

Fabian Society.

REPORT ON THE LANCASHIRE CAMPAIGN.

THE campaign began on September 20th and ended on October 27th, when about sixty lectures in all had been delivered. It was found convenient, in making the preliminary arrangements, to extend somewhat the original idea of the campaign, and accordingly lectures were delivered not only in Lancashire at Manchester, Liverpool, Rochdale, Oldham, Preston, Salford, Blackpool, Bury, and in the district around Manchester; but also at Barnsley, Kendal, Carlisle, Sheffield, and Hebden Bridge.

In thus making our first attack upon the stronghold of the Old Unionism and the new Toryism, we would have been contented with a very small measure of success, and we are much more than contented with the results obtained. The lectures, except for a few days during the contest at Eccles, were extremely well reported; and even the *Manchester Guardian* (the *Daily News* of the manufacturing districts) came out with an approving leader. The audiences throughout the campaign steadily increased, and followed the lectures with close and intelligent attention. In particular, the members of the Liberal working men's clubs constantly declared that they had never heard "the thing put so straight" before, and complained that the ordinary party lecturers were afraid or unwilling to speak out. Men who frankly confessed that they had hesitated before voting for the admission of our lecturers to their clubs, were enthusiastic in welcoming our message as soon as they heard it. The vigorous propaganda in the manufacturing districts of the S.D.F. branches has been chiefly carried on by means of out-door meetings. Its effect upon working-class opinion, especially among unskilled laborers, has been marked and important; but it entirely failed to reach those working men politicians who form the rank and file of the Liberal Associations and Clubs, or the "well-dressed" Liberals who vaguely desire social reform, but have been encouraged by their leaders to avoid all exact thought upon the subject.

About one-fifth of the lectures took place under the auspices of Co-operative Societies. These proved, as a rule, the least successful of the series. The majority of the members of the Co-operative Societies regard these merely as cheap shops and useful savings banks, and hardly recognise their character as a means of democratic organisation of industry which neither the State nor the municipality can yet take over. But this idea is spreading among the leaders of the movement, from whom every courtesy was received by us, and who are constantly impressing upon the co-operators that the real object of their movement is not "dividend" or the sharing of "profit," but the complete reorganisation of the industrial system. Much harm has been done in the past by the mutual misunderstandings and denunciation of Socialists and Co-operators, and we are happy to think that our lectures have done something to bring about a better feeling.

Many of the lectures were delivered in Unitarian school-rooms and chapels, and arranged by Unitarian ministers. Several of these men have been doing splendid work during the past few years, and have formed groups of earnest and instructed Socialists among their congregations.

Nothing can be more untrue than the common belief that the bulk of the Lancashire workers are satisfied with the present economic condition. The strength of the Conservative party in Lancashire is due far more to the revolt of the mill-hands against the blatant "Manchesterism" of the Liberal mill-owners than to any desire that things should remain as they are. The proprietors of the *Sunday Chronicle*, a Manchester paper which has a circulation of 230,000 among readers belonging pretty equally to all political parties, find it profitable to publish several columns weekly written by an avowed and eloquent Socialist. A very important development of the "New Unionism" is going on among the hitherto unorganised trades, and four different unions of this kind have been formed in Oldham during the last few weeks. Even in so prosperous a time as the present, the cotton-workers are beginning to be hard hit by the substitution of "ring" for "mule"-spinning. The labor of men in many processes is being displaced by that of married women and of children, and in consequence the age of leaving school is being constantly lowered, and the mortality among infants is alarmingly high. The Liberal leaders at Eccles were forced unwillingly and ungraciously to adopt the Eight Hours Bill for miners, and the consequent departure of one of the Lancashire Liberal candidates, Mr. Rhodes, marks the beginning of an important change. More than one Liberal official told us that the only way in which to win Lancashire is by adopting a social programme.

The quarrel of the cotton workers' unions and the majority of the Trades Union Congress has been much exaggerated. Even at Oldham the delegates did not dare to take a vote of the Trades Council on the eight hours question before going to Liverpool. Nothing more has been heard of the threatened secession from the Congress organisation, and Messrs. Maudsley and Birtwistle are already supporting the miners' bill.

As a result of our visit we have enrolled many individual provincial members, and local Fabian Societies are being formed at Preston and Manchester, whilst in Birmingham a few energetic members, aided by visits from our lecturers, have organised a strong Fabian Society for their district. At this moment, therefore, the provincial work of the Society is probably of even greater importance than our London propaganda, and it should, we believe, be developed to the utmost limits which time and funds will allow.

