An employee could be dismissed by the company on a 24-hour notice, but he must give the company a week's notice on a

Saturday. Paper was weighed in and credited to the shop as goods, and must be so accounted for. The shrinkage allowance was quite inadequate, especially in shops where the purchases were individually small.

The manager was not allowed to leave the cash in the shop after closing, he must take it home and there guard it. There were occasional cases of assault, and robbery by footpads, with sometimes serious injury to the manager. Moreover, to have that money in the house, especially over the week-end, was a source of worry and anxiety not only to the manager, but his household. The manager had to pay 30s. a year, and the buttermen 15s. and 8s. a year, into a guarantee society to insure, not themselves, but the firm against loss. The manager was subject to a radius clause agreement and had to pay from his commission for all breakages of utensils in use in the shop. His commission was a "gift" from the firm. It was called a "gift" so that it would not be legally claimed, and it could be drawn upon for short stocks. I interpolate an interesting anecdote about that same "gift" or quarterly commission payment. In December, 1916, the managers put in a claim for increased wages. The firm replied by circular telling them they could each week take 5s. from the quarterly commission. There is a touch of genius about that conjuring trick which delights me. To get the staff to pay their own increases deserves fame, along with all those other anecdotes of self-help and thrift beloved of our fathers and Sunday School teachers.

Some managers received as little as 30s. a week wages. Closing hours were the hours of the district or town, but were padded out with unpaid, unrewarded overtime, especially when stock was being taken. It was not unusual for the manager to work on Sundays.

At long last the staff determined to make a change. When it came, the revolt was a rank-and-file one. It started with a meeting of the employees, convened in the Mildmay Radical Club North London, in March, 1914: 300 turned up.

Following the recruitment of members, local conferences were called in all parts of the country to draw up a programme, and delegates were elected for a national con-

ference to finally consider it. That national conference was held in London at Morley's Hotel, Trafalgar Square, on Sunday, August 2nd, two days before war was declared. It was decided to carry on with the organisation until a majority of the staff were in the Union. But circumstances were to have their say in the matter. Everything was in process of disintegration, and staff personnel constantly changing. In spite of all endeavours the organisation became very fluid. However, in December, it was resolved to call another conference, which was held in London on December 22nd. Negotiations were opened with the firm.

After the programme had gone in the firm began making concessions. They allowed cash to be left in the shop, paid the guarantee premiums, did away with the radius clause, and increased the shrinkage allowances. They increased the bonus and commission to the managers to the value of 10s. to 20s. a week, increased the wages of the assistants up to 12s. 6d. a week and allocated £25,000 for distribution amongst the staff, and suspended the breakage deduction. But they did not recognise the Union, they would make no agreement. A ballot on strike action was taken, which resulted in a majority vote in favour. A further national conference was called to consider the situation in February, 1915.

It was then decided that in view of the concessions won, and the difficult position the country was in, not to press the matter further at that stage. The fact is, the time lag—nearly twelve months had elapsed since the campaign had opened—had beaten them as well as the state of war. That time lag always was to be the difficult factor when dealing with a very large multiple firm.

The concessions won were very considerable and well worth while. The firm were eventually to concede much larger wage increases than those then requested of them which, when opportunity served, they were to filch back from their patient and long-suffering staff. It is not without significance that when the turn of the tide at last came late in 1934, it was the staff of the Home and Colonial Stores which led the way, gathering in splendid train all that galaxy of dairies which made a veritable Milky Way

surrounding the great acquisitive Sun. What a charming, captivating nomenclature is theirs to be sure—Maypole Dairy Co., Meadow Dairy Co., Shepherd's Dairies, Peark's Dairies, Sherry's Dairies, Crown Dairies; you can almost hear the cows lowing, the milkmaid laughing, and the lark singing; you can see the buttercups and daisies growing in the meadows and scent the new-mown hay, for such magic is there in a name.

There was a slight pause, at the outbreak of war, before the march was resumed. Actually the currents of the movement kept going, the forward urge had been too long forming and had become too deep to stop altogether. Nevertheless, there was pause enough for us to-day to look back and see that most of the old obstacles had been cleared away. The movement, so to speak, had reached its Pisgah and could gaze at last down at the land of promise. It had passed beyond the melancholy plains of the 1890s. The pause is a suitable moment for me to deal with the question so repeatedly asked, "How did you do it?" meaning, of course, "How do you get them into the Union?"

So far I have written in vain if I have not conveyed to you many implications of what there is to do. But I will try to be more explicit. For my part I did at the end what I did at the beginning, with all the forty-five years of variations in between—I called on the individual to convert him to the cause. The variations in between have many of them been delightful and inspiring, and that is the reward of the wandering crusader and organiser, helping him to endure the kicks and stripes he is bound to receive.

I recall, for example, my second night on the road forty-four years ago. We adjourned after the meeting in Colchester to the back of a multiple shop. The manager had got in a barrel of oysters and some bottles of stout, and these, with crisp rolls and sweet new butter, made a feast fit for a king. Managers of other shops had been invited to the "do" to meet me. What would I now not give to repeat that *fiesta*! Then there was that occasion in David Evans's, of Cardiff, when they installed me with chairs and a table behind rolls of lino in the carpet department and the

girls were presented one by one all a-blushing and a-giggling. Some were too modest to come one by one, though bless you I was harmless enough, so came two by two, blushing and a-giggling all the more in consequence. But they one and all joined the Union.

Again there was the occasion when the girls of Plummer, Roddis, and Tyrell, of Folkestone, asked me to call and see them, and I went upstairs to the costumes department. They gathered round me, seated at a table well hidden by rails of costumes and mantles. I can see them now, all dressed in gorgeous black silk dresses with flowing trains. They would have thoroughly overawed me were it not that I had been used to such splendour in Peter Robinson's, and so had practically become immune to their glamour and blandishments. Some stood up, some knelt on the floor with elbows on the tables and chins in cupped hands, as I preached to them the word which meant for them life more abundantly. In retrospect my senses still respond to the sweet intoxicating fragrance of femininity which in that showroom was almost overwhelming.

Many a time have I drunk tea from gallipots (stone jam jars) in the back shop of a grocers, the assistants seated on boxes or on counters, whilst I held forth with swift and subdued eloquence. Many a time I have waited in the basements of the International Stores amongst the sugar bags whilst the staff have come down in groups to hear me.

Meetings have I held in hundreds of shops immediately after closing time, and in some of the largest drapery stores in London and in the provinces, the showroom or restaurant placed at my disposal for the purpose. For years I spoke from the sand-bin outside the Army and Navy Stores in Greycoat Place, before they listened gladly. At street corners, in parks and open spaces, on esplanades and on sands at the seaside, at all times of the year the gospel of collective salvation has been preached. Even in the City of London, where such shocking doings and carryings-on are quite prohibited, dinner-hour meetings were held in the open-air market of Whitecross Street. Nor am I likely to forget that meeting called in one of the bedrooms of the "living-in" quarters of a drapers in Bath. Four beds in

the room, one washstand, chairs from which the backs had long since broken away, damp walls from which the unclean wallpaper in one corner was flapping down. My audience packed the room, sitting on beds or standing, whilst I answered their questions and showed how they could win respect and freedom.

A boss asked me once, "Why did you not ask permission before speaking to the staff?" Said I: "I might not have got it." Said he: "You wouldn't, but you're honest, so you have it."

A manageress of one of Lipton's shops, a fair damsel aged, I should think, about 26, spoke to me thus: "I am not interested—I think Union people are a lot of wastrels; you are not to waste the time of my staff, and I will see that none of them have anything to do with you." Now that was a telling-off good and proper, and as it was in the time when agreements and increases were floating about, and we had actually got that young lady an increase of 10s. a week, I rather resented it. I saw one of the staff wink at me as I was going out, so I leaned over and whispered, "Get all staff to meet me outside after closing." They were there. I took the ten of them to a café, stood coffee and biscuits and then joined them all up. Then I wrote a letter to the haughty and naughty queen. "You will doubtless not be pleased to learn that the whole of the staff are members of the Union, and if you dare interfere with one of them I'll strike the blooming lot." Two days after the inspector met me, showed me the letter, and said: "What's the meaning of this, Hoffman?" I told him. "What shall I do about it?" "Do what you like. The letter sticks. If she takes the letter back from you, you are finished with it. If she doesn't then you have no option but to send it to headquarters, and that suits me." The lady was shifted shortly afterwards.

At one of the Home and Colonial branches in Bath, the manager, with bowler hat upon his head, came out from the hole in the wall (the shops were so constructed that one crept bent double to get under the counter and through an opening in the back, like neolithic man creeping into his cave) and spoke sharply: "Clear out!" I looked at him,

then looked over the counter and whistled. Said he in tone still more imperious, "I said clear out." I whistled. Said he a little uncertainly, "What yer whistling for?" Said I, "To draw that dog away from behind the counter." He turned red, and shouted: "If you don't clear out I'll come and chuck you out." "Do!" said I calmly, "Do!" (My eyes were on the staff.) He came, he pushed, and as he pushed I caught hold of a butter dish which fell down and broke on the tiled floor, and with it the butter, shaped like the tub it came from, and as it was summer the butter was soft, so there was much mess. And then all the bounce was out of him. That story travelled—how it did travel. Throughout the West Country, all the Home and Colonial branches had got it, and I heard with delight many versions of it and endorsed them all, or nearly all; I drew the line at a stand-up fight.

Negotiations in respect to wage rates and working conditions speeded up considerably after the panic following the outbreak of war in 1914 had subsided. The movements already started gathered strength and momentum from the circumstances of the time. The Government of the day, ignoring the warnings and indeed the repeated clamant requests of the Unions to fix prices and introduce rationing, deliberately and with open eyes declined so to do. The Prime Minister, Mr. Herbert Asquith (afterwards Lord Oxford and Asquith), stated in answer to their requests that the law of supply and demand must work itself out. War itself was a gigantic and very positive interference with the doctrine of supply and demand. A Nazi chief thug, one Hermann Goering, was later to sum it all up very succinctly, if brutally, in the phrase "You cannot have guns and butter."

Be that as it may, the chase of money after goods, consumers' goods, was on and was to go on for seven years until pushing forcibly a third of the nation down to the grim abyss of poverty stayed it and eventually gave us another war just to "learn us." The average percentage increase of the cost of living, according to the Ministry of Labour Index (formerly the Board of Trade Index), as compared with July, 1914, went up to 35 in 1916, 65 in 1917,

90 in 1918, 120 in 1919, 125 in 1920, 165 in 1921 (January figures in each case), after which year it fell steadily to 42 in 1933, the lowest figure it ever was to reach.

Eventually, Food Control was established, Excess Profits Tax was initiated and Rent Control enacted. But all too late. The cost of living increased but the wages of working people always lagged far behind. But the chase was on and all joined in. Shop workers perforce were in the race. Their programmes included increases to meet the cost of living, with the recognition of minimum wage scales, and a code of working conditions. In 1915 negotiations were undertaken with 472 firms (apart from Co-ops.). In 1920 1,250 firms negotiated increases amounting to £3½ million a year. That is not the full story by any means, because some of the so-called "firms" were actually associations of employers. As there was no time or staff to knit the employees of the various "National Multiples" together on a nation-wide basis, applications went in on behalf of districts or of single branches even, though being sent to the same headquarters they were counted as single firms. Arbitration Courts worked full time and cases waited their turn. It was a splendid schooling, having to argue your case before an independent tribunal. They called for facts and figures, and so the research departments of the Unions came into being and Union officers, getting well down to their cases, became extremely able advocates.

As if all this turmoil arising from the dolorous gospel of "leaving things alone" were not enough, having all unwittingly raised a whirlwind, the Government then tried to ride it and direct it. Having refused to interfere with the "law of supply and demand" they interfered belatedly, used statutory rules and orders, got prescribed rates, and set up Trade Boards the which, at the time, whatever were their merits otherwise, only added very considerably to the confusion and difficulty. If there had been reasonable foresight, then the history of our time would have been different and our people would have been spared much misery.

Chapter VII

POST 1914—GROCERY

IN the grocery trade, which I will first deal with, Scotland leads the way after the short pause following August, 1914. In April, 1915, agreements were secured with Cooper's Stores and with R. and J. Templeton, of Glasgow, both firms having branches in other parts of that country. It should be noted that Templeton's were part of the Home and Colonial Group who had refused to negotiate with the Union. A case of the part being greater than the whole, Euclid notwithstanding. The same month witnessed a wholesale grocery strike, of 16 in staff, in Stockport. One man with 32 years' service got 28s. a week; another with 19 years', whose duties were tea blending, coffee roasting and grinding, got the same amount. One with 12 years' service got 27s. and on it managed to keep a wife and five children. In May the membership in Barrow and Crewe succeeded in getting a number of shopkeepers to adopt Union rates, and the North-East reported similarly an unspecified number. In September, one of the largest grocery firms in Scotland, Andrew Cochrane, of Glasgow, with numerous branches, another of the Home and Colonial Group, came to an excellent agreement. This was followed by a successful strike at MacSymons, of Greenock and Port Glasgow. In quick succession came reports of agreements with grocers in Newport, Mon., Hull, Barnsley, Sheffield, Beverley, Keighley, Bridgwater, Peglers, South Wales (38 branches), Stockton, and Wallsend. Then in 1916, began that series of negotiations with the great multiple firms, Home and Colonial, Park's, Lipton's, Meadow Dairy, Pegrams (Liverpool) and others, on behalf of their staffs, either in districts (as for example, the managers of the Home and Colonial in London), or on behalf of the employees at single branches, that were not to cease until some sort of National Agreement was arrived at three years later. These separate

negotiations numbered hundreds. One would have thought that, seeing the general trend of things, these large multiples would have consented to operate National Scales, but nothing of the sort. Thus Lipton's agreed to operate our scales from Hampshire to Cornwall and for Ireland, Pegram's for branches first in the Liverpool and then in the Manchester areas. In other words it was a period of catch-as-catch-can.

Some towns, as for instance Ammanford and Aberavon, reported that all the shops, not grocers only, including the multiples in all trades, had agreed to the Union rates as well as to a 48-hour week. It is quite impossible to note them all. In 1918 the staff of a dozen of Pegram's shops in Manchester came out on strike. It lasted for three weeks, the firm managing to get some staff from their other shops to enable them to carry on. The Liverpool area, however, realising the danger, got themselves together and threatened to come out in sympathy. In the upshot the dispute was referred to arbitration and they got a satisfactory award.

As an illustration of the spirit of the times I give an incident that happened in September, 1918. Coming back to Dilke House after lunch I found the roadway outside, as well as the hall and the stairways, packed with people, mostly women. They were the staff of the meat-packing department of Sainsbury's warehouse in Blackfriars Road, and the assistants of the Civil Service Supply Association of Bedford Street, Strand. They were out on strike for more money, and came along to join the Union. Our first job after signing them on was to get them back to work, get the whole staff organised, and then negotiate agreements in respect to wage rates and conditions, which we eventually did.

In November, 1918, came the first award of an Arbitration Court—the Committee on Production—in the grocery trade. It was for the warehouse staff of Hudson Brothers, the high-class provision merchants. About the same time an award was given by the same Court in the case of Peter Keevil's, the wholesale provision firm. It was a joy to meet that Cockney staff. The work of the women was mostly bacon scrubbing. The slimy sides of green bacon which came from America, preserved in borax, had to be

well scrubbed in troughs, to be got ready for smoking in the bacon stoves. So these good souls spoke and dressed rather differently from the ladies of the showrooms. A slanging match between them and their foremen on the subject of the Union was an education in the vitality and vivacity of the English language. To go to one of their meetings was a pick-me-up and a delight. I can see them in a school-room off the Edgware Road. The ladies seated on the front forms with laps amply spread, and hands resting comfortably thereon. Hats with feathers, gorgeous creations; coats of pony skin, coney skin and phoney skin reaching below the knees; under the coats aprons of all hues and design. Comments are carried on in loud Cockney voices: "'Ere 'e is, that's 'im, that little beggar with the glasses. Blimey! he can't 'arf talk he can't, be beats Bill 'e does." When the meeting gets going and the speaking is on, the comments thereon are continuous and to the point. "R! you got it there! Quite right—let 'em 'ave it, mister, give 'em socks—so they ought—R! where does the money go?—R! that's what I says," and they nod to one another in agreement, applaud the telling points, interjecting many an "R!" for their own satisfaction and emphasis.

It was at this time the Trade Board question came into the arena, and as it was to provide a handy excuse for grocers and others to procrastinate, and as it was in the grocery trade that the first Board was set up, this is the place where it can most properly be dealt with.

On March 20th, 1919, there was a meeting, called by the Ministry of Labour at the Central Hall, Westminster, of 43 employers' associations connected with the distributive trades, and 11 Trade Unions. Thus, after nearly five years of the "law of supply and demand" and "each man for himself," the Government decided to do something about it. We will, they said, set up Trade Boards for unorganised trades, the Whitley Councils, and Industrial Councils for organised trades, and Interim Reconstruction Committees for those betwixt and between. I should be the very last to object to wage-fixing machinery for occupations not properly organised and whose workers in consequence are ground down in poverty, for had we not all along been

advocating the extension of Trade Boards to distribution trades? No, I did not object to effective machinery for the unorganised workers, for I hate preventable poverty and all the degradation of mind, body, and environment which springs therefrom. But there was resentment, which was justified by events, that the machinery should not have been set up earlier. Then it could have become effective at the right time and in the right way. But coming five years late, it was used to stave off decisions and put a sprag in the wheel of direct action. At first the Ministry agreed with the joint committee which had been set up to find the right way of implementing the Government's decision, that there should be one Trade Board for the whole of Distribution, and actually produced a draft order for this. Then some hair-splitting pundit in the Ministry of Labour discovered that distribution was not a trade. Grocery was a trade, Drapery was a trade, but distribution was—a new constellation, a monastic order—Lord knows! Anyway, it wasn't a trade.

So there was much delay whilst fresh definitions were drafted. The Grocery Trade Board held its first meeting in July, 1920, one year and four months after the Minister had told the wholesale and retail trades what they must do to be saved. But there—they did not want to be saved. Not whilst they were on Tom Tiddler's Ground.

The first grocery rates were proposed in September, 1920. Then began the childish game which went on for years, the rates being the shuttlecock to the battledore of the contending parties. There was a terrific row over Trade Boards in connection with dressmaking, which led to a Committee of Inquiry presided over by Lord Cave which will be dealt with in the chapter on drapery. But the Inquiry was used as an excuse for further delays of every kind. Eventually the Board was disbanded and with it went the chance that the wage structure erected so painstakingly and hopefully would be maintained.

One good thing came out of the deplorable display of dissimulation and short-sightedness of which the Grocery Trade was guilty. It arose from the fact that the applications to each of the multiple grocery firms had become so

numerous that together they assumed national proportions. The firms had put off their consideration of the applications in order to "see what the Grocery Trade Board would do." So when, after talks with the Union, which had started in 1919, the date for operating the proposed rates was postponed, the multiple-shop proprietors recommended all its members to put them into operation immediately, which they did. This became that sort of "National Agreement" to which I have referred. The rates first proposed are of some interest to-day. Briefly, they gave to assistants at 25 years wages up to 58s. in rural areas, 70s. in London, and 68s. in all other areas. These rates were for a 48-hour week or less, with overtime after 48 hours. At this time the cost-of-living Index showed a percentage 125 above that of July, 1914, or 21 points higher than it is at the time these lines are written. A number of other employers and associations of employers, following the National Multiples, agreed to put the Trade Board rates into operation, as for example the North-West of England Wholesale Grocery Association. In retrospect, how petty it all seems. The grocery trade had the opportunity of stamping out its worst evil: that cut-throat competition which is based on sweated employees.

From the first the employers' side was obstructive; their opposition could not be said to come from bad trade, for a boom was on when they started, though things were admittedly in the doldrums when they enthusiastically asked for their throats to be cut. The Union tried to stay the suicide-pact between employers and the Minister of Labour, by calling a National Conference of Grocery employees; this was held in London on September 11th, 1921, by which time the proposed rates had been further reduced to try unavailingly to appease the opposition. But by this time the ebb-tide of reaction had so strongly set in that strike action on a very large scale would seem to have been the only answer, though it could hardly have been successful when the failure of the miners is considered. Meantime the strife in the world of men was going on.

In July, 1919, came the news that 250 employees of the Wigan Grocers' Association had secured £1,500 back pay,

increases of from 1s. to as much as 32s. a week. Following news of a combined Traders' Agreement at Bolton, and one with Cooper's stores in London, we learn of two strikes in Edinburgh. The first is with the Buttercup Dairy Co., a small multiple doing a cheap trade, and the second with R. T. Gibson Ltd., the high-class grocers of Princes Street. These strikes went on for weeks before a settlement was reached. Town after town reports agreements with local Grocers' Associations. At the close of the year the Wholesale Grocers' Association of the North of England agree to rates for their membership in twenty large towns, as well as a 48-hour week, payment for overtime and an annual holiday of one week with pay. In London early in 1920 Spiers and Pond, the well-known caterers and provision retailers, come to a useful agreement, also in the North-East, Brouchs Ltd., with a large group of branches. Strike action lasting some weeks occurs at Ellins and Sons of Leeds, and there are threatened strikes at several high-class grocers in Plymouth. London reports agreements with George Mence Smith, Star Tea Co., United Kingdom Tea Co., World's Stores retail multiples, as well as Brooke Bonds, Horniman's, Lovell and Christmas, Reynolds, Warren's, Peek Winch, Yeatman's, E. and I. Pink, and a number of other wholesale provision merchants.

A story about Sir Thomas Pink which I garnered from those restless days is worth telling. Sir Thomas, who was one of the trade's "characters"—almost as great a one as "Tommy" Lipton—saw one morning one of his clerks with unshaven face. He demanded the reason for this undisciplined behaviour—too lazy getting up in the morning, he supposed. No—the poor chap lacked the necessary tuppence to go to the barbers, that's all. So Sir Thomas gave him a chit to get tuppence from the cashier. At the end of the week the grateful clerk found not only that the tuppence had been deducted from his wages but he had been docked a quarter for the time it had taken to get shaved.

Cater Stoffel and Fort, the high-class grocers of Bath, makers of a deservedly famous Bath Oliver Biscuits, aided in piling up the numbers of staffs now working under Trades Union conditions. It is beyond me to keep count of all that

happened at this time ; it was as if the whole country was coming to agreements. So great was the rush that I actually negotiated an agreement with John Sainsbury for the whole of their retail shops in a taxicab journeying between one meeting and another.

Grocers' Associations of North Staffs, Nottingham, Stockton, Manchester, and Salford, etc., swell the tide. The smaller multiples swing into line, like Duckworth's, G. J. Mason's (after a ballot on strike action), Pink's of Portsmouth district, Gallon's, Thrift Stores, and so on. South Wales reports agreements with Lipton's (42 shops), Direct Trading Co. (24), John Evans (20). In the Isle of Man no settlement is obtained until strike action, backed by the other organised workers in the island, is threatened and then satisfactory rates are secured by arbitration for all shop workers in that most favoured isle. The great uprising extends from one end of Great Britain to the other. Nothing like it has been seen before or since. The revolt is almost out of hand, when early in 1921, as with the keen stroke from a knife, the upward surge ends.

The rearguard actions of those in retreat has begun. From now on they must stave off reductions and save what they can. For the Federation of British Industries has decreed : " The workers must be prepared if necessary to put up with conditions worse than pre-war."

