LEAFLETS FOR THE PEOPLE.
No. IV.

For God and Home, Homeland and Fatherland

THE

VILLAGE

COMMUNE

A LABOUR POEM
BY
ALARIC.

BRISBANE:
PUBLISHED BY THE QUEENSLAND SOCIAL-DEMOCRATIC FEDERATION.
Queensland Social-Democratic Federation.

OBJECTS.

1. To publish and disseminate literature on social-economic subjects with a view to educate the people upon the true principles that should govern society.
2. To do such other work as may appear necessary for the advancement of Socialism.

Literary contributions on social-economic subjects will be received and published if approved by the Committee, Q.S.D.F.

All friends of the cause are solicited to send subscriptions for the above objects to the Secretary, Trades Hall.

LEAFLETS FOR THE PEOPLE

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DEDICATION.

THIS POEM IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED TO
WILLIAM LANE.

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

Though betwixt in many a conflict, the chivalry of the Order will gather again its scattered and battered legion. Nor will the fight ever cease until the Chivalry of Capital is exterminated, and from its highest turret flows the blood-red banner indicating that Government is by Labour, for Labour; for God and Home, Humanity and Fatherland.

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

Yours sincerely,

For the Humanisation of Labour,

ALAMO.

"Workers" Office,
5th September, 1893.
THE

VILLAGE COMMUNE.

A LABOUR POEM, BY ALARIC.

Part I.

Oh, Sons of Toil!! was it a dream unreal
When Christ proclaimed the Brotherhood of Man,
And sought to bind our souls with chords of love
Until the human race should be one family
Encompassing the earth? One family,
One soul, one heart, and our affections as
Inwrought, that, like the intertwining vines,
The many are but one. Oh, mystic Brotherhood!
Which kindles in each heart Love's holy fire
And halloweth earth, our common fatherland.
But brother mine! since Christ proclaimed
The Social Age, two thousand years have passed,
And still upon the remembrance of time
We see not yet the glad sunrise when Strife
Shall cease and Love be lord of all.

For when amidst the carking care and strife,
Which ever form life's foetid atmosphere,
That tender seedling, Love, would timidly
Put forth the young green leaf and bloom, the frost
Of fratricidal strife seals up the fount
Of human sympathy on which it feeds.
For, orchid-like, Love strikes no root on earth,
But lives upon the dew and balm of heaven,
Those sweet and subtle sympathies that spring
From secret wells within a good man's heart.
And thus a lawless competition reigns
And rooks up all that is most holy, pure,
And lovable in man. Until above the with
Of grinding mills, where poor humanity
Is ground, like grief, between the mighty stones,
There rises from the hearts of men, stone-ground,
This great and bitter cry—

It is the sin of sins
That one must seek another’s leave to till,
And Labour of must starve when wanting work.
It is the wrong of wrongs that any man
Should seek to profit from another’s toil,
And Living Labour, made in God’s own image, be
Considered but a CHATTEL to be bought and sold—
To-day be hired and to-morrow cast aside.
Nor less a bitter wrong is that he
Who owns the instruments creating wealth
Can stow his brother into bondage,
But thinly veiled when masked with none’s name.
For Capital, more strong than governments,
Holds arbitrary power of life and death,
And for a mere caprice, a trivial fault,
Or to enthrone itself of gainst glut, or loss,
May close the factory, shut down the mine,
And bar the means of work against the work
Whose toll created them, and who—if right
Were done—would own them still.
And thus the chattel slave of olden time
Becomes the wage-servant of modern days.*

Though Ho, who never rests, but ever steers
The staple engines, whose silent keels
Though heaven’s blue immensity, decreed
The sacredness of Labour, undo the earth
A workshop which our toil must sanctify,
This sacred Living Labour is esteemed of far
Less worth than Capital, a thing insinuate.

* What little real difference there is after centuries upon centuries of so-called “progress” can be seen by contrasting the condition of the modern agricultural labour, or the worker in the match factories, with that of the worst type of Roman slavery, as described in Columella, De Rusticis l. 5.

