

THE COMMONWEALTH

The Official Journal of the Socialist League.

VOL. 2.—No. 40.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 16, 1886.

WEEKLY; ONE PENNY.

NOTES ON PASSING EVENTS.

PARLIAMENT having "dried up," and a complete languor having followed on the excitement of having a real live Tory Government in office, the bourgeois press was beginning to reconcile itself to a dull season in politics, when Lord Randolph Churchill broke the dulness by his speech at Dartford. That speech comes on people as something like a surprise, after the stolid "How can we?" with which the Tories received Mr. Parnell's measure (no doubt much to his satisfaction). But a little consideration will show them that Lord Randolph has not been so extra bold as he has been thought, that he has not made such a very dangerous excursion into the realms of Tory Democracy. Some, indeed, see him in the light of the butcher who has just put his knife into the Tory ox; but that is scarcely the way to look on his position, because that noble beast was dead before the stroke, and can barely be made a marketable carcase now.

On the other hand, it is perhaps a question whether he is not striking a stroke for freedom from the Whig domination, especially if it be true that his vague hints about local government in Ireland are to be redeemed by a Home Rule Bill which will seem somewhat advanced to the ordinary Liberal mind, but which the Irish party will not and cannot accept. Perhaps even his extravagant flattery of the Unionist Liberals (*i.e.*, Whigs), or it may be said his gross servility to them in words, really conceal this revolt. Certainly if he is determined to revolt they will have to give way if, also, his own party follow him, as it is to be supposed they must, and if he still sticks to the quasi-democratic part of his programme, or makes a fair show of doing so. And if the Whigs do let him pull them a step or two out of their beaten path, they will find after all that when it is done they will not be so much worse off: there will still be room for Whiggery when all that he has promised or threatened has happened.

The three acres and a cow, duly reduced to a very humdrum allotment scheme, will not bring about a very great revolution, and the older Whigs must put up with seeing Mr. Jesse Collings pleased and Mr. Chamberlain somewhat rehabilitated. Local self-government may mean something considerably short of free communes. The threat to the railway interests can be easily explained away—nay, that explanation is already prepared for in the disclaimer of any intention of attacking their *rights* of private property—while the hint about free education means anything or nothing, according to circumstances.

At any rate, whatever he is going to yield to "Democracy," he is not going to give, but sell; and the fact that this is clear ought to be enough to keep the Whigs quiet, especially as the gain he proposes to himself concerns their darling institution, the House of Commons. For after all, probably the only serious intention he has is to attempt to muzzle the Opposition, whose feebleness he taunted, not without reason, if we except the Irish party. The Whigs will be bound to help him in this, in spite of all that has come and gone, and the rest of his programme sounds very like a bid for the support of whatever professes to be Radical or progressive in Parliament. "Will you allow a factious minority to stand in the way of the generous and even sweeping reforms which I am prepared to lead my party into?" is what he practically says. "Let us make the House of Commons a really good machine for expressing the will of—property."

In this enterprise he is not unlikely to succeed; and some of us will not be very sorely grieved at his success. The House of Commons will always represent property as long as there is property to be represented, whether that property be aggregated in the possession of the owner of half a county, or divided among sham peasant proprietors and £3-a-week savings-bank-and-building-society examples of "thrifty and steady industry," who may consider that they belong to a Radical party, but who are really ex-Radicals turned Whigs by the force of the said property. It is far better, then, that the iron exclusiveness of Parliament should be made obvious by Government muzzling of obstruction, than that it should be able to pose as a body that has tendencies towards looking after the interests of the people, which may be developed into something approaching to revolution. If Lord Randolph can rehabilitate the House of Commons and show it clearly to every one as an august and orderly assembly barring the way to revolution by means of constitutional reforms, he will do good service to the cause of Socialism.

Certainly this will scarcely be Toryism, but it will be very good Whiggery; and it is most important to us that the growing elements of discontent shall come to recognise the solid truth that the Whigs will always rule the roast and have the executive in their power till the day when the people are determined to help themselves.

Lord Randolph called on his hearers to be encouraged by the fact that the depression of trade was showing signs of yielding to better times. It may be true, as is commonly said, that we are on the eve of a temporary recovery, although the tokens of it are not very obvious. If it should take place there may be an appearance of retrogression in our propaganda, as it will make a portion of the working class in this country "contented" once more, who are now inclined to listen to our doctrines. But if that does happen it ought not to discourage us; there must be more general understanding of the grounds of Socialism before the waning night points towards the dawn of action, and it may be that quieter times will not be altogether unfavourable to revolutionary education. "The poor ye shall have always with you," while our present system lasts; and during the time of the recovery, which will certainly be short-lived enough, we may still make abundant progress amongst those whom no "recovery" will advantage, and to whom at all times we must address ourselves most directly.

Lord Randolph Churchill sang the Jingo song at Dartford about as small as it could be sung. In point of fact, he changed Lord Salisbury's "The Austrian sentinel is on the ramparts" to "We hope to see the Austrian paw on the hot chestnuts."

Mr. Norton, the Australian labour delegate, has pretty much knocked the bottom out of the emigration humbug. His letter to the *Daily News* of October 9, about the serious matter of Chinese labour in Australasia, must interest everybody who thinks of the labour question; but he does not quite seem to see the bearings of it. That American or Australian or English workmen should be shouldered out of the labour market by Chinese or any other workmen who can live cheaper than they can is the necessary outcome of the competitive system—of the system which aims at producing profits for the employer and not goods for people to live on. By hook or by crook the employer will have his cheap labour, because he must, and because he *can* as long as the wages system lasts—that is, as long as the workmen must needs pay some one to "employ" them instead of employing themselves in making what they want and living happily. WILLIAM MORRIS.

COMMERCIAL CANNIBALISM.

WHEN Swift, in 1729, gave forth his 'Modest Proposal' to an astounded nation, neither he nor those to whom it was addressed were in the least likely to imagine that its re-publication, wellnigh two centuries afterwards, would find substantially the same state of affairs in existence. In despite of the inducement offered, that "whoever could find out a fair, cheap, and easy method of making these children sound, useful members of the commonwealth would deserve as well of the public as to have his statue set up for a preserver of the nation," neither the mordant satire of Swift nor the enthusiastic work of a myriad others have prevented two more miserable hundreds of years from having elapsed without appreciable progress in the happiness of the proletariat. Progress in some sort has been achieved; but if viewed relatively to the higher standard of living and the increase of productive power, it will be found that the mass of the people are as badly off as when, in a grim travesty of the orthodox economical preachment, the sardonic Dean of St. Patrick's gravely proposed to utilise the surplus children of the labouring classes as food for those able to pay for it. "I grant this food will be somewhat dear, and therefore very proper for land lords, who, as they have already devoured most of the parents, seem to have the best title to the children."

We are so well accustomed to human bodies being articles of merchandise piecemeal, that it is difficult for the average man, not a Socialist, to see that the whole of our present commercial system is based upon the buying and selling of men and women for the profit or pleasure of the purchaser as literally as though they were bought in open market to be actually eaten. The private ownership of land and all other means of production—the monopoly of the means of life—class-control of the material resources of the community—places the proletariat at the mercy of his masters, for they own all that is requisite