Chapter VIII

POST 1914—HAIRDRESSING

THERE is one thing you may be sure of when organising hairdressers: life will never be dull. You may be exasperated and discouraged, but bored you will never be. Because of the lack in this country of the organised training which is usual upon the Continent, the craft of hairdressing was very cosmopolitan. That is to say the well-trained certificated hairdresser from abroad could readily find a place here. So, as might be expected, full allowance must be made for the clash of temperaments. Mentally you must strive to be "above the battle" and that's not easy, for a decision has to be made sooner or later and, as likely as not, it will please nobody. I was caught up once by two rival groups of Jewish hairdressers in the East End of London, and in the endeavour to make peace went with them to some house in Sidney Street, Whitechapel, the street where Winston Churchill, in top hat, with the help of a platoon of Guards, so gallantly disposed of Peter the Painter. We were crowded together in a small room like sardines in a tin, myself perched in magisterial splendour on the pillows of the bed. Waves of talk in a babel of tongues went on through the night and believe me I sat there uncomfortably "mum." It was no use attempting to speak until the tide of words was on the ebb. The orgy of speech having spent itself I was able to get them to shake hands, a breakaway was saved and an amalgamation secured. But a high spot of adventure came when a member, at the close of a meeting off Regent Street, suddenly drew a knife and made at me, and if it had not been for Alex Lyon, hairdresser at the National Reform Club, who threw himself at him and so diverted the blow, I might have been severely injured. As the gentleman of the knife insisted on following me, three of the members determined to escort me home, and in the crowded tube train I tried vainly to look indifferent while

I was shouted at and bespattered with such epithets as "Traitor!" "Labour Fakir!" "Robber of the Workers!" But my assailant fell down in an apoplectic fit by the time we reached Chalk Farm, so it was we who had to escort him home. No! you will never be dull organising hairdressers.

It is Scotland which again leads the way in the march forward after 1914. For first of all Glasgow hairdressers win improvement in their minimum wage scale from 28s. to 30s. during July, 1915, followed by Edinburgh a month later. It is not until late in the year that any further progress is reported and then, as it is in London that the advance will begin and continue, a word or two ought to be written about the layout of this craft in the metropolitan area at that period. In this account I shall alternate between the words trade, craft and profession when dealing with hairdressing, for it is in fact all three.

There was, then, the City area in which the City Guild spoke for most of the employers. Hairdressers' hours were much shorter, tips were larger and sales were greater than in most of the suburban areas, but correspondingly the fixed wages were much lower. Some were paid as little as 15s. a week. In the West End, where there was a higher-class trade, often both gents' and ladies' work was done in the same establishment. Tips generally were higher, hours were longer than in the City but better as a rule than in the suburbs.

Nearly all ladies then wore their hair as it grew. My own good lady's hair at that time reached down to her knees. Mind you, some padding was resorted to, with fringes and tails and what-not ("ladies' own combings made up!") to add to the glory, but bobbing, shingling, and so on, was exceptional. Sales consisted of lotions, dressings, brushes, all sorts of things, and there was usually a larger commission paid for selling one's employer's own preparations (stuff that will make hair grow on a billiard ball) than on proprietary articles. It was, and still is, a custom of the trade to encourage services beyond the basic shave and hair-cut, by payment of a high commission upon such work—such as face towels, shampoos, singeing,

scalp massage, and so on. "Ladies' hands" always did and always will command a larger wage than "gents' hands," because their work is much more skilled and in the higher branches initiative and originality of a high order is demanded. Some of them are artists of international repute. There are international competitions, held here and on the Continent, open to the world. They have their academies which meet regularly after business hours to encourage skill and initiate new styles or revive old ones. There is a pride of craft in all this quite voluntary endeavour which is highly commendable and deserves far more recognition outside the trade than it receives.

In 1915 negotiations with the City Guild of Hairdressers eventually led to an agreement for the payment of a minimum wage of 28s. at 21 years of age. Early in 1917 the Glasgow hairdressers pressed for a further advance, part of which was conceded by the employers who had by this time got together in a Glasgow (central) Master Hairdressers' Association, and the other part went to arbitration. The award issued in May of that year fixed the minimum rate for "gents' hands" at 35s. at 21 years of age, increased in 1918 to 45s. Then in April, Belfast scored a valuable victory but only after strikes at some saloons.

Towards the end of 1917 began widespread negotiations in the West End of London. As a result the following charter was agreed to with more than twenty firms:

Hours—48 maximum.

Wages at 21 years:

Manicurist (Ladies') 25s. and 10 per cent. on all takings.

Gents' Hands 35s. and 12½ per cent. (chiropody 2d. in 1s. extra).

General Hands (that is those who do some work in Ladies' Saloon as well as Gents') 45s. and commission.

Ladies' Hands 60s. and commission.

Charge Hands 50s. and commission.

General Conditions—Mealtimes as in Shops Act (which did not apply to hairdressers) and one week's holiday with full pay.

They were not to get through without trouble, however, for a strike, only a short but successful one, occurred in January, 1918, at Faulkner's Saloons, which operated at a number of railway stations. In June, Harrods' Stores, with seventy-one employees, agreed to an extended charter including :

Chiropody—60s. and 10 per cent. on takings.

Postiche Dresser—60s. and 5 per cent. on takings.

By this time the City Guild agreed to a minimum of 32s. and increased commission from $8\frac{1}{2}$ to $12\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. There were now, in July, 1918, eighty-two firms under agreement with the Union, including two large stores, Harrods and Selfridges.

The Shop Steward question was causing difficulty. One firm sacks the Steward as soon as appointed. All staff is withdrawn and an advertisement is put in the trade journal, and the firm falls into line. Another proves more obstinate, but as the staff puts on sandwich-boards and parades in front of the premises, in three days the firm gives way.

The question of assistants waiting on clients at their homes or places of business arises for settlement. This and other matters compelled the drafting of definite duties for Shop Stewards, one of whom was appointed in every saloon. "A Code of Working Rules for Shop Stewards" was displayed. Here is the code summarised as briefly as possible :

" 1. All assistants must be members of the Union.

" 2. The Steward is the recognised intermediary between staff and employer ; his duty is to adjust all disputes ; when not able to do this they must be reported to the branch committee whose decision is final.
Examples are :

(a) Disputes between employers and employees.

(b) Bad time-keeping.

(c) Arrears in subs.

(d) Unprofessional conduct.

(e) Non-Unionists.

" Every member is expected to perform his duty to employer, during business hours, and to his colleagues at all times."

If there is one thing more than another which depends for its success upon personality it is the Shop-Steward movement, and if there be one place more than another where it is particularly difficult of application it is a cosmopolitan hairdressers' saloon. The code as given briefly above was well-intentioned. But just as there were difficult Stewards, so there were difficult employers, and there were a lot of them. From the beginning they resented any interference with the arbitrary way in which they had been in the habit of dealing with their staff, in some cases, downright bullying in front of customers at that. So we were to come up against this resentment with a vengeance at the close of the year. A Shop Steward, to be a really valuable part of the Union machine, must have the regard and confidence of his fellows, he must possess tact and judgment, have an enthusiasm for the cause, a sense of timing, and be a good craftsman. The "must nots" are legion. A good Shop Steward is worth his weight in gold. Obviously this paragon is also as scarce as gold. Experience is the pertinent factor and that comes with time. Time was lacking in the case of the London hairdressers.

Naturally, after securing so much for so many, the assistants began to tackle a comprehensive charter. A crowded meeting at the International Hall, Café Monico, Piccadilly Circus, in January, 1918, confirmed and amplified what was presented to them. Actually they tried to do a very ambitious thing: to draft a charter for all London. The ambitious part of the scheme was to try and get the employers to agree. Indeed, to get the hairdresser employers of London to agree with one another, let alone with those they employed, was proved well-nigh impossible. It is to their credit they tried it. They saw that if, with the ever-increasing development of women's hairdressing, they were to win control over working conditions, London could not be treated in zones. London must be treated as a unit and the occupation catered for on the basis of class of trade, graded by prices charged. The difficulty of reaching coherence between employers in the matter of charges, was in great part the cause of their inability to work together. The margins were very narrow. As long as anyone with a

£10 note could open a barbers shop and charge anything they liked for shaving and haircutting, it was extremely difficult to get a firm foundation, as difficult as it was to get a decent living! Work it out, on the basis of four shaves per hour at tuppence per shave, with a continuous stream of clients waiting their turn, for 48 hours of the week, you will have gathered in 32s., out of which sum must be paid rent, rates, taxes, light, heat, towels, and so on.

You may have heard the story of Sir Richard Arkwright, who as a young man opened a barbers shop in Bolton and put up a sign, "Come to the Subterranean Barber, he shaves for a penny." No wonder he went looming! Double the charge to fourpence and even so you gather in only 64s. The lack of agreement on charges continues to this day. In March, 1948, I found within 100 yards of Piccadilly Circus, the following prices charged at different shops for shaving: 4d., 6d., 9d., 1s., 1s. 6d. This is the basic difficulty in the hairdressing profession: the margins are insufficient. The organised assistants, when threshing out their difficulties, knew this quite well. They were prepared to face realities much more soberly and with more foresight than the owners of saloons. There were those amongst the employers who knew what ought to be done, and said so and tried to get it done, but the bulk were unresponsive.

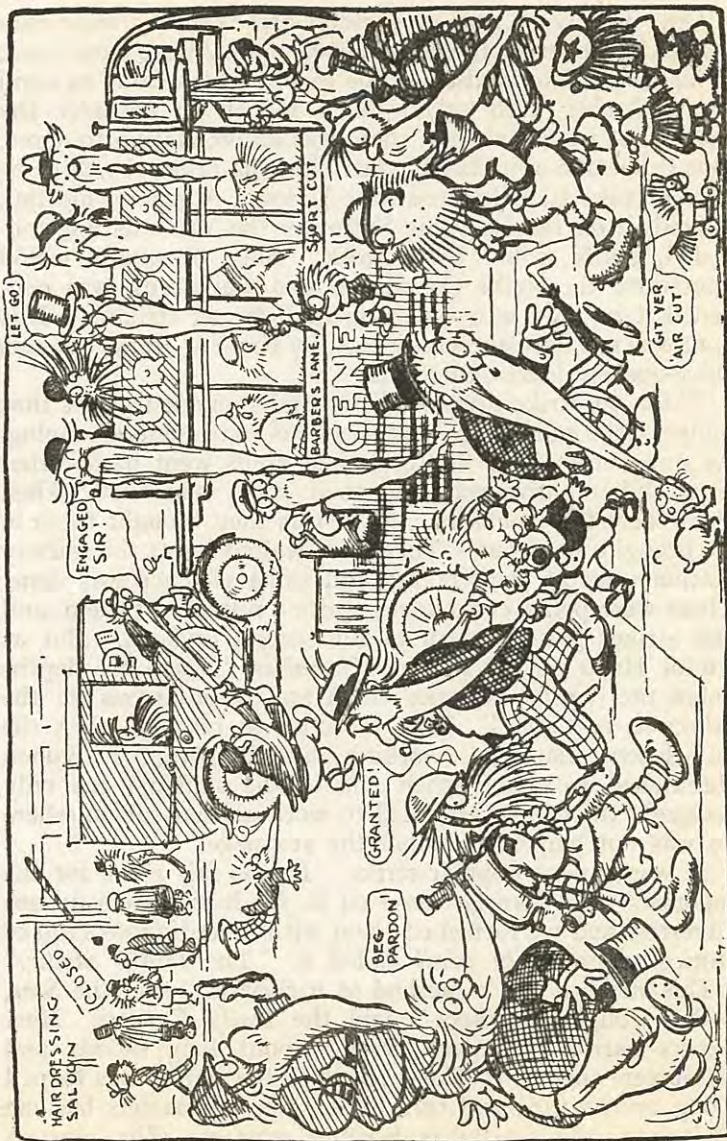
The profession has a very excellent weekly paper, *The Hairdressers' Journal*, which had quite impartially given reports of the assistants' activities, so that the meeting which confirmed the draft charter was fully reported, and it became a matter for general, if heated, discussion in the trade. There were three employers' associations catering for hairdressers: The London Suburban Master Hairdressers' Association, the City Guild, and the Incorporated Guild of Wigmakers, Hairdressers and Perfumers. The last body was precluded by its charter from dealing with wage negotiations. Nevertheless, its secretary took the initiative and convened a meeting of all London employers at the Café Monico early in 1918. But the meeting was apparently not a happy one, for the *Journal* thus commented: "As the meeting developed, the conversation lapsed into the

haggling, quibbling and hair-splitting that one expects to meet with over a committee table."

Eventually a joint committee of the employers' associations met the assistants and hammered away at the subject, quite unavailingly I am sorry to say. The talks went on for nearly twelve months. The employers wanted a 56-hour week, rates only for efficient workers, commission only after wages had been earned, zonal rates and no overtime pay, fines for being late. They could not agree to an all-London rate as the City stuck out against it. However, though at that time nothing was agreed, the talks and ventilation of the subject prepared the way for the agreement which was reached after the great strike, the largest which has ever occurred in the hairdressing trade in this country, the story of which is now due for the telling.

By this time so strong were the hairdressers that they raised between them £1,500 to open a club called "The Hairdressers' Rendezvous" in Archer Street, Piccadilly Circus. All their activities became centred there whilst it lasted. There was a very good restaurant business done, as well as a flourishing bar and wine cellar, a reading-room, billiard saloon, and several meeting rooms.

On December 5th, 1918, a large meeting held at the Rendezvous decided unanimously to make an application to every saloon where the staff were members of the Union, for a 10s. increase to date from December 16th. The date was fixed because of the known procrastinating habits of the employers. The application was sent in to forty-four firms. By the time the strike was over, after seven weeks of exciting struggle, forty-six employers, including Bond Street firms like Hills, Truffitts, and Douglas, as well as Penhaligon of St. James's Street, had agreed to the 10s. increase, four employers had come to special arrangements, leaving twenty firms covered by the close of the strike terms to which I will refer presently. Why did the strike have to occur? Because the firms round Piccadilly Circus hated the Shop-Steward movement and were determined once more, as they put it, "to be masters in their own saloons"—and also, of course, because few could see further than their respective noses.



With acknowledgments to the "Daily Express"

Only the West End of London and the City were concerned in the strike, the huge suburban areas were untouched, being as yet unorganised. The replies which came to hand by December 16th asked for a month to consider the matter, to which, at first, there was an inclination to agree. But it became abundantly clear that the interval was to be used to take steps to smash the Union. A general meeting agreed, if on the following Saturday the 10s. was not conceded, staffs would cease work; Shop Stewards would constitute the strike Committee and where 10s. was conceded it be paid into a dispute fund to aid strikers. This sum was not only cheerfully paid by those at work, but was subsequently increased to 20s.

Those on strike numbered 270 and remained about that figure to the end, for the situation was continually changing. As some firms gave way and their staffs went back, other firms did not give way and their staffs came out. Then there were the blacklegs. As fast as they brought them in we brought them out. They were waited for at the railway stations and at their homes and some violence was done. There were police court cases, quite a number of them, and one striker got a month in the second division. But as Victor Hugo puts it in *Les Misérables*, "there are depths below the depths, infamies which are too infamous for the infamous to touch." That bottom was reached when the half-dozen blacklegs working at Shipwright's Saloon threatened to strike when one of the strikers, the only renegade there was, attended to work at that saloon where he was not employed before the stoppage.

It was a very popular strike. It was fair game for the reporters who were let loose on it, for hairdressers do not advertise and we furnished them with a continuous crop of stories. The *Daily Mail* called it "The Polite Strike." "This strike is not a method of barberism," said the *Star*, "The Obliging Strikers" said the *Daily Express*. Most papers carried cartoons usually about long beards and "Get yer 'air cut." The interest to the public was helped along by the turn and turn about, for the masters became assistants, the assistants became masters. The masters donned aprons, grasped razors, perched combs in their

hair and went to work at Shipwright's Saloon, the largest gents' saloon in the West End. The assistants got wind of it and arranged accordingly. Pickets massed outside, even as did customers. And such customers! The unshorn and unshaven of London were gathered there; from highways and hedges they were garnered and given money for shaves and haircuts and a solatium for any loss they would incur. Shipwright's catered for the élite—generals, judges, Cabinet Ministers. That morning instead of the Upper Ten they got the lower eleven: men whose beards, where not patriarchal, were like wire, and the hair of the head, where it had not become matted, fell in waves even as a woman's.

The assistants opened the Rendezvous as a saloon. The four billiard tables were taken down, the marble-topped tables from the restaurant upstairs were arranged down the centre of the basement, and the mirrors used in the academies were propped up on them in two rows. High-power electric lights were installed and an electric fan. Thirty chairs were arranged in front of the mirrors and lounges were set against the walls. Several of the upstairs rooms were converted into Ladies' Saloons and one part of the basement was curtained off for the twelve manicurists. Magically, it seemed out of nowhere, appeared piles of towels, lotions, perfumes, oils, and all the mysterious and indispensable appurtenances of hairdressing which proclaim to all and sundry that you have been to the barbers. From morn to night in relays boys jerked huge cans of boiling hot water up and down the service lifts.

One of the Pressmen had lyrically written in his paper "Visit the Bevy of Beauties in the Barbers' Hall"—and visit they did, all the *hoi polloi*. Fashionable London had got a new sensation. A Striking Shave by Striking Shavers! Visitors included Peers of the Realm, Generals, Service Officers, Jockeys, Doctors of Science, Ambassadors and at least one Prime Minister—W. Hughes of Australia. All thoroughly enjoyed themselves. Stars of stage, screen and music-hall patronised the Ladies' Saloons. No charges were made, because that would have brought them under the London County Council regulations, but a large trunk was placed open on a table by the entrance and patrons

were asked to give what they liked. And they did like! The first week's takings in the Treasure Trunk were £273 7s. 6d., and remained a steady £30 a day until the close.

A film of the Saloon in full working order was made and exhibited all over the country. Shipwright's Saloon closed on Saturdays for the half-day. Franks, the next largest, closed on Thursdays, so the employers decided to transfer themselves to Franks on the Saturday afternoon, but so close was it picketed that the employers could not get through—there was only one entrance and that up some stairs. As a precautionary measure a series of itinerant musicians were sent in relays up the stairs to do a turn at the door of the saloon. It was a great joy when one burnt-cork minstrel, entering into the spirit of the thing, sang for half-an-hour on end "Where is my wandering boy to-night," with banjo accompaniment.

All this time correspondence as well as conversations were going on to try and find a way out. But one could never pin the employers down. If an offer was secured from their representatives, as likely as not it would be repudiated by their rank and file.

Under the Wages (Temporary Regulation) Act, 1918, the Minister of Labour had the power to fix a prescribed rate, or a substituted rate for the prescribed rate, where there was a dispute. We invoked (the first body ever so to do) the help of the Minister under that Act. This made the other side sit up. We met together on January 31st, when they offered us 45s. as a minimum for gents' hands, as a basis of agreement to operate from return to work. On that resumption-of-work question we split. They asserted that some of the men were bad workmen, did not take enough money or were guilty of unprofessional conduct.

On February 7th terms were arranged as follows: Work to be resumed immediately; as a temporary arrangement commission to be raised to 15 per cent., and a committee to be appointed to go into the whole of working conditions which when agreed to shall be operated from March 1st; the application under the Wages Act to be withdrawn. The terms as finally agreed in May, after meeting three times

a week with what had by this time become the London Federation of Master Hairdressers, was as follows :

Gents' Hands 45s. Chiropody 2*d.* in 1s. extra.

Managers 45s. and overriding commission.

General Hands 52s. 6*d.*

Ladies' Hands 70s.

Lady Assistants :

Plain Saloon Hands 30s.

General Saloon Hands 40s.

Commission 12½ per cent. on attendance charges after wages have been earned, 17½ per cent. on employers' own preparations, 10 per cent. on general sales, 2½ per cent. on proprietary articles.

Manicurists 25s. and 15 per cent. on all takings.

Knotters 30s.

Experienced knotters 40s.

Counter Hands 37s. 6*d.*

Notes.—For an assistant who mixes, prepares and executes own hair orders, commission be paid over rates. Women taking men's places and doing exactly the same work as men, to receive not less than the minimum rates laid down for men.

Shop Stewards.—An official spokesman shall act in any shop with four assistants when any difference arises, which if not settled either side can bring to the notice of his Association. No collection of contributions shall interfere with business.

Conjuring from out the faded years that struggle of the London hairdressers, there appears upon my mind as vividly as upon the silent screen a picture of those glorious but turbulent days. It is not right that what was then done to achieve freedom and justice among us should live only in the shadowing memories of those who played a modest if fruitful part. Their story has a right to live and to be a leading light to all who come after. There were splendid men inspiring that struggle, men of Britain as well as from various countries of Europe. They must have been more than ordinary to perform all they did, to organise as they did, and to achieve what they did. It would be

invidious indeed to single out any one of them for special mention. Indeed, it would be nearly impossible to do so, for once started there would hardly be an end. There were so many who gave all their experience, their ability, their enthusiasm, and sacrifice for the common cause. Yet I cannot refrain from recalling that splendid character, their chairman, C. S. Fildew. He was tall and slim with a slight moustache, and in conversation spoke like the fine English gentleman he was. A gents' hand at Carter's in Fleet Street, under his skilled and nimble fingers sat the leading lights of bar and bench as well as innumerable Pressmen. They all respected him. It was largely due to him that we had such a good press, and the movement went forward on that inspiratory note. I wish I could be sure that time and their sacrifices had swept away that obscurantism of hair-dressing employers which obstructed their onward march.

In June the hairdressers of Greenock obtained a settlement which gave to male and female assistants of four years' experience 63s., or alternatively at their option 50s. with 15 per cent. on gross takings.

In October another strike occurs, this time in Glasgow. Here negotiations for a 10s. increase had gone on for months and produced an offer to increase their rate from 45s. to 50s. Out came 174 men and women and stayed out with razors and scissors shut for two weeks, when a settlement was reached on the following basis: Rate 55s., with no commission until 70s. has been taken, when it is to be one penny in the shilling until 90s., and thereafter fourpence in the shilling. Incidentally that settlement, if examined closely, throws a flood of light upon what was wrong with Barberdom.

An agreement with employers in Aberdeen is closely followed by one in Manchester with the Hairdressers' Federation. They obtain 45s. and commission, etc., with Trade Union membership a condition of employment. Then in August, 1920, an application to the Waldorf Saloons, who had nine branches in Manchester, for a 70s. minimum causes a strike. The employer referred the matter to the Manchester Hairdressers' Federation. The Federation rejects the claim and gives as reason that a

Trade Board is to be set up for the industry. This is in 1920 and here we are with our old friend the Trade Board again. The Manchester Press supports the strikers and issues lively posters on their behalf. Newsboys enter into the spirit of the affair ; they go into such saloons as remain open, with the help of friends and relations to have manicures. A "darkie" is sent into one saloon for a shave and "a trim," and many other larks of the same kind are indulged in.

The Federation would probably have liked the strike to go on indefinitely, for the small traders have never loved the multiples. Are they not ruined by them—sometimes twice a week. But the strike does not go on for ever. Maybe the Chairman of the Federation does not relish that the takings which should have been his are finding their way into the tills of his fellow-members. A settlement is reached after three weeks, the commission payable on earnings being increased to 40 per cent. ; and that is a substantial percentage.

