A Red × here means that if we don't hear from you (with enclosure) we shall cut off your supply.

# THE PLEBS MAGAZINE

"I can promise to be candid but not impartial."

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## CONTENTS



## The Class-Struggle in South Wales

This is the first of a series of articles. South Wales has been considered to be from the beginning the special preserve of the *Plebs*, so that they are singularly appropriate. It may come as a surprise to many Plebeians to know that our actual circulation in South Wales is—well ! very little compared to the interest aroused, to the knowledge of our movement and, shall we add, to our power.

This series should provoke keen interest in South Wales, and also in all industrial areas where our propaganda permeates, and should add not only to the reputation of the author, but also to our circulation. —ED.)

I.

OF all the industrial areas, that of Glamorgan, Caermarthen and Monmouth is the youngest, and whilst it shows a most vigorous growth of capitalist production and a considerable development of class consciousness amongst the working population, it has comparatively slender traditions, and presents conditions of a much simpler nature than the Clyde, South Lancashire, and the West Riding of Yorkshire. To all intents and purposes

we may say that what Marx describes as manufacture practically had no existence there apart from Bridgend, Abergavenny, Brecon (if we may include it in the area) and Monmouth, where there was a little making of caps, flannels and dressing of beaver-skins. Scarcely any coal was obtained from Glamorgan, and none from Monmouth until the close of the 18th Century, as Bristol, Bridgewater and Wellington could draw their supplies from the Somerset field. Iron was worked on an insignificant scale in the 17th and early 18th Centuries, when the timber reserves of the Severn began to fail the ironmasters of Worcestershire and Shropshire, and copper was smelted at Swansea and Neath in a small way. With these minor reservations we may assert that all the now densely populated and busy valleys of Monmouthshire and Glamorgan were wildernesses of " common and waste " prior to 1760. There were practically no roads and no towns between the coast and Brecon and Abergavenny. The woods, whose former location is denoted by the frequent use of the ending " coed " or " goed," were indeed disappearing somewhat rapidly, as tiny forges and little furnaces made their temporary home in some part of a valley, moving on the furnaces or bloomeries, at all events, when the timber was exhausted. The cottages and smaller farmhouses, which to-day nestle away on the slopes of the valleys like some relics of a bygone age, and the bare, little walled-off fields high up against the moorlands speak, how eloquently my Welsh readers well know, of the poverty, isolation and meagre livelihood which conditioned the social outlook and communal life of the years when crude tools and solitary family labour scarcely won a pittance from the inhospitable, rain-soaked ground. Then the land belonged in law to the families of Talbot, Windsor, Wyndham, Morgan, Neville, H. Lewis, and so forth, having fallen to them by the grant of the King or the Privy Council at various times, and at others being seized and the seizure legalised or tacitly assented to at a later date. But it remained and continued to be described in grants at Dowlais, Pontypool, and elsewhere as " common and waste," and to be let on lengthy leases at nominal sums for immense tracts of mineral property. The iron and the coal and the limestone were there, the more or less questionable title deeds confirmed the landowners, the lords of the manor or ward, in their occupation, but no labour had been applied to their surface cultivation or to their mining development, and they continued to have no value. To-day, Dowlais and the Rhondda are fabulously valuable tracts, and yet, in 1748, some 4,000 acres were leased by the Windsors to Thos. Morgan of Machen for £26 a year. A great tract at Hirwain was leased in 1757 for £23 rental, and, as late as the end of the forties, Crawshay Bailey acquired several farms in the Rhondda, having a yearly value of £160, which in 1888 were yielding £30,000.

Moorland, bogland, woodland, waste—such was the South Wales

Coalfield when, about 1760, John Guest came to be furnace manager at Dowlais Works and Richard Hill, founder of Hill's, Plymouth, took charge if a furnace at Cyfarthfa.

Operations were conducted at Dowlais, Cyfarthfa, Penydarren and Plymouth on a petty and insignificant scale, with furnaces like little lime-kilns, with tilt-hammers, bellows and cumbrous tools worked by hand labour, supplemented by lumbering, creaking waterwheels, with " patches " and " slants " or " levels " where coal and iron out-crops were worked near to the surface and abandoned as they filled with water ; with no means of carrying the mineral but in hods on human backs or panniers on horses and mules, which latter sufficed to take the bars domestic and merchant iron ware (iron-mongery) across the hills to Swansea. Very little labour was required, and the forge-masters and furnace-owners in many cases superintended and participated in the operations themselves. At Cyfarthfa we learn that Anthony Bacon, a Virginia tobacco merchant investing his gains in industrial pursuits, bought a number of leases belonging to small copyholders for £100, which pile of golden sovereigns must have appeared the fabulous treasure of the Indies to these humble peasantry, but which did not last very long, and whose dissipation required them to go to the capitalist and solicit him to employ them to work, quarrying " literally in holes in the ground," getting out mineral and carrying it down to the furnaces. Such is the story, not only of the creation of an original proletariat—a class of workers having no tools or other means of production—at Merthyr, but of this social revolution in many a thousand other quarters in the early years of what we call the Industrial Revolution. We may, however, take the year 1785 as the commencement of the capitalist era in South Wales, for it was at that time that Richard Crawshay, ironmonger of York Yard, London, having leased Cyfarthfa furnaces to get a supply of iron for making cheap flat-irons and other domestic hardware, adopted Henry Cort's process of making malleable iron by " puddling." Other ironmasters followed suit, and, as a result of the adoption of this new device, of the possibility of deep mining for iron and coal now that James Watt's steam engine was being applied to pumping apparatus, and the demand for iron for textile and other machinery, new iron works quickly sprung up all along the iron outcrop from Herwain to Blaenavon. By 1800, the four works at Merthyr, those of Sirhowy, Tredegar, Ebbw Vale, Nantyglo, Varteg and Blaenavon were all actively producing iron. The Glamorgan and Monmouth Canals had been constructed ; several " dram-ways " were being laid down, and the coal works near Abercarne, Risca and in the Beddwelty districts had either been started or were about to be sunk. Neath and Swansea Valleys were developing rapidly as copper-smelting, iron-founding and coal-producing areas, and capital was flowing into the whole district from Cornwall and

