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NOTES ON PASSING EVENTS.

In ordinary political matters there are at present but two subjects wherein any one pretends to take any interest in this country—the Irish question and the Greek. The general English public know next to nothing about the first, and nothing about the second. Yet it is not uncommon to find people more interested (even though quite ignorant) in the Greek question than the Irish, probably because they expect, or have expected, the dramatic entertainment of a war for which they will not have to pay. As to the Irish question, the so-called educated classes stick with great fidelity to the opinions of their favourite newspapers, and by this time have learned to conduct an “argument” on the subject by those means—the whole operation being called the “formation of public opinion.”

Meantime that opinion seems to be setting somewhat in favour of Mr Gladstone's Bill, in spite of the shrill and almost triumphant cry of the parliamentary people and their hacks that it was doomed. One is fain to hope that the reason for this is that another and more genuine opinion, or instinct rather, is acting on the leader-made “public opinion,” and that a real undercurrent of popular feeling is at work, and is teaching the people to see through the elaborately-woven veil of pretences to wisdom, foresight, and statesmanship that is hiding a mere lust for conquest and greed of exploitation in the great mass of our “respectable” classes about this Irish business. If this is so it is well, because, as I pointed out last week, it is not the details of Gladstone's Bill that we need note, but whether the Irish people see their independence in it; and the cheerful acceptance of that independence by the English working-class (the opinions of no other class are of any importance to us) would mean a great blow to Jingoism, which is one of the great foes of the Revolution, and which has already been sorely shaken by the disgraces of recent piratical wars waged by the Gladstone as well as by the Tory governments.

One cannot, however, ignore the fact that there is one thing which makes it probable that the democratic side of Liberalism will accept Irish independence—to wit, worship of Mr Gladstone. The enthronement of a temporary and most powerful king, to which (strange irony of history!) democracy, as opposed to Socialism, tends, is certainly all too obvious in this case. Nay, it is not to be thought that the burst of hero-worship which the Irish themselves have expressed towards this G. O. M. is hypocritical: they are clearly touched at so great a man condescending to befriend their contemned race. Who can wonder at this? Individually we are weak, poor, ignorant; as democrats we have not learned to understand the power of combination inspired by principle and a high ideal, or how it can transform the man whom it draws out of the slough of grovelling individualism: therefore we naturally feel grateful to a man on whom all eyes are fixed, if from his pedestal of greatness he will condescend to half-adopt, and half-spoil in adopting, the very ideas which we have forced him to express for us. Democracy while it lasts will never be free from this hero-worship, and all the traps which the heroes (poor devils!) wittingly and unwittingly lead their worshippers into. Socialism alone will give us manly independence of thought, which, again, can alone lead to harmonious action, instead of machine-made policy.

Meantime, all the hints at alternative measures to Home Rule mean nothing more nor less than the retention of our English Poland, whether they are put forward by Conservatives, Liberals, or Radicals. Provincial councils *we*, at least, should not find fault with, if they were intended to be genuine and independent; in that case they would educate people towards the condition of the free federation of free communes, which is the only solution of politics. But these “light and leading” provincial councils are just meant to choke off the demand for practical independence, which naturally is the only thing which the Irish demand. They are not meant to deal with anything on principle; they are, in fact, to be enlarged *vestries*.

Of course this means a desperate attempt to shunt the land question—which cannot be shunted. We may well believe Mr. Wilfrid Blunt when he says that it cannot be put off for even six months; matters, he says, are growing so desperate that the landlords are hard at work evicting, as if with the consciousness that their time is drawing near; and they are using their power even though its exercise rather damages than forwards their money interests. In short, it is high time that Mr. Chamberlain should leave his dreams of a possible

Radical Ireland, and that the Liberal Associations should leave off babbling pedantry about representation and taxation and the “expulsion” of the Irish members (expulsion of a man from prison!), and find out what form the Irish will accept in order to look to their own affairs.

As to the Land Purchase Bill, it provides a monstrous compensation for the Robbers of Ireland; and one would think that landlords would break their necks almost in their hurry to run to meet it; but it does not seem that they will. Perhaps they feel it as such a joke that they should be compensated for the glorious times that they have had at other people's expense, that they cannot help thinking there is something else behind it, and can scarcely believe in the reality of the English money with which Mr. Gladstone is bribing them to take themselves off from Ireland. To us all this matters little so long as in England and elsewhere landlords sit awaiting the compensation which Democracy may one day offer them; while capitalists compensate themselves by the daily and hourly robbery of labour. That the Irish accept in any way this Bill, shows probably that they consider it a mere futile and temporary experiment, which will not interfere with their dealing with the matter in their own way.

Mr. Matthew Arnold's paper in the *Nineteenth Century* is noteworthy, though not for its own sweet sake; for it is not worthy of the author's reputation as a clever essayist with an occasional gleam of insight. It is in fact a piece of Whig commonplace, such as may be seen in any Whig organ by the dozen, but helped out somewhat (not much) by adroitness and neatness of style. But as showing whitherward “Sweetness and light” are drifting, it is of interest, since it is Mr. Arnold's manner of doing what Professor Huxley has recently done more emphatically, to wit, declaring formally for Reaction, as perhaps a pensioner is bound to do in the long run.

If any of our friends may happen to think Arnold's views on the Irish question are original and valuable, they had better refer to the passages in which he openly advocates the suppression of the rights of public meeting, or note his newborn admiration for the King of Pettifoggers, Bismarck. Though perhaps he is not wrong in elevating that “buffoon,” as one of our comrades called him in the *Commonweal* last week, into the rank of the statesmen, when one considers the history of those pests of the human race. Well, it is what was to be expected. Since Mr. Arnold has sorely developed the prig in him since his early days, it is natural that he should at last distinctly put forward the Prig Government: and yet it is sad that a man who once had a genuine, though not copious poetic gift, should narrow himself to the limits of such a poor world of pedantry and hypocrisy as the cultured middle-class is; that culture should greatly ignore the struggles and aspirations of the greater part of humanity, and elect at last to live and die in a flunkey's coat.

As to Greece, it was clear from the first that she was to be coerced into peace if it suited the robber powers of Eastern Europe who use England as a cat's paw. It is not worth while even to think about the dark and tortuous intrigues which have been at work in the matter, further than noting them as part of the general ignominy of European “statesmanship” to which we are forced to submit. The robber powers nearest to these weak Eastern European peoples will of course take any advantage that they can, amidst their first business of keeping down their own populations, of the development of the energies of those peoples. It is to be hoped that intrigue will fail in stimulating them into artificial outbreaks founded on unhappy race prejudices. The true opportunity for the development of Eastern Europe will be found when that war begins which will lead to Revolution: a war which is bound to be the outcome of the blatant scoundrelism of the robbers aforesaid.

Says Mr. Gladstone in his latest address to his constituents: “*The adverse host then consists of class and the dependents of class.*” This might serve as a motto for us, only we should mean something by it that Mr. Gladstone does not: he still imagines a compact Tory party and a compact Liberal one in the main, though the latter may suffer from occasional secessions. He does not see that the march of events towards real freedom is forcing men to declare themselves, that they are being frightened out of their hypocrisy. Yet his sentence is true, and coming from a bourgeois Prime Minister has even a prophetic ring about it. We accept it, but in its literal meaning, which probably is not quite Mr. Gladstone's.

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