No Hairdressing Trade Board was set up. The movement, full of such splendid promise, gradually receded all over the country. The full aspirations of those formative years will some day be realised. The masters alone will not bring it about. The urge of artistry amongst hairdressing employees must, if it is to succeed, come from the workers themselves. There is no other way. If, therefore, this record of what was striven for and what was done helps in a small way to encourage those who are working to so useful an end, it will not have been written in vain. The industry, it is true, is small in numbers, the craft is a small one. It is because it is so small that it can become so great.

Chapter IX

WHOLESALE DRUGS AND OTHER TRADES

THE conditions of work in the Drug warehouses were generally very bad indeed. Not only were hours long and wages low, but working conditions were slipshod, sometimes positively dirty. The places where processing went on were often dwelling-houses or sheds in back-yards. Once I was summoned to one of the largest warehouses with quite new modern buildings, to find that girls engaged in boxing, bottling, finishing, labelling and capsuling had come out on strike because their piece-rates had been cut. I obtained an interview with the responsible directors and the reason they gave for cutting the piece-rates was that the girls were earning too much money. They would be giving themselves airs, Jill would be as good as her master, she would be wearing a fur coat and would not come to work on Mondays. That was the gist of what was said. I am not exaggerating. It reveals the mental outlook of many employers at that time. In fact, these particular directors were rather enlightened and up-to-date, as witness their new and airy buildings. Their attitude to those they employed was not peculiar. For that is the way the workers generally were treated; they had to be kept under, sat on, squashed, they must on no consideration be given a chance to improve their lot or the very foundations of society would shake. Few realised that it was not rock upon which society rested, but a morass of wretched poverty.

Many people do not understand that a human being is not encouraged by kicks and cuffs. He may be made more submissive or docile, but he is not thereby rendered a good workman. When piece-rates are cut without the workers' consent, they are being robbed of their just reward and no amount of sophistry will cover up the fact.

The first time I came up against the question of demarcation between manufacturing and wholesale distribution was when negotiating on behalf of the warehousemen

and ordermen at Cadbury Brothers, Bournville. They were manufacturers who supplied both wholesalers and retailers direct. So the difficulty was how (when both manufacturing and distribution were carried on from the same floor) to tell t'other from which. The factory workers had one agreement and another was being negotiated for the warehousemen. The firm then put it up to me to find a solution. Cadbury's are like that; they make you think—and quite right, too. I was put on my mettle—and I had a brain-wave. Why not draw a white line across the factory floor? All who truck goods up to that line should be considered as factory workers; all who handle those goods thenceforward should be considered as warehousemen. Eureka! No sooner said than done.

But bless you, you could not apply such a fine distinctive differential in those higgledy-piggledy drug warehouses. So they had to be taken into membership as they came, the Union confining its attention to "Fine Chemicals."

The movement amongst the Wholesale Drug Workers in London began in 1913. By early 1915 the organisation had become so good that negotiations were opened with several firms. Then began the sparring and procrastination which we had experienced elsewhere and were to become accustomed to. So two staffs who felt strong and determined enough decided to cut the knot. An ultimatum was sent. The same old story—only a threat of cessation of work makes some firms "see reason." The firms with whom the first all-round agreement was secured in the drug trade were Baiss Brothers and Stevenson, and Willows, Francis, Butler and Thompson. (Drug firms have strings of names like solicitors!) It provided for a 48-hour week. Time-and-a-quarter overtime, double time Sundays. Wage Rates:

Home Packers, Bottle Washers, Warehouse Porters, up to 30s. at 21.

Laboratory Assistants, Counter Hands, Tablet and Pill Makers, Export Packers and Checking Clerks, up to 32s. 6d. at 21.

Mill Hands, Grinders and Mercurial Workers, 35s.

Female Workers, Bottling and Finishing, up to 16s. at 21.

Charge Hands, 2s. 6d. to 5s. above the foregoing rates.

You who read these lines will not think very much of those wages, obtained as a settlement after hard negotiations and after a ballot to cease work in order to get the negotiations going. It will seem as if a prodigious steam-hammer had been brought into Herculean play to crack a filbert. But if you will remember the wages of the girls at that Drug house where the strike occurred (the highest paid was getting 8s. per week) you may think, as these staffs thought, that they had accomplished a revolution. Indeed, they had. The wholesale drug trade was never to be the same again.

In September the above agreement with some slight additions was agreed to with Burgoyne Burbidges and Co., of East Ham. Here once more a threat of stoppage had to be used and indeed peace or war one morning hung, so to speak, upon the telephone. Later in the year Evans Son, Lescher and Webb agreed to the same arrangements. Then began difficulties over the operation of the 48-hour week, and at one firm a strike was agreed to and pickets arranged before they faced up to their difficulties. In March, 1916, a new agreement was reached with Boots, Nottingham, who undertook that any new applicant for employment must belong to the Union or be willing to join before being allowed to enter the employment of the firm. This rule to apply to all except qualified chemists, technical workers, foremen or apprentices; accommodation at each warehouse is to be provided, after business hours, where the treasurer or any other official of the Union could receive subscriptions from members of the staff who were in the Union.

Then, in the second half of 1916, started the chase after the cost of living. An application was put in for 10 per cent. increases, and in that connection the first industrial Arbitration Award ever obtained by the Union occurs. The arbitrator, Mr. Ernest Page, gave, in the case of Willows, Francis, one penny in the 1s. to those getting 30s. a week and under, and 2s. 6d. a week to those earning over this sum "during the continuance of the war."

A strike—unfortunately an unofficial one—occurred in August, 1917. British Drug Houses Ltd. was one of the largest firms in the Trade. The management set its face against the light; it resented those they employed acting

together in their Trade Union. They were threatened, cajoled and bribed, all of which proved unsuccessful. So staff were dismissed if they were active Trade Unionists and were maintained by the Union. But the dismissals naturally disturbed the staff very much and they determined to take action. We were nearly ready to open negotiations when two of the girls, one of them a Shop Steward, were discharged. Against Union rules, moved nevertheless by a fine impulse, 196 ceased work the following morning. We tried unsuccessfully to invoke the Munitions of War Act, but the firm was not a "controlled firm"; its output was not affected sufficiently to warrant the interference of the War Office. So at the end of four weeks the strike was declared "off." Of the 196 who came out only 30 went back. Of the rest some had from 15 to more than 20 years' experience and their going into other jobs (for they all found work easily) was a real blow to the firm. The staff were cheerful enough: "they had had a run for their money," was how they put it. I wrote at the time: "The men's spirit is right, but beautiful as that spirit is, inspiring as is the sacrifice, patience as well may call for sacrifice no less inspiring. And there are times it is better to play patience than pontoon."

By this time organisation in a number of Houses had been completed, and new applications had gone in to such firms as Allen and Hanburys, Dakin Brothers, Hewlett and Son, Curley, Wyman and Co., and many more.

Then Sir George Askwith, Chief Industrial Commissioner, called a conference at the Ministry of Labour of the Warehouse Workers', General Workers', Dock Workers' Unions, as well as of our own Union, all of whom had membership in the Drug Trade, together with representatives from the newly formed Fine Chemical and Wholesale Druggists Manufacturers' Association. The object was to set up for Fine Chemicals similar machinery to that already in existence in Heavy Chemicals. It was agreed that adjustments of wages should take place in February, June and October of each year, at the instance of either party, before the Committee on Production, the awards being given under the Munition of War Acts and as such compulsory on all parties.

We were concerned with two matters in these negotiations : a war wage advance, and the establishment of minimum rates and a code of working conditions. We secured, quickly enough, an award under the first part, which meant 5s. for the men, 3s. for women and 2s. for juniors, but the second part took some months. Eventually, in September, 1918, agreement was reached. Briefly, the agreement gave an increase of 20s. and 30s. to the already agreed basic rate. An Adjustments Committee was set up to deal with matters arising out of the Agreement, especially with regard to grading difficulties. Shop Committees were recognised and in some cases rooms were placed at their disposal on the premises.

Meanwhile, the employees of the wholesale druggists of Dublin were succeeding, but not without trouble. One firm, McMaster, Hodgson and Co. Ltd., agreed at once to the rates which meant increases of from 3s. to 17s. a week ; but the other firm, Hugh Moore and Alexander, was altogether another kettle of fish. Their attempts to get out of paying the rates make a nice little story.

First, they ignore the letters sent to them. Then they decide to do nothing at all about the matter. So as the firm was doing nothing the staff decides to follow their example—at least being modest Irish lads they will only follow their good example part of the way ; and so they decide not to work the overtime from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. which they had been working without payment during the past twelve months. The firm retort by giving the staff receipts, instead of wages for the groceries they purchase from the firm. They are threatened with legal proceedings. Like a snail when touched with the finger they sensitively but hastily withdraw into their shell. Again they take the offensive and tackle the staff individually. " Will you be after working that overtime for me now ? You won't ? Then here is the order of the sack for you, me fine boy," or words to that effect. Six workers refuse and six are sacked, and then the rest of the staff, always obliging, sack themselves to save the firm the trouble. But they don't stay sacked for long. The firm bring in some black-

legs who manage to set the place on fire. Organised workers refuse to handle the firm's goods. The firm try to carry on by withdrawing their travellers from the road and concentrating them in the warehouse. But though the travellers could sell, they couldn't make or make-up, and the senior traveller refuses to do it anyway and resents other firms taking his customers, and says so. All this is too much for the firm. They give way and the staff start work again, having won, after four weeks, an average of 9s. a week increase and reduced their hours of labour from 80 to 49 a week.

Drug workers back home had been pressing nationally for a 44-hour week as well as for further increases of wages. The employers' attitude to this further application stiffened considerably. But the cost of living index was mounting rapidly and the pressure was inexorable. A great national strike was narrowly averted by last-minute concessions, for by a ballot vote the workers had decided to cease work. In June, 1920, an agreement was reached with the Wholesale Druggists Sundries and Proprietaries, including Hovendens and Osborne Garrett.

With regard to the Retail Trade in this country there was, I think, only one wage scale and that was hardly an agreement with the Union. Boots Ltd. submitted for our information and comments a scale they intended to operate, which incidentally provided a £6 minimum for branch shop managers. But in Ireland there developed a nation-wide movement which is extremely interesting and which I will briefly deal with.

By the end of 1918 the Dublin Chemists' Assistants had so gathered themselves together in fellowship that the profession was practically blackleg-proof. In consequence they were able to compel arbitration upon their claims and the award of the arbitrator was published in May, 1919. I give just one or two of the main points of the award: Unqualified male assistants after completion of second year after apprenticeship, 52s. 6d.; Qualified Assistants, 5s. over rates; Qualified Chemists, three years' experience following apprenticeships, 75s.; an additional 5s. to be paid for

attending to the night bell, the duty for which commences at 11 p.m. until opening time in the morning.

The people of Ireland are not easy or is it they are too easy. In the South their dislike of industrialism did not prevent a robust Trade Union spirit amongst shopworkers. They won their way often with a laugh. A secretary of our Cork branch was once called to the office by his employer. "See here, Tim, are you a member of this Union I'm hearing so much about?" "Sure I am that, Sorr." "Phwat's the Union for then, Tim?" "It's to raise the wages of us, Sorr." "It cannot be done, Tim." "Then it's to reduce the work of us, Sorr." "Why, you'll be the ruin of us entirely, Tim, and there'll be no work at all." "We have the roight to live, Sorr." "See here Tim, I'll have none of it. You can all get out of the Union or get out of here." "But, Sorr, Pope Leo the Thirteenth in his *Encyclical* upon Labour said the workers must get into their Unions and the employers into their Associations." "And," said Tim telling the story, "I'd got him there, for he daren't argue with the Pope."

The organisation of the chemists spread rapidly throughout Ireland after the success in Dublin. Negotiations which opened in July, 1919, in respect to a new programme, failed of their purpose, and arbitration being refused, the whole of the membership in Dublin, Belfast, Cork, Limerick, and Waterford, came out on strike on December 1st. Some 200 workers marched with banners through the principal streets of Dublin, and that must have been a sight for the citizens of that beautiful, dear, dirty and scarred city. I would have loved to see those "qualified" men a-marching in their own right cause. They marched, they adorned themselves with huge placards and picketed closely—so closely and so persistently that at least one arrest was made. The accused, an M.P.S.I., had done work in most of Dublin's dispensaries and was a member of the Strike Committee. He had a delightful argument with the Magistrate. He was asked: "Did you mention the word 'robbers' outside the shop?" "I did." "And can you defend the use of that word?" "I do; if a man is not paying me a living wage he is robbing me. We chemists were the first body of

professional men to strike to enforce a living wage." The Magistrate told him: "You do not deserve sympathy at all." He answered: "I don't want sympathy, I want justice. My conscience is above the law; quite above your law and every law." Later he said: "I don't care a rap about you and Sir Thomas Robinson." (Sir Thomas was the owner of the shop in Grafton Street before which the row took place, and where accused addressed a crowd of hundreds of people.) He declined to pay a fine of 40s., and refusing to allow anyone else to pay it, went happily and joyfully to Mountjoy prison for a month. I would like to have met Mr. N. Burns, for though thumbing your nose at the law is a fine and ancient Irish pastime, I have not heard of that gesture of independence being done by a qualified pharmacist before.

But all was not happy in the camp of the Employers' Federation. Mr. J. E. Payne, then organiser of the Union, who was sent over to Ireland to lend a hand, has given us a vivid account of what happened. The employers in Cork broke with the Federation and a local settlement was reached. The employers in Waterford and Limerick threatened to do the same. The Lord Mayor of Dublin called a conference at the Mansion House and excellent progress was made towards a settlement; then the employers who were not at the conference repudiated those who were and sent to the next conference fresh delegates who wanted it put down as a first condition that "Reinstatement would not be guaranteed." The Lord Mayor was most indignant. The conference broke up. Meanwhile picketing was being intensely carried on from early morn till dewy eve. Trade was diverted to those shops not in the Federation, supplies were held up. After six weeks a settlement was secured. The assistants' rates were raised to 67s. 6d., with qualified assistants 5s. above, and qualified chemists 20s. above, assistants' rates. "Locum tenens" qualified (outdoor), £5 5s.; assistant outdoor, £4 4s., with return rail-fare. They had secured improved conditions, a reduction of hours, a stricter limitation of apprentices, increases of more than £10,000 a year. That is a splendid achievement for two years' work, even if it did take a nation-wide strike to do it.

TOBACCO

The long struggle with Albert Baker and Co., tobacconists, began in 1913 and to this I have already drawn your attention. The firm had forty-seven branches in London and others at Oxford, Brighton, and Eastbourne. They also had a warehouse, cigar and tobacco factory. In June, 1915, the staff gained 10 per cent. increase with a maximum of 3s. But there came a change in management forced by a shareholders' meeting. With the change came a struggle with the staff.

The new Chairman was a little Scotchman, obstinate, given to indulging in pin-pricks, splitting hairs and all sorts of minor nonsense. There had been two years of shuffling, quibbling and evasion. Never a straight answer to a straight question. There had been a snapping of finger and thumb at the staff, "that for your Union!" Repeated attempts were made to get him to receive a staff deputation when they asked for their minimum rate (agreed to in 1913) to be raised from 28s. to 31s. The workers, along with a large number of other employees in retail distribution, had suffered a 15 per cent. cut at the outbreak of war, which had been partly restored by the advance mentioned above. They now demanded a further increase of 5s. all round to meet the increased cost of living. Then came pull-devil-pull-Baker. The firm called staff meetings. Pains and penalties were promised to those who stood for the Union, rewards and everlasting felicity for those who stood by the Chairman. It was then that the patient unity of the staff was to bring its reward. They stood solid. The company Chairman was a very poor psychologist, for if he could not break their unity with individual contacts he should have known he would be less likely to do it when he got them all together.

Actually the situation had by December 20th simplified and clarified. Confining their request to the 5s. "bonus," the staff had already placed themselves in the hands of the Disputes Committee, so it was decided that a last attempt should be made to get a deputation received; if not, out they must come, this being again refused. Telegrams were dispatched to the managers and assistants of the forty-seven

London shops and to the warehouse, calling them out by 3 p.m. that Thursday. Out they came and fixed notices, already printed, upon the doors :

SHOP CLOSED. FIRM WON'T PAY

STAFF WAR BONUS 5s. WEEKLY

Each manager brought his keys to the Disputes Committee for safe keeping in case they were lost and, as each did so, cheers were raised from the growing throng of employees. The next day only eight shops remained open. These were closely picketed. Then came a relief column from Headquarters, headed by the Inspector armed with duplicate keys, supported by the managers of the cigar factory and repairs department and Secretary of the Company. They sought, with the help of the few remaining at work, to open the shops. They managed to open two more shops between them. So telegrams were sent to the three country shops, closing them down. By 2 p.m. on Saturday only six shops out of the fifty remained open, 150 employees were out. The Press was sympathetic.

The founder of the "Nicotine" branch was a former A.B.C. employee, H. C. George. He had been for months lying on a sick-bed, his life being several times despaired of. The branch had all the time helped to relieve him of financial worries by levying themselves from their lean earnings. They loved "Long George" as they called him. Thinking to cheer him up they sent him a telegram as soon as the stoppage was complete. "On receipt of the telegram the old lion was aroused in George and he had to get out of bed and see the boys. He came to us, worn, wan, frail, hobbling with a stick, but with a smile upon his lips. He could not keep away, he said. Not one amongst us was there who was not affected at the sight of him and could scarce restrain a tear. So they cheered him again and again. And he sat in a chair in the big room in the midst of the strikers and spoke to them with love and inspiration for full fifteen minutes. They sang 'He's a jolly good fellow' thrice over and cheered him out of the room. They got him a cab to take him home, but naught would do but he must perform his bit of picketing with the rest."

On the firm's side the directors got together and between them levered the Chairman out of the chair, and one, Richardson, a solicitor of Bristol, was put in his stead. Both sides were invited to the Ministry of Labour and at the instance of Horace Wilson (afterwards Sir Horace, and Neville Chamberlain's adviser, of Munich fame) it was agreed to submit the dispute to arbitration. But first the other side agreed to recognise the Union and for the firm to be a closed shop. Wages were to be paid in full for the duration of the stoppage. Then the directors came into the room with us, for we had until then been in separate rooms. How pitifully deflated looked the ex-Chairman. Though it was his own folly that had brought this defeat upon him, I for one felt very sorry for him. The others shook hands with us and hoped that a new era was to begin. A bright new era did begin—until the Finlay "Whale" came along and swallowed the A.B.C. "Jonah."

The arbitrator's award published in February gave a 3s war bonus to those over 18 and 1s. 6d. for those under that age. The firm agreed to a further similar bonus in July. By the end of 1917 a fresh agreement on minimum rates was secured, shop classification was done away with, managers' rates were raised to 50s. and assistants' rates to 35s., while women, when doing men's work, were to get men's rates.

All went as happily as marriage bells. One man got heavily in arrears with his subs. and would not pay up. He was reported. The Chairman sent for him: "Jones, can you play cricket?" "Yes sir." "Then go back to your counter and play it." The man paid up. One man was dismissed for overcharging for a cigarette-case and pocketing the difference. The Staff Committee took up the matter and asked me to try and get his reinstatement. Said Mr. Richardson (a solicitor, mind you) to me: "My dear Hoffman, do you mean to tell me that the staff, knowing this man to be a thief, have the nerve to ask for his reinstatement?" "Yes sir," said I. "Knowing the risks they take, that the managers are responsible for their stocks and that suspicion may even fall in future on one of the assistants, they yet ask for his reinstatement." "But—

but I've never heard the like." "Well sir, let me put it another way to you. He may steal again—he may not. You risk losing say £10, £20, £30. This man is now unemployed, with a wife and child, without a reference, a marked man branded as a thief—is that man's soul worth £30?" Mr. Richardson was certainly moved; he jerked forward in his chair. "Good gracious, Hoffman—you frighten me. All right, I'll give him a chance." "Thank you, sir. Will you have him up to speak to him yourself?" He looked at me over his glasses and said, "Yes, I will."

Later on went in another application. For some unaccountable reason the firm went to the National Engineering Employers' Federation with their case and for some similar reason the Federation took it up for them. So it was agreed that the war advance given to the engineers of 23s. 6d. would apply to the staff also. Moreover, it was agreed that during the war and for six months afterwards the wages were to be regulated by the general awards made by the Committee on Production or Ministry of Munitions. Although the reason for it all was unaccountable the result was eminently satisfactory to the staff.

MEAT

Can you tell me why pork congregates in the Black Country? Is it that the folk of "Brum," Bilston, Dudley, Wednesbury and such-like resorts need the savoury white flesh and the brown crisp crackling as a sort of compensatory cheerfulness? If the grunting, obstinate beasts still pack the thoroughfares, coerced by perspiring men shouting strange and barbarous exhortations in language which only the pigs understand, enforced by thwackings on the rump, I should not be surprised, for I have not seen a pig for many years and so conclude that it is to the Black Country they must go. It certainly was in the Black Country they were enticed to become sweet-smelling hams, succulent pies, chaps, knuckles, trotters and all sorts of tasty and delectable delicacies. Just before Christmas 1947 I had lunch at an ancient inn in Westminster, and when we came downstairs on our way out, lo and behold there hanging from one of the old black oak beams was a reminder of the

spacious and abundant days that are gone—a Marsh and Baxter ham girt about with its seemly wrappings. As the Israelites lusted for the fleshpots of Egypt, so did we yearn for that sumptuous ham and, turning to the bar, poured out libations as to the golden calf itself.

It reminded me of the strike of the Black Country Pork Butchers in 1915, for that strike included workers employed by Marsh and Baxter. Their programme was simple and modest. They asked for a minimum wage of 28s. at 21, to 36s. at 28, with 5s. in addition for foremen and branch managers, 54-hour week with time-and-a-quarter overtime.

Their applications in July were met with a unanimous and ominous silence on the part of the employers. Ominous because quietness amongst butchers is so unusual as to suggest something portentous or sinister—like the quiet before a storm. Then the employees made a mistake. They ought to have known, there were experiences enough during the previous four years to warn them, that to give a week's notice was to commit a first-class blunder. Of course, the employers tried to take advantage of their position. A number of them worked in the shops and slaughterhouses side by side with their staff. They bullied, they cajoled, and when these methods did not suffice, they bribed them. A number succumbed. As much as £20 was given in a lump sum and 5s. advance in wages. Those who accepted in one firm signed the following: "The directors reserve the right to withhold the bonus in the case of an employee if in their opinion such employee becomes or remains a member of any outside organisation which is in the opinion of the directors inimical to the interest of the Company." It would be well if, when our public men rail against the closed shop, some of these intimidatory documents were thrown in their faces.

Nevertheless, 200 workers came out. Some from Smithfield Birmingham, from Bilston, Wolverhampton, Wednesbury, Greatbridge, and West Bromwich. When the situation in Smithfield weakened, the butchers from the outside marched into Birmingham and held a meeting in the Bull Ring, that ancient and sacred forum of the Midland capital. The strike lasted four weeks and certain gains

were registered, but from a Trade Union point of view the end was not satisfactory. Individual advances, however useful, are not a good substitute for an agreement on wages rates. Later, in 1920, an agreement was reached with Marsh and Baxter, Brierley Hill, for 5s. increase for single and 7s. 6d. for married men, with payment for overtime and a grading system.

The next spot of trouble in the meat trade took place in Aberdeen in March, 1918. One day's stoppage convinced the Master Butchers' Association of the solidarity and sincerity of the slaughtermen. There was some dubiety as to a year or two by the old in years amongst them, but they were all positive as to this, that no rise in wages had been received for some thirty years. In some seasons they worked from 4 a.m. to 9 p.m. So when they got their hours of work definitely scheduled from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., they felt they had achieved something. They also got an increase of sixpence per bullock and threepence per sheep, with the perquisites of the trade to go to the men. Not to be outdone by their neighbour the slaughtermen of Bonnie Dundee registered in September a similar agreement.

