

THE COMMONWEAL

The Official Journal of the Socialist League.

VOL. 2.—No. 22.

SATURDAY, JUNE 12, 1886.

WEEKLY; ONE PENNY.

NOTES ON PASSING EVENTS.

Mr Chamberlain gained last Monday one of those curious reactionary victories which mark the progress of ideas almost as clearly as reactionary defeats do; because they draw the limits of the camps of reaction and progress, and force men to declare themselves for what they really are. Mr Gladstone might well say that his side on the division was on the flowing and the other on the ebbing tide, and he did well to renew his appeal to the heart of the people which his Midlothian manifesto contained. It is to be hoped that he will have the courage not to draw back from his words. At present, though beaten, he has the glory of the contest, and Chamberlain the victorious has its shame; but if Mr Gladstone now shrinks from a dissolution, or if he has the chance of bringing in a new Bill after the dissolution and makes any compromise in it, then Mr Chamberlain will have the laugh on his side. Meanwhile, what is to become of the Liberal party? Where will it be after this next election? Victorious Whiggery exults now, and probably it will now for some time to come appear to be the sole party that has any power; it is now only the unseen or utterly despised growth of the instinct towards real freedom which will be formidable to it. Vain-glorious inflation and sudden collapse are what await it now.

"A meeting was held at Lady Maxwell's, 15 Ennismore Gardens, on Tuesday last, to consider the interesting question of the prevention of pauperism by national insurance. The Earl of Derby, while passing over as by no means insuperable many of the commonly alleged objections to the proposal, indicated as stronger ones the difficulty of collecting the contributions from some wage-earners," etc., etc. Really, in common with Baillie Nicoll Jarvie, one finds some "glimmerings of sense in the creature"—which, however, were not strong enough to keep him away from Canon Blackley's meeting. Yet we ought to be rather thankful to the worthy canon for the resolution he displays in his *reductio ad absurdum* of the wages-system, and his exposition of the blessings of the "iron law." I have heard that some people have an inborn incapacity for seeing proportion between things; I *know* that some people are incapable of seeing a joke. The canon doubtless shares these incapacities, and hence his usefulness to Socialists.

The following is a curious example of another kind of philanthropy from Canon Blackley's—though like his it wants to take something from nothing—and is suggested, apparently, by a joker as unconscious of his humour as the canon is; it really is too quaint to be missed:—

"Sir,—A gentleman has offered to give £20 for a picture to measure about seven feet by five feet, and to be painted by a young artist for the pleasure of the working-classes; this picture to be then held in trust for them by the Kyrle Society. The donor's object is twofold—to enrich, so far, the lives of the poor, and to enable a struggling young painter to produce a high-class picture. The £20 will be sufficient to pay his expenses of materials and of models, and he will then be enabled to paint a thoroughly good picture, without lowering his conception to please the paying public."

"From those that have not shall be taken even that they have" must be rubbed very deeply into this "gentleman's" mind. My good sir, this is a job for baronet artists; they surely won't refuse it.

It is announced that an office is to be established for providing authentic information for emigrants; and the *Daily News* is righteously sarcastic on the circumlocution which has been so long making up its mind to this step at the moderate expense of £500 a-year. But working-men had better look to it that the remedy does not prove worse than the disease—that the office does not get into the hands of emigration agents and other sharks of a similar character. The following paragraph, among many of a similar character, may serve as a warning to them:—

"Sir John Rose, Bart., presiding to-day at the fiftieth Annual Meeting of the South Australian Company, said although the colony was passing through a period of temporary depression, he did not think they need be under any apprehension as to its future. The Company owns 80,522 acres of land; its property is of the estimated value of £1,135,650; and a dividend of 10 per cent., with a bonus of 4 per cent., payable half-yearly, was declared."

Indeed, one sees every day how hard our rulers are at work to give us information on subjects which concern the workers, as well as their keen insight into the nature of things and their freedom from class prejudice! As an example, the Commission which has been enquiring

into the depression of trade has finally come to the conclusion that it is all due to "the appreciation of gold and the depreciation of silver." Useful creatures! To drop irony, such stupidity fairly sickens one.

Meantime we might ask those who have a lingering idea that the present system of the distribution of wealth is a good one, or even a tolerable one, to take note that according to its supporters the welfare of huge populations, their very life or death, are dependent on the relative scarcity of two of the more useless metals. It is their opinion that the accumulated intelligence of the human race, having brought us after so many ages of ingenuity into this pass, will be contented henceforth and for ever to play such a huge game of hazard as this, in which circumstances play against us always with loaded dice.

Again, as to the depression in trade. I have thought it not unlikely that there are many whose faith in the stability of our capitalist society is shaken, but who are holding back from the acceptance of Socialism till they see whether after all the present condition of trade (which has been going on more or less for some seven years) will not mend, and things be on the upward road again. To these we may say it is not improbable that there will be a partial recovery, which will set the monied classes on their legs for a while once more, and will confer some temporary benefit on the upper part of the working-classes, and if that happens Socialism will be discredited for the time; but remember, that the causes which have produced the present depression will still be at work. Cut-throat competition, which is the real cause of the present depression, will be stimulated to fresh excesses by the relief from the burden which it now feels, and will produce new and increasing armies of lack-alls against the new evil day, when it will not know what to do with them save send them out of the country, or to try, perhaps, under a new Canon Blackley, to take something from their nothing. Those waverers may be assured that the first hour that the clock struck of evolutionary Socialism tolled the knell of capital and wage-labour, and was the tocsin of Revolution; the people was sure thenceforth of becoming conscious of the wrong it had so long blindly resisted.

"It is understood that in the majority of cases the Liberal candidates defeated at the last General Election are declining, when appealed to by the local Associations, to stand at the next election as supporters of Mr. Gladstone. The despondent view which the Ministerialists now take of the situation is to a great extent due to this fact, which adds seriously to the difficulty of finding Government candidates of wealth and local influence."—*Standard*. A fine tribute this to the beauties of our representative system, and a curious commentary it makes on Mr. Gladstone's appeal against class influence in his last Midlothian manifesto! Wealth and local influence are, after all, but a roundabout application of the straightforward bribery of Walpole's days.

The American funny paper, *Puck*, amidst a farrago of ferocious and brutal insults against those who fail to see the beauty of a tame life under the rule of Jay Gould, has the following kind of Balaam's prophecy on the subject of the emancipation of labour: "Wherever one brave man, or a handful of brave men, stands boldly up and insists on every man's natural right to make his own price for his labour, or to sell it for what he chooses to sell it for, a blow will be struck in the cause of the labouring man's independence. And it rests with the labouring man to work out his own salvation." *Puck* will not see these lines, but some half-converted American worker may, so for his benefit I ask the following questions: Can any working-man *choose* to sell his labour for less than it is worth? Is not every working-man in America, as well as other "civilised" countries, *compelled* to do so? If that is not the case, how did Jay Gould and his kind make their fortunes?

The same journal has a cartoon in which it uses the wife-and-child sentiment for the labour-thief's benefit. A workman is inclined to join that "handful of brave men," and "stand boldly up to insist on every man's right to sell his labour for what he chooses to sell it for." His wife, her infant in arms, and child with her, are saying to him: "Husband, don't waste your time here. What will become of *us* while you are neglecting your work?" The factory is seen through an open door; that factory in which both wife and child are *compelled* to work to reduce the husband's wages. Is this sort of thing the work of ignorance or malice? Well, well, probably of Journalism!

WILLIAM MORRIS