

# THE COMMONWEALTH

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WEEKLY; ONE PENNY.

## NOTES ON PASSING EVENTS.

THE great rally of the Caucus at Leeds was no doubt of some importance to whatever party quality may be left in the remains of Liberalism, and also it was of importance that this body, formidable enough in the welter of broken principles, halting opinions, and intrigue, should declare definitely its adhesion to Gladstonian Home Rule. But if one had any lingering hopes in the Liberal Party—as who has?—it would be discouraging to note that what really roused the enthusiasm of the audience at Leeds was not the hope of the coming change in Ireland; not the joy of England discarding some part of its long tyranny and injustice to a people whom we call our fellow-countrymen, and will not allow to be anything else; it was not really these reasonable revolutionary aspirations which moved people, but Mr. Gladstone's name as a party leader. It is only too likely that the question of justice to Ireland was looked upon by this meeting of would-be progressive leaders, great and small, and their adherents, as an adjunct of Mr. Gladstone's personality; a whim of his to be indulged, and which we, the party, can at least imagine we sympathise with, though we don't in the least sympathise with the results which are sure to follow, or indeed guess what they are.

That the assembled Liberals did not think of or wish for the results of the political freedom of Ireland is not a matter of guess, but is proved by the barrenness of the programme put forward by them—a programme about as valuable as a proposal for the re-enactment of Magna Charta, and which, it must be said, seems to have excited no more enthusiasm than that would have done.

Mr. Morley, in a sentence likely to become famous, mentioned his fears of our being in for a period of "degraded politics." This was of course meant for a hit at Mr. Chamberlain, which doubtless he deserves; but there is more in it than that, whether Mr. Morley meant it or not. This "degradation," this slough of despond of personalities, intrigues, and trickeries, is the necessary outcome of parties walking about and pretending to be alive when the brains are knocked out of them. With the single exception of the Irish question the Liberal Party is now shutting its eyes resolutely to all the real questions of the day. The last six years of "crisis" it is determined to look upon as non-existent; it has now come to recognise finality in politics with as little misgiving as the old Tories. Doubtless it thinks itself very progressive as to the matters of Ireland, but the next stage of these will find it out, and "Liberal" will have the same meaning as reactionary.

As far as mere passing party politics go, this meeting has of course a very simple meaning—no surrender to the Unionist Liberals. They are going, when Lord Hartington can make it convenient to come amongst them, to have a field-day in their turn, which will have less interest than even the Leeds meeting to those who look upon the real politics of life and not the sham politics of Parliament. As far as concerns the game played therein, the result of all this means a quiet innings for the Tory Government, which by means of a few threats of "dishing," and a sham attempt to carry them out, can always paralyse the Liberal Party, both sections or either. "These be thy gods, O Israel!" Surely as mean a set of shufflers and blinkards as ever walked the earth.

Mr. Henry George has belied the confident predictions of the bourgeois press both at home and in America by gaining a substantial vote for the mayoralty of New York. Mr. George is not a Socialist, or was not when last heard of; his programme as candidate could not be considered a Socialist one in any sense. Nevertheless the Bourgeois are determined to consider him the Socialist candidate, and a dangerous one at that, and have done their best in a tremulous manner to belittle his success. We must conclude, therefore, that the robber society of New York feels itself beaten, and is anxious and unhappy under its beating. At the least its obvious terror, reflected by our own press, at what would seem to an onlooker a small matter, is a sign of a very bad conscience. In spite of all the bluster and conventional congratulation on the stability and progress of modern civilisation, it seems easily shaken after all.

The meeting at the Mansion House about the Beaumont Hall, or People's Palace as it is pompously called, was such a queer exhibition of stupidity that Guy Fawkes day seemed an appropriate date for it.

The obstinacy of the "saints" who want to teetotal and sabbatarianise Beaumont Hall (when they get it), the nervous anxiety of the Lord Mayor to muddle up the question till the money was got, and the empty conventional resolutions passed made a pretty kettle of fish of it. As a human being one is really irritated at such simplicity of stupidity as Mr. Charrington and Mr. Wookey showed in mixing up teetotalism and sabbatarianism. Surely if ever they want a job done which none but an incompetent person can do, they need not advertise for one in the papers. Yet we owe them thanks, nevertheless, for showing us what the saints' rule upon earth would be if we suffered it; and also for punching a hole in this patronage of the working classes by the thieves who have robbed them.