BOOKS AND STATIONERY

In February, 1918, the employees of Guy and Co., Ltd., stationers, Patrick Street, Cork, gained increases of wages varying from 2s. 6d. to 8s. a week. They had asked for a minimum of 30s. a week and did not get it. The firm pleads poverty, that the staff is incompetent, that the business will have to close down, that the assistants live at home so low wages are justified, the firm pleads—what does not the firm plead? The staff, unimpressed with these unctuous pleas, says so in so many words, and gets its increases. Then the firm, feeling the seat of authority still firmly under them, starts to get its own back. What it has lost on the swings it will try and regain on the roundabouts. So it decides not to make payments during sickness, which is a very old-established house rule. Faced with a protesting staff the firm decides that the shop employees shall be placed on the same terms as those in the factory, and then proceeds to operate the worst conditions of both places. The

staff demand all the terms as they exist in the factory of these following conditions : a 25 per cent. increase, 48-hour week, overtime pay and a fortnight's holiday. For a week negotiations go on ; the employers refuse arbitration and conciliation is quite hopeless. Some thirty-five members of the staff cease work. Eventually, when the firm agree to arbitration, the staff go back. But the arbitration award was an insult. In substitution for the sick-pay is awarded $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. on wages as compensation, but the wages are still very low ; they average less than £1 a week. The arbitrator accepts the firm's story of shortage of goods and agrees to seven of the staff getting the sack. The staff, feeling sold but solid, bide their time. This came just before Christmas that same year 1918. The fiasco of July turned into triumph in December. The Cork correspondent wrote : " It must be forever remembered to the credit of the staff that although their magnificent battle ended in such a fashion, although they had to suffer the insult of $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. increase upon their miserable wages and were compelled to stand helplessly by while their fellow-members were shamefully victimised, they did not desert their organisation." The firm having had the experience of a kind of negotiations suited to its pocket, eagerly offered arbitration. The staff insisted upon unfettered negotiations in which they won the day. A few instances of what the difference in pay meant are given below :

	February Wage	December Wage
Assistant, Male ..	12s. 6d.	27s. 6d.
Assistant, Female ..	12s. 6d.	22s. 6d.
Charge Hand, Male	25s. 0d.	40s. 0d.
Clerk	7s. 6d.	17s. 6d.

Thus a small staff of a small firm in a small Irish town, away from the main tributaries of our industrial life, puts up for months on end a lone fight for a decent life and, in spite of reverses caused in part by an underling from Dublin Castle, wins and nearly doubles the firm's wages bill. That small staff of shop workers refused to knuckle under. They were not veterans in Trades Union struggles, they were mere fledgelings, yet they hung on like old-stagers. More than

thirty years after that event we can review what they did with pride and gather from the episode inspiration and courage.

There were several other agreements reached about this time in the stationery and bookselling trade: as for example with the Times Book Club, London, Philip, Son and Nephew, Liverpool, and A. Brown and Son, Hull. A whole series of agreements were also reached with the Stephens Ink Company.

To state out the story, till it
 One lesson I learnt as to long words
 To place them with a needle, and press them together,
 Put them in a press, and press them together,
 Till ten words or twelve were turned to fifteen!

The Vision of Piers the Plowman

WILLIAM LANGLAND, 1330-1400

I now come to the Brewery trade, including the depart-
 mental stores, which is the largest and most important
 trade section of them all. In it the struggle was heroic,
 the agreements reached the most comprehensive, the
 estimate partly on the part of the employers the greatest,
 and the damage done by that breach of faith the worst
 and most lasting, for it was decisive for the whole embas-
 si of distributive trade workers.

I propose to deal with the Wholesale side first for it is
 the broader section of the "ret trade." Mainly it clustered
 in the shadow of the great Cathedral of St. Paul, in that
 historic City of London, with its narrow cobbled streets,
 alleys and lanes stretching off alongside the more modern
 of the names of which with their lovely letter-
 bottom that formed below the Great Fire of London:
 Finsbury Wood Street, Finsbury Street, Milk Street, Trinity
 Street, Park Lane, Water Lane.
 I have told you how I was introduced to the City as an
 youngster. I see it and hear it now as it was then. I saw
 down (beside to the Royal Exchange, surrounded with
 its gossamer of a tower, sign of warning and of hope,
 looked on its right with the Cathedral, ancient London

Chapter X

DRAPERY—WHOLESALE

“ Then I drew me to drapers my duties to learn,
To stretch out the stuff, till it looked the longer.
One lesson I learnt as to long striped cloths ;
To pierce them with a needle, and piece them together,
Put them in a press, and press them thereunder,
Till ten yards or twelve were turned to thirteen ! ”

The Vision of Piers the Plowman.—

WILLIAM LANGLAND, 1332-1400

I NOW come to the Drapery trade, including the departmental stores, which is the largest and most important trade section of them all. In it the struggle was fiercest, the agreements reached the most comprehensive, the ultimate perfidy on the part of the employers the greatest, and the damage done by that breach of faith the worst and most lasting, for it was decisive for the whole endeavour of distributive trade workers.

I propose to deal with the Wholesale side first for it is the premier section of the “ rag trade.” Mainly it clustered in the shadow of the great Cathedral of St. Paul, in that historic City of London, with its narrow cobbled streets, alleys and lanes branching off Cheapside, the mere reading of the names of which, with their lovely larder sounds, betoken that period before the Great Fire of London: Poultry, Wood Street, Bread Street, Milk Street, Friday Street, Pudding Lane, Water Lane.

I have told you how I was introduced to the City as an apprentice. I see it and hear it now as it was then. I see down Cheapside to the Royal Exchange, surmounted with its grasshopper as a mystic sign of warning and of hope, flanked on its right with the Corinthian columned Mansion

House, and on its left with the Bank of England retiring whether for shyness or shame, behind its high blind walls.

Old Cheap is crowded with horse-drawn vehicles of every description. Down the narrow cobbled side-streets you may hear the continual klip-klop klip-klop of the van horses cheeky van boys perched precariously upon the tail-board, which carry the rich and abundant merchandise to and from the warehouses belonging to the puissant merchant princes of the textile trade or their not so puissant shareholders. In between all this slowly moving traffic, dodging under horses' heads, the foot passengers, many in top hats, cross from one side of Cheapside to the other. And darting in and out of the traffic like London sparrows are little boys, with uniform peaked caps, a sort of dustpan in one hand and a brush in the other, gathering up the horse droppings as they fall. The Corporation of the City of London liked its main streets undefiled; it actually washed them at night. When the clocks chimed the midnight hour and the business folk had gone to their well-earned rest, out came the Fire Brigade, clad in high rubber boots, and dragging rolls of fire hose with which to sluice, with mighty swirl and swash, the main arteries through the ancient City.

Employers in the Wholesale have a dignity, an aura you will find lacking in the Retail. It comes partly from the fact that they are often not merely the suppliers to, but the bankers of, the retailer, and partly from the tradition of the City itself. There has come down to us, preserved in the City, the pageantry of the Middle Ages, together with the wealth and magnificence of the Guilds, as witness the Companies of Haberdashers, Vinters, Fishmongers, etc. The City was, for centuries, the custodian of the liberties of the people. The Guilds were the organisations of the craftsmen, and craftsmen the world over have ever been men of liberty. It was in the City that the five Members of Parliament found refuge from the petty and petulant wrath of Charles I; and the dwellers in the City defied him so and threatened him so that the poor man felt safe only when far away at Hampton Court. But of all this pomp and circumstance, what is left of it, of the prestige and all the ceremonies, the feasting and junketing, has passed into

the hands of the nabobs, the Aldermen and the Liverymen, who are Freemen of the City, entitled to wear the livery of the Company to which they belong. These grand folk do not live in the City (no one lives there except cats and caretakers) but they make their money there. They would do well to remember sometimes how all these things have come about and humbly to acknowledge that it was the craftsmen in their Guilds who gained the power, the symbols and garments of which they wear to-day. It would be an act of grace to recognise those modern guilds, the Trade Unions, and not put obstacles in the way of their own employees gathering together in purposeful unity.

It is for the good of his soul that the ruthless retail buyer drives the unwilling apprentice lad citywards with explicit instructions, adding thereto such material things as pins, cuttings and a bag. For the lad is to go "matching." That is, he must find the House where a certain piece of material came from and must get such and such a quantity of it. In as much as patience and self-discipline are the first principles of life and a good knowledge of the wholesale houses and the lines they deal in is necessary for his future well-being, it was well that this young reluctant Jason be sent in search of the golden fleece. So in and out and up and down he would go—to Cook's, Pawsons, Devas's, Brettles, Bradbury's, Debenham's, Copestake's, Hitchcock's; and wearily would he wander Ludgate and Newgate, Cripplegate, Aldersgate, Change Alley, Golden Lane, Paternoster Row, Barbican, Little Britain, Petty France, Aldermanbury, and down Wood Street to Ryland's, the joy of the tour. Almost the only joy of the tour was Ryland's. For Ryland's was vast and no one took any notice of you once you got through the glass swing doors. One always went to Ryland's whether one had business there or no, for in Ryland's was a wonderful contraption. It was a continuous lift, or series of lifts, one on top of the other, moving up and down without stopping and with much clatter. You jumped on the lift at one floor and off the lift on the next floor, or rode on and on until at last maybe a uniformed attendant spotted you. It was great fun. Ryland's had more visits from "matchers" than

any other house in the City, especially on rainy days. You should be going to visit it now, for it was the first House in the Wholesale Drapery Trade where the Union secured an agreement. But alas, Ryland's of Wood Street is no more. Its sub-basement is wide open to the sky and children scamper about its ruins and gather ragwort, valerian, willow herb and groundsel. For lo! the proud City—or half a square mile of it—is left desolate, all brought low by fire and bomb.

Early in 1918 the staff of Ryland's put in a request for a 25 per cent. increase on their wages, the abolition of dinner and tea "in," with 12s. 6*d.* in lieu, a 48-hour week and payment for overtime at the rate of time-and-a-half. When that claim went in the management was mightily flustered, though they must have been expecting something of the sort, for the work of Trade Union organisation had not been done in secret. The gospel of salvation in fellowship had been gloriously and openly preached. But the directors of Ryland's, elderly gentlemen, many of them promoted from the ranks, were troubled at this new thing which had come to them for the first time in the ninety years of the firm's existence. They took their case to the Wholesale Textile Association. The Association did not want it. They treated the application as a noxious thing which, unless it were carefully isolated, might be catching. So Ryland's must deal with it themselves.

There came a day quite soon when Trade Unionism knocked at their door, too, and they had to open their gloomy portals and let us in. Now that was an historic occasion. The premises which housed them, in Oxford Court, Cannon Street, were ample, but as sombre as a solicitor's office. London has seen thousands more interesting and important occasions than that first meeting of Wholesale Textile employers and the Trade Union representatives, yet for those in the wholesale distributive trade it was a great occurrence. I wonder who was the most nervous. I am not ashamed to say I was timidity itself. Around the top of that horseshoe table stood—for they stood up on our entrance—the great personalities whose names I had always known in the trade since I was a

boy. Some of them had been down to Purley to inspect the Schools, at prize-givings and on speech days, and full of awe we had seen some of them enter the dining-hall and taste of the plain but wholesome fare provided for us, the orphans of the Trade.

They came forward to shake hands, with introductions all round. The Chairman was Mr. Howard Williams (of Hitchcock, Williams), whose father founded the Y.M.C.A., a rather reserved gentleman, a big supporter of the Purley Schools. The Vice-Chairman, afterwards Chairman, was Mr. Corby (of Corby, Palmer and Stewart), a kindly, genial man with ruddy complexion so like a prosperous gentleman farmer (as indeed he was) and with whom I was to get on remarkably well. My being a child of the Trade made a lot of difference. If a picture were to be painted of the scene in those melancholy surroundings, rendered the more umbrageous by the heavy mahogany furniture and the dark red velvet curtains, then two bright spots must shine from out the encircling gloom: the glorious salmon-pink geranium worn as a button-hole by Mr. Corby, and the red carnation which adorned my fragile and timorous self.

Negotiations therefore commenced with Ryland's alone. Abolition of dinner and tea "in" was agreed to with 10s. in place thereof. Upon other matters, especially regarding hours (the firm wanting a 50-hour week), the negotiations broke down and arbitration was arranged. The arbitrator, Mr. J. B. Baillie, was invited to go over the warehouse, and as he insisted upon my being with him we both went and I saw parts of the huge premises, especially the sub-basements where hydraulic pressure-packing for export was done, that I had never seen in my youthful peregrinations. The award gave 15 per cent. for all employees over 18, and 3s. for those under that age (including, of course, the dinner and tea money), a 48-hour week and time-and-a-half for overtime, the existing bonus of four weeks' wages (for porters and packers) paid in June and December to continue. This award meant to the staff of 900 an average increase of 20s. a week.

There were also wholesale textile warehouses in Glasgow,

Manchester, Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Dublin, and Belfast. Cardiff is the first place from which an agreement is reported. The staff of Cooper and Co., branch establishment of the Manchester firm, secure improvements of wages and hours. In Glasgow in 1918, the staff of Arthur and Co., the largest firm in Scotland, secures three months' wages as a cost-of-living increase. But when those employed by Mann, Byars and Co. make a similar application considerable difficulty is experienced. The firm at first refused to discuss the matter, but the solidarity of the staff compelled a somewhat more conciliatory attitude. They offered two months' wages. The offer was rejected and a meeting of 300 decided that unless they got all they asked for they would not go in on Monday morning. A meeting called for the Monday morning heard that the negotiations which had proceeded during Saturday night had secured an offer of three months' wages to those who had been with the firm over three months and who were receiving less than £200 a year. So feeling very pleased with themselves they went back to work. The difficulty about all general increase applications was that newly engaged employees were, as a rule, paid a higher wage than those who had been for some time in the firm's employment.

Negotiations were opened for a 35 per cent. increase of wages, as well as the Union Code, with Copestake, Crampton and Co., Bow Churchyard, Cheapside, Jeremiah Rotherham, Stapley and Smith, Hollington Brothers, Withers and Withers, Newman, Smith and Newman, Dr. Jaeger, and G. Rushbrook. Each firm referred us to the Wholesale Textile Association. So the noxious thing gave several resounding thumps upon the door in Oxford Court. Still the W.T.A. would not let us in. They said in effect: "We don't know you. There's going to be a nice Trade Board set up presently so we'll all meet there in a friendly spirit, but we cannot let you in here." We had, as it were, to shout at them like naughty boys through the letter-box, as we were not allowed inside. "Good sirs, there is no Trade Board so we offer to go to arbitration." We submitted all the facts to the Conciliation Department of the Ministry of Labour. Said the W.T.A.: "There is no need for you to

come into this matter at all. We don't know these people who keep knocking on our door making themselves a beastly nuisance, but we are putting our own scale of wages into operation at once." The Ministry sent us the scale, the W.T.A. would not, for we still had not been introduced.

It was something to get a scale through a third party after thumping upon that old door with clamorous impurity. But it would not satisfy the membership. A meeting was called at South Place Institute for members only, and though 800 squeezed themselves in hundreds were turned away. They did not like the top scale of 55s. and the 46 hours and said so in no uncertain fashion. So we met in July, 1919, with Mr. Howard Williams in the chair. "No doubt," said he, "some of us were rather old-fashioned and might take a little time to get used to the new ideas of collectively arranging working conditions." That first meeting, which was to establish bona-fides and so on, was adjourned till July 11th. But the conference was not called on July 11th, so the employees determined to assert themselves. The large Memorial Hall, Farringdon Street, was taken, and three days before the meeting was held on July 29th, a conference with the employers was called for that very morning. That night 2,000 employees filled the hall and, even so, hundreds were turned away; the cheers from the meeting could be heard at the top of Ludgate Hill and must have penetrated the dark portals of Oxford Court. Certain matters had been agreed to, namely, 44-hour week, 1s. 6d. per hour overtime, "living-in" to be optional, the question of wage rates to go to arbitration. The matter of general wage advances which had been already applied for were to be gone into with each firm. In fact, the 35 per cent. was agreed to in each case though there was variation of the maximum salary to which the advance applied.

The award of the Interim Court of Arbitration was published in October, but dated back to July 1st. It fixed rates up to 60s. at 25 for salesmen, clerks, etc., and 50s. at 22 for porters. The full agreement covered the 30,000 people employed by the membership of the Wholesale Textile Association and meant something like £780,000 a year increases in wages.

Whilst the City of London was on manœuvres, battle raged elsewhere. In Belfast 539 employees of fifteen wholesale textile firms ceased work in June, 1919, in order to obtain Union recognition. Negotiations had opened for the Union scale of wages, but the employers' association decided that each firm must deal with its own staff and would not recognise the Union. Some firms wrote to the parents of the younger people who were out and pressure was consequently used from that intimate quarter. One firm exercised the grossest intimidation. But more subtle by far was the bribery which took place. Being in the "Wholesale" they could do it in a wholesale way, 70 per cent. increase of wages was something concrete.

Actually it worked out at £25,000 a year between them. Recognition of the Union! You cannot see or feel that most intangible of substantial strengths. You would have to be a person of some vision, capable of taking a sufficiently long view to weigh rightly in realistic balance a 70 per cent. increase upon your wages and the recognition of your right to unite with your fellows and to arrange in an intelligent manner your future conditions of employment. So the bribers won.

Organisation in the Wholesale Textile Warehouses in Glasgow went very well. In addition to Arthur and Co. and Mann, Byars and Co., the staffs of many other firms gained Union recognition. Wholesale employers had no such Association as that of the City of London, so negotiations had to be undertaken separately with each firm. Minimum scales were presented and it was asked in some cases that all existing bonuses be merged into wages and that a 25 per cent. increase on earnings then be given. Rattray and Co. agreed to minimum rates up to 85s. at twenty-six years, in other cases they would do no more than increase the percentage of earnings. But most firms eventually conceded a 50 per cent. increase, although not without a struggle. Actually a ballot vote of the whole trade was taken, and strike action was agreed to with one dissident.

For some time talks with the City of London Wholesale firms had been going on, to secure a new agreement, and in

March, 1920, these were completed. The hours were to be varied thus: For six months of the year a working week of 42 hours, and for the remaining six months a working week of 46 hours, always provided the average be not more than 44 hours, which could be worked through the year. Bad cases of underground working were gone into; rates for ordermen, salesmen, general and department clerks (including telephone operators, and shorthand typists) were up to 80s. for men and 47s. 6d. for women; packers, case repairers and department porters up to 73s. 6d., etc. The agreement was to remain in operation until October 1st, 1920, unless the cost of living advanced by 7 per cent., when it could be open to revision. That new agreement meant increases to the value of well over £1,000,000 a year. The cost of living still rose, and in the autumn an application for revision of rates was made. But by that time the slump had set in. Retail shops which did not make the first loss their last by ruthless cutting of prices, were to be in for a very bad time. Naturally, all of this was reflected among the Wholesale firms. So it was agreed that the rates remain in operation until August, 1921, and then—but that part of the story must remain for telling later.

Chapter XI

DRAPERY—DRESSMAKING

*“ Work—Work—Work
Till the brain begins to swim ;
Work—Work—Work
Till the eyes are heavy and dim !
Seam and gusset and band—
Band and gusset and seam,
Till over the buttons I fall asleep
And sew them on in a dream ! ”*

THE *Song of the Shirt*, by that kind, gay and tender-hearted poet, Thomas Hood, appeared first in the Christmas Number of *Punch* in 1844. *Punch* in those days had a radical flavour and a pungency lacking these fifty years or more. That poem of Hood's was to tear at the heart-strings of the nation ; it was to provide texts for exhortations at evangelical gatherings ; it was to be fervently recited in drawing-rooms, at Mutual Improvement Associations, at concerts in church and chapel, and at labour gatherings when they yet glowed with the fervour of a mighty uplift. It was to inspire the desire to right great wrongs. I doubt if there ever has been a poem written in the English language which has moved great numbers of people so profoundly and with such ultimate purpose. It is probably true to say that Hood himself did not know how the great wrong pictured in his poem could be remedied. The penultimate line of the poem : “ Would that its tone could reach the rich,” suggests that he was looking in the wrong direction. Exposing a wrong is not to right it, but is the first step towards righting it. Hood's poem exposed an evil with clarion call. Its notes, throbbing with emotion, pierced the smug complacency of the early Victorian era.

*“ Oh! men with sisters dear!
Oh! men with mothers and wives!
It is not linen you're wearing out,
But human creatures' lives! ”*

Now that was strong meat, even for *Punch*! I defy anyone who has a sensitive fibre left in his body to read that song to-day without being deeply stirred.

For all that, it was to be sixty-six years before any positive action was taken by the State to remedy the wickedness exposed by Tom Hood in so impassioned a plaint.

He is a man of vision who out of the evils of his time can, from the springs of compassion within him, sing a song that shall inspire others to action. And he is a man of great courage, and vision, who out of the springs of compassion within him hears that song, is moved by it, and himself takes action. There was such a man: a great though unfortunate man, Sir Charles Dilke. He discovered the Empire before Joseph Chamberlain. The Empire which Sir Charles Dilke discovered was young, vigorous, and adventurous. He witnessed and investigated the new and daring social legislation of Australasia. He came back and tried to diffuse his knowledge to a people at first mainly indifferent. Our compulsory “Closing” legislation is due, very largely, to his Australian experiences. He came back, moreover, with a mission that would have rejoiced the heart of Tom Hood. An Anti-Sweating League had been formed in Victoria in 1893, and in 1895 Wages Boards were passed into Law to fix legal minimum rates of wages for various trades. Inspired by this example Dilke introduced in 1898 into the House of Commons his Wages Boards Bill and presented it there without success year after year, so that he almost lost hope of it ever being passed. Twelve years later it was passed into Law, though at first only for four trades. Shirt-making was not included until 1913. It was to be another eight years before the “needle trades” as a whole were covered. What gave the lead in this direction was the Anti-Sweating League which Sir Charles Dilke helped to found together with J. J. Mallon, now Dr. Mallon, of Toynbee Hall, as its magnetic and efficient secretary.

It took persistent courage to continue in the course he had set himself and that is why Dilke deserves a high place in the records of our working-class movement. While he aimed to abolish sweating, he achieved, incidentally, wage-fixing machinery for the whole of the distributive trades; compulsory closing of shops and national minimum wage rates. A mighty accomplishment! You can understand why, when the Union had to build a house to dwell in, they named it "Dilke House."

To appreciate the story of the revolt of the dressmakers I shall have to tell you a little about dressmaking. The first patented lock-stitch sewing machine was invented about 1846. The first Singer lock-stitch machine was patented in 1851. But it was many years later that machines came into universal use. When I served behind the counter Mama would bring her troop of daughters to be fitted out with silks for dresses. They needed lengths for the dresses, for the linings, for the petticoats of which there would be many (and all must rustle), and for other more intimate garments. These were either destined for the "bottom drawer" or to be made up from time to time as need and occasion warranted. There were then no dresses ready to wear. All had to be specially made. To the best of my recollection it was not until 1902 that the first partly ready-made gown came on to the market. It was made of silk or muslin, open down one side so that it could be fitted to the figure. Each garment was packed separately in a large flat cardboard box. Individual dressmaking then was universal, it touched all classes of society, from the court dressmaker to the little woman in the back street who, in her home, made up dresses for her neighbours.

