

THE COMMONWEAL

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WEEKLY; ONE PENNY.

NOTES ON PASSING EVENTS.

Lords, generals, barons, justices, doctors, aldermen all, gathered together to dine, capitalist-fashion, in celebration of the Cab Drivers Benevolent Association. Grand and inspiring news for the cab-drivers. No less than thirty-eight aged or infirm cabmen, some, possibly aged and infirm, receive annuities of a whole £20 a year, payable (with wise foresight of the habitual recklessness of the working-classes) by monthly instalments. Some of the thirty-eight have driven cabs for more than fifty years. Quite one-third of the thirty-eight are rheumatic from bad weather, and another one-third disabled by accidents.

Pleasing, in these days of want of thrift among the "lower classes," to find this magnificent institution, producing such magnificent results, is partly self-supporting. Much of the fund for giving the thirty-eight their huge annuities, has been squeezed out of the meagre earnings of the cab-drivers themselves. But, as the newspapers feelingly put it, the subscriptions of the cabmen themselves are [like their earnings] far too small to allow of annuities without the generous (*sic*) support of a benevolent (*sic*) public.

The workers and would-be-if-they-could workers of Whitechapel and Mile-end Road, had this week quite irresistible temptations to holiday-making. Not that every-day one of worn-out life and limb and of mind sick of overwork, homesick for a little rest and peace; not that every-other-day one, in the summer, of warmth and sunshine, making the city air more gross than ever. These were, as usual. But added to these and making temptation quite irresistible, was the presence of royalty. So those who were out of work came forth and made quite a respectable crowd from Aldgate eastward, whilst behind this fringe of desolate idlers, within the hard-visaged houses and the multitudinous dense side-streets their desolate brothers and sisters toiled on as usual. These were making first the equivalent of their own means of subsistence, then that of the means of subsistence of the crowd cheering mechanically or as mechanically silent in the streets, then all that surplus-value which makes alike possible royal pageants and desolate crowds, within and without.

Soldiers, capitalists, and priests were all present. Prayers and hymns were said and sung. And then the Beaumont Trustees, addressing the Prince, told him and so much of the world in general as chose to listen how the People's Palace is in very truth the People's Palace. It is no gift of Mr. Barber Beaumont, or of the Draper's Company, or of the Duke of Westminster, or of the Earl of Rosebery. The £75,000 have, every penny, been produced by the people, and the interest on this that is to keep the palace going, after it has built the palace, will come, every penny, out of the unpaid labour of the working-classes. Verily, it is the People's Palace. They build it, they pay for the building of it; they will maintain it, and some stray few of them will have their sodden lives touched a little, here and there, by its influence.

Even the Prince of Wales calls the East End "this important district of the metropolis." But its full importance he probably does not quite grasp. Yet many a man and woman there could tell him, had he ears to hear, that the real importance of that land of labour and of suffering is in this. It is the type of all places where production is going on, and where the workers are exploited for the maintenance of the privileged. It is also the type of all places where this tremendous truth is slowly dawning on men's minds. And from it, and hundreds like it, will come forth the irresistible voice of Labour, claiming at last its own, bidding him and such as he

"Come down, be done with, cease, give o'er,
Hide thyself, strive not, be no more."

One Sir George Bowen has been lucubrating at Oxford on behalf of the colonists. "As England's trade—the bulwark of England's greatness, of course—fell off with foreign nations, it increased with the colonies, her own children." Doubtless. And then sets in with the colonies, as with foreign nations, the era of competition, and the weakest go to the wall as inevitably when both combatants speak English as when they use different tongues. Sir George Bowen was at Oxford, and the atmosphere of the place might have reminded him of certain classical cases of the relation between parents and offspring, very apt when England and her colonies are under consideration. Medea slew her children, and Saturn devoured his or they would have devoured him.

The same noble "Sir" could only feel that "if he had been an Irishman he should have looked upon it as a most degrading thing to have a course suggested that would have severed him from the history and association of the grandest empire that ever existed." If Sir George had been an Irishman (thank the powers, he is not!), he would have longed for such a severance, as a slave longs for the breaking of the chain that binds him to the chariot-wheels of a brutal conqueror.

