

## GENERAL MASTER POWDERLY.

### Sketch of the Man Who Abhors Strikes and Looks Ahead a Long Way.

The New York Sun of yesterday publishes the following from General Master Workman T. V. Powderly, of the Knights of Labor, about himself and his connection with the organization of labor:

"I was born in Carbondale, Pennsylvania, in January, 1849, of Irish parents, who came to this county in 1826. They were Catholics. I was their eleventh child, there being four girls and eight boys in the family. My father was a day laborer. I was sent to school at 7 years of age, and continued at school until I was about 13, when I went to work for the Delaware and Hudson Canal Company, having the care of a switch on one of the railroad branches. I worked at this for several years, and then was employed in the machine shops of the company. I left Carbondale in 1869 and went to Scranton, and found work in the shops of the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railroad Company. At night I studied drawing and mechanical engineering, my ambition then being to become a master mechanic. I was married in 1872. I joined the Machinists and Blacksmiths' Union in 1870, and was soon elected president.

"My interest in trade-unions began in 1870. My idea was that men who worked at the machinists' trade should understand one another throughout the country, so that they might be of assistance to each other. One of the aims in view was to make the subordinate unions schools in which should be taught the 'arts and mysteries of the craft.' You may know that in the papers which bound me as an apprentice those words were used. I discovered after being a member of the union for awhile that it did not fill my ideal of what such an organization should be, and as a remedy for grievances it would not do much for the members. It was very narrow in view; too narrow, only recognizing and enrolling machinists and blacksmiths. I saw the poor laborers, carpenters, painters and other trades in the employ of the company without any organization. I felt that the union should include all. I tried to induce the union to open its arms to all workmen, but was defeated.

"In 1870 I was invited by a friend to walk out with him, and he took me to a meeting of the Knights of Labor. I joined that night. It was Assembly No. 88. I found there all crafts, and thought I had found just what I was looking for. No. 88 was then the only assembly in northeastern Pennsylvania; all of its meetings were very secret, and nothing was ever said about its existence outside of the meetings. Our idea was that we should secretly add to our strength and keep out politicians and other self-seekers.

"When the panic of 1873 came I was laid off with many others. I went west through Ohio and western Pennsylvania. I settled in Oil City, Pa., and became a member of the Machinists and Blacksmiths' Union there, and a month later was sent to the national convention of the Union at Louisville, Ky., in September, 1874. Shortly after I returned to Scranton and was employed at my trade by the Dickson Manufacturing Company. I did not work for them very long, because I was sent out to do many outdoor jobs, and as I have always been troubled with quinsy sore throat, I could not bear the exposure.

"I went back to Carbondale and worked at my trade. I tried to induce the Machinists and Blacksmiths' Union to join the K. of L., but for a long time was unsuccessful. Of course I worked secretly, having to take each man alone and sound him and convince him. The great obstacle was, as I said, the contempt with which the machinists and blacksmiths looked upon other workers. At last my efforts were successful, and the union was disbanded and the members became Assembly No. 222 of the Knights of Labor. During this time I had worked among the surrounding towns, so that when the Carbondale Union joined the Knights there were several assemblies in the neighborhood. I had thus worked to win them to the Knights of Labor because I saw that in the union all of their legislation about apprentices and shop rules would amount to nothing.

"With the introduction of labor-saving machinery the trade was all cut up, so that a man who had served an apprenticeship of five years might be brought in competition with a machine run by a boy, and the boy would do the most and the best. I saw that labor-saving machinery was bringing the machinist down to the level of a day laborer, and soon they would be on a level. My aim was to dignify the laborer. In the K. of L. I saw a good field for operation. In 1876 we organized a district assembly of five or six assemblies in Lackawanna county, and I was elected district secretary, an office which I have held ever since from choice. In 1877, when the strikes on the railroads swept over the country, many of our men, with others not of the K. of L., numbering in all about 5,000, were discharged and went West, settling in the Western States and Territories. Wherever our knights went new assemblies sprang up. Up to that time there had been no national head to the K. of L. So Frederick Turner, of Philadelphia, Richard Griffiths, of Chicago, Chas. Litchman, of Marblehead, Mass., Thos. King, of Reading, Pa., and I met and held the first General Assembly of the K. of L. at Reading, Pa., in January, 1878. We had then seven districts, representing Philadelphia, Reading, Pittsburg, Charleston, W. Va., Scranton, and Shawnee, O., and several local associations which I cannot now recall. Mr. Uriah Stephens, of Philadelphia, was elected the first General Master Workman, and I was elected to the next office, which was called Grand Worthy Foreman. We there changed the date of meeting from January to September. We next met in St. Louis. Mr. Stephens did not attend this convention, but wrote a letter recommending me for General Master Workman. In April, 1878, I was elected mayor of Scranton. After that I gave my entire time to the work of my office, this being the first time that I had worked at any business other than my trade.

"The strikes of 1877 were caused by the men not understanding one another. At that time I began to study the causes of that strike and of the distress of the workmen. I concluded that an organization should be perfected which would be a grand industrial school. I had no hobby. Others were for greenbacks, tariff revision and a dozen other things. I had never read the writings of any theorist. I had never met a theorist. I was re-elected mayor two or three times. When first elected I was not known outside of the laboring classes. It was said by my opponents that all sorts of trouble would come if I was elected. However, I was elected, and among other acts I discharged the entire police force of the city because I found that I must have men on whom I could rely. Then, during my administration the debt of the city was reduced about \$20,000. Previously the debt had annually increased. In 1884 the Knights of Labor had grown so large that the business of the order took all of my time, so I had to decline re-nomination for mayor. We now have assemblies in England and Belgium.

"I have read Henry George's 'Progress and Poverty,' Spencer's 'Social Statistics' and Thornton on 'Labor.' I am not sure what my plans will be for the future. A syndicate of newspapers has offered to send me to Europe to write up the labor question as it is there. I do not believe in strikes, because I do not think there is any necessity for them. I believe that these troubles can be settled without strikes. The order has materially changed in a few years, is broader and more liberal than at first, less secrecy now, the oath has been abolished in the initiation, and only the word of honor is now required. The whole matter of the wage system is wrong. So long as one finds it to his advantage to buy labor at the cheapest price and the other demands the highest price for it, trouble will come. Profit sharing is the remedy. The Knights of Labor will not allow a liquor distiller, or brewer, or liquor seller, or one whose wife is a liquor seller, to become a member of the order, and I am now striving to prevent liquor drinkers from joining."

It may be added that Mr. Powderly lives in a plain, unpretentious style, his salary being only \$1,500 year.