

THE COMMONWEALTH

The Official Journal of the Socialist League.

VOL. 2.—No. 30.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 7, 1886.

WEEKLY; ONE PENNY.

POLITICAL NOTES.

THE Tories in office again and dividing the spoils won by their recent victory—such as it is. A purely Tory Ministry, with the assurance of the “benevolent neutrality” of the Whigs: that is to say, their complicity without responsibility in the game of reaction which the new Parliament is pledged to play. What are their chances in the game? In the first place it is only the Irish question which need be taken into consideration; on all other points the Tory Government will do pretty much the same as a Liberal one would; so we need only consider how they will deal with their Irish kettle of fish.

There are signs even in the more moderate of the Tory prints that they are expected to make *some* move in the direction of coercion; to take advantage of any opportunity the Irish may give them by riding rusty under their defeat. But after all, the Tory rank and file has to put up with as many disappointments at the hands of its leaders as the Radical rank and file has, and it is likely that this will be one of them. Lord Salisbury will do nothing at all as long as he can; and will at least try what he can do in the way of saying “Yes” and “No” at once to the Home Rule claim. He will bring in some “gas and sewage” Home Rule Bill, which the Irish need not fight against, but which of course will not choke their agitation; nay, many Irishmen think and have thought for some time, that any Bill for Local Government would be of use to them; that they would use the bodies so constituted to organise their agitation still further and more completely. Perhaps they are sanguine in this; but, at least, the most revolutionary Irishman need not be afraid that Lord Salisbury will offer Ireland so much or put what he does offer in such a dramatic manner that it will injure the sentiment for Home Rule among the people.

Of course, what the Tories would do if they could would be to offer such a “concession” as would irritate the Irish into open resistance, while it would seem a fair offer to outsiders. Happily this is scarcely possible after the frank and almost too effusive way in which Ireland received Mr. Gladstone’s incomplete and unsatisfactory measure. Indeed Lord Salisbury is much more likely to spoil his game by acting like a timid whist-player and being stingy with his trumps. So we may wait without excitement for the Tory Home Rule Bill.

Meanwhile how great is the relief from a sense of danger, which all Tories and Whigs are now feeling is shown obviously enough not only by the ordinary jubulations after a successful electoral contest in the party papers, but also in more grotesque and downright fashion. The prospectus of the Loyalist League of Great Britain (printed in true-blue) which has found itself at the Socialist League office, is a fair example of this terror calmed for the present. After stating in fairly plain terms that one of their objects was to further civil war if they could not have *all* their own way, they appeal for help “to resist to the utmost the disloyal and Socialistic associations in their persistent efforts to disintegrate society and weaken the empire.” Well, some people may laugh at their big words and their premature terror; but after all their instinct has not misled them. Home Rule doesn’t aim specially even at the weakening of the empire, still less at the disintegration of society, yet it is a sign that both these movements are going on. Friend “Loyalists,” it can’t be helped! An empire which is the empire of cheating and hypocritical traders cannot last for ever; “society” which is but a band of thieves has a tendency to disintegrate, you need not doubt that!

As to the “Cabinet-making” which has been going on lately, no one scarcely pretends to take any interest in it except so far as concerns the position of Lord Randolph Churchill. But we Socialists need not

trouble our heads about that either; the fact that such a man could be considered of any importance in Parliament does but give us a measure of the weight and depth of the others. It is scarcely worth while to say that he has all the faults of a reactionary demagogue, and not much else, since the man himself scarcely professes to be more than a machine, whose design has been taken from a much more exquisite piece of machinery, the late Lord Beaconsfield, to wit. One thing we may be pretty sure of, that the new Parliament will play a considerable part in sickening people of the whole business of Parliamentary Party Government, and help still further to discredit the knot of wire-pullers, landlords, money-lenders, lawyers, and professional politicians, who profess to represent the people of these islands.

While on the one hand the instruments of bourgeois domination are visibly wearing out, on the other there is a feverish activity arising against Socialism. In America, the determination, whatever may happen, to have some victims to middle-class revenge for the Anarchist outbreak at Chicago, and the suppression of freedom of speech generally; in Belgium the vindictive sentences against the rioters, in Holland the sentence against Domela Nieuwenhuis, and the arrest of Fortuin and Vanderstadt at Amsterdam; the obstinate deadlock in Denmark; in France as the latest item, the approaching trial of Louis Michel and Jules Guesde for “inciting to murder and plunder;” and finally, with us, the attack treated in the English, or petty and hypocritical style, by setting the police at us as street nuisances, and pretending that opinion has nothing to do with it, and that they do not notice our utterances, though the police make elaborate notes of them. All this does specially and above all things show fear on the part of our rulers, a sense of insecurity, the origin of which is not so much the open Socialist agitation (that is an effect rather than a cause), as the crumbling away of the basis on which “Society” is built, to wit, the safe and continuous expansion of the exploitation of Labour by Capital.

WILLIAM MORRIS.

THE FALL OF DILKE.

THE Dilke case and the comment it has excited afford a curious and noteworthy illustration of the manners and morals of latter-day civilisation. We are not going to follow up this remark by descanting, in approved style on the bestiality, the brutality, the criminality, etc., etc., of Sir Charles Dilke’s conduct in the matter in question, although treachery towards a professed friend, and double-dealing of the worst kind, there undoubtedly was—albeit, perhaps no worse than is common among the circles of high social position in which Sir Charles moved. What is curious and noteworthy is the attitude of “public opinion” and its press towards the case. The holy horror, the unspeakable disgust, professed at its mere sensual side is slightly amusing, when it is an open secret that bizarre forms of eroticism are by no means unknown among persons of high standing in official and governmental circles whom the horrified journalist most delights to honour. As for the lust-element itself, it is enough to say that while the mere animal side of the sexual passion still obtains in human nature—as it undoubtedly does to-day, and as it will as long as civilisation exists with its corrupt material conditions and its hypocritical personal ethics and canting of “purity” to fan the flame—just so long shall we find it manifesting itself, and no amount of head-shaking and name-calling will affect it. Not before many generations of rational social life have shaped man will it be modified—of that we may rest assured. Meanwhile “society,” which pretends, with its frowns and its ostracism, when scandal arises, to force men to asceticism, only succeeds in making them hypocrites. It may be a desirable thing that the coarser side of the sexual passion should be eradicated: in any case it will only be affected by a gradual succession of inherited changes in the human organism through the medium of its social and economic surroundings, and not by any amount of enthusiastic determination to be “even as the angels are.” Physiological miracles are as hard to work as any others. A strong inherent tendency must wear itself out by a process of exhaustion, so to speak; if you try to stamp it out, it will only