EDWARD AVELING.

A LETTER FROM SCOTLAND.

ON Tuesday 22nd I found myself at Arbroath, a pleasant stone-built town of some 20,000 inhabitants on the German Ocean, the original of "Fairport" in Scott's 'Antiquary,' the remains of a magnificent church and abbey dominating the homely houses. The industry practised there is sail-cloth making, and it is in a very dismal condition at present. There was much suffering there in the past winter. In a walk that I took with my host (a Free Kirk minister and a Socialist), we got into conversation with a field-labourer who was resting from his job of harrowing at a field's end. I should premise, for the benefit of our English readers, that Scotch field-labourers are hired by the half-year, and receive their "meal-and-milk," lodging in a "bothy"—or a not too luxurious pig-stye—and a sum of money. This friend, who was a brisk and intelligent young man, told us that wages were low, and that he was now receiving £9 for the half-year, instead of £12, which he used to receive. He also told us, perhaps unnecessarily, that he could not save out of this splendid salary. I was told afterwards that wages had fallen back to what they were ten years ago, at which time they had risen suddenly. A foreman, our friend told us, was now getting £28 per annum, which used to be the wages of a full private labourer.

In the evening I lectured to an audience of upwards of 600 very attentive persons, mostly of the working-class. They cheered me heartily, and took up the points well. There was a goodly attendance on the platform of the committee who had organised the meeting, and who were chiefly co-operators. Questions being asked for, I only got one, from the irrepressible temperance champion, which was received with some laughter. In fact, the meeting was rather huddled up at the end, as there was no gas and the light began to fade into the mid-summer twilight, which is all the darkness of those northern regions at this time of the year. A fair amount of literature was sold.

On the 23rd I lectured at Edinburgh, in the Oddfellows' Hall, for the committee which is the fag-end of the Industrial Remuneration Conference of last year. We expected but a poor attendance, as there were several meetings of parliamentary candidates going on in the city; but after all it turned out well, the attendance being better than at any previous lecture. Again the audience seemed sympathetic—nay, enthusiastic. I asked for questions in writing, dreading the meandering speech which usually accompanies spoken questions. I got quite a pack of cards of them; and the answers were well received. A clergyman was in the chair, another (our friend Mr. Glasse, who made a Socialistic speech) moved the vote of thanks, and a third seconded it. This last gentleman poked some heavy ecclesiastical fun at me, interlarded with buttery compliments. Once for all, I must ask our comrades to forgive me for receiving votes of thanks, on the ground that I could not help it. The sale of literature was good. I had a short but pleasant interview with the members of the Branch afterwards.

They seemed rather depressed; lack speakers, and so find it difficult to make much way; but are getting a few new members, in spite of the slackness of their propaganda. They told me that a branch of the Social Democratic Federation started, apparently with good prospects, early this year or late last (I forget which), had quite disappeared after a few weeks' existence. One comrade said that in talking to fellow-workmen they would agree with everything that he said in favour of Socialism, but could not be brought further than this passive adherence. On the other hand our comrades are making most commendable efforts to push the *Commonweal*, and with much success. The news-shops take it and sell it, too, and they are also getting newsboys to sell it; so that propaganda of some sort is going on, only our comrades feel the want of public and obvious propaganda. I should add, the University Society, who have a good deal retreated from their position, at all events in appearance, are starting a kind of progressive debating society, appealing to trades' unionists and co-operatives to join it, which our comrades intend to use for their own and other people's education.

The 24th I gave the same lecture at Glasgow. A wet evening, meetings of candidates throughout the town, and again apprehensions of a failure; but again a good audience, perhaps rather more in assent than at Edinburgh; a somewhat overwhelming amount of questions, the answers to which were very well received. A sprinkling of Ruskinians were there, somewhat inclined, I fancy, to take exception to the roughness of the opinions: indeed, the mover of that (terrible) vote of thanks said as much, and was somewhat cheered.