All this People's Palace business means is that "the people" are perforce such strangers to orderliness, cleanliness and decency, let alone art and beauty, in their own dwellings, that the upper classes, who force them into this life of degradation, do now and then bethink them if they cannot provide them with a place where they can play at being comfortable, so long as they behave like good children, between the spells of their stupid hopeless weary work and their miserable and hideous "homes." Time enough to think about People's Palaces when the workers and the people are one, and no artificial authority stands between them and their human wishes.

WILLIAM MORRIS.

## A DREAM OF JOHN BALL.

SOMETIMES I am rewarded for fretting myself so much about present matters by a quite unasked-for pleasant dream. I mean when I am asleep. This dream is as it were a present of an architectural peep-show. I see some beautiful and noble building new made, as it were for the occasion, as clearly as if I were awake; not vaguely or absurdly, as often happens in dreams, but with all the detail clear and reasonable. Some Elizabethan house with its scrap of earlier fourteenth century building, and its later degradations of Queen Anne and Silly Billy and Victoria, marring but not destroying it, in an old village once a clearing amid the sandy woodlands of Sussex. Or an old and unusually curious church, much churchwardened, and beside it a fragment of fifteenth century architecture amongst the not unpicturesque lath and plaster of an Essex farm, and looking natural enough among the sleepy elms and the meditative hens scratching about in the litter of the farmyard, whose trodden yellow straw comes up to the very jambs of the richly-carved Norman doorway of the church. Or sometimes 'tis a splendid collegiate church, untouched by restoring parson and architect, standing amid an island of shapely trees and flower-beset cottages of thatched grey stone and cob, amidst the narrow stretch of bright green water-meadows that wind between the sweeping Wiltshire downs, so well beloved of William Cobbett. All these I have seen in the dreams of the night clearer than I can force myself to see them in dreams of the day. So that it was a natural thing for me to fall the other night into an architectural dream. I had begun my sojourn in the Land of Nod by a very confused attempt to conclude that it was all right for me to have an engagement to lecture at Manchester and Mitcham Fair Green at half-past eleven at night on one and the same Sunday, and that I could manage pretty well. And then I had gone on to try to make the best of addressing a large open-air audience in the costume I was really then wearing—to wit, my night-shirt, reinforced for the dream occasion by a pair of braceless trousers. The consciousness of this fact so bothered me that the earnest faces of my audience—who would not notice it, but were clearly preparing terrible anti-Socialist posers for me—began to fade away and my dream grew thin, and I awoke (as I thought) to find myself lying on a strip of wayside waste by an oak copse just outside a country village.

I got up and rubbed my eyes and looked about me, and the landscape seemed unfamiliar to me, though it was, as to the lie of the land, an ordinary English low-country, swelling into rising ground here and there. The road was narrow, and I was convinced that it was a piece of Roman road from its straightness. Copses were scattered over the country, and there were signs of two or three villages and hamlets in sight besides the one near me, between which and me there was some orchard-land, where the apples were beginning to redden on the trees. Also, just on the other side of the road and the ditch which ran along it, was a small close of about a quarter of an acre, neatly hedged with quick, which was nearly full of white poppies, and, as far as I could

see for the hedge, had also a good few rose-bushes of the bright-red nearly single kind, which I had heard are the ones from which rose-water used to be distilled. Otherwise the land was quite unhedged, but all under tillage of various kinds, mostly in small strips. From the other side of a copse not far off rose a tall spire white and brand-new, but at once bold in outline and unaffectedly graceful, and also distinctly English in character. This, together with unhedged tillage and a certain unwonted trimness and handiness about the enclosures of the garden and orchards, puzzled me for a minute or two, as I did not understand, new as the spire was, how it could have been designed by a modern architect; and I was of course used to the hedged tillage and tumble-down bankrupt-looking surroundings of our modern agriculture. But after a minute or two that surprise left me entirely; and if what I saw and heard afterwards seems strange to you, remember that it did not seem strange to me at the time. Also, once for all, if I were to give you the very words of those who spoke to me you would scarcely understand them, although it was English too, and at the time I could understand them at once.