Humanity, which once lived and learns
And carries in its bosom all the hope
Of progress for our race in future years,
Is valued less than minted gold;
And men before the Golden Calf of Capital
Bow down like serfs, like serfs adore.
Wherever depression comes, Humanity
Must first be starved, or turned drifters,
Before the “sacred rights of Capital”
To interest and profits are denied.
To strange the “sacred rights of Labour” are
So seldom talked about—the right to earn
A subsistence for wife and child, to build
A cottage home and live a human life.
For God, we’re told, so loved accumulated wealth
That He created all the vast expanse
Of this revolving globe for Capital alone,
And then created men, its humble serfs,
To minister unto its luxuries.†

Upon the anvil of Despair, bedewed
With sweat and tears of toiling multitudes,
Must Labour forge the mighty dollar for its use,
And swell its hoards while tolling million stars.
Thus Capital neglects its sacred aim,
To be the heart of Industry and pump
The life-giving corpuscles of warm blood
Through all its veins; to foster, not exploit.
But, like the octopus, it sprouts abroad
Its suckers, seeking whom they may devour.

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

† “The Church has lost, since the days of the first Edward, the willing servant of State-right, and has hardly raised its voice against wrong-doing” (Thomson Stape’s “Six Centuries of Work and Wages”). In Queensland to-day this is only too true,
To suck the veins of Living Labour;
Nor over shares the loss arising from
Victimising of seasons, drought and flood.
In plenteous years,
When Nature whispers to the bursting seed,
Awake! put forth each tender leaf and shoot
And robe the earth in loveliness;
In cloths of gold where waves the ripening corn,
In mingled green and gold where saffira sport
Amongst the tasselled moire; and richest green
Where over hill and dale the pasture spreads
Its rolling billows; deck its breast with ships
Where daisy-craft unfurl their painted sails of pink
And white and gaily ride at anchor;
Moored side by side with clover blooms that toss
And heave where'er the fitful summer winds
Bend how the supple masts;—then and then
Alone may Capital claim interest
In fair proportion as its use did tend
To raise the harvest. Most unjust is it
If Capital demand its pound of flesh
In years of iron slates, or devastating floods,
When all the earth is one vast wilderness.
In seasons such as these must Labour bow
His haughty head to Capital for bread,
And one by one the smiling homesteads fall
Into grim Shylock's greedy maw, and then
The independent yeomen cease to be.

And 'tis the mind of man
That, like the eagle, seeks to soar and scan
The whole circumference of this round earth
And all the worlds beyond,—even that
Is shackled. Who may articulate the wrongs
Of his dumb, suffering brother in words that bare
Like living coals, made incandescent with
The sense of grievous wrong, but Capital,
Wide-minded Capital, will hear and see;
And call him "agitator," worse than thief,
And sentence him to starve while tatalised
By looking at the wealth he may not own?
But still each one must fight as Nelson fought,
His blind eye on Espionage, his eagle gaze
On that far-distant signal-post in heaven
Where Duty's signal flies. Nor cease till Death's
Cold fingers ran the shot-torn ensign down
And waft the bare-craft into those silent ports
Where, after turmoil, there is peace.

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

Ah! once I dreamed
That Capital, in lieu of human serfs,
Renowned to harness eagles to its car.
The harness was of finest silk, embroidered o'er
With precious stones, and decked with waving plumes.
But they, the free-born wanderers of the sky,
Repulsed with scorn the gilded chains and scoffed.
At wages-slavery. "Harness the winds," they cried,
"That whip the ocean surges into foam,
Bend the mighty current of the deep
That lash their snow-white crests against the craze;
And cage the hurricane; but leave the eagle free."
Yet one of them, censured by cunning wiles,
Was harnessed to the car.
In rain it bashed its wings
And tore the galling chains with beak and claws.
Then realising that it was indeed a slave,
It drove its beak into its mighty heart
And tossed its life-blood to the winds, and cried,
"Bear witnesses, ye, before the mountain craze,
And hymn it to the rocks that I chose death
Itself to slavery." And ever since
The traveller in the rocky pass may hear
The storm wind sing—

The fetters of the slave
Must by himself be wrought;
Heroes met and braved,
Heroes of deed and thought,
Prefer a freeman's grave,
And on the dead men's plauds
They sprang the slave's chains.