I may here remark that it seems to me that the Scotch are much given to "lion-hunting," and that therefore it is necessary for a Socialist who wants to get at the facts to discount a certain amount of the enthusiasm with which he is received, if he happens to have any reputation outside Socialism. Still enough remains in these cases to show that there were many in the audience who really agreed. At Glasgow there was a good sprinkling also of Land Restorers; but these, I think, are beginning to see out of the narrow close in which Henry George has hedged them.

The 25th I lectured at Dundee, and had much such an audience as at Glasgow, only that they lacked the instruction that our Branch has, with all drawbacks, given to the Glasgow folk, and therefore did not seem so ready to take up the points. Trade is very slack at Dundee; the jute business nearly gone, Indian competition having destroyed it. I was told that there are few places where the difference between the classes is more felt than it is at Dundee. I much regretted that I could not stop there and get to know some of the workers. Our comrades here (Glasgow) ought to make a push to get up a branch at Dundee.

I meet the Branch to-day, and in the evening lecture again. Tomorrow I lecture at Bridgeton, a suburb of Glasgow. But I send this off to be in time for the current number, and will give an account of whatever else happens next week.

WILLIAM MORRIS.

Glasgow, June 27.

WHIGS, DEMOCRATS, AND SOCIALISTS.

[Read at the Conference convened by the Fabian Society, at South Place Institute, June 11.]

(Concluded from p. 97).

BUT again, it may be said, some of the Democrats go further than this; they take up actual pieces of Socialism, and are more than inclined to support them. Nationalisation of the land, or of railways, or cumulative taxation on incomes, or doing away with inheritance, or new factory laws, or the restriction by law of the day's labour—one of these or more than one sometimes the Democrats will support, and see absolute salvation in one of these planks of the platform. All this I admit, and once again say it is a hopeful sign, and yet once again I say there is a snare in it—a snare lies lurking in the grass. Those who think that they can deal with our present system in this piecemeal way very much under-rate the strength of the tremendous organisation under which we live, which appoints to each of us his place, and if we do not chance to fit it grinds us down till we do. Nothing but a tremendous force can deal with this force; it will not suffer itself to be dismembered, not to lose anything which really is its essence without putting forth all its force in resistance; rather than lose anything which it considers of importance it will pull the roof of the world down upon its head. For indeed, I grant these semi-Socialist Democrats that there is one hope for their tampering piecemeal with our Society; if by chance they can excite people into seriously, however blindly, claiming one or other of these things in question, and could be successful in Parliament with driving it through, they would certainly draw on a great civil war, and such a war once let loose would not end but either with the full triumph of Socialism or its extinction for the present; it would be impossible to limit the aim of the struggle; nor can we even guess at the course which it would take, except that it could not be a matter of compromise. But suppose the Democratic party peaceably successful on this new basis of semi-State Socialism, what would it all mean? Attempts to balance the two classes whose interests are opposed to each other, a mere ignoring of this antagonism which has led through so many centuries to where we are now, and then after a period of disappointment and disaster the naked conflict once more; a revolution made and another immediately necessary on its morrow!

Yet, indeed, it will not come to that; for whatever may be the aims of the Democrats, they will not succeed in getting themselves into a

position from whence they could make the attempt to realise them. I have said there are Tories and yet no real Tory party, so also it seems to me that there are Democrats but no Democratic party; at present they are used by the leaders of the Parliamentary factions, and also kept at a distance by them from any real power. If they by hook or crook managed to get a number of members into Parliament, they would find out their differences very speedily under the influence of party rule; in point of fact the Democrats are not a party because they have no principles other than the old Whig-Radical ones, extended in some cases so as to take in a little semi-Socialism which the march of events has forced on them; that is, they gravitate on one side to the Whigs and on the other to the Socialists. Whenever if ever they begin to be a power in the elections and get members in the house, the temptation to be members of a real live party which may have the government of the country in its hands, the temptation to what is (facetiously, I suppose) called practical politics, will be too much for even many of those who gravitate towards Socialism; a quasi-Democratic Parliamentary party, therefore, would probably be merely a recruiting ground, a nursery for the left wing of the Whigs, which would indeed leave behind some small nucleus of opposition, the principles of which, however, would be vague and floating, and it would be but a powerless group after all.

