

# THE COMMONWEAL

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## MR. CHAMBERLAIN'S LEADER.

PARLIAMENT has met for a ceremonial, and done about as much as it would have done if it had met for the despatch of business—nothing, to wit. But besides that, the two parliamentary groups that represent anything like principle and at the same time have any power in Parliament, have also met, and each has done so much at least as to announce its policy in the present state of things. The Parnellites have met in Dublin, and the Jingo-Whigs in Devonshire House; and the conclusions come to by both parties are certainly encouraging to those who wish to see an end of all parties, since they point directly to the further disintegration and final impotence of parliamentary government.

The Parnellites had obviously a very simple course to take: they had merely to state that they had not changed their minds at the bidding of the English shopkeeper terrified into a special exhibition of spite. They have taken that course, and have announced "that no measure offering less legislative or executive control over Irish affairs than that contained in Mr. Gladstone's Bill can be accepted as a settlement of the Irish national question." They would have betrayed their trust if they had said less than this, and no one supposed that they would say less. But they go further, and hint in terms by no means obscure that the rents are not likely to be forthcoming, and point out that the first and simplest measure of pacification must be the suspension of evictions. There is no doubt that the whole of non-Orange Ireland will support them in the war which they have declared. It is to be hoped under the circumstances that the Irish will not by rash outbreaks give the Government the opportunity of renewing direct and flagrant coercion: that would simplify their position very much. If the Irish "fight cunning," the position of the Government will be a very intricate and difficult one, unless, as is possible, they make up their minds to dish the Gladstonians by bringing in a real Home Rule Bill.

That they might do, if it only depended on themselves and their declared Tory following, who would but curse and follow; but they have to reckon also with the Whig-Jingo group, who are not under their leadership, though they are allies to be trusted, in the Irish matter at least; and *they* cannot allow serious concessions to be made, as their doing so would really mean opening the door to Mr. Gladstone again, and it is quite clear from what took place at Devonshire House that they are determined not to do that.

It really affords curious matter for reflection on the stability of mere party names and the influence that they still have over the mechanical cohesion of a party long after that party has lost its principles, that some of the Liberal papers, notably the *Daily News*, affect to look on Lord Hartington's speech at Devonshire House as an indication of the healing of the breach in the so-called "Liberal Party"; whereas it was the plainest statement of the irreconcilability of the split,—a definite tender of help to the Tory party so long as the latter would do its duty in opposing Mr. Gladstone and Home Rule. The "Liberal Party" can only be united by the Gladstonites declaring definitely against Home Rule; and doubtless many of them are longing to do so. Mr. Alderman Cook, for instance, will probably not lack his reward, but will be returned for East Birmingham as a convert to the cause of Chamberlainism and no surrender. If Mr. Gladstone were to die, or if he were to give up the parliamentary game, as he is not likely to do; or if he were to argue himself out of his present position of the Friend of Ireland, as it is to be feared he may do—this kind of reunion of the Liberal party would certainly take place; and then the world would wake up and find itself Whig. Apart from the *people*, who have an inconvenient craving for food once or twice in the twenty-four hours, not easy to satisfy at present, there would be a glorious Whig world,

in which contention would be dead, or would only be represented by a feeble Radical spray beating against the firm rock of Whiggery.

For as between the solid political parties the matter stands thus: the Liberals, the Radicals even, though some of them, like Mr. Bright and Mr. Chamberlain, had coquetted with the Irish party at one time or another, had no thought of granting Home Rule to Ireland; Mr. Gladstone became converted to the necessity of granting it; one may well wonder why; possibly he may have seen the necessity of providing a new battle-field for the old Liberal and Conservative faction-fight; or again, he may have wished to atone for the Soudan massacres by making peace with Ireland; or, strange as it may seem to a non-professional politician, the elections of 1885 may have made him see for the first time that the Irish were almost unanimous in claiming Home Rule. Anyhow, he was converted, and bade his party be converted also, and most of them obeyed, since they were overawed by his appeal to the generosity and justice of the *People*; an appeal to which the *People* would probably have responded if they had had votes or dared to use them. But "the Party," the Parliamentary hacks, wire-pullers, etc., were converted against their wills, and though doubtless they are sorry that they have been thrust out of power, they will not be sorry to come back to power by the help of the "Unionist Liberals" as Home Rulers so modified that the Irish will not know them as friends.

This, then, is the chance of Lord Hartington and his friend and follower Mr. Chamberlain, that they may "unite" the Liberal party by taking away all reason for its existence, or, may not one say, by "uniting" it to the Tory party. For let us be clear about one thing, that except for this revolutionary question of Home Rule and its consequences, which has so strangely become a question for "practical" politicians, there is nothing which can be debated in Parliament concerning which the recognised factions have any serious difference of opinion, or on which at least they can differ seriously as to action. The Irish Question once resolutely shelved, the peace of the kingdom of heaven would descend on St. Stephens, except for a few Radicals, whose grumblings no one would heed, and who, if they were not blind, would have to declare themselves either Whigs or Socialists.

Let us hope that those who declare themselves the latter will also have the wits to come out of the Constitutional Parliament, and join the *People*, who were never intended to have anything serious to do with that august body, nor ever will, till the day when they destroy it.

WILLIAM MORRIS.

## ORGANISED LABOUR.

### The Duty of the Trades' Unions in relation to Socialism.

#### I.

FELLOW-WORKERS,—As a staunch Trades'-unionist for over twenty years, I desire to call your serious attention to the present alarming condition of the unceasing struggle between Capital and Labour. It is useless to cry "Peace, peace," when there is no peace. The hard disagreeable reality forces itself upon us and cannot be evaded, that never has the conflict been fiercer and never has the outlook been more gloomy than now. In the dark days that we have passed through already, there has always been a rift in the clouds to cheer us with the promise of brighter hours, and amidst the din and strife of previous contests the hope of victory brought comfort and encouragement. But the conditions of the warfare are changed. No further successes are possible by the old methods and with the weapons we have hitherto used. Indeed, the utmost care and watchfulness are needed even to retain the positions we have won. For this reason I urge the immediate summoning of a Council of War to deliberate upon the situation and to consider the advisability, nay the imperative necessity of a complete change of tactics in order that the standard of Labour may yet be borne aloft and planted on heights heretofore deemed impossible of access.

Until now we have to a very large extent been struggling aimlessly