During the next few years a big improvement had taken place, from the partly made-up gown, to be fitted to each customer, to the gown so completely made to the customer's needs that only slight alterations would be required. Girls doing that work were called "alteration hands." A machine age was arriving as this story of the dressmakers' struggle begins. In fact, one can say it had already arrived. The 1914 war only accelerated and accentuated it. The moving continuous belt, the band-knife sharp as a razor (to

which the cloth was brought in thick layers or folds, and not the knife to the cloth), machines which cut the button-holes and stitched them; all these coming into use for shirts, men's clothing, women's underwear, and blouses, began to be used also for more fashionable gowns for women's wear. Later on, variations in garments were introduced and applied on the same broad principle of large-scale production of ready-to-wear dresses.

We were caught between this struggle of the old and the new. Nearly all dressmaking employers sought to keep themselves going against these inevitable changes, by keeping prices low and vigorously resisting increases of wages. One can understand the small dressmaker with two or three employees struggling to keep her end up in her own home, but one cannot understand nor forgive the draper whose major profit was gathered elsewhere. Whatever was to happen to the dressmaker as such, in consequence of the changes in manufacture, would not apply to the hurt of the draper. For what he lost in the dressmaking workroom would be more than recovered in the extension of his costume department.

Dressmaking is a highly skilled occupation. The worker must know more than something of the material she is working upon; how it can be revealed most beautifully; how it can best be utilised. For materials differ, even as human beings, in their reactions under varying conditions of line and light. The dressmaker must have an appreciation of colour and design. She must be economical in cutting so as to get the utmost from the material she is handling. Waste is a sin. She must be clean in her person, light and deft in her touch. She must be quick and accurate in all her work, for a mistake once made can hardly be rectified, or only with difficulty, and with much loss of time and possibly of material also. She must judge her customer quickly, note her figure, complexion, the colour of her hair, her style and how she carried herself, and then be Oh! so very tactful, in suggestions as to what will suit Madam!

As a "learner" she enters the workroom and runs errands, makes the tea and does all the odd jobs; although

she may be allowed to sort the cottons and buttons and do some sewing. As an "improver" she will sew on buttons and do some machining and some sewing. As an "assistant" she will be doing all the necessary operations except cutting; she will sit at a table with a number of others under the supervision of a "hand" who is responsible for all the work done at her table. "Assistants" may be of any age and may consist of those who are either unqualified for, or have no wish to take on, the responsibility of "hands." There are skirt, bodice and sleeve and blouse "hands." There are "third hands" and "second hands," depending upon the size of the establishment who work under the "fitter." The "fitter" is the big shot, the designer, the one who meets and overcomes "madam," and generally supervises the workpeople. Sometimes she is temperamental; she will throw the work at you one moment and kiss you the next. To the above grades must be added machinists of all kinds.

The above full set-up of a dressmaking workroom was for a good-class establishment, met with in various parts of the country. But the principle of the table with assistants and learners and the "hand" in charge was met with everywhere.

You would have thought that so much skill, and the many years needed to acquire that skill, would have warranted high pay as a matter of course. You would suppose that those working upon exclusive creations costing say, 50 guineas, would be rewarded accordingly. For 50 guineas was a lot of money even in 1918 and such a garment must have been very exclusive indeed. But in 1918 high-class firms in the West End of London paid such wages as the following:

Assistants, 21 years, 20s.

„ 28 „ 21s.

Hands, 22 years, 16s.

„ 24 „ 17s.

„ 29 „ 18s.

„ 32 „ 19s.

Some years later when I was introduced to Queen Mary and she asked about wages being paid to dressmakers, I

shocked her very considerably when I told her the wages, very little more than those set out above, which had been paid to girls who made the exclusive gowns, sometimes besprinkled with pearls, which she wore.

Here is an extract from a letter I received at that time, written on behalf of "Three Sisters":

"Perhaps the Masters will show you the wages book of the girls and say how much they earn, but please take notice that one week's money means two weeks' work. We are asked to take the work home after we leave our day's work at 6 p.m. and we sit up till 12 o'clock every night working at home, so when you see what our wages are kindly take in the hours, 8.30 a.m. to 12.30 a.m. Of course, that will be a big pull on the Masters' side to show what we can earn but they will forget to mention we work till 12 every night for it, and in the slack times we have to be there 48 hours a week and wait all day and earn about 10½d. or 1s. a day putting in all our hours there. Please do not mention this letter as we are all terribly afraid of the sack. . . . It will make a great difference to our lives if we can earn 28s. a week all the year round. We could live in two rooms instead of one."

Four people could live on so little in two rooms instead of one. Three-quarters of a century after Tom Hood had blistered society with his red-hot barbs:

*"O God! that bread should be so dear,
And flesh and blood so cheap!"*

workers in the needle trades could still be treated as were those three sisters. These things took place when unrestricted free enterprise had full play with no one to call it to account. Except maybe a gifted poet like Tom Hood, Thomas Carlyle hurling his thunderbolts at the self-satisfied ranks of Mammon, John Ruskin denouncing the comfortable idle rich, Charles Kingsley preaching mercy and championing the downtrodden, and William Morris inspiring a new vision of beauty in use for the common weal.

To the wretchedly low pay which those craftswomen of the needle were subjected was attached the system of slack time. Dressmaking was seasonal. Generally there

were two slack periods—the summer, and about the end of January after the season of winter balls and receptions. The girls were stood-off for weeks at a time, or put on short time at a moment's notice, and were also liable to be called back to work at a moment's notice. They were treated as casually as that. So you must spread the amount earned when they worked, over the weeks when they stood idle.

The first agreement in Bespoke Dressmaking in the United Kingdom was in Aberdeen in May, 1917. The conditions prevailing may be judged from the terms of the settlement. Applications were sent in to dressmaking firms and milliners to operate the Union scale and much correspondence ensued. One firm, John Falconer and Co., definitely refused. The girls from Falconer's were paid their month's wages on the Wednesday (paid monthly they looked more like wages), so having something to back themselves with they decided not to go to work on the Thursday. Still, they decided to give their obdurate employer another chance. (Women are always inclined to give men that other chance.) They did not come out on the Thursday morning but offered arbitration, which was refused. So after midday seventy-nine out of eighty-two workers stayed out. As Mr. Neil Beaton, then the organiser for Scotland wrote: "It was only at 2.15 p.m. that Mr. Falconer and his heads of departments realised that these brave women had parted with the past and had stepped forward into the future, that promises to revolutionise the whole dressmaking trade in Scotland." Not only Scotland, Beaton, but England, Wales, and Cornwall too!

For four days the girls were out and then they decided on a public meeting. That produced a counter-move—this time from the Aberdeen Drapery and Clothing Trades Association. They wrote a letter. They plead that "a flat rate is not a fair test of value." However, conversations take place and each offer as it is made is turned down by the girls. Then a meeting is held of the whole dressmaking trade of Aberdeen. The girls join the Union and decide not to go to work on Saturday morning. At last

all shilly-shallying ceases, the employers negotiate and the following is agreed :

(1) Year.	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
Wage	4s.	5s. 6d.	7s.	9s.	12s.
Employees on their own (i.e., not Assistants)	14s.				

All those at present being paid at the rate of 12s. to receive an advance of 3s. upon wages paid in January last up to 20s. a week.

(2) Overtime—time-and-a-half.

(3) Hours—8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday 8 to 1. 1½ hours for dinner.

(4) Holidays—one week with full pay.

That agreement was come to in May, 1917, when the cost of living stood 67 per cent. above July, 1914.

At the same time as Aberdeen was scoring its initial successes agreements were reached with Daly and Co., and Pettigrew and Stephens, both considerable drapery houses in Glasgow.

A month later is the turn of Edinburgh. The pride of Edinburgh is Princes Street. The buildings which make up the street on its north side are, on the whole, noble and worthy. Here are the country's most famous pastry-cooks (oh for the melting shortbread, the currant bun and the walnut loaf!) and some of the country's most famous drapers: Renton's, Forsyth's, Small's, Robert Maule's, Jenner's, Darling's, and on the North Bridge, Patrick Thomson's and J. and R. Allan's. Excepting Darling's, Forsyth's and Small's, staffs of these firms had to fight their employers for six obstinate weeks. This is the story of the fight 300 dressmakers waged against those powerful high-class drapers, some of whom could charge their customers, according to Neil Beaton, 20 guineas and more for a dress.

The overtures to the dressmaking employers of Edinburgh met, at first, with the usual dilly-dallying. Tired of the delay, incensed at the continuous and mean attempts to break their solidarity, they all decided to strike, unless an early settlement was reached. Twelve firms employing 300 capitulated, followed by St. Cuthbert's Society with a staff of 131. Fourteen firms did not concede the terms and their

staff numbering 436 came out. Five of these then yielded. Employees from other firms then joined in the struggle and by the beginning of the third week 800 workpeople were covered by Union agreements, leaving 300 employed by nine firms, still out. Those in work levied themselves by the amount of their increases to support those who were out. The St. Cuthbert's employees, for instance, gave their first week's war bonus amounting to £200.

Public support was overwhelming. The *Edinburgh Evening News* called upon the employers not to continue to fight the inevitable. Lady Beatty, wife of Admiral Beatty, openly supported the strikers. The Scottish Tailors' and Tailoresses' Union refused to do any dress-making work. Many demonstrations were held demanding justice for the women. The employers advertised for staff, offering more than was asked by the strikers. They sent letters to the girls' homes, and messengers who wheedled or threatened.

At last the Chief Industrial Commissioner, Sir George Askwith, was invited by both parties to try and find a way out. He found it in the scale which the employers themselves had published when they invited blacklegs into their service. The girls won a magnificent victory.

It was now London's turn. The organisation of the workers, which had been going on steadily during 1917, quickened as 1918 opened and there were encouraging scenes at recruiting meetings. Some employers were helpful, one even permitted a recruiting meeting upon the premises. The workrooms hummed with excitement and expectancy. There were a combination of circumstances to account for this. There was the growing shortage of labour (the West End employers had appealed by pamphlet to all the schools for recruits), the increasing cost of living, the renascent ideas of liberty called forth by the war (no sacrifice is too great when liberty and freedom are at stake), and the fine example of the girls in Scotland who had broken free. Here is a paragraph from a report of one of the meetings in King's Weigh House: "The hall holding over 500 people was packed to overflowing nearly half-an-hour before the meeting was timed to start. When the seats were all taken

up groups of women and girls installed themselves on the window-sills and on any other available resting-place. Hundreds had to remain standing. Another hall almost as large was immediately packed out." Meetings were carried on every night of the week in relays. The girls poured in. From all over London they came tired but happy with eager anticipation. Later we were to fill the Queen's Hall again and again as you will hear. If the meetings were remarkable for the enthusiasm and determination of the audience, how can I worthily commemorate that magnificent band of women who made them possible? There was Miss Mabel Talbot, who had taken on the job of voluntary secretary of the branch and who came nightly from behind the counter, when she was at Swears and Wells, Regent Street; afterwards she was buyer of the gloves at Gooch's in Brompton Road; then became President of the Union, and is now in Australia. And Miss Nellie Bradley, herself in the trade, producer of children's coats and traveller for her firm, afterwards in an excellent business of her own with clients all over the world. And Miss Mary Tyler, of Peter Robinson's workrooms, the first full-time secretary for the dressmaking branch, who afterwards went into the production of children's coats on her own account. And let us remember with special gratitude Miss Loustalan, a gentle creature who worked till she collapsed; each moment she gave up to the cause was a sacrifice, for she died before their labours were completed. There were many, many more, who gave so much so freely to secure the first great step upwards in London's dress-making world.

The first agreement secured was with Reville and Rossiter Ltd., of Hanover Square, one of the highest-class firms in London. Too long for inclusion here in detail, the rates of wages agreed to were: up to 27s. 6d. at 21 for Assistants; Junior Hands, 32s. 6d.; Hands, 37s. 6d.; Second Hands, 47s. 6d. It covered 270 employees. Then followed applications to over sixty firms in the West End of London, including most of the best Drapery Houses. Some, like Fenwick's of Bond Street, and Gaunt of Grape Street, operated our scales at once, others referred us to the newly formed

London Employers' Association.

Now a word or two concerning the London Employers' Association, for you will hear a great deal about this body. In principle and outlook it differed from the two other organisations we shall meet, the Drapers' Chamber of Trade and the Retail Distributors' Association. In fact, as the years went by, an extraordinary state of things showed itself. Stores and drapery establishments might join all three organisations. Usually, though not always, the work-room managers represented their firms on the London Employers' Association. Thus a very curious and anomalous situation was created. For the firms, through their representatives on one body, recognised the Trades Unions which they repudiated in the other. The Association was fortunate in their Presidents. Their first was Mr. Ernest Debenham (whom we have met on an earlier page), their second was to be Mr. Martin de Selincourt, and their third, Lord Ebury (of the Army and Navy Stores), each of whom accepted the principle of the recognition of the Unions and the regulation through them of working conditions of employment.

You may have noticed that Mr. Ernest Debenham had taken for years a rather more progressive line than his fellow drapers. I was to meet him often in negotiations and he reminded me much of the Cadburys in that he was willing to listen. But you must prove your case. Generalities and hyperbole got you nowhere. To meet him and argue was to have your wits sharpened as on steel—a mighty good exercise and a fine corrective to all conceits.

The Secretary of the Association was Mr. Herbert Kay (now Sir Herbert), formerly manager of Peter Robinson's workrooms. If we got through, as we did, in securing the first agreements in the London area, it was owing very considerably to the tact and patience of Herbert Kay. He was to show that tact, patience and skill again and again when the shop staff's negotiations came within his care, when the Trade Boards were set up, and when the turbulence of revolutionary drapers nearly smashed the whole beneficent machinery. From first to last we got through without a strike upon our hands. Not that we didn't have our

difficulties. To start off with there was a threatened strike at Alfred Edwards, and my first meeting with the Employers' Association was over this incident when we all sat in the newly acquired offices in Berners Street on imported boxes because there was no furniture. When negotiations began they took a mighty long time, but it was agreed that whatever increases were due would be back-dated. Eventually, the Queen's Hall was taken for a meeting and a report was given to the girls whose patience had been tried nearly to breaking-point.

That meeting was certainly one of the most remarkable I have ever been to. Women everywhere, from top to bottom, crowding the platform, and the rows of seats about the great organ. Miss Talbot was in the chair and several of the women spoke courageously. We had had only a week to book the hall and arrange the meeting, but a whisper at the corner of Bond Street would have filled Queen's Hall at that time, for the hope of the needful is its own trumpet call. The speeches of the women, novices at public speaking, were wonderful, no doubt because they were moved by the great and unique occasion.

The Agreement itself which, because of the rule of the Employers' Association applied to all their members, covered about 25,000 workers in 150 firms in the retail and wholesale dressmaking trades of London. Briefly, it provided for: Payment for usual statutory holidays, with annual holidays up to two weeks (to operate at once). Girls under 16 getting 16s. or under not to be put on short time; Learners not to do messenger work after first six months; a Tribunal representing both sides to supervise references when requested; Girls 14 to 16 to attend an L.C.C. Trade School for three hours on two days a week without loss of wages; tea and dining-room accommodation to be provided; premises to be open at 8 a.m. to provide shelter for girls travelling by workmen's trains; proposals for mitigating evil of slack time. Rates: for Learners and Improvers, 8s. to 16s.; Assistants, Finishers, etc., up to 24s. after five years; Junior Hands, etc., 28s.; Tailoresses, 30s.; Senior Hands, 34s.; Tailoresses, 36s.; Alteration Hands, makers of women's uniforms, overalls, etc., 28s.;

Machinists, up to 32s. ; Embroideresses, up to 38s. Agreement to operate for three months, with one month's notice on either side.

To help things along, the girls booked the Queen's Hall again for a concert. They packed it and raised £200 for their publicity work.

In Scotland agreements were reached, in May, 1918, with firms in Greenock, Ayr, Kirkcaldy, Arbroath, and Dundee, the rates being up to 25s. in the ninth year. In Ayr there was trouble with one employer who, after agreeing to the rates, discharged the staff and tried without success to engage girls willing to take less money. After fifteen weeks he gave up the struggle and took the girls back. There was a stoppage at another firm in Greenock who did not want to pay ; the firm stood out so long that the girls got jobs elsewhere and, unable to get other girls, the business closed down. In Aberdeen, another strike occurs over the unjust dismissal of one of the workers, ninety women cease work, the girl is reinstated and, in future, employees were to be encouraged to make suggestions about running the work-room. A new programme is submitted to the Aberdeen employers in line with what had been secured elsewhere. Arbitration is agreed to and the award practically concedes everything asked for. In Scotland it seems they must literally fight for each advance they get. A pugnacious people are those Scottish employers, for more strikes take place in Dunfermline and in Kilmarnock and the workers are victorious after a day or so. In Edinburgh and Leith an agreement is reached which dispenses with the "two agreements" and brings into operation rates up to 25s. in the tenth year. In the New Year (1919) a Scottish National Dressmakers' Conference is held in Edinburgh in order to draw up a National Programme and one delegate travels all the way from Wick. They decide on a 44-hour week and rates up to 35s. in the fifth year.

Before the year is out negotiations are on in all parts of the United Kingdom, including such good-class firms as Griffin and Spalding, and Jessop's of Nottingham, Liberty's, and Holiday's of Birmingham. They cover towns from Lancaster to Cornwall, that peninsular of penury for dress-

makers. At one firm in Cornwall the following wages were paid :

At 20 years 7s. 0*d.* per week.

„ 21	„	4s. 6 <i>d.</i>	„	„
„ 22	„	10s. 0 <i>d.</i>	„	„
„ 23	„	10s. 0 <i>d.</i>	„	„
„ 24	„	10s. 0 <i>d.</i>	„	„
„ 26	„	12s. 0 <i>d.</i>	„	„
„ 30	„	12s. 0 <i>d.</i>	„	„

The London Dressmakers secured a new agreement which was practically an increase of 4s. on the rate. There was another meeting in the Queen's Hall and a ballot vote on the acceptance of the new terms. The girls were starting to feel their feet. Then something happened which made everything else seem comparatively unimportant.

A little preliminary explanation is required. The Minister of Labour had notified the Employers' Associations and the Unions that he was going to set up a Trade Board for the Needle trades. The employers wanted several Boards, the Unions wanted one. So a committee was set up to go into lines of demarcation. But committees eat up a good deal of time. The Unions had already requested the Minister to use his powers under the Wages (Temporary Regulation) Act, 1918, and fix prescribed rates of pay as we did during the Hairdressing dispute. It was at one of those committee meetings that Sir David Shackleton told us it was the intention of the Minister to use the Act and prescribe a rate. The Interim Court of Arbitration sat for four days in Old Palace Yard to hear evidence. Seventeen Employers' Associations were represented. They agreed to the principle of a National rate and not a District rate. The Unions asked for ninepence per hour, the employers asked for sevenpence. The Court agreed with the employers and fixed a rate of sevenpence per hour for workers of 18 years of age and over.

That meant that no worker of 18 years of age in dress-making was to be paid less than 28s. per week of 48 hours. The rates for those under that age would be in proportion. Twenty-eight shillings a week! Think of it! It makes

all the agreements come to up to now look quite ridiculous ; for if a girl starts work at 14 years of age, after her fourth year she must get 28s. a week. The girls in Aberdeen had fought hard and in the end got 12s. after their fifth year and had won a considerable victory. The women of Edinburgh had fought Princes Street so gloriously and victoriously for six weeks to win 17s. at 18 years, and all those who had counted it as a remarkable advance, as indeed it was, to secure 25s. at 23 years of age, were to get 28s. at 18 years of age. It was a miracle ! Put yourself in their place. Taste the penury they experienced. Think of the needful things they went without ! What threadbare garments they wrapped about themselves as they sewed the silks and satins, the muslins and tulle for their rich sisters. See the thin worn boots and shoes which gaped and in wet weather chilled their weary feet ; their bodies often hungry for food, their souls ever hungry for beautiful things. They were going to get 28s. ! It was a miracle indeed to those " three sisters." " If we could have 28s. a week the four of us could live in two rooms instead of one." Sister ! we are going to get 28s. a week and we are going to live in two rooms instead of one, for a miracle has taken place !

Then the Drapers' Chamber of Trade commenced the sordid tactics which were to lead them along devious and slippery ways, ending in what can only be described as a showroom revolution. The Employers' Associations had themselves said that if there was to be a prescribed rate let it be a National one of sevenpence. The Court agreed and fixed it so. The drapers did not like it ; they did not want to pay ; the drapers never did want to pay, least of all the Aberdeen drapers, who could not be induced to agree to more than 12s. a week, while in the extreme South-West the Cornish drapers had paid a girl of 21 4s. 6d., and a girl of 30 12s. a week.

The Drapers' Chamber of Trade issued a circular to their members which misled them by stating that they need not pay the rates until matters under discussion were settled between the masters and the Unions. The rates became law on April 7th, 1919, so by not paying they were breaking

the law and they were to be taught so. Nevertheless, it caused a lot of trouble and expense. Claims were made for back pay to April 7th. Newport reports that they have recovered more than £80, and in North Staffs, ten members secure £112 back pay, Sheffield £27, while at one firm in Ammanford six girls get £95. In Bournemouth, of all places, there is taken to Court the case of two girls, 15 and 16 years of age, who received 2s. and 1s. a week instead of the prescribed rate of 4d. per hour and £8 is recovered in the one case and £20 in the other.

As you may suppose negotiations opened all over the United Kingdom, with the prescribed rate the basis for assistants and a demand for wages for hands and others above that rate. In Birmingham, for example, an Agreement with the Employers' Association provided for 32s. for second-class and 36s. for first-class assistants, and 45s. for charge hands, as well as general conditions that had been obtained in London. When I say "negotiations opened all over the country" that is literally the truth, for there are recorded negotiations in more than 200 towns.

Fresh negotiations start with the London Employers' Association, and at another packed meeting in the Queen's Hall the girls accept a new Agreement, which means increases of 7s. 6d. for skilled workers and 5s. for Assistants.

The Trade Board for the dressmaking and wholesale bespoke garment trade, set up in January, 1920, proposed rates which were endorsed by the Minister of Labour, to come into operation from May 24th. This was rather more than thirteen months after the Minister had fixed a prescribed rate for the whole country. The rate for workers other than learners was 34s. for a 48-hour week, with a piece-work basis time rate of 9½d. per hour. I wrote at the time: "Those employers who did not like the prescribed rate of 28s. were likely to go into hysterics over the suggestion of 34s. for all needleworkers."

Meanwhile, another strike took place in Aberdeen, and I am indebted to Mr. T. Brown, the Union Divisional Officer for North Scotland, who was at that time in charge, for the story. Following the National Scottish Dress-makers Conference an application went in to all dressmaking

establishments and a settlement was to come into effect by May, 1920, with the exception of Aberdeen. There the employers refused to negotiate. Some 600 workers were out for thirteen weeks. "A large number of them formed themselves into a Dressmaking Guild and successfully undertook orders operating on a co-partnership basis. They were well patronised by the public." The organisation of the employers in the Aberdeen Dressmaking and Light Clothing Association was so thorough that they financed any small employer who intimated that they were prepared to give in and sign an agreement with the Union. One of the most fashionable employers, a Miss Ellen Bagrie, did, however, sign an agreement to pay 50s. to those over 20 years of age for a 44-hour week. In September a settlement was reached with slightly better terms than those of the Scottish National Agreement. It was the last strike of dressmakers. Aberdeen workers had the high honour of being the first to strike and also the last. They raised the banner in Aberdeen and they kept it flying bravely. They won 14s. a week for hands in 1917, they won 50s. in 1920. The struggle had been worth while.

