

## THE COMMON PEOPLE

THE phrase "the common people," is well understood by the people to whom it is applied; they understand that they are but ordinary kind of folks, and are contented to be called "the common people." We have our "peculiar people" who represent but a small portion of the community, while the common people are numbered by millions, and are represented by the "great unwashed," "the toiling thousands," "the fustian jackets," "the mobocracy" and proletarians of modern society, the abundance of such *cognomen* being a proof of the careful study which the more observant have thought them worthy of.

To us it seems that the phrase which we have here taken as a text is about to be used by some with a stronger meaning attached to it than we have been accustomed to admit. Tired, as it were, of using the more hackneyed phrases which are applied to describe the masses, a writer in the aristocratic periodical "Vanity Fair," uses the phrase which we now use, as a title to a very readable article. The appearance of the phrase in the journal alluded to is sufficient to bring it into fashion, and to help to bring it into more use than has been made of it for some time.

It appears to us that the writer has been very careful in the selection of his title. It does not seem to be a bit of chance work or haphazard selection, but the result of careful thought, (a happy choice) having the free touch of the true artist.

None of the modern phrases which we have quoted are so graphic as "the common people." It has a genuine Saxon ring in it, and we know that the word common is here used to express what is meant, and without birth or descent.

Taking it in this meaning, in its application it is strictly correct, and we at once see the force of the expression, and the happy, or it may be unhappy, hit, which the writer has made.

The writer in the article referred to, says, "everything is tending more and more to throw our destinies into the hands of the common people," and that it would be well we should know what they are — "that a knowledge of the actual state of the common people is of vital importance."

We agree with all this, and hope that the writer of the article will give his help to ascertain, as far as may be, the actual state of the common people in whom he is so much interested.

From a suffrage restricted to a property qualification to a suffrage unlimited, the writer goes on to say before another generation has passed away, the common people will have all power, and be the arbiters in part of our destiny.

He thinks it would be well that our governing class should gain some idea of the common people, and argues that something may be known about them by a knowledge of the kind of literature which they indulge in, by Hyde Park demonstrations, and match boys' processions; by learning that they are the readers of Reynolds' newspaper, which is full of attacks on the aristocracy, the bishops, and the royal family, and of their cost to the common people, who are fond of this style of abusive language.

The faults which they are charged with are attributed to the lesson taught them by their betters, who are charged with having taught them to look upon the relations of society as being purely commercial, and that they are to look upon each other as instruments of material profit.

In face of all this alarming speculation, whence comes it that we have a conservative reaction in the country, and a people with all power—the admirers of Reynolds' politics?

Can it be that the people are Conservative at heart, and that a knowledge of their newspaper reading gives no proof as to their political creed? Or is it that they are indifferent to party politics, and that the reaction so much talked about, and dreaded by some, exists amongst the middle class only, who have become converts to Toryism from a fear of the common people, a dread of trade unions, material considerations, and the purely commercial relationship of class (their own philosophy) being a danger from its antagonism to progress?

It seems to us as if the brazen trumpet of Ben, the Israelite without guile, had awakened our middle class to some action of a reactionary kind, while the common people are asleep at their posts, and need to be aroused by a louder trumpet. Ben's tocsin has sounded the alarm with its notes about the "withering blast of Atheism, and the simoon of sacerdotal usurpation." Let some other sound a blast to awaken the common people to their real position, and a sense of their true worth.