from Bath and Bristol (referred to in Vol. I. of *Capital* as the richest town in the West of Europe at the beginning of the 19th Century). In Monmouthshire, to a considerable extent, the capitalists were absentees, and no one could well be blamed for living outside the new industrial areas if they could by any means do so.

Before proceeding to detail the evidence of the appalling social conditions in Merthyr and in Monmouthshire in the first seventy years of industrial capitalism in that part of the world or describing the economic position of the new proletarians at the time when they commenced to pour into the empty valleys or to swell the ranks of those who had already arrived, we had better analyse the composition and origin of their enemies—for it was as enemies that the two classes regarded each other as we shall abundantly prove.

The Crawshays of Cyfarthfa belonged to a yeoman stock which lived at Normanton in Yorkshire in the early 18th Century. Richard Crawshay had proceeded to London, secured employment at an ironmonger's, succeeded in and to the business, and had then embarked on manufacture. His son remained in London, and from an ironmonger became, by logical sequence of prosperity, an iron merchant and a merchant prince, with huge properties in the West Indies and great holdings in the National Debt. Richard's grandson, William, no sooner succeeded to his father's tremendous fortune, reputed to be the largest of the time, than he built him a monstrous imitation of a baronial seat, the bourgeois castle of Cyfarthfa, from whose front windows you, like His Wealthiness, may look down upon the noisy, reeking, profit-producing helots at the furnaces and forges in the valley below.

Subsequently, he retired to a country residence near Reading, and his dependents, their wives, their man-children and their maid-children knew him no more. The Crawshays and their relatives, the Baileys of Nantyglo, Aberdare and, subsequently, Mardy and Ton-Pentre, never aspired to politics, but invested their colossal fortunes in land and the funded debt. They were conservatives, and stubborn, relentless task-masters.

The Guests of Dowlais, hail from Broseley, in Shropshire, where John, their progenitor, was farmer, inn-keeper, brewer, coal merchant, furnace-master, and general factotum at the White Horse Tavern in 1759. He and his immediate descendants were Wesleyans, and contrived to have their furnaces " suspended for several hours every Sunday, with the best (moral) effect, and without any diminution in the make of iron." (*Children's Employment. First Report of the Commissioners* (Mines) 1842, p. 202, 848.) They lived at Dowlais, participated in the religious life of the community, developed their business and in the fullness of time, John Josiah the third master of Dowlais, went to Parliament as a mild Conservative, learned better, and became the first Radical M.P. for Merthyr, married the sister of the Earl of Lindsay, and became a

baronet, fittingly (if one would regard him as does Wilkins in his *History of Merthyr*) to honour the Queen upon her Coronation in 1838.

The Homfrays, of Penydarran, and afterwards of Tredegar, the Formans of Penydarran, and the Thompsons of the same were, the first named, landed proprietors and ironmasters in Staffordshire, and all of them, iron or general merchants in London. They were Churchmen, men of the world, and quarrelled freely and frequently with their pious neighbours at Dowlais. The Halls of Plymouth were struggling iron masters, endeavouring to keep going, and hampered throughout their earlier career by heavy mortgages. The Harfords, of Ebbw Vale, Sirhowy, Melingriffith, Swansea, etc., were very prosperous Bristol merchants, who had made their fortunes as clothiers, West India tobacco growers, shippers, Cornish mine owners, and general merchants. They were Quakers, and had family or intimate business connections with the Harveys, the Partridges (Partridge Jones family), the Darbys, of Coalbrookdale (who bought Ebbw Vale when they went bankrupt) and other ironmasters in Monmouthshire. They became merchant princes, county gentlemen and Tories.

The large landowners of Monmouthshire leased out their land for collieries and iron mines, took up shares in the Canal, built tramways, and sometimes engaged in mining. For the most part, however, the coal owners were Bristol and Somerset investors, small landed farmers, or shopkeepers in Newport. Monmouthshire was, like Swansea, a great mineral estate developed by the capitalists of Bristol.

J. T. WALTON NEWBOLD.

*(To be continued.)*