Ah me! If men were men with lion hearts
And eyes that glow with Resolution's fire,
Like eastern cobra, undaunted, unquenchable.
Oh! what a band of Labour Knights would ride
Aroad to rend Oppression's chains and hurl
That tyrant, Capital, from its desolate throne.
Then would the hearts of men be temples most
For Liberty to dwell, not be defiled.
Behind each brow would glow the noble light
Of God-like consciousmess, and crown the face
With manly beauty, pow'r, and will.

Part II.

THE VILLAGE COMMUNE.

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

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

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

Slaves! ye sons of Saxon sires,
Hark! the poet's thrilling lyre
Hymn the songs of new desires,
Wage-slaves, rend your chains!

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

Let the horses and yoked oxen
Echo back from shrew to shrew.
"Labour is ensnared no more."
Wage-slaves, rend your chains!
Thunders! blow thy bugle harsh
From the top of heaven's arch,
Wake the dead to join the march.
Wage-slaves, rend your chains!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I looked around in mute astonishment.
The earth, arrayed in bridal dress of green
And gold, was smiling in the summer sun.
The gentle summer wind was perfumed with
The fragrant scent of violets in full blossom.
From countless trellised vines the luscious grapes
In pendent clusters hung, and orange-groves
Were wreathed in blossom. All the fields were white
With ripening wheat; and here and there a patch
Of lucerne seemed a small green island, girt
About with seas of golden corn, whose waves
In rustling billows beat upon its shores.
Large flocks of sheep browsed o'er the meadowland.
The lazy vines were greasing all around,
Their umbels, full of mills, ran croses for wine.
The isolated huts selecters built
Of slabs of wood, piled end on end, and thatched
With sheets of bark, had vanished, save a few
Preserved as relics of a barbarous past.
But in the middle of the homestead stood
A goody pile—a central hall, and round
About a nest of little cottages.
For there a family ne'er separates,
But all united by the crimson tie
Of common kin, together dwell and form
A Household in fraternal love and union.
"The family divided has more pain
Than joy," the proverb says. Each Household tills
Its land in common for the members' use.
Ten Households form a Tithing, and, in case
Of need, co-operate to render mutual aid.
Ten Tithings constitute a Hundred, and
Ten Hundreds form the whole Community. And thus
The unit in industrial life is not
The helpless individual, as with us,
BUT ALL THE COMMUNE, one vast family,
Linked heart to heart, and hand in hand.

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

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

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

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

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

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

∗ Mussini: "Essay on the Duty of Man."
Their rose-blue petals in the children's eyes,
Is this a planetary, a poet's dream?
Philosophers, whose burning brains fashion
Communities, shape laws for men, first build
Their worlds with bricks of thought: first print
Their books with mental types, and then the settle
 Becomes the book, pruned on rock with living type
 Of men and women. Thus our beamy fathers
Printed this—the book upon the old Commons—
And cherished it the Book of Freedom.
Its binding was the eternal woods, its pages were
The wide-extending fields; free seen, not chained,
Its living types. And I, the poet of
A slavish age, but reconstruct, in dream,
The fair Co-operative Commonwealth
They built in oak when men were truly free.
The secret was the Brotherhood of Man,
The reign of Love, Freedom, Humanity.

Then oh, my brother! feed the lamp of Love
And Brotherhood, and gently tend the flame,
For Love must be the rock on which to build
The Commonwealth and Temple of Humanity,
For ever to endure.
Let lust for gold and Compeition cease,
That each of us, all basic elements
Ourselves, may be a living, Christ-like soul.
Let Labour's Cause, the service of humanity,
Be unto you the end and aim of life,
In Labour Knights, and serve the Cause till here.
Where'er the bugle sounds to free the slave,
Where'er the blood-red banner waves, and Christ,
Their standard is marching on, ever, hence to rest;
There sit the ways-end of the Order goal—
For God and Home, Humanity and Fatherland.