Well, as I stretched myself and turned my face toward the village, I heard horse-hoofs on the road, and presently a man and horse showed on the other end of the stretch of road and drew near at a swinging trot with plenty of clash of metal. The man soon came up to me, but paid no more heed than throwing me a nod. He was clad in armour of mingled steel and leather, a sword girt to his side, and over his shoulder a long-handled bill-hook. His armour was fantastic in form and well wrought; but by this time I was quite used to the strangeness of him, and merely muttered to myself, "He is coming to summon the squire to the leet"; so I turned toward the village in good earnest. Nor, again, was I surprised at my own garments, although I might well have been from their unwontedness. I was dressed in a black cloth gown reaching to my ankles, neatly embroidered about the collar and cuffs, with wide sleeves gathered in at the wrists; a hood with a sort of bag hanging down from it was on my head, a broad red leather girdle round my waist, on one side of which hung a pouch embroidered very prettily and a case made of hard leather chased with a hunting scene, which I knew to be a pen and ink case; on the other side a small sheath-knife, only an arm in ease of dire necessity. Well, I came into the village, where I did not see (nor by this time expected to see) a single modern building, although many of them were nearly new, notably the church, which was large, and quite ravished my heart with its extreme beauty, elegance, and fitness. The chancel of this was so new that the dust of the stone still lay white on the late summer grass beneath the carvings of the windows. The houses were almost all built of oak frame-work filled with cob or plaster and well white-washed; though some had their lower stories of rubble-stone, with their windows and doors of well-moulded freestone. There was much curious and inventive carving about most of them; and though some were old and out of repair, there was the same look of deftness and trimness, and even beauty, about every detail in them which I noticed before. They were all roofed with oak shingles, mostly grown as grey as stone; but one was so newly built that its roof was yet pale and yellow. This was a corner house, and the corner post of it had a richly-carved niche wherein stood a gaily painted figure holding an anchor—St. Clement to wit, as the dweller in the house was a blacksmith. Half a stone's-throw from the east end of the churchyard wall was a tall cross of stone, new like the church, the head richly carved with a crucifix amidst leafage. It stood on a set of wide stone steps, octagonal in shape, where three roads from other villages met and formed a wide open space on which a thousand people or more could stand together with no great crowding.

All this I saw, and also that there were a goodish many people about, women and children, and a few old men at the doors, many of them somewhat gaily clad, and that men were coming into the village street by the other end to that by which I had entered, by two's and three's, most of them carrying what I could see were bows in cases of linen yellow with wax or oil; they had quivers at their backs, and most of them a short sword by their left side, and a pouch and knife on the right; they were mostly gaily dressed in red or brightish green or blue cloth jerkins, with a hood on the head generally of another colour. As they came nearer I saw that the cloth was somewhat coarse but stout and serviceable. I knew, I do not know how, that they had been shooting at the butts, and, indeed, I could still hear a noise of men thereabout, and even now and again when the wind set from that quarter the twang of the bowstring and the plump of the shaft in the target.

I leaned against the churchyard wall and watched these men, some of whom went straight into their houses and some loitered about still; they were rough-looking fellows, tall and stout, very black some of them, and some red-haired, but most had hair burnt by the sun into the colour of tow; and, indeed, they were all burned and tanned and freckled variously; their arms and buckles and belts were all what we should now call beautiful, rough as the men were; nor in their speech was any of that drawling snarl or thick vulgarity which one is used to hear in civilisation; not that they talked like gentlemen either, but full and round and bold, and they were merry and good-tempered enough; I could see that, though I felt shy and timid amongst them. One of them strode up to me across the road, a man some six feet high, with a short black beard and black eyes and berry brown skin, with a huge bow in his hand bare of the case, a knife, a pouch, and a short hatchet all clattering together at his girdle.

"Well, friend," said he, "thou lookest partly mazed, what tongue hast thou in thine head?"

"A tongue that can tell rhymes," said I.

"So I thought," said he. "Thirsteth thou any?"

"Yea, and hunger," said I.

And therewith my hand went into my purse, and came out again with but a few small and thin silver coins with a cross stamped on each, and three pellets in each corner of the cross. The man grinned.

