How the English Workman Lives

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PREFACE TO THE GERMAN EDITION.

The greater part of the following observations have already appeared in the Dresden weekly paper, the Volkswohl. The Editor thinks, however, that they ought to be made accessible to a wider public. Although they may contain but little that is absolutely new to the student of English life, yet they exhibit the old in a new and characteristic light.

The author is a plain German miner, who has enjoyed no further education than that afforded by the elementary school of his native place in the mining district. Since then he has travelled much in Germany, and observed men and affairs with open eyes, and also with a considerable dose of the peculiarly German tendency to hypercriticise. The latter quality having brought him into conflict with the powers that be, he has turned his back on the Fatherland, and has sought a new home and a new sphere of work in England. Thither, too, the tendency to criticise has accompanied him, and to it we owe the contents of the following pages.
To the Editor our author's comments appear well worth taking to heart at the present moment, when a certain over-estimation of our position at home, both politically and socially, is unpleasantly conspicuous. The homely miner here shows us that we have in many respects, and especially, notwithstanding our much-vaunted labour legislation, in regard to labour questions, still much to learn from the English. And he does so, not from the standpoint of the fanatical partisan—for he seems to have left his animosity, along with his Socialist gospel, behind him in the Fatherland—but rather from that of his own personal experience. For this reason his words have a weight of their own not found in the works of specialists.

The reflections of the writer are here given in their unadorned freshness. May they not miss their mark!

(Signed) Dr Böhmert.
PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION.

Its novel point of view constitutes the especial value of this little monograph.

Studies of working-class life have not of late been rare, but they have seldom been contributed by those who are actually living that life, or who belong to that class. Their standpoint has usually been an external one. Herr Dückershoff shares the life, and belongs to the class, and therefore he voices the feeling of workmen themselves towards the present conditions of labour, instead of the feelings which men of the middle and upper classes might entertain towards those conditions if they were actually subjected to them. Yet, writing for a German, not an English, public, he allows himself to accentuate positive ameliorations in the life of our masses with a frankness which an English writer, bent on reforming it altogether, might deem scarcely opportune.

It would be easy to join issue with a statement here and there, such as, for instance, that English women in general bake their own bread instead of buying
it from a baker, a practice almost unknown in the
South; or, again, that attendance at school is not
compulsory. But such inaccuracies will be found, as
a rule, to result from the error, extremely natural to
a foreigner, of mistaking a part for the whole. The
author has not unfrequently written English where,
with wider information, he would have written Nor-
thumbrian. Generally speaking, however, his booklet
displays the painstaking attention to detail no less
characteristically Teutonic than the tendency to fault-
finding remarked by Dr Böhmert.

The fact that the book is really a collection of
newspaper articles is probably accountable for the
repetitions which occur here and there in the original.
It has been attempted to correct this failing in the
present translation by an occasional omission or
transposition.

C. H. d'E. Leppington.
HOW THE ENGLISH WORKMAN LIVES.

CHAPTER I.

MY EARLY LIFE IN GERMANY.

I, ERNST DÜCKERSHOFF, was born at Merscheidt, in the district of Solingen,* on the 11th of September 1858. From my sixth to my tenth year I attended the Roman Catholic elementary school at Solingen. My father, a master shoemaker, had contracted a chronic lung complaint through his occupation, and was not in a position to support us. There were six of us children. I, the eldest, was employed as errand-boy by several knife manufacturers. My

* Solingen is in the Rhineland, between Cologne and Elberfeld.—Tr.
first wages were two thalers† a week. I took great pride in being some little help to my parents. Later on my mother was also attacked by disease of the lungs. We were then left completely to ourselves. No one troubled himself about us. My efforts alone brought us in some money. In consequence chiefly of the treatment I had received at school and in play, there arose within me a rage against all who were better off than myself, which has not quite died out even yet. Love and friendship were almost unknown to us. Our parents were glad when we were out of the house. Outside we were made to feel our poverty by the sneers and contempt of the other children.

At twelve years old I was quite independent, and worked wherever I could earn the most. I had become a builder's handy lad at two shillings and threepence a day. The only word of praise I received

† Six shillings.—Tr.
from my parents was when I brought home plenty of money on Saturdays. At the same time, I did not starve myself. After the war of 1870 there was no lack of well-paid work. Before I was quite thirteen both my parents died within three months of each other. I was the eldest of us six, and a free man. My two younger sisters, aged three and five, were taken by a very poor old widow. All at once I met with a number of friends, every one of them eager to persuade me to live with him. But I quickly noticed that it was my earnings, not myself, that attracted them. I sought for affection, but found none. I had been brought up most religiously by my parents, and I strove to gain peace through prayer, but in vain.

Suddenly my native place grew distasteful to me. I bade farewell to my sisters, and to my parents' grave, in order to see the world. At sixteen I was working, first at Düsseldorf, next at Cologne.