

# THE COMMONWEALTH

The Official Journal of the Socialist League.

VOL. 2.—No. 44.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 1886.

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