"Aha!" said he, "is it so? Never heed it, mate. It shall be a song for a supper this fair Sunday evening. But first, whose man art thou?"

"No one's man," said I, reddening angrily, "I am my own master."

He grinned again.

"Nay, that's not the custom of England, as one time belike it will be. Methinks thou comest from heaven down, and hast had a high place there too."

He seemed to hesitate a moment, and then leant forward and whispered in my ear: "John the Miller, that ground small, small, small," and stopped and winked at me, and from between my lips without my mind forming any meaning came the words, "The king's son of heaven shall pay for all."

He let his bow fall on to his shoulder, caught my right hand in his and gave it a great grip, while his left hand fell among the gear at his belt, and I could see that he half drew his knife.

"Well, brother," said he, "stand not here hungry in the highway when there is flesh and bread in the 'Rose' yonder. Come on."

And with that he drew me along toward what was clearly a tavern-door, outside which men were drinking meditatively from curiously shaped earthen pots glazed green and yellow, some with quaint devices on them.

WILLIAM MORRIS.

(To be continued.)

### 'The Table.'

THE advance of Socialism is sometimes shown in unexpected quarters. We have been sent a copy of a weekly called *The Table*, which, as its name implies, is a journal of "cookery, etc.," and there, amongst recipes for dainty dishes, the fashions, accounts of entertainments, and the like, is an article (a leader) on Dives and Lazarus, which puts the indictment against our Robber Society in quite plain terms, and with a sensible appreciation of the facts of the case. "A hundred years ago," says the writer, "when the cost of necessaries was greater, a merchant or manufacturer possessing £10,000 was deemed a wealthy man: to-day a business man with £30,000 balance is only talked of in the city as 'sound.' Does not this clearly prove that the immense balance in the advantage machinery has given has gone into the hands of the employers, and little if any has gone into the hands of the workers, who are the large majority of the people?" Yes indeed it does, amongst other things; and one must say that such straightforward observation of facts is the best weapon for breaking through the maze of sophistries and averages by which workmen are so often deluded. The writer of this article ends by saying, "We are no revolutionaries; we are not Socialists." That perhaps is only a way of speaking; but anyhow if he continues to keep his eyes open, and to clear his mind of prejudice, he will very soon discover that he is a Socialist, and probably that he has been one a long time. And meanwhile, like all honest men who will look the matter in the face, he is doing us good service.

M.

Some prosecutions of employers for infringements of the Factory Acts have been dismissed most unjustly. In two cases in the Blackburn district it was clearly proved that children were cleaning while the looms were running, but as it was stated that "the firm asserted that such cleaning was contrary to orders given by them," the prosecutions came to nothing. Let us see how much this excuse was worth. The Act allows for women and children 56½ hours per week. The machinery is kept at work the whole of this time and sometimes longer. When this kind of employers are asked when cleaning is to be done, they say it is no concern of theirs, the "hands" must do it as best they can. To stop their looms or frames means at least a stoppage of pay, usually the "sack"; the cleaning *must* be done; it is done—and the employer is "not responsible for acts done against his orders." S.

A writer to the *Echo* of November 5, thus lays down the law to "him who would be instructed": "It cannot be too well known that waste land does not repay the cost of cultivation; therefore cultivation must result in a loss either to the cultivator or to the nation. If wages were one-third lower, it might possibly pay to cultivate some of the best cleared land, if no fencing were required." If wages were one-third lower—well it is difficult to imagine what would happen if this were the case. To the writer's eyes it evidently presents a fair picture of prosperous farmers and decent economical cottage-life: to our eyes the possibility paints by no means a pretty picture. The naive and ingenuous writer goes on to confess that "two years ago hearing that 10,000 labourers were starving in the East-end" he tried to take advantage of the general distress by getting labourers at a lower rate of wage, *i.e.*, 8s. 6d. a week with free lodging, "knowing that I could myself live well for a quarter of that sum. Ingenious man! one wonders how he did it or for how long? He is exacting too as regards the quality of the labour; the men must be steady, industrious, intelligent, well-versed in their business, etc. Getting the unemployed to work at lower rates under the pretext of charity or what not, is a game that will not be played every year, one is glad to think.

M. M.