

THE KNIGHTS OF LABOR

MASTER WORKMAN POWDERLY TALKS ABOUT THE ORDER.

HE TELLS OF ITS ORGANIZATION, MEMBERSHIP, PROSPECTS, AND WHAT IT EXPECTS TO ACCOMPLISH.

PHILADELPHIA, Aug. 3.—Terence V. Powderly, the Grand Master Workman of the Order of Knights of Labor of America, attended a celebration held here to-day of the anniversary of the birth of Uriah Stephens, founder of the order. To a representative of the press he talked freely and frankly upon many matters intimately connected with the Knights of Labor. As is well known, Uriah Stephens was animated by two desires—to keep the name, membership, and doings of the Knights profoundly secret, and that each trade instead of having a separate organization should amalgamate closely with other trades in one grand society. The conversation with Mr. Powderly was as follows:

“Are you satisfied with all of the changes in the methods of organization and conduct of the order which have come to pass since Stephens’s death?”

“I am not. I am heartily for a return to his doctrine of secrecy. I think it was a mistake to depart from it. The name, membership, and doings of our order should be kept entirely from the public.”

“Are you in favor of each trade having a separate organization?”

“No. It is my earnest belief that all of the trades should come into one grand common meeting. By this means only can the members of each craft acquire the necessary familiarity with the wrongs of other crafts. For instance, the shoe-makers may want to strike for higher wages, and yet their movement may be opposed by the glass-blowers, because the latter, not having been in close union with their brethren, are unable to appreciate their oppressions.”

“Are all the trades of the country now represented in the order?”

“Not one is left out.”

“Are any more strikes among any of the different branches contemplated?”

“So far as I know, no. Anyway, we will first get through with this telegraph strike.”

“Has any assessment been raised for the telegraphers?”

“No. At the opening of the strike there was in the treasury of the brotherhood nearly \$20,000. I do not know whether this has been exhausted, but a few days ago they declined to take an assessment on the score that they did not need it.”

“The Knights are in hearty sympathy with the strike?”

“Yes. The rule of our order is first to arbitrate, then strike. But in the case of the telegraphers the company refused to arbitrate. Hence the strike was proper, and we will stand by them to the last moment.”

“Are there any special matters of legislation which the order intends to attempt to have abolished?”

“We want the railroad land grants repealed and the absurd and unjust franchises to the telegraph companies. In Pennsylvania there is on the statute-book an eight-hour law which cannot be enforced, there being no penalty. We hope to organize this Winter and compel by legislation, if necessary, its observance.”

“How is the order faring in point of membership?”

“Well, we have 272 local organizations, with membership running from 20 up to 1,300 and 2,500 persons. We have now five organizers in the field establishing local assemblies. This Winter we will put more organizers on the road. At present we are centralizing our efforts in the Chicago regions.”

“Do you think the order is increasing in public favor?”

“Decidedly. The employers have come to understand that we compel our members to render conscientious work to them. When we find a man is not doing his work properly we do not fine him, but we so hold him up to ridicule that he is compelled to mend his ways, and that speedily. Then we are meeting with much sympathy from public representative bodies. Among the most noticeable changes of sentiment is that upon the part of the employers of the members of the Amalgamated Iron and Steel Workers.”

“Will Jarrett be re-elected?”

“If he wants the place he can have it. From what I understand he will not refuse to accept it if it is thrust upon him unanimously. He is the best man for the chair. His labor is only half done, and he cannot justly step down. If it had been any one else in the late trouble there would have been a pretty muss.”

“Do you desire any special legislation?”

“No, there is too much legislation already. We want special legislation repealed and not more enacted. We can hoe out our own row if we are not held down by these special laws for monopolists and monopolies.”

“How does the order stand on Denis Kearney and Herr Most?”

“We have nothing to do with either of them.”

“Are the principles of the order in any way akin to those of modern Socialism?”

“Only this far: We believe in organizing first for proper wages, then for proper education. Our next move will be to establish our own schools. We already have co-operative stores and factories in successful operation.”

“Does the vote of the order, as an order, incline specially to either party?”

“It is evenly divided. We hope to control both parties before long.”

“Is the organization of the different trades what might be desired?”

“The organization of the Iron-Workers is by no means what might be desired, but we hope to keep on perfecting our system.”

“What will be the primary object of the secret convention in Cincinnati in September?”

“The Stephens question will be discussed. I shall in my report deal with the order now and as it was when first organized. I shall suggest some of the reforms of which I have spoken. But the rumor that any radical change of organization will be effected is untrue.”

“It is reported that the Federation of Labor, at its secret session in New-York next week, intends to make an effort to absorb into their body your organization.”

“The rumor is unfounded. Neither the Independent Knights of Labor nor the Federation has any such object in view. We are on harmonious terms. I hear some talk of a struggle between the different trade organizations for the great head place. There will be no such struggle.”

“Are the affairs of the order in a satisfactory condition?”

“Indeed they are. We are growing rapidly and we are in a splendid healthy condition. At present there exists a harmonious understanding between the employes and the employers of all of the branches of the Knights except the telegraphers.”

“What do you think of the latter struggle?”

“I think the company will ‘cave.’ I understand that the stockholders of the company are willing to grant the advances asked for, and that the rumor of Gen. Eckert’s resignation was caused by trouble between a few of the more important stockholders and the Executive Board, which, in turn, passed the disagreement on to Eckert.”

Mr. Powderly goes to-morrow to Washington to consult with James Mitchell, of the Executive Board of the Knights, concerning the telegraphers’ strike.