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NOTES ON PASSING EVENTS.

THE "Dissentient Liberals" have had their field-day; and at first sight the thing which would strike the observer most would be the extreme shabbiness of their purpose. These lords and gentlemen—these superior persons—were met together really for the purpose of enforcing their legal right to take the last penny out of the pockets of a few poor people on the verge of pauperism. Stripped of a very thin veil of pretence to patriotism, fair dealing, ten commandments, and the like, this is the only explanation of their conduct. And one must say that the sweating of the Jews by King John was a generous and almost ideal proceeding compared with this dull, blank shabbiness; for at all events the Jew had something worth taking, and his "portable property" might well captivate the imagination of a hard-up mediæval king.

Their desperate earnestness in their purpose was also striking. "The manly straightforwardness" of Lord Hartington—which an enemy might perhaps call grovelling stupidity—the old-womanish spite of Mr. Bright's much-becheered letter, Mr. Chamberlain's quaintly arrogant telegram, are not more remarkable than the obvious eagerness of the rank and file to declare themselves supporters of Lord Salisbury. Fear had consolidated these opponents of Home Rule, that is clear; but fear of Home Rule? Surely not.

For if they had no enemy save Home Rule the game for these patriots to play would be support of the tenant-farmers against the landlords; to be able to say, "What do you want with a Dublin parliament when we will give you all you ask for, and as an instalment, to show that we mean it, will stave off the landlords from you at this pinch, so that you may make *some* livelihood out of the land?" Surely this would have been the card to play for a party calling themselves Unionists. And to an outsider it seems as if it would have been so easy, too. The National League with its "Plan of Campaign" would appear almost to have been asking the *Liberal* Unionists to dish it. At least Mr. Bright might have been expected to be on the side of the tenant-farmers.

After all, our Irish friends seem to have understood the people they were fighting against, and that they could be trusted to plunge deeper and deeper into the mire. And as for Mr. Bright, he is one of those persons who roar out for sweeping reforms as long as there is no chance of their being realised, and draw back in terror as soon as they seem likely to come about.

In short, there are no two words to be said on the matter: The terror arises from the attack on property, as it seems to their eyes; though to ours the "Plan of Campaign" seems rather a recognition of the rights of property, and therefore to be deprecated. But it is clear from the speeches that Socialism was the bugbear, and Lord Salisbury once again echoed the feeling in his speech to the Conservative Club; in which, by the way, he was naturally jubilant over the definite adhesion of the "Liberal Unionists." He has a strong party to lead now.

Neither are there wanting signs that the greater part of the Gladstonian Liberals will soon be in the same camp. The avidity with which they will seize on an excuse to go over to the safe side was well illustrated by the article in the *Daily News* following Lord Kilcourse's letter on Mr. Dillon's speech. It meant once more: "Yes, we will do what Mr. Gladstone wishes as long as the natural results don't seem likely to come of our doing so; but then—." The Gladstonian Liberals also are beginning to understand what Irish affairs mean; and when they have come to understand fully that it is not a question of Parliamentary politics, but of property, then, except for the Irish themselves and a few Radicals, there will be but one party in Parliament as far as Ireland is concerned. But, meantime, how the Irish party must despise their Liberal allies!

Yes, the Tory party seems safe, and it would be unreasonable if it were not so, since except in this matter of Home Rule, in which they are not in earnest, the Liberal party has nothing to propose which the others are unwilling to accept. Take as an example Mr. Arnold's ridiculously misnamed "Free Land" scheme, and here is Lord Salisbury's remark on that point: "Anybody must be absolutely ignorant of the history of this country who believes that the desire to make the acquisition of land easy" (to those who have the privilege of

money understood) "is inconsistent with the principles of the Conservative party." Perhaps Lord Salisbury had better let history alone. But "the principles of the Conservative party" at present need no stretching to enable them to accept a scheme which would strengthen the power of capital, as the "Free Land" business certainly would.

To those who wish to retain any respect for human nature, the stupidity exhibited by the speakers at meetings like the Poor-law Conference is somewhat of a blow. Meantime, it is not worth while to hunt these people through the labyrinth of lies which they construct so elaborately. Yet, fools as they are, it is strange that even they cannot see that their arguments against the exceptional nature of the distress, which no one denies, form the heaviest indictment possible against the cruel fraud which they call Society, and which they sustain so persistently. If this is to be our ordinary condition in the future, and if you have no plan for getting rid of this "chronic" and necessary misery and degradation, what scheme of revolution can be too wild for us to try? In sober truth it seems to most thinking people that we are being pushed down a long incline, and that before long we shall look back to this dismal year as one of comparative prosperity. What is the remedy for the present condition of the poor? To get rid of the condition of the poor; and we know how to do it if we will, by getting rid of the condition of the rich, to whose existence as a rich class the poor are necessary.

WM. MORRIS

A VISIT TO THE TYNESIDE.

THE North of England is just now peculiarly adapted for Socialistic agitation. It is in a great state of excitement. The workmen are forming a Labour Federation to obtain a working-day of eight hours, and the seamen are agitating also to raise their wages from £3 10s. to £4 per month. I found, therefore, upon visiting this part that the people listened eagerly to any ideas that promised to benefit them. I spoke twice upon Socialism, once in the open-air, and again in the Gladstone Hall, Bedford Street, North Shields. My task was not an easy one, for the local papers, as usual, have been very busy burlesquing and misrepresenting our teachings. The virulence of some of the papers concerning us would be amusing, but, unfortunately, they are doing a great deal of harm. I will give an example of their work: "We have been taught that the Socialists are a lot of drunken vicious agitators, who are making a living by duping foolish workmen," said a man to me at the conclusion of one of the meetings; and I must add, these are the views commonly held about us. The lying press have done their work well on the Tyneside. In spite of this, those to whom I had the opportunity of speaking received our doctrines with favour. The usual questions were asked: "Who will do the dirty work?" "What are you going to do with the idle people?" and "Cannot you give us a detailed scheme?" These I answered to the best of my ability. One great obstacle to the advance of Socialism in this place is the intense Radicalism or Republicanism of the people; should you speak slightly of either of these they are offended. Many of them too belong to the Atheistic-Individualist school of thought; this may be due to the influence of a very strong branch of the National Secular Society in South Shields. I was sorry too to see the homage they gave to Mr. Gladstone, amounting nearly to idolatry. Until they can shake off this worship little good can be done by them; it is both pernicious and dangerous. On the question of land nationalisation we were all agreed. One very noticeable and sad fact is the hatred in which the "foreigner" is held. It is lamentable that such should be the case, but it is easily to be understood. It is through the action of foreign sailors that the wages of seamen have been reduced to the miserable pittance of £3 10s. per month. It also seems that they will put up with coarser food than an Englishman. They have also hampered the action of the English by holding aloof from the sailors' organisation. Of course I attempted to break down this national prejudice, but I am afraid that it is a hopeless task while the foreign seamen persist in their present conduct. However, I have great hopes for Socialism in the North of England if put before the people in a reasonable manner.

At the conclusion of my last meeting, I obtained sufficient names to form a Branch, and Mr. Lydon, 63, Bedford Street, North Shields, consented to act as secretary. It may be as well to state that he is at present secretary to the local Branch of the Irish Nationalist League, and I trust that any one who is willing to help the North