

# THE COMMONWEAL

The Official Journal of the Socialist League.

VOL. 2.—No. 47.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 4, 1886.

WEEKLY; ONE PENNY.

## NOTES ON PASSING EVENTS.

MR. LABOUCHERE speaking at Manchester on a Gladstonian-Liberal resolution in favour of Home Rule, had naturally not much opportunity of speaking of the general Radical policy: what he did say showed how feeble he really thought the Radicals and their changes. His amendment of the programme of the Leeds Conference comprised pretty much the Radical platform as it used to be: this platform would now be on the point of being established if it were not that the opinion of the people is now not so much passing beyond these measures as getting on to another line. The end once proposed by Radicalism was the utmost development of the system falsely called that of free contract, that is absolute freedom of the fleecing of labour by money. That end is now seen by everyone to be worthless or unattainable, and the result is that the means necessary to its attainment are no longer interesting, and that the Radical party as a party is "unemployed"; and even such a brisk politician as Mr. Labouchere, has to put forward its programme speaking from the teeth out. There is no longer any heart in it, and no life, and it has to compete for attention with other lifeless things such as Protection, Paternal Government, the honour of the British Empire, and the rest. Therefore honest Radicals think there is reaction, which is a very great mistake. All that has happened is that the Radical ideal is worn out and has to take its place with other worn-out ideals and be a plaything for those who have nothing to do with practical politics, to use those much abused words in their right sense. Such things are fit subjects for debate in the House of Commons, which means that they are done with everywhere else.

What Mr. Labouchere said about Ireland is out of date since the new adventure of the Government into coercion. As Lord Salisbury promised us at the Mansion House the other day, the Tory Government has announced its sole function to be that of acting as bumbailiff to the Irish landlords. It must be said that in so doing it has shown a much keener appreciation of the meaning of Irish agitation than the Radicals have. To defend property at all hazards and in spite of any suffering that may be caused to innocent people—that is the function of Constitutional Government. The Irish agitation attacks property, ergo, it must be put down at any cost. W. MORRIS.

It is not only the Government that is making plain the point at issue in the Irish land-war. The people are preparing in many ways that show how the struggle is narrowing its ground and becoming more deadly the more it is understood. The "Plan of Campaign" alluded to last week as put forth by *United Ireland* has been adopted on several estates, and is giving rise to the greatest hopes on the one side and liveliest apprehensions on the other.

On Lord Dillon's estate in Mayo, from whence he has wrung £20,000 a-year, mostly earned in the harvest-fields of England, as the land can barely be lived on and cannot be made to produce the rent as well, his tenants have resolved to adopt the plan, should his sublime lordship refuse their application for a reduction. From Wicklow, Clare, Cork, Leitrim, and Kilkenny similar reports are received.

The most keenly dreaded part of the plan is the depositing of the rent that the tenants are willing to pay in the hands of an anonymous trustee for safe keeping—and further use should occasion require. This disposes finally of the fear always felt hitherto of a landlord's being able to frighten the more timorous or bribe the more mercenary of the tenants into betraying their fellows. As the *Westmeath Examiner* of November 20 well says:

"The rent struggle has now commenced in good earnest. The fight is going on fiercely in most of the counties in Ireland. *United Ireland's* excellent Plan is being extensively availed of. Landlords and tenants alike recognise that if the tenants on any estate work out this Plan to the fullest extent they cannot for any length of time be refused such fair terms as they demand. The two vital points in this Plan are union amongst the tenants and the lodgment in the hands of a trustee of the rent which they consider fair. Without these the tenants cannot expect to do anything. These points are absolutely essential to gain success. The tenants should see to it that these conditions be fulfilled. There can be no backsliding—no traitorism in the ranks; such is securely guarded against. So the tenants should not have the old fear of one another—the fear which existed in other times and during other fights."

Would that workers everywhere were as united and resolved as the

men of Ireland—but for a nobler object than the *reduction* of rent! The Government that adopts coercion hastens on this end.

Unlike Sir Charles Warren, to whom he was compared when appointed, Sir Redvers Buller has no taste for the inglorious work of defending the spoilers of a people; he cannot stoop to be the willing tool and subservient bravo of the privileged; his humanity asserts itself, and official wrath is waking against him. He is sure to be recalled, and replaced by one readier for the vile work he will not do.

Back to the immemorial plan of those in authority has the Government again turned in the Irish affair. Proclamation of meetings, prosecution for "intimidatory language," threatened suppression of the popular press, and all the rest of the well-worn tricks are to be— are being reproduced. It is ever so. Wrong, buttressed though it be by the superstition of centuries, trembles before untrammelled speech and flies for refuge to brute force as to the last appeal. One day the lesson so long taught by the Governments of the world will be learnt by the peoples—and then?

The murder of the old widow Lebon by her two sons, daughter, and son-in-law, and their trial and condemnation at the Blois Assize Court, have, says the *Daily Telegraph*, "furnished the occasion for a good deal of unfavourable comment on the character of the French peasantry in general." For the sake of her savings, £32, the poor old woman had been murdered by roasting alive, so that it might be thought she had herself fallen into the fire by accident. "Sordid, pitiable greed," and "cold-blooded, brutal murder" are fine phrases, rolling well from bourgeois lips, but not applicable only to the peasantry of France or elsewhere. Were they sought out there might be found among the philanthropic phrase-mongers some arrayed in broad-cloth and fine linen, to sustain whose delicate lives widows and orphans have been immolated wholesale.

To an impartial observer what difference other than of degree can be traced between a highway robber and a wrester of unpaid labour, or between a murderer and one whose gain is wrung from the misery of the masses?

France, or rather the bourgeois Republic that usurps her name, is in difficulties. "Financial deficits," and all the rest of the ills that Governments are heir to. Republic or despotism, whatsoever be the form of the Government or political system, there must be again and again inevitably these kind of troubles until the people take all things into their own hands, organise production and distribution for their common benefit, and put an end to the universal waste entailed by monopoly and competition. H. HALLIDAY SPARLING.

## A WORKMAN'S VIEW OF AUBERON HERBERT.

THE greatest drawback to a proper and careful analysis of such vital and all important topics as Individual Liberty is the limited time at our disposal. Mr. Auberon Herbert lectured here on that subject lately, and many were present who not having time to speak were nevertheless able to point out grievous errors enunciated by our worthy and earnest lecturer. But I regret to say that there appears to be a tendency on the part of some teachers to indulge intentionally in mistakes, in order that their ideal may receive assent in preference to any other. For instance, what did the lecturer mean by stating that Socialism wants to gain power? Does he mean that this is the object of Socialism? If so, let me tell him that nothing could be further from the truth. True, Socialism may find itself forced to utilise power against opposing power in order to bring about the tranquility and equilibrium sought, just as the defender of individualism uses the force of persuasiveness and contention against those adverse to its doctrine. The teaching of Socialism, as I have learned it, has proved to me the ignominy of man in usurping power over or commanding in any way his fellow-man; and this holds good not only with the individual but national life. It was Socialism which taught me to look with abhorrence and disgust upon the man or men who seek to become masters of their fellow-men. And what to a free mind can be more revolting than the fact that we are obliged to look upon our fellow-creatures in the light of masters and slaves? It was Socialism also which instilled into me a desire to esteem, love, respect and be grateful to all who, possessing talents, utilise them for the advancement and