Everywhere Agreements were being reached. Then came a new Trade Board rate. But the proposal to fix a rate for hands, such as 10 $\frac{3}{4}$ d. per hour, making a 43s. minimum for a 48-hour week, got the drapers fairly "on the raw." It was too much, not to be borne! First 7d. per hour, that was bad enough; then 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ d., that was atrocious; and now 10 $\frac{3}{4}$ d., which spelt ruin! The Drapery Trade Press beat the big drum and they blew the bugle to "action stations." The *Drapery Times* sent out letters asking for the opinion of their readers. The *Drapers' Organiser* declared: "The time for action is now". The *Drapers' Record* swelled the protesting chorus. The Trade Board received a deputation from the Drapers' Chamber of Trade. The chairman spoke for the indignant drapers. Thousands, he said, were thrown out of work by the 7d. rate, thousands more were thrown out by the 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. rate, and thousands more would be out and workrooms closed if the 10 $\frac{3}{4}$ d. rate became operative. When the Board met, the employers' side said what a terrible state of things had

been revealed, but they would not move an amendment to the rate, they would not vote against it, they would not vote at all. So the rate was agreed to and endorsed by the Minister in September, 1920.

Then came 1921 and with it the attack on Trade Boards. The attack on the existing Boards had a two-fold purpose : it would tend to prevent further Boards being set up, and, if successful, would end existing ones and so would smash the only barriers which were keeping wages up. They were to succeed in the one endeavour but not in the other. The dressmakers were to hold their Board. Never again were those workers to fall back into the abyss from which they had raised themselves. Nevertheless, a vicious attack on their existing standard of living was made by their wealthy but short-sighted and misguided employers. How they failed in that endeavour, though succeeding in others, will be dealt with later. But what I have written of those women may help you to appreciate their wonderful spirit and the big things they did. As long as our country can produce such women it will be great and none need despair of her.

Chapter XII

DRAPERY—RETAIL

It was at Boulds Ltd. of Devonport, late in 1917, that the first success in respect of wages is recorded (after 1914), and there employees secured 10s. a week increase. From that time on things move fairly rapidly. Towards the end of the year the organisation of the staff of Lewis's Ltd., Liverpool, reached 75 per cent. Negotiations were opened and an Agreement was arrived at which, in addition to many other things, fixed minimum male rates, up to 35s. at 28; female rates, up to 26s. at 25; average commission for 1917 to be consolidated with wages; one penny in the £ to be paid on all sales, with dinner and tea in addition.

Then J. D. Blair & Sons, Edinburgh, adopt the Union scales. In February, Ireland comes into the picture with a strike of twenty assistants at the firm of J. J. Pollock and Co., Derry. The firm advertised for assistants to take their place, could not get them, and so bowed to the inevitable. The staff went back to work to await the result of negotiations, which being unsatisfactory they came out again. The earnest way those drapers' assistants, girls and boys as well as men, tackled their picketing and undertook the duties assigned to them, won public favour. There were fine reports in the Irish Press. Other firms agree to pay the rates and a 20 per cent. increase on existing wages. A sympathetic strike is threatened by other workers. One point is worthy of mention. "Out of deference," we are told, "to the feelings of the underpaid assistants, Mr. Owens (Union Officer) was prevented from publishing their wages in detail." I know those drapery shop workers and I remember my own youthful feelings. We were so ashamed of the little we received that, though we put so bold a front on that little, nevertheless we would blush for it to be known. Ten days they were out, and went back having won all they came out for.

Negotiations were taking place mainly individually with more than 400 drapers and drapery stores throughout the country. This does not include the dressmaking negotiations. These we are viewing now are for the staff of drapery establishments in quite small towns like Pontlottyn in South Wales, and quite large ones like Manchester and London. Most of the largest I shall mention again in the course of what I have to tell, so there is no need to give



their names here. But so that you shall know the quality so to speak of the negotiations and their truly representative character I give a few of the most important and well-known firms.

Bon Marché, and Owen Owens, Liverpool; Affleck and Brown, and Paulden's, Manchester; James Howell, Cardiff; Ben Evans, Swansea; Edwin Jones, Southampton; Jones and Co., Bristol; Landport Drapery Bazaar, Portsmouth, In London, Woolland Brothers, and Harvey Nichols, Knightsbridge; Haymarket Stores; J. R. Roberts, Stratford; Shoobreds, Tottenham Court Road; John Barnes, Finchley Road; Bourne and Hollingsworth, Oxford Street; Bon Marché, Brixton; Nicholsons, St. Paul's Churchyard; R. O. Davies, Westbourne Grove.

There was repeated trouble with Morrison's Economic Drapery Stores, Aberdeen. The firm fully justified its name by its treatment of the staff, which was certainly on economic if not on lean and hungry lines. The firm was requested to advance all under 19 years, 6s. a week, with a minimum of 20s. and commission for those over that age. Certain offers were made which were rejected. Then said the head of the firm: "Unless you accept this we may as well get to grips as I can fill all your places." That was early in 1918. So the staff, seeing there was to be a struggle, gave the firm 24 hours to think it over. Then they came out. The firm offered 5s. a week for those under 19 and 19s. a week, plus commission for those over that age, which the staff accepted. Next year they tried again. They were offered 1s., which was refused. So the thirty-five women and twenty men, came out on strike again. A notice was exhibited on the windows:

" Business Temporarily Suspended—
Staff on Strike."

The staff was out for three weeks, when the firm agreed to arbitration.

Agreements varied very much. The one with Ben Evans of Swansea, for example, was the Union minimum plus 12s. 6d.; Paulden's, Manchester, plus 15 per cent.; Howell

and Co., Cardiff, the Union minimum plus 12s. 6d. Affleck and Brown, with 800 in staff, one of the largest "pure" drapers in the North of England, won 15 per cent. with numerous other concessions too long to go into here. These are but samples from the vast number I have in front of me. For a long time negotiations had been proceeding with the Scottish Retail Drapers' Association. The Agreement ultimately came to cover firms in Glasgow, West Scotland, Edinburgh and Dundee and applied to some 25,000 employed persons. The rates agreed were up to 60s. in the tenth year for men and 45s. for women, with commission in addition.

But wages were not being advanced to meet the increasing cost of living. It was just left to chance and high water. When war broke out trade was, for a few weeks, very bad indeed and then, when it was to their interest to interfere, they reduced staff and cut wages by 25 to 50 per cent. and we were busy meeting employers individually and arranging that hours should be reduced in proportion to the wage reduction, if we could not do away with the reductions themselves. Those reductions, in some places, were not restored up to two years after war broke out. But they seldom interfered, and then only slowly and inadequately, when to do so would have been to the staffs' advantage. They could hurt but they would not heal.

It was most ironical that those same staffs helped to fill stock-rooms with goods bought in anticipation of advancing prices. They marked up those goods with every advance of the market. None knew better than they that the cost of living had gone up and they had to explain to the customer the why and the wherefore of advancing prices. This reminds me of a very old story which did duty in the Drapery for years to illustrate the point to youngsters undergoing their noviciate. The customer desired to know why the silk she wanted had gone up in price. The last time she bought some it was only 2s. 6½d. a yard, now it was 2s. 11¾d. "Ah well," said the salesman, "the wholesaler charges us a higher price and so we must increase our price accordingly." When the customer had gone the buyer said: "You will have to be more tactful than that,

young man. You must say something like this: 'My dear Madam, we are very sorry, very sorry indeed, but you see a disease has broken out amongst the silkworms in China which is causing a great silk scarcity and is sending up the price.' See what I mean?" The young man saw, but like so many willing young men he was a little slow in the uptake. One day, after that lesson in the art and ethics of modern salesmanship, a beautiful lady, with golden tresses and wondrous blue eyes shaded with long dark eyelashes, toying with a wrapped bundle of tape, said in honeyed accents: "What! a shilling! Oh dear—I only paid tenpence three-farthings for a similar bundle last time and I am sure at Swan and Edgar's I could get the same bundle at that price." . . . Then the young man broke in and made adroit speech with her, even as his buyer had instructed. Open-mouthed he stood wondering when the lady gathered her things together and with skirts that swished took herself indignantly out of the shop. For what he had said was: "Madam, we are very sorry, very sorry indeed, but scarcity has sent up the price of tape, for you see a disease has broken out amongst the tapeworms. . . ."

Of the calling of staff meetings there was no end. I remember that the staff of Woolland Brothers presented us with the problem of the respectable coyness of those who had for so long looked upon Trade Unionism much as a high-caste Brahmin would look upon untouchables. I wooed those beautifully gowned, magnificent Circean creatures with all the patience and understanding of a long and sympathetic experience, wooed and won them in a stable-yard. For the room we met in night after night was in some mews opposite Knightsbridge Barracks. In due course a meeting was called at the Kensington Town Hall for the staff of John Barkers. The Directors of the firm sent us a letter regretting we did not write them first for they would have given us every facility for a meeting on the premises, "which would probably have created greater interest and enthusiasm and perhaps, incidentally, might have attracted a larger attendance."

Subsequently, I went to see the Managing Director, Mr. Sidney Skinner (afterwards Sir Sidney), and he received me

pleasantly. I had met him previously at one of the numerous consultations the L.C.C. Advisory Committee on Textile Distributive Training called together whilst drafting their memorandum. Mr. Skinner sat next to me and he said: "I don't know what you want this education for. Look at me, I've always got on all right." Said I: "If we all were Skinners perhaps Skinner would not be where he is." To which he replied: "S'pose you're right." He came to the next class, bringing with him some rare pieces of lace, for whatever else he was or was not he certainly was a great authority on lace. Skinner was blunt to the point of rudeness, but if you spoke fearlessly to him you got on all right. He put on his top hat, took me all round the store and introduced me to the heads of the departments, asking them if they wanted to join the Union. When we got back to his room he said: "There you are, they are too well treated, they don't want anything to do with your Union." "Mr. Skinner, what on earth did you expect them to say, you are their bread and butter." "S'pose you're right." So we were given the restaurant for meetings. "No," said Skinner, "I won't come, you might tick me off again."

Afterwards we were to take the Queen's Hall and the Albert Hall, as you shall read.

In March, 1918, a significant thing occurred. The Drapers' Chamber of Trade carried the following resolution: "With a view to this Chamber assuming its share of responsibility with respect to the difficulties of employment now obtaining in the Retail Drapery Trade, a policy (on the lines of the Whitley Report) henceforth to be pursued by the Chamber in its relation to the National Union of Shop Assistants, Warehousemen, and Clerks, be adopted." What had happened?

Early in 1916, they were very concerned about the lack of recruits to the trade, just as were the dressmaking employers. So they conferred with us to see if something could not be done about it. We told them what was wrong, which they ought to have known all about, but owing to the usual aloofness of employers, they probably didn't. It was agreed by both sides to recommend a permanent joint



Staff of Roger Edwards and Co., Drapers, Merthyr Tydfil, on strike against "living-in", 1911. Seated on the right is Miss A. M. Morgan, afterwards Mrs. P. C. Hoffman

The strike committee during the Army and Navy Stores strike, 1919



committee for consultative purposes. The Chamber turned it down but expressed its willingness to meet us when necessary—which meant when we compel them. So, though nothing very much ever seemed to come of it, I suppose that just as the continual drip of drops of water will wear away a stone, and even create one, so those contacts had their eventual uses in wearing out prejudices and creating understanding.

Be that as it may, one other very important thing had taken place in 1916, in consequence of which the Drapers' Chamber of Trade was definitely committed to the principle of minimum rates of wages. At the Central School of Arts and Crafts, Southampton Row, classes were initiated for Textile Distributive Training. In June a joint deputation representing the Chamber and the Union waited on the Higher Education Committee of the L.C.C. to obtain their sanction for the scheme of training and the setting up of an advisory committee. The Chamber's representatives were Mr. John Boardman (Stratford), Mr. John Marshall (Marshall and Snelgroves), a very promising young man who I am sorry to say was killed in the war, and Mr. Charles Coleing, of whom more presently. One very pertinent question was put to me by an L.C.C. member, the Rev. Scott Lidgett: "Before we can justify ratepayers' money being spent on young people in this trade, will you tell us please, Mr. Hoffman, what the conditions are like for those employed in the Drapery Trade?" I answered in one word, "Rotten." Naturally there was much laughter and some consternation. Mr. John Boardman, a sensitive Christian gentleman, answered this by stating they were rather ashamed of what had taken place in the past but they intended to consult with the Union and enter into agreement with them in respect to wages and conditions, and the other two drapers signified their concurrence with that statement. The Advisory Committee was set up and nearly twelve months were spent consulting with every section of the wholesale and retail trade whilst drafting a memorandum upon the subject. I may add the memorandum went through several editions and was circulated all over the English-speaking world and was accepted

gladly as a revelation on technical training for the distributive trades, as indeed it was. It anticipated the Fisher Act by more than two years. That memorandum, finished in March, 1917, says this amongst much else: "Therefore there should be set up a revised apprenticeship in the form of a Learners' Agreement providing for:

- (1) Adequate shop training and a minimum scale of wages.
- (2) Adequate complementary education based on the particular trade and given in the employer's time without loss of wages."

The memorandum afterwards accepted by the Chamber committed them pretty thoroughly.

Now it becomes necessary to try and reveal Mr. Charles Coleing to you. He had a business in the Hampstead Road, now owned by the London Co-op., employing about 100 people. He was of medium height, thick-set, with a squarish bald head, a fringe of grey hair and a slight clipped moustache. He smoked cigarettes through a long holder. You could see his mind working, for he would, when you talked with him, wrinkle up his brow and interject "What's that?" "Say that again." "Ah! I've got it—go on." He was well respected in the City, for when he took over his father's business he undertook to pay all the debts, for his father died bankrupt, and though it took him many years, eschewing delights and living laboriously, he did it. He was a kind, earnest man, and a bachelor. In politics he was a Tory. He had several Purley boys in his employment, two of them buyers. He invited me to dinner one night at the business to meet them. He said: "Now you chaps take no notice of me, you get on with your 'I remembers,' just as if I wasn't here."

He went with some others of the Drapers' Chamber to tour the United States of America to meet their opposite numbers in that great country. He told me that all they learned was to add 10 per cent. to their overheads. But they came back with a startling discovery: Technical Training for the Drapery! The drapers of America had swallowed our memorandum, hook, line and sinker. They

operated it (in an American manner of course, that is, they made a stunt of it) and the drapers who accompanied Coleing thought the Americans wonderful—and Coleing brought over here a lady who was the Chief stunt merchant to the big Stores in the U.S.A., whom I had the pleasure of meeting and, privately, of course, debunking. Our drapers rallied in great numbers to lunch and listen as to an oracle. So the great idea which had been invented here, and was with vision and courage being carried on here by a few, found its market in its homeland as an imported American product. 'Twas ever thus—for ideas like prophets are not without honour save in their own country.

Do I give you, then, something of Charles Coleing and the force he was, during a time at any rate? I confess to an affection for him, for I was to work with him for a few years. It was he who gave me my first great chance with the Dressmakers, for he took me along to Peter Robinson's and reintroduced me to Herbert Kay, saying: "You two should get together. You should get to know one another better, for there is a great work before you both." I am glad of this opportunity of paying this humble tribute to a man who though not of us was, nevertheless, a pioneer in our cause.

I have told you in the Grocery section how the Government, after refusing to do anything to cope with rising costs, leaving everything to the "law of supply and demand," decided to interfere a great deal and set up all kinds of machinery. All Employers' Associations, as well as Unions, were consulted by the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Reconstruction and this took many months to complete. Mr. Charles Coleing was at that time Chairman of the Retail Staffs Committee of the Chamber, and his affairs being in order he had sufficient leisure to attend all the conferences involved. The Chamber was told by the two Ministries that if it wanted, as it said it did, a Joint Industrial Council, then it meant a high state of organisation on both sides. The Committee reported to the main body that they "must view the Trade Board as a stepping-stone towards the Industrial Council, which was to be their goal." The Committee's report was accepted by the

Chamber and it obviously entailed obligations which, however reluctantly, they had to face.

When we sent in our applications for Trade Union conditions some firms referred us to the Drapers' Chamber of Trade as, for example, did Affleck and Brown's, Manchester, Owen Owens, Liverpool, and J. R. Roberts, Stratford, Essex. It was arising out of the Affleck and Brown's application that we were presented with the Chamber's own idea of a scale, which the staff refused to accept pending negotiations upon it with the Union. So a temporary settlement in their case was reached. But that scale was officially sent to us in June, 1919, for our approval and resulted in the calling of the first National Trade Conference ever held by the Union.

There were two things which the employers had in mind. They had seen us entering into agreements all over the country, which naturally differed very much, and they felt that the confusion it would eventually lead to was not a good thing. Then there was the Trade Board looming ahead for which both sides ought to be prepared. So the employers wanted to agree upon a scale which would be ready when the staffs, firm by firm, were organised and then when the Trade Board was set up, that scale would receive legal sanction for the whole trade.

Then there enters upon the scene the Incorporated Association of Retail Distributors. This was the very special Association of the Big Bugs, the Exclusives, the Exquisites, the coterie of the big stores and the classy ones in Retail Trade. For the restlessness of those employed in shops, their determination to effect changes, reached out at last into this exclusive domain so they had to sit up and take some notice, however disdainfully. So in September they issued to their staff managers for their operation, if necessary, a scale of wages based upon the Drapers' Chamber of Trade Scale, in fact, a colourful imitation of it. No copy was sent to us though I managed to get copies of all their reports, confidential and otherwise, never mind how.

They never did recognise the Union—officially. They tried to dodge issues ; if they could not dodge them they put on

someone else's clothes such as those of the Drapers' Chamber. You shall see them doing it again presently. They had not met during the war, so when circumstances compelled some semblance of action, then the Secretary of Harrods acted as the R.D.A. Secretary. It was all as loose as that. So loose that when the Army and Navy Stores turned to them later in the year when they were in trouble, they dodged so much, hummed and hawed so much, and looked so disdainful through their bally eyeglasses, that instead of helping the Army and Navy out of a strike they plonked them bang into one.

The National Conference of 200 delegates of those employed in the Drapery Trade (members of the Union) was held at the Cannon Street Hotel, London, on Sunday, October 26th, 1919. The President of the Union, Mr. David Thirsk, Birmingham, was in the chair. Thirsk was one of the ablest men who ever voluntarily served the organisation. There is no need to go into any detail about that conference. It suffices to say that the idea of a National Agreement was welcomed and many amendments, mainly based on the Unions' own programme, were made to the employers' proposals.

Further negotiations with the Chamber took place and, in April, 1920, the first National Agreement arrived at by the Union was endorsed by the Drapers' Chamber of Trade. I will summarise it as it is too long to reproduce in full. The Board of Trade Index of the cost of living in the towns of the United Kingdom formed the basis for the variation of rates. The figures I give are the basic rate for the group of towns where the cost of living is lowest; it is advanced by 2s. for the next group, 4s. for the next, and 6s. for London. Minimum rates are inclusive of commission or premiums.

Learners' rates, first six months, 12s. 6d. male, 10s. female, to 25s. male, 20s. female, in the sixth six months; 2s. 6d. to be added for travelling where distance justifies it.

Assistants and Department Clerks: Males up to 65s., females 52s.

Book-keepers, Ledger Clerks, Shorthand Typists: Males up to 69s., females 55s.

Packers 62s. 6d., Porters 57s. 6d., all at 28 years.

Shop Walkers and Window Dressers £4.

Deduction for "living-in" 20s. Dinner and tea 12s. 6d. and for tea 2s. 6d.

The principle of a Learners' Agreement to which the Chamber and the Union shall be signatories is agreed. In high positions where equal responsibility obtains there shall be equal pay for both sexes. Canteen Committees upon which elected assistants shall serve to be set up. References to be open to joint inspection. General cost of living advances to be dealt with when applied for. Holidays, one day per month up to twelve days, to be paid not less than minimum. Wages to be paid during sickness: after six months' work six days' pay; after twelve months' work twelve days', over that eighteen days' pay in any current year.

That Agreement was a satisfying one because it dealt with the whole conditions of shop employment from early training upwards, and as in so many things employers and employees had joint responsibilities.

Whilst these highly important matters were proceeding to their satisfactory conclusions, the struggle swept on in the shops and stores of the country. Glasgow workers win considerable victories but have to cease work with one large firm and nearly strike at another. An application is submitted to the West of Scotland Drapers' Association for 25 per cent. increase, two weeks' holiday for ex-soldiers and payment weekly. The firm of W. P. Costigan and Co., owning "Granite" and "Bonaza" shops in Argyle Street, refused the increase, so, after a ballot vote, the staff came out. They were out for one day during which time the two stores had to remain closed for there was no one to open them. One man with thirty-five years' experience received 49s. 6d. a week, and women, we are told, who received 14s. in 1914, were rewarded for their fidelity by being paid in 1919 16s. a week. At lunch time the firm offered 12½ per cent., which was refused by staff, then

later on, at 6 p.m., an offer of 15 per cent. was accepted pending the agreement with the West of Scotland Drapers' Association. At 6.15 p.m. the staff of Royal Polytechnic Ltd., one of the largest stores in Scotland, now owned by Lewis's of Liverpool, sat in continuous and singing session not expecting to work the next morning, but a stoppage was averted by the firm giving a written undertaking to operate whatever was agreed between the Union and the Association from July 1st.

In December came the strike of 4,000 employees of the Army and Navy Co-operative Society, Ltd., Victoria Street, London, the largest stoppage in retail trade the country has witnessed. At one time the Army and Navy Stores was a trading concern for the Services only. It had, however, long since passed that exclusive stage. In 1919 it was a very wealthy and prosperous corporation. Its 1s. shares were quoted at 45s. each on the Stock Exchange. It had paid, for the preceding year, a dividend of 3s. plus a bonus of 6*d.*, or 350 per cent. upon the 1s. shares. There was an old employee who invested his savings of £50 in 1,000 1s. shares and for years he got an income therefrom of £3 a week—more than the wages he earned by hard work. When at last he claimed, as was his right because of his founder's shares, a seat on the Board, the Admirals, Generals, Commanders, Colonels, and Captains sitting there could not stomach this ranker claimant and bought him out. The price they paid history does not relate.

When you applied to enter the service of the Stores you filled up a form. And such a form! I applied once in my youth, but it was too much for me. Some of the questions were: Who were your last four employers? Have you had varicose veins? Have you ever had fits? You had to leave your pipe, tobacco and matches in a bag at the staff entrance and claim them on leaving. You were liable to be searched on your exit; you had to join a Provident Fund in which you had no voice, and had no guarantee that you would get back what you had paid in. There were fines for all sorts of petty offences. The firm's representatives could visit your home and if it was found not to be your address you must pay the enquirer's fares and be fined 6*d.*

Serious offences liable to dismissal were borrowing, lending, gambling, and the possession of matches. You had to use an indelible pencil.