The future of the Constitutional Parliament, therefore, it seems to me, is a perpetual Whig rump, which will yield to pressure when mere political reforms are attempted to be got out of it, but will be quite impossible for any real change in social and economical matters; that is to say so far as it may be conscious of the attack, for I grant that it may be betrayed into passing semi State-Socialistic measures, which will do this amount of good, that they will help to entangle commerce in difficulties, and so add to discontent by creating suffering; suffering of which the people will not understand the causes definitely, but their instinct will tell them truly that it is brought about by *government*, and that, too, the only kind of government which they can have so long as the Constitutional Parliament lasts.

Now, if you think I have exaggerated the power of the Whigs, that is of solid, dead, unmoving resistance to progress, I must call your attention to the events of the last few weeks. Here has been a measure of pacification proposed; at the least and worst an attempt to enter upon a pacification of a weary and miserable quarrel many centuries old. The British people, in spite of their hereditary prejudice against the Irish, were not averse to the measure: the Tories were, as usual, powerless against it, yet so strong has been the *vis inertiae* of Whiggery that it has won a notable victory over common-sense and sentiment combined, and has drawn over to it a section of those hitherto known as Radicals, and probably would have drawn all Radicals over but for the personal ascendancy of Mr. Gladstone. The Whigs, seeing if but dimly that this Irish Independence meant an attack on property, have been successful in snatching the promised peace out of the people's hands, and in preparing all kinds of entanglement and confusion for us for a long while in their steady resistance to even the beginnings of revolution. This, therefore, is what Parliament looks to me; a solid central party, with mere nebulous opposition on the right hand and on the left. The people governed; that is to say, fair play for the money-privileged classes to make the most of their privilege, and to fight sturdily with each other in doing so. But the government concealed as much as possible, and also as long as possible; that is to say the government resting on an assumed necessary eternity of privilege to monopolize the means of the fructification of labour.

For so long as that assumption is accepted by the ignorance of the people, the Great Whig Rump will remain inexpugnable, but as soon as the people's eyes are opened, even partially—and they begin to understand the meaning of the words, the Emancipation of Labour—we shall begin to have an assured hope of throwing off the basest and most sordid tyranny which the world has yet seen, the tyranny of so-called Constitutionalism.

How, then, are the peoples eyes to be opened? By the force evolved from the final triumph and consequent corruption of Commercial Whiggery, which force will include in it a recognition of its constructive activity by intelligent people on the one hand, and on the other half-blind instinctive struggles to use its destructive activity on the part of those who suffer and have not been allowed to think; and to boot, a great deal that goes between those two extremes. In all this all those who can be truly called Socialists will be involved. The modern development of the great class-struggle has forced us to think, our thoughts force us to speak, and our hopes force us to try to get a hearing from the people. Nor can one tell how far our words will carry, so to say. The most moderate exposition of our principles will bear with it the seeds of disruption; nor can we tell what form that disruption will take. One and all, then, we are responsible for the enunciation of Socialist principles and of the consequences which may flow from their general acceptance, whatever that may be. This responsibility no Socialist can shake off by declarations against physical force and in favour of constitutional methods of agitation: we are attacking the constitution with the very beginnings, the mere lispings, of Socialism.

Whiggery, therefore, in its various forms, is the representative of Constitutionalism—is the outward expression of monopoly and consequent artificial restraints on labour and life; and there is only one expression of the force which will destroy Whiggery, and that is Socialism; and on the right hand and on the left Toryism and Radicalism will melt into Whiggery—are doing so now—and Socialism has got to absorb all that is not Whig in Radicalism. Then comes the question, What is the policy of Socialism? If Toryism and Democracy