It is true that after the Union claim had gone in, increases were passed out to the staff, carefully discriminatory, be it said, though on no revealed principle. The increases ranged from 1s. to 12s. 6d., but averaging 5s. per head. Before these last-minute increases were made some of the wages paid were as follows :

Fifty saleswomen in one department averaged 22s. a week. A foreman 42 years' service 47s. Two men 43 years old, 8 and 10 years' service 40s. A messenger aged 47, 26s. Clerks of 60 got 40s. Girl cashier taking £50 a day got 8s. a week, if one penny was short she would be fined 6d. And so on. The Cost of Living Index stood at that time 125 per cent. above July, 1914.

On October 30th the claim of the employees was sent in and after three weeks an offer of arbitration was refused by the Stores on the ground that "the members of their staff were perfectly satisfied." Ballot papers showed only 116 against strike action. On December 2nd the Army and Navy Stores joined the Retail Distributors' Association, and on the following day we were all summoned to the Ministry of Labour and there met Mr. Horace Wilson. We were in separate rooms. The only positive suggestion they now had to make us was (this being Wednesday) the matter be left over until Monday to see if the R.D.A. would then recognise us or not. From that they would not budge. A packed meeting was taking place at the same time in the Central Hall, Westminster, to give the answer. They gave it all right two hours later, a thunderous unanimous "No." Picketing started at 6.30 the next morning, the men acting as if on sentry go round the whole block of buildings. The Directors made a brave show of carrying on. All the lights were on, including the little gas jets which were usually burning at the entrance doorways and at which customers could ignite their cigars and pipes. But there were no commissionaires to hold the little doggie-woggies on leashes whilst their owners went shopping inside. A little white leaflet was issued to the public giving the facts

of the dispute, which concluded: "This statement is issued not only with a view of placing the facts before you and to express regret for the inconvenience caused, but also in the hope you will bring such pressure to bear upon the Directors as will lead to a speedy and satisfactory settlement." It became a really popular strike. The Press unanimously backed the staff. The papers competed one with the other in publicity about the Great Shop Strike. The fight between Carpentier and Beckett faded into insignificance beside the battle with the brass hats of the Army and Navy. Each paper carried pictures of the scenes. There was a surprising amount of support from the shareholders. A major sent a cheque for £100; a lady shareholder offered her year's dividends, another placed her drawing-room at the disposal of the staff. Two hundred shareholders signed a document calling for fair conditions before dividends.

In a masterly understatement a frock-coated and top-hatted under-manager stood explaining to the few though very loquacious customers that the assistants were "out." One very large, furred, and comely lady, who must, at the very least, have been the wife of a general, stood there quite unable to understand, repeating helplessly: "Out, did you say out? It's all very strange, very strange indeed. Out! I never heard of such a thing! Just fancy! Out!" "But," said another bothered lady, "I want my sugar ration. I just must have my sugar ration. I can't go on without my sugar ration." And the flustered manager said: "Sorry, Madam, we don't know where the sugar is. If you leave your address we'll send it." "Send it, send it indeed! And I've got Lady Flare coming to tea at half-past four. What's the country coming to, I wonder!"

The Directors took up an amazing attitude to an obviously hostile Press. Over and over again they said: "Nothing for the Press. We are a private Society run for the benefit of our members." The little white leaflet was in enormous demand and did much to popularise the strike. It even influenced Lord Northcliffe—but I will quote from what I wrote when he died in August, 1922:

"The cessation of work was complete, and the Central Hall, Westminster, was overflowing with a palpitating mass

of employees. They were vivacious and earnest ; they had taken the first step in the great adventure and they were irresistible. There had been anxious days beforehand and I was physically tired, but uplifted and happy that our organisation which we had been at such pains to build up had turned out so well."

Whilst I was speaking a message was brought to me that Mr. Mumford (of the *Evening News*) wished particularly to see me after the meeting was over. He stated he had been on the phone with the Chief and he was glad to inform me that Lord Northcliffe had decided to back the dispute. . . . That evening a telephone message came to me, could I see Lord Northcliffe in *The Times* office at 11 o'clock the next morning. On arrival I was shown right up into his private room in Printing House Square. . . . Seated upon a stool and bent over another upon which was a large Benares brass tray full of letters, was a man thick-set, bordering on stoutness, with a full face, clean-shaven, and strongly marked features, his hair parted at the side with one lock falling carelessly down over the forehead, reminding one strongly of the straying lock of Napoleon, the Little Corporal.

"He looked up. 'So you're Hoffman—help yourself to a cigar, you'll find some on the desk, excuse me a minute whilst I go through my letters.' . . . He then sat opposite me on the other side of the fireplace and began putting questions in a short, sharp way. How are your funds? Have they met you yet? Are you going to win? What are they paying? and so on. He congratulated me upon the statement issued to the Press, the clearness with which we presented our case and the modesty of our requests. He stated he was prepared to throw open the columns of his paper to subscriptions, and the proprietors would start with a substantial donation (£10,000 was mentioned). I told him all there was to be told in respect of the Army and Navy Stores dispute, and thanked him for the offer, which we would accept if the dispute hung out, which I doubted.

"He then went on to talk of shop life generally, of our Union in particular and of the Labour Movement as a whole. 'How are Whiteley's going on?' he said. 'They must be

better now for I used to get a lot of letters of complaint at one time. Why was that ? ' I was able to tell him because I had been a Whiteley's man. And so he went through the various Houses in the West End, showing some knowledge of conditions in each of them, gleaned from letters which had reached his various papers. He could not understand the objection of employers to the collective arrangement of working conditions. He himself could not carry through his huge concerns were it not for the Trade Union. All reasonable facilities were given to the ' Father of the Chapel ' and he was bound to confess that on the whole it all worked out well. . . . Other talk there was ' about it and about ' and, in bidding me good-day, he wished me success and stated that if in future I had as good a case as in the Army and Navy Stores, and stated it as fairly, I could count on him for all reasonable support. So ended an interview which had lasted nearly two hours. . . ." Afterwards he was as good as his word and gave me that support in the John Lewis strike.

We met the Directors late on Friday and the negotiations went on for seven hours throughout the night. The terms of the settlement, which were unanimously accepted by the staff at a meeting early on Saturday morning, were as follows :

No victimisation, and no intimidation of those who remained at work. Wages to be paid in full for the week without reductions. Each employee to receive the same earnings as the previous week. Whatever is decided upon at the Arbitration Court the award to date back to first pay-day after date of application October 30th. Full recognition of the Trade Unions. National wage rates for the Vehicle Workers and the Bakers. The Shop Assistants' Charter to be referred to Arbitration under the Industrial Courts Act.

The strike had a beneficial effect upon those in retail trade all over the country. Everywhere wage increases were reported. Some put into operation forthwith our scale which had gained so much publicity. The big London Stores gave out they would operate the Industrial Court Award when made. The Civil Service Supply Association,

with whom negotiations had been opened about the same time as the Army and Navy Stores, agreed to a general increase of 35 per cent. and to operate the Industrial Court Award.

The whole thing was a double shock to self-satisfied rich retailers—that the 4,000 employees of so well known a Store should strike, and that Press and public should back them so overwhelmingly. Suddenly it was realised that if the public backs something, it becomes respectable. Fancy that! Even a strike may become respectable. For an Englishman that is enough.

The Retail Distributors' Association having failed them, the Stores joined the London Employers' Association. The award of the Industrial Court was given on December 31st. It was resolved to take the Albert Hall and invite all the large Stores employees of London, as well as the Army and Navy staff, to hear the award read. If history was in the making, as indeed it was, then it was felt it ought to be made in a big way. That wonderful rotunda has witnessed many remarkable gatherings, but never surely a more memorable one than that of the 7,000 shop workers assembled there on Saturday, January 3rd, 1920. It was the largest meeting of shop employees ever gathered together in a hall in this country. They cheered everybody and everything, for they were in a cheerful mood. When John Turner reminded them that the Bermondsey Borough Council had just decided to pay their dustmen £4 a week, and asked: "Was it not time they woke up and got something near the wages of a dustman?" they cheered like anything, for they felt just like waking up and becoming dustmen on Monday morning. Then, when a speaker gave figures of wages being paid in the West End—as, for example, at one very large Store a saleswoman with three years' service got 20s. a week with dinner and tea, at another a young lady of 20, employed as a model got £15 a year with dinner and tea—there came, as a change from the cheering, lively interjections, and cries of "Shame!" that boded ill for any responsible employer who revealed himself at that meeting, as employers revealed themselves in Dr. Clifford's Chapel in June, 1901. Then, in magical

contrast to all the uproarious laughter, the loud and continuous cheering, the groans and cries of indignation, one could hear a pin drop as that vast audience listened intently in silence to every word of the Industrial Court Award as it was read.

Briefly, the Award gave a general advance of 35 per cent. to those over 21 years and 20 per cent. for those under that age, subject to a maximum advance of 21s. a week. It fixed minimum rates up to 68s. at 26 for male and 50s. at 24 for female General and Departmental Clerks and Checkers; Chief Clerks and Stock-keepers 10s. above rates, Assistant ditto 5s.; Salesmen Packers and Warehousemen up to 65s. at 26 for men and 48s. at 24 for women. Porters, Messengers and Liftmen up to 60s. at 26; 48-hour week, overtime time-and-a-half, double time Sundays and holidays. Holidays one day per month up to twelve days after twelve months' service. Twenty-six per cent. of seats on Board of Provident Fund to elected employees.

In February a meeting of West End Drapery Employees was convened at the Queen's Hall, Langham Place. That meeting elected House Committees for every firm in the West End, and a few weeks later, in early May, the Union programme with requests for its adoption were sent in to all the large Stores. But prior to those applications going in there broke upon us the John Lewis strike.

The John Lewis Store was situated in Oxford Street, London, occupying an island site with its back entrance in Cavendish Square. (I say "was," because during the recent war it was, alas, almost blown to pieces and burned out.) In May, 1920, it had no connection with any other establishment. It was a fine store and did a remarkable trade. Most drapers work to a $33\frac{1}{3}$ per cent. profit on selling price which is 50 per cent. on cost. John Lewis worked to 25 per cent. on selling price and insisted that the public should get the advantage of a good purchase by his buyers. They must not charge up on the rings what was lost upon the coconuts. Every available discount was taken as accounts were paid on the nail and there were few retail credit customers, so clerical costs were kept low. John

Lewis saved another "overhead" in that he did not advertise. The old chap had his points. He was a remarkable man, a character, a "card" he would be called in the Five Towns. Can I give you a portrait of him, I, who never met him, but was to do battle with him on behalf of his staff? At the time of the strike he was 84 years of age and going strong. There is a picture of him in front of me as I write. His features are pronounced—what you see of them—for his eyebrows are bushy and he has a full white spade-shaped beard. He is of medium height, slim, not an ounce of superfluous flesh on his bones, I should say. His feet are large, draper's "tootsies" which become flat and large from long standing. He has a hard felt bowler hat upon his head, the hair of which is ample and white. He is dressed in dark overcoat, wears gloves, and under his arm he carries a long, narrow brown-paper parcel, a draper's parcel from the way it is tied, and obviously it contains some soft material. The weight of his years has stooped him slightly. He could be generous—and mean. Having done a fine thing which costs him something, he regrets it and tries to go back on it. It is this mean streak in him which accounts for much. He was, in fact, a tyrant as well as a fearless, obstinate man.

Now a man who so rigorously, yet with sound business principles, had built up a great establishment in the heart of London, which he looked after personally for so many years, must have many stories told about him and if I select some to tell you I do so in order that you shall, whilst enjoying the stories, get to understand the man, who stood there like a gnarled old oak, representing much of the worst type of employer in the rugged, rather shameless, individualist past of the Victorian and Edwardian era.

His Store was his domain; his word and will were law; he brooked no opposition from anyone, not even from those of his own household. Like so many others John Lewis, who had fought for his own rights for so long, overlooked the fact that anyone else had any. If only he had shown some respect for this in others one could have had respect for him. He lacked the sense of the social application of that liberty which he stood for in the individual.

His ground landlord was Lord Howard de Walden. They got at loggerheads over the rebuilding of his premises. John Lewis refused to obey an order of the Court in 1903 and was sent to Brixton Prison for contempt. In 1911 Lord Howard sued him for libel in respect of posters exhibited on the hoarding around part of the uncompleted premises. They read :

“ 16 and 17 Holles Street. Lord Howard de Walden's Monument of iniquity. In the Holles Street drama the young baron is discovered behind the curtain pulling the wires for the imprisonment of his old tenant.”

Lord Howard got a farthing damages. John Lewis said he would never part with the placards and the proceedings would one day fill a page of English history. They find a page here, anyhow, to aid fulfilment of that prophecy.

In 1915 he was again in a police court action over posters put on his shop windows cautioning recruits against vaccination and inoculation. The posters were torn down by a doctor who was thereupon assaulted by old John. Both were bound over by the magistrate. During the Lloyd George and Asquith Controversy he put posters on his shop windows calling for support for Asquith, “ the saviour of his country.” Broken windows did not deter him.

At one of the meetings during the strike a van boy stated : “ When delivering goods C.O.D. (Cash on Delivery) the customers often made out cheques $\frac{1}{4}d.$, $\frac{1}{2}d.$ to $\frac{3}{4}d.$ short of the full amount. These differences were deducted from the wages of the van boys. Last week my deductions came to $\frac{3}{4}d.$ ” Another boy at the back of the hall jumped up and said, “ Please sir, I can beat that. I had a deduction of a farthing from my wages.” At the beginning of the war John Lewis generously offered to make up to all those who volunteered to join the Army the difference between their Army pay and their former wages, and did in fact pay this difference for some time and then refused to pay, until legal proceedings were taken.

It was an interesting fact, making for sober thought, that, out of the total staff in the employment of Messrs. John Lewis in 1914, only fifty-four were at the time of the strike (that is, six years later) in the employment of the firm.

I am indebted to Mr. L. R. Prichard, who was in the employment of the firm at the time of the strike and took an active and courageous part in affairs, for the following anecdotes which illustrate this great insecurity which hovered over the staff.

"We were not supposed to wear coloured shirts in business. J.L. had been known to go up to salesmen and point to the shirt-front and say: 'Forgotten to take your pyjamas off this morning—see it does not happen again.' When he was on the coloured-shirt warpath, there was always a run on the buckram counter, not buying but borrowing to make a 'dicky.' None of us had an odd white dicky in reserve.

"He would take a dislike to a salesman or woman for no reason at all and would go up to him or her and ask one or two questions about their length of service with the firm and then would say: 'You have been here too long. Go to the Counting House and get your money.' He seemed on occasion to have an uncanny memory; he would go up to a man or woman and say: 'I did not engage you.' Invariably the answer was, 'No. Mr. So and so did.' His reply was sometimes 'He had no right to do so,' and often the person so engaged would be dismissed. This happened to a young woman engaged for the foreign fancy department. During the first morning there she was accosted by J.L. and told to get her money, which meant only the day's pay. As she had come from the provinces, the buyer and others of the staff collected sufficient to cover her fare back home. He often used to chase matching girls out of the shop, especially from the silk department; he would chase them out through one door, but they would soon be back through another, making a great joke of the chase. Yet he was known to notice some of those with a ragged pair of shoes in wet weather and would direct they be given a new pair in the shoe department."

One last story with which I was concerned. A young man called on me at Dilke House on a Friday and said he had got the sack from John Lewis. "What for?" I asked. "Earning too much money," was the answer. "Here, what the hell! Sit down and tell me about it." It seemed



*John Lewis homeward bound after his day
behind the silk counter.*

*Reproduced from a Press photograph taken
at the time of the strike at his stores, 1920.*

that whole fixtures of chiffon and other soft silk fabrics had been damaged by water running down the wall at the back. So the buyer told him if he could get rid of them amongst his dressmaker connection he could have the premium upon them, which was a penny or more a yard, and charge just any price he could get for them. The young man sold the lot and there were thousands of yards. John Lewis himself paid his staff every Friday, so when he came to this young man and saw the large amount (the premiums amounted to about £15) the old chap exclaimed: "What's this? You can't have earned this honestly. You are a thief—Get out." The young man got out and came to me. Said I: "Have you seen Yeardsley about it?" (Yeardsley was the silk buyer, probably the best in the country.) "He's in Paris." "When will he be back?" "Monday." "You see him then and if you don't get satisfaction come and see me again."

He saw Yeardsley on Monday and told him about it. Yeardsley went up to see John just as he was in his shirt-sleeves (for all helped in dressing out in the mornings). John told him he was as bad as the assistant. Thereupon Yeardsley said: "Very well, sir, when you want me you had better send for me." So he went back to the department, put on his coat and hat and walked out. Then I had a phone message: "Come to the silk department at once." I went straight away and there saw all the assistants in that very long silk room standing with folded arms refusing to serve customers until Yeardsley came back. I had seen that sight before at a drapery store belonging to an obstinate old man with a white beard who was also an octogenarian, Roger Edwards of Merthyr Tydfil. I saw the manager, Mr. Moss, and asked for an interview with John Lewis. "He won't see you, Mr. Hoffman." "Well, Mr. Moss, that's up to Mr. Lewis, isn't it? I've come to help. You see those men with folded arms—well, if Mr. Lewis refuses to see me, or the assistant is not reinstated, then I undertake those men will receive the financial backing of the Union in their protest, with all the help and sustenance it can give." He came back presently with my card in his hand and said: "Mr. Lewis refuses to see you."

"Very well, Mr. Moss, I'm sorry." But John did send for Yeardsley who sent for the assistant, and so that spot of bother was over. But what a man!

On January 28th the application previously referred to, went in, but with other registered letters and an offer of arbitration was ignored. Ballot papers were issued to the staff and showed an almost unanimous vote in favour of ceasing work. As the result of the efforts of the Conciliation Department of the Ministry of Labour in early March an Agreement was reached and signed. In order to make this clear to you I must tell you what had taken place. I got the inside story from Mr. Hollingsworth, of the firm of Bourne and Hollingsworth, of Oxford Street. We had come to an agreement with them some months previously. They asked for our full rates, went carefully into them and though costing them £30,000 a year they voluntarily put them into operation. Mr. Hollingsworth was a tall, well-groomed, very generous, kindly gentleman; if you can imagine a prosperous farmer with a round face and ruddy complexion in tails, markedly striped trousers, and a topper which shone like a mirror, this was him. Now all Oxford Street wondered when one day John Lewis put on his silk hat and went to call on Bourne and Hollingsworth. Never before had it been known for old John to call on another draper in Oxford Street. John saw Mr. Hollingsworth and told him all his trouble with the Union and asked his advice. Mr. Hollingsworth told him how he had met us, found us all right, and gave him a copy of his Agreement with us and advised him to meet us.

That Agreement fixed minimum rates for salesmen up to 72s. 6d., for saleswomen 58s., and there were other rates for other grades which I need not quote. But it is essential to mention conditions. The employees would receive a minimum rate weekly, but accounts in respect to salary and commission would be taken out monthly and any adjustments made. "Living-in" was to be optional with 20s. deduction for adults who lived in entirely, and 10s. for those adults who have dinner and tea in. Employees' representatives were to be elected to a committee to control "living-in." During meal intervals assistants to be

allowed to leave the premises and suitable sitting-out accommodation provided on the premises. Hours, holidays and sick pay were the same as in the Drapers' Chamber Agreement. In the case of those assistants whose wages are supplemented by premiums or commission, payment during holidays to be not less than the minimum. That Agreement was signed by John Lewis and myself with the Conciliation Officer as the go-between. Our application for 50 per cent. increase of wages as they were at the time of our application was referred to the Industrial Court of Arbitration. Payment during sickness was to be left to the discretion of the firm and sitting-out accommodation during meal times was to be considered later on. At the meeting of the staff held in Wigmore Hall to report the result there was not the enthusiasm which one would have expected. I sensed something strange. The report was accepted, there were some cheers at the close but there was distinctly something lacking. I was to learn what it was later on. They just did not believe that old John had come to an agreement. "There's a catch in it somewhere." And there was.

A notice was issued to the staff that on and after April 1st all premiums would be abolished, and this without consultation and without compensation. He then sacked staff for all sorts of frivolous reasons or no reasons at all. He engaged new employees, who had to sign an Agreement not to be members of the Union whilst in his employment. Staff were not allowed to leave the premises during the meal interval, nor were steps taken to elect a House Committee. Before the Court of Arbitration commenced to hear the case for a 50 per cent. increase I raised these matters.

Mr. Oswald Lewis (afterwards Tory M.P. for Colchester) represented his father at the hearing. Sir William McKenzie, the Chairman of the Court, said: "You know, Mr. Lewis, these things are not done these days." Mr. Oswald said he could not answer for his father, but he would convey to him the opinion of the Court. Sir William added that it was the view of the Court that the premiums should be averaged over two years and consolidated into the wages and there should be a *modus vivendi* between the

Union and the firm. These points, also, Mr. Oswald Lewis promised to convey to his father. But Lor' bless you, it made no difference. Five points were submitted in writing for Mr. Lewis to agree to: (1) That the Agreement be carried out; (2) Compensation for loss of premiums; (3) Abolition of non-Union Agreements; (4) Enquiry into dismissals; (5) Right of Association.

The letter was ignored. Then a second ballot was taken and showed an almost unanimous decision in favour of ceasing work. Sir William McKenzie, who at my request made an excuse to obtain an interview with John Lewis, having seen him, said: "I am sorry, Mr. Hoffman, I have been unable to shift him. You will, I think, have to use your own devices."

The Ministry of Labour could do nothing with him and asked if I had any last suggestion to make. I said: "Ask him if he will receive a deputation of his own staff." He did receive a very reluctant deputation, consisting of a buyer, a shopwalker, a female and a male assistant, on Saturday morning, April 24th. They put to him the five points. He turned each one down emphatically, telling them that he "feared neither God nor Devil." He held it to be a matter of principle that he should engage non-Union people and not allow them to be members of the Union as long as they were in his employment. The deputation reported to the staff that afternoon at Morley Hall, Hanover Square. The buyer, Mr. Turner Thomas, moved that they do not go to work on Monday morning and the shopwalker seconded. Then I jumped on a chair and said: "Before that resolution is put to the meeting, I feel it my duty to tell you that in my opinion if once you come out you will never go back." They unanimously decided to cease work.

Picketing commenced on Monday morning at 6 a.m. Including a number of buyers, who were under three months' agreements with a £500 penalty, not more than fifty people were working.

Many of those who came out (the total was 450) were not eligible for Union membership; even the Chars downed swabs and pails. There were 370 members on the Union books at the beginning of the dispute, and 384 at the end.

The apprentices were sent home at the Union's expense to various parts of the country.

John Lewis addressed a communication "To our young men and maidens," from which I will quote the first part: "I have just learned with amazement that it has been said that I am disposed to make changes in the staff for trivial causes. Nothing can be further from the truth. Take the ladies first. No small number of them have lived on here from girlhood to advanced age. What is it, then, that has caused this unhealthy atmosphere? It is the vapourings of the accursed Trade Unionists. Their vocation is to make mischief or otherwise lead idle lives at your expense by drawing from you money that might be saved for better purposes. . . ." He did not attempt to defend the action he had taken—the breaking of the Agreement, the reduction of the earnings of many of the staff, the denying them under duress the legal right of Association. He never did, in fact, at any time justify what he had done. He must, I suppose, have had some innate personal satisfaction which justified himself to himself.

The "vapourings of the accursed Trades Unionists" notwithstanding, the strike caught public imagination and it became exceedingly popular. The newspapers unanimously supported the staff. *The Times* said: "It is probable that Mr. John Lewis and his fellow directors will presently find cause to change their minds. The shopping public has no sympathy nowadays with obsolete ideas about Trade Unionism and the right of workpeople to fair treatment."

The *Daily Herald* carried a cartoon by Will Dyson, the *Outlook*, a weekly journal, also came out with a splendid cartoon which it gave away by the thousand. Arnold Bennett drafted many of our bills as well as contributing magnificently to the strike fund. Lord Northcliffe carried out his promise and swung his journals fully behind the staff. Placards came out in a strong, steady stream of support. "The Island of Lewis," "The Battle of Oxford Street," "John says nothing," "Tales of Hoffman," etc. Pictures of the strike appeared in all newspapers. Miss Hilda Canham, who was the girl assistant on the deputation which at the end faced up to old John, found herself the

leader of the strike. She became "the girl in brown" and the Press took her to its bosom and featured her. Right well and modestly did she justify this fleeting greatness thrust upon her.

Mortimer Hall, Wigmore Street, became the strike headquarters and meetings were held there each morning. Telegrams from former employees of the firm poured in from all over the world. Many came with gifts in their hands in earnest of the good wishes upon their lips. Some gave cheques, some coin—one gave ten golden sovereigns he had been holding back from the call-up. The money poured in and all of it was needed for reasons I will show. Altogether nearly £2,500 was subscribed. The Big Stores turned up trumps. More than £300 came from Harrods' staff and a similar sum from the Army and Navy Stores. The Dressmakers subscribed £150, the Wholesale Textile houses £250. I learned afterwards that Queen Mary saw to it that something from her was regularly put into the collection boxes in Oxford Street. Theatres sent us tickets; others sent tickets for various entertainments. A transport company placed two motor lorries at the disposal of the strikers during the week-end. Private persons entertained strikers at their homes, at restaurants and at seaside boarding-houses, and placed cars at their disposal for outings. Music-hall artists volunteered to give concerts. In short, the evidence of public support was overwhelming. So much so that the staff were thoroughly though agreeably astonished and this led to something which, in justice to all concerned, I ought to relate.

Ever since the negotiations were first opened, my own actions were guided by what I knew of Mr. John Lewis's reputation. I had faced up to, and been beaten back by, two such obstinate men before: J. D. Llewellyn, of Neath, and Roger Edwards, of Merthyr; so I knew what I was up against. So what I did was regulated by the kind of man I was dealing with, and by the thought that if a fight did come it would have to be a fight so obviously right that the public would back it, and it must be waged in such a way as to secure solidarity to the end. That could hardly be explained to the employees whilst negotiations were on and

so my actions were naturally misunderstood. So much so, that there was developed a positive coldness towards me by the leading members of the staff. They suspected me—in their eyes I became a trimmer. I was letting them down. I felt it deeply but could do just nothing about it except, perhaps, grin and bear it, or bear it without a grin. So when the gloves were off and the fight was on, and the warm wave of public support and sympathy lapped over them, they turned towards me to make amends. Turner Thomas moved a vote of confidence in me, saying: "All along we thought he was afraid to fight the old man. We now know he was working to win us the support of the public, which we have got in so great a measure that it makes us feel ashamed of our suspicions, and I wish on behalf of the whole staff to apologise to him for them." When they stood up and sang "For he's a jolly good fellow," I was quite overcome. They sang Welsh hymns and "a hwyl," as the sons of Gwalia name it, came upon the meeting; they were lifted up and inspired as those are inspired who feel they are called upon to fight and maybe to die in a great cause. There was thenceforward confidence, co-operation, even affection between the staff and myself.

Each day the valiant 400, headed by police, "formed fours" and marched round the shop, through Cavendish Square and into Hanover Square. The traffic was held up, the public lined the pavements and cheered them as they marched. It was a most impressive sight. The National Union of Railwaymen and the Vehicle Workers' Union instructed their members not to handle or deliver goods directed to the firm. In fact a very tight cordon was drawn round the firm as long as the strike lasted. Few goods got in. No repairs to the premises were carried out. The Furnishing Trades Association membership did no work. Attempts at mediation by all kinds of people in the trade and out were continuous, but all were without avail.

One story of intervention deserves the telling, however. I was brought into personal touch with the Right Hon. John Burns. He was rather under the weather at the

time. A Cabinet Minister in the Liberal Government of 1906 he, along with John Morley, resigned upon the declaration of war, to which he was opposed, and he lost his seat in the 1918 election. I had a great respect for him, though he was somewhat bumptious, not only because of his great Trade Union record and his wonderful work in the London County Council (he knew by heart the remarkable Main Drainage System of the largest and healthiest City in the world) but also because of his attitude during the Boer War. I was behind the counter at the time and used to go over to Battersea every Sunday evening. For there, in the Latchmere Road Baths, was the only spot in London where anti-war meetings could be held. John was the speaker. He thundered for ninety minutes like a Boanerges, he smacked, he thwacked, he coined words and phrases, and poured out a cataract of apposite and telling eloquence that had to be heard to be believed. It was the man in his hour and how he gloried in it! The audience and he were one, he lifted them all up upon his broad shoulders and carried them with him whithersoever he wished them to go. You came away refreshed, for he had said what you wanted to say, he expressed the freedoms you wanted to enjoy.

Now John Burns and John Lewis were friends. At least, when John Lewis went to Brixton Gaol for contempt of Court, it was John Burns who convinced him he could not carry all the sins of land tenure in this country upon his shoulders and got him to apologise to the Court and so obtain his freedom.

So John got me one afternoon to walk with him round the cloisters of Westminster Abbey, a favourite spot of his. It is so very quiet there and beautiful and ancient. He drew me out and I told him everything. I opened my very heart to him. I reminded him how I tried years ago to get him, in the House of Commons Lobby, to speak at a meeting and how he said "Come to me when you have 50,000 members." He felt a little ashamed of that, but he brightened up a lot when I told him I heard him speak in the Y.M.C.A. in 1899 when some of Pawsons and Leafs' clerks were on strike. "Ah," said he, "I was good that

night." He was too. So telling him the history of our struggle we came to John Lewis.

"Difficult man, John Lewis. Very difficult. Not like that stone there, which is Portland stone and wears away in our London fog. Some day we'll stop that fog as we'll stop the Thames from smelling. But he's like those sets out there—granite. Aberdeen granite. Horses hoofs won't wear that away. Look here, I'll see Mrs. Lewis in Hampstead first, and then see him. See what I can do. Will you come to me when I want you? Good."

So John Burns tried and it was kind and good of him to try. The man who, in the year of Queen Victoria's Jubilee, spent six weeks in prison, on the prosecution of timid and scared Authority, for maintaining the right of assembly in Trafalgar Square and the upholding of free speech, was to go with an olive branch, not in his hand but up his sleeve, to attempt the impossible. That he did not succeed was not due to any failing on his part. I relate the fact that he tried and salute his memory for the endeavour.

Even as far as we have reached in the story of this determined and heroic struggle for freedom by Oxford Street drapery shop assistants, it will be appreciated that the amount of organisation it entailed was considerable. Things could so easily have gone all awry and there is nothing which discourages people in a fight so much as to witness muddle, mishandling and mischance. It is said that the British always "muddle through." That is one of the silly traits in us as a people—we play down the things we do, belittle our efforts and our achievements. It is not so much due to an inferiority complex; it is rather an innate shyness—a notion that boasting or bragging is "rather bad form don't you know." It is true we may take time to make up our minds about a job that requires to be done, but usually after that it is well done. Hang it, we ought, if only for the sake of those who are doing the work, to take credit for the things we do well!

My colleague Arthur Jones did a splendid job of organisation throughout that six weeks' struggle, as he had done in the case of the Army and Navy Stores. Difficulties were overcome promptly and with skill. The most trying time

came when shelter had to be found for the 200 girls who "lived-in." It taxed all our resources. The girls "lived-in" at three separate hostels and they were advised to go on sleeping in them as long as they could. Meals were the first snag for, as the girls were not paid till the end of the month, many of them had no money, or were woefully short, so it was arranged for them to eat at the Y.W.C.A. headquarters canteen, and the Union redeemed the chits which they signed.

At first Mr. Oswald Lewis and Mr. Moss visited the girls at the hostels, to try, but quite without success, to persuade them to return to work. That personal persuasiveness not succeeding, the firm issued this notice: "Anyone 'living-in' who is not now willing to work should make arrangements as soon as possible either to go home or to find employment with some other firm."

Some of the conversations recorded between the girls and Mr. Oswald Lewis (who was a barrister) are full of spirit and quite witty. I refer to them because they reveal the girls' understanding of what they were fighting for. I confess to an admiration which overwhelms me with deep emotion as I go over the records of that struggle of twenty-eight years ago. One cannot contemplate it closely without being aware that this was not a pumped-up agitation.

A young Irish girl talks to Mr. Oswald Lewis. "Where is your home?" he asks her. "North of Ireland." "Do your parents understand the steps you have taken in this matter?" "Yes, they are quite aware. I have explained the whole matter to them." "You're very silly—a young girl like you with no friends in London. If this strike lasts out what are you going to do?" "We've got plenty of support to last six months if necessary." "What if we closed the shop altogether?" "Shure, other people are waiting the opportunity to purchase." "Oh? why are you eating Mr. Lewis's food?" "You'll excuse me, I only had breakfast here on Monday morning; I am only sleeping here." "Supposing we lock the doors of the place?" "Other people have offered us accommodation." He then said that a lot of girls are going back to work. "It doesn't

matter who goes in or who doesn't. I'm not. I intend to stop out until we all go in together.

Those of you who have read my account of the long, sometimes desperate, always valorous revolt against "living-in" will appreciate the stand made by that bright young Irish girl alone in London with nowhere to go, her home her tin box. Against a background of age-long servility, of fear of dismissal, of overwork and under-pay, against a background of shop life, a community of penurious unfranchised men and girls, clothed like the well-to-do and gathering shreds of vicarious comfort therefrom, against that sordid mockery of life you are to put the respectful if independent replies of that pretty vivacious Irish girl, Miss Bobbie Stirling, from the Juvenile Department. Or you are to put little Hilda Canham, seven years in the firm's employment, who had the last word at the staff interview with John Lewis, on the morning of the day they decided to cease work. There they stood with youth and grace, free in spirit, demanding their rightful heritage and claiming that age and privilege shall make way for them. They were to fight to the end and they were to win—in the end, though that end was far off.

An appeal was issued to the public for accommodation for the girls when at last notice was given them to leave the hostels in twenty-four hours. The response was splendid and came from all classes of the community.

After six weeks the Disputes Committee of the staff faced, frankly and squarely, the facts of the situation. If the strike went on for another six months they would still be in the same position and the strain upon friends and supporters ought not to be continued unless they could see victory at the close. Through a buyer on the inside they once more tried to get John Lewis to receive a deputation. "No," said the kindly old fellow, "if they came upon their hands and knees I would not receive them."

So on June 2nd the strike was unanimously declared "off" and it was resolved: "We retire firm in the belief in the justice of our cause and decide that no one shall return to work for John Lewis." The resolution was carried with cheering and singing. They sang hymns, they sang

"Pack up your troubles," they sang "He's a jolly good fellow," over and over again, they joined hands and sang "Auld lang syne." Yes, I had seen and heard that before, too, in a retirement which was progress and a defeat which was victory, at Neath in 1907. They stood as cheerful and high-spirited in the end as they did at the beginning. It was a wise retirement. Large numbers of the girls were placed with the Kensington High Street houses, and Harry Tilbury, general manager of Pontings, phoned me that he would take all the girls I could send him. "I haven't had such girls come into the trade for years," he said afterwards. Yes, that last blow was a shrewd one. Mr. John Lewis lost something precious when he lost that staff.

Time, and my wanderings, have given me pleasurable though short contacts with a few of those Drapery boys and girls, men and women, who fought the good fight with all their might against that rich though obstinate and self-willed man in Oxford Street. To each I put the question you would expect me to put: "Do you think now we did the right thing?" And from each came the same answer without a moment's hesitation, for they must have asked themselves that same question over and over again: "If we faced the same situation to-morrow we would do just that same thing once more." That is the opinion of those who did battle but did not conquer. And you—what do you say who have followed their six weeks' struggle and sacrifice for what they knew in their very souls to be right? What can you say but, Well done, comrades of the past, givers of our liberties and hope for our future!

In July, 1920, one hundred assistants, representing 85 per cent. of the staff of Messrs. Beatties, Victoria Street, Wolverhampton, came out on strike three hours ahead of the firm's ultimatum to leave the Union. On May 7th an application was sent requesting the adoption of the Union code. A month later the firm replied that they were waiting for the formation of a Trade Board, and in the meantime could not recognise the Union and would pay wages at their discretion. Then the firm sacked the leader of the staff, and this was followed by the dismissal of two

more active members. Having thus first cracked the disciplinary whip just to put the fear of Beattie into them, the staff was called together and given twenty-four hours to hand in their Union cards or else. . . . So those employees united in deed and thought, jumped one step ahead of their ruthless and dictatorial employer. When the strike was on, the firm's advert. of frilled lingerie and pictures of interesting and seductive ladies' underwear vanished from the local Press and in their place was the following :

" About the Lock-out at Beatties.

" We wish to inform the public that the Union members of our staff were dismissed because we decline to recognise the Union."

No bones about that, is there ! The Trade Union movement sprang to the help of the brave shop workers as did prominent citizens also. Indeed, the local Press itself, in spite of the firm's advertising, gave such fair reports that a resolution of thanks was sent to them by the strikers. The Mayor, the Clergy, and all sorts of people, tried their hand at mediation without success. The firm tried to get the Drapers' Section of the local Traders' Association to agree to dismiss all Union staff. This they declined to do.

The strikers made effective use in a handbill of Article 427 of the Peace Treaty, which reads : " The high contracting parties, moved by sentiments of Justice and Humanity, as well as by the desire to secure the permanent Peace of the World, agree to the Right of Association for all lawful purposes by the Employed as well as by the Employer." A lot did the Beatties, the John Lewis's and other Victorians of the Drapery Trade care for Peace Treaties or that British people fought and died to win those Treaties and save their miserable Drapery Shops ! To them, compared to till-filling, Peace Treaties are all poppycock. " Men's oaths are straws, men's faiths are wafer cakes, promises are like pie-crust made to be broken."

Meetings and processions were held. One was attended by 15,000 people. Did it move Beattie ? Not on your life ! Beattie tried a sale, a cut-price sale. But crowds of

women so filled the arcades in which the entrance to the shops were situated, that no customers could get in. He then decided to keep his shop open till 8 p.m. (other shops closed at 6 p.m.). At 6 p.m. precisely, as T.I.M. so punctiliously puts it, the heavens opened, the lightning flashed, the thunder crashed, heavy rain smashed down for two hours, and at 8 p.m. precisely it finished. People swore that (and wrote to the papers saying) it was judgment from Heaven, though why Heaven should take so much notice of Beattie no one thought to question or explain. Still, the storm washed out the gesture.

Then came Police Court proceedings, for you can well imagine that there was much excitement in Wolverhampton, the capital of the Black Country. A customer of the firm was fined 40s. on two summonses under the Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act, 1875, for intimidating two of the blacklegs. Two summonses against one of the girl strikers were dismissed. One of the complainants who admitted she was formerly a member of the Union voted in the ballot in favour of the strike but changed her mind. She was booed and hissed by a large hostile crowd. She admitted she had said the strikers were "standing in the gutter and living on charity."

The Chief Constable tried to stop picketing, on the ground that as the firm had sent the strikers a week's money in lieu of notice there was no strike. That opinion was tested and the Chief had to give way. The Trade Unions of the area raised such money support for the strikers that they were able to have their strike-pay made up almost to full wages. This hard-fought and gallant stoppage was full of life and incident. It lasted sixteen weeks and that is a very long time to be battering at a wall. What can you think of a firm who fought tenaciously for the continued right to pay a girl of 21 18s. a week, or a girl of 26 22s. a week, which at 1914 values was worth 7s. 6d. and 9s. a week! What are you to think of those one hundred men and women who fought that man and all the out-of-date outworn stuff he stood for! All honour to those brave drapery shop assistants of Wolverhampton who put up so grand a battle for righteousness and progress.

All the more; perhaps, because it was the last strike of Drapery shop workers for very many years. It was the last stand of the young old guard who dies, but never surrenders. Those workers did not go back to work for Beattie. They stood firm for the rightness of their cause and worked for their bread elsewhere.

Now I must describe what was happening in the case of the big Stores. The first Army and Navy award of the Industrial Court dated back to October 1st, 1919. The R.D.A. said they would put the award in operation. In fact some of their members did fully, some partially, and some failed to do so. Organisation was proceeding apace with the larger houses, and the Union, nationally, at its Easter Conference endorsed fresh scales of wages as the old scales no longer sufficed. To save the confusion of many figures let me put it thus: The Army and Navy award gave up to 65s. for salesmen at 26 years, the Bourne and Hollingsworth agreement went up to 72s. 6d. for salesmen at 28 years of age. The new Union Scale requested 90s. for salesmen at 26 years of age. The application for operation of those new scales went in to all firms, including the Army and Navy Stores, just after Easter, 1920. The Army and Navy referred us to the London Employers' Association. We were concluding negotiations with the Drapers' Chamber of Trade for a National Drapery Trade Agreement, and now the other firms named referred us to the R.D.A. There were thus tripartite negotiations going on. The R.D.A. firms were: Harrods, Whiteley's, Barker's, Haymarket Stores, Francis and Co., Woolland Bros., Thos. Goode and Co., Pontings, Derry and Toms, Civil Service Supply, and Shoolbred's. Along with the Army and Navy Stores 15,000 employees were involved, most of whom were members of the Union. The negotiations were prolonged, tedious, and unsatisfactory. Eventually, at the close of the year, the London Employers' Association agreed to go to the Industrial Court in the case of the Army and Navy Stores.

We were to learn what had been taking place when we met them in December. The Wholesale Textile Association, the Drapers' Chamber, the London Employers and the

R.D.A., had come to an agreement ; in view of the state of trade no general advances were to be given, and the minimum rates to be operated by the members (Drapers, mind you) should be those proposed by the Grocery Trade Board.

The Army and Navy award, published in January, 1921, increased the rate for salesmen by 10s. from 65s. to 75s. at 26 years of age. A very interesting pronouncement was made by the Court, in view of the contention made by the Employers' Association, that they should not pay more than the rates proposed by the Grocery Trade Board. It will prove interesting in view of what follows, as well as for future reference :

" The Trade Board rates are not finality in minimum wage rates, but are, as was intended they should be, a rock-bottom minimum below which no tradesman, however poor he may be, will be allowed to employ assistants."

The R.D.A. declined to meet Union representatives to consider the May application, contending that the rates they had put into operation the previous December, the rate of 72s. 6d. for salesmen at 28, met the case. That the cost of living had advanced 41 per cent. in the interval made not the slightest impression upon them. So the Shop Stewards decided to call a meeting in the Albert Hall. The year began with one meeting in that great arena and was to close with another. Of course, there had been a lot of preliminary sparring. For instance, at Harrods there was a staff council, a sort of cushion or buffer called into being by the firm, to stave off " outside interference " as it was called. The answer to former applications had been : " If the staff have any grievance (and we are not aware of it) there's the staff council." Later on when the staff council was asked to join with the Union in seeking to get the firm to receive a joint deputation, the reply of the council was favourable to the Union. I quote now Mr. E. R. Pountney, who had been in the service of the firm in the Silver Department and was full-time secretary of Harrods Branch and therefore presumably knew what he was talking about : " The council's full reply was to the effect that matters of wages and working conditions were questions of such



Sir Herbert Kay, C.B.E.

moment that the council felt the proper parties to deal with them were the representatives of the firm and the Union. As sent out the reply merely stated that the council could not adopt the course proposed. Sir Woodman Burbidge, the Managing Director, had 'blue pencilled' the reason why." That editing of the staff council's decision distorted it, twisted it into a lie and made the staff council an instrument of the firm's will. This, mark you, after Sir Woodman had openly stated he was quite prepared to consider any proposition his staff council might suggest. There is much virtue in that word "consider."

It must be clearly understood that the applications to the various firms had gone in individually. Now, in September, the Joint Staffs' Committee collectively offered arbitration which was turned down by the R.D.A., and it was that point which was to be submitted to the Albert Hall meeting. The hall was packed from top to bottom, and carried a resolution which, besides agreeing to arbitration, decided: "Should, however, this course prove unsuccessful, Shop Committees be given power to take such steps as will bring a satisfactory result. To that end they be empowered to ballot the members or otherwise."

The Ministry of Labour failed in bringing the parties together. Ballot papers were thereupon issued to the staffs of the thirteen firms. The questions asked were: Are you in favour of ceasing work forthwith, or are you in favour of waiting until the Army and Navy Award is published and then considering the situation? Then began an unedifying spectacle. The Chairman of Harrods' staff council (a member of the Union) after an interview with Sir Woodman Burbidge told the council that the firm intended to operate the Army and Navy Award. This was denied in the Press by the Secretary of the R.D.A. After which, having had a further interview with Sir Woodman, the Chairman of the staff council met the Joint Committee of the thirteen staffs and said he had been requested by Sir Woodman to come along and assure them the firm would put into operation conditions not less favourable than the award of the Army and Navy.

Then the Civil Service Supply Association stated in the Press that the Company would not think of paying their staff less than the rates of the Army and Navy Stores: "If they are higher we shall pay higher wages." This, too, was officially denied by the R.D.A. on behalf of the thirteen firms. As to all of which you may take your choice of interpretation. It may have been done to bamboozle the staffs in view of the ballot, or it may have been a division of opinion in the membership of the R.D.A. Probably a little of each. But the die had already been cast. It was cast when the Tory Government decided on a policy of drastic deflation regardless of consequences and to force penury and want on a substantial portion of the population as the price which must be paid.

The result of the ballot showed a slight majority in favour of awaiting the Army and Navy Award. But, by the time the Award was out, the attacks on wages had begun with a vengeance, backed by an hysterical hue and cry in all the Press. Unemployment went up with a bound and was not to come down until the Second World War, kinder in that respect than the captains and controllers of British industry, at last gave full employment again. Here, then, is another paradox in this already astonishing and bewildering scene, for the Industrial Court increased wages by 10s. a week when the employers were indulging in savage and panicky attacks on the workers' insufficient standards. Meantime the Union application for an improvement in the rates of the National Agreement, which was sent to the Drapers' Chamber of Trade in September (in accordance with the clause in the Agreement which provided for such a contingency), was turned down by that body.

So the second splendid phase of this unfolding of the great revolt of shop workers is nearing a mean and tragic close. But the Army and Navy Stores management, all honour to them, stuck by the decision they had reached with us, after honourable battle, that there would be in future collective bargaining in their establishment. So, you see, the employers were not united. In fact, the Agreement reached with the London Employers' Association based on

the Army and Navy Award was to go on in spite of the surrounding miasma of reaction, until the Joint Industrial Councils coming into being twenty years later, superseded it. The London Employers' Association and its agreements with the Unions does, in fact, stand out as a hill of refuge in a swamp of depression. For no one can call the action of the other Employers' Associations in Retail Distribution fine, far-sighted or fortunate. There was nothing constructive or noble for the future of the Trade in the mean things they did.

The story of the shop workers' splendid endeavours to retain what they had won, and their rise at last to the position as you know it to-day, forms the fourth part of this history. But now, forgotten were the desires and pledges to build a New World for the fighters and victors of World War One ; thrown over were those who in times of stress and days of common consecration saw a great light and sought to kindle that light for the future. For wild, ruthless and shameful men had jumped into the saddle and were to ride the country like the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, nigh to its fatal undoing.