

# THE COMMONWEAL

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## NOTES ON PASSING EVENTS.

LORD RANDOLPH CHURCHILL'S declaration of policy has been received by the Tory party on the whole as they must receive anything from those of their party who have any capacity, as something, namely, which they must support, though they may not either understand it or agree with it. There are some signs of restiveness. Mr. Chaplin, for instance, has found out that all that talk meant little beyond muzzling the Irish members, and is a little uncomfortable; since he thinks that the turn of the wheel may one day put the Tories in the position of their Irish foes. He threatens opposition, but will probably have to give way; all the more since as a matter of party tactics he is wrong and Lord Randolph is right. The Tories, indeed, are not likely to have a majority by themselves, but in alliance with the Whigs they are likely to be in a perpetual majority; the Liberal-Radical party only exists as a criticising minority.

The rest of the press has been very rough on the *Daily News* for its announcement of a Government Home Rule scheme. The *Pall Mall*, especially, has exceeded in scorn. Naturally; since the latter journal has had such success in mares'-nesting, that it may well feel that it should be privileged in that occupation. But after all is it not likely enough that a Tory communication was made to the *Daily News*? It would not be a bad move to play: to feel the pulse of the political world by means of a hint to an adverse journal, to go on if the public seemed to approve, and if not to repudiate the hint and thereby to damage the said adverse journal, would really be a good stroke of business in that Art of Lying in which English statesmen are past-masters.

It is pretty clear that the Austrian revolutionary story was an excuse for the arrest of "dangerous" persons. The press now says that the matter has been much exaggerated, that the saltpetre bottles were, in fact, dummies, and so forth. It is rather weak of the authorities to let this sort of thing leak out after the concoction of such a vigorous romance. On the whole the matter is of bad augury for European peace, and looks as if the Austrian Government were anxious to have as many as possible of its "dangerous" subjects under lock and key before it takes the field.

A case of white-lead poisoning reported in the press this week is worth a little notice by workmen generally. Stripped of verbiage it amounts to this, that a man was killed by being compelled to work in a place where white-lead was flying about, and that no precautions were taken to prevent his dying speedily. A shilling a-week extra was the handsome sum given to the poor man thus murdered in compensation for his being killed. It is quite impossible that the man's employers did not know the risk he ran of this speedier death, and the certainty of his being poisoned sooner or later, and yet all that the jury durst say about the matter was "to express a hope that Mr. Lakeman (the factory inspector) would be able to make representations to the Home Office with reference to the case, to show the necessity for some extra precaution being taken for people working in mixing factories."

Yet further, this is only an exaggerated example of the way in which the lives of working-people are played with. Under present conditions, almost the whole labour imposed by civilisation on the "lower classes" is unwholesome; that is to say that people's lives are shortened by it; and yet because we don't see people's throats cut before our eyes we think nothing of it. After all, probably Tamerlane was a blessing to the world compared with the factory system.

WILLIAM MORRIS.

At Southwark last week John Sullivan, aged forty, a chintz-glazier, a very respectable looking man, was charged with breaking a public street lamp. The defence was that he had been out of work for three months, and though he had first-rate recommendations, he could not get employment. With wife and family starving at home, he had broken the lamp in sheer desperation, so that he might obtain food and shelter. Mr. Sheil, the sapient presiding magistrate, remarked that starvation was no excuse for breaking the law, and remanded the prisoner. Workmen, you must starve in quiet, and not break the laws your masters have made for you! I wonder if the well-fed magistrate had been in Sullivan's position, would he have the same respect which he evidently possesses at the present time for the laws of this free and happy country?

An inquest was held on Tuesday October 12 at St. Giles Coroner's Court by Dr. Danford Thomas as to the death of George Hibbert, a carpenter, who committed suicide on the preceding Saturday. In a notebook that was found on him, directed to the coroner, was the following statement: "The cause of this act is my inability to get work during the present depression of trade. I have not been able to earn a proper living for the last five years. Being physically weak and naturally slow, I have not been able to cope with quicker men in these days when speed is everything. If I were twenty years younger I should be more hopeful." The jury returned a verdict of "suicide while of unsound mind." Their verdict should have been "murdered by the system of competition."  
D. N.

In East Surrey a child nine years of age has died from starvation. She was one of six children; her father was a bargee and had been three months out of work. The family had been eking out a subsistence on a small piece of bread each once a day and some water. This is not an uncommon occurrence. What comment can one make on facts like this?

Here we live in a society, most of us uncomplainingly, and we calmly and callously read of the slow murder of little children, and take it as a matter of course. Their lives are sacrificed merely to sate the greed of one class, and the system is borne with and even supported by the folly of both. Perhaps ten years hence the father of that child will be struggling by the side of his fellows against the class that murdered his child; and if his passion, inflamed by this bitter memory, lead him to excesses, his conduct will be pointed to as an example of the horrors of revolution. And yet nothing he could do or would dream of doing would be half as repulsive as this one horror of civilisation.

The Salvation Army week of self-denial has brought out some curious results. A Manchester merchant sent £500 as the result of his week of "self-denial." Has the gentleman sent this as the sum of his business profits and the extravagances of his living? Capitalists don't often practice self-denial, but as the result is so good when they do, it might be worth while to make them frequently, or even constantly, repeat the experiment. To put the matter in a very blunt way, this capitalist, having taken the £500 out of the working-men's pockets, denied himself the usual pleasure of putting it in his own. What he had stolen from the people's stomachs he generously spent in saving their souls.

It is all very well for Mrs. Fawcett to pitch into Mrs. Linton about her commercial view of the education of women, but the unfortunate thing is that Mrs. Fawcett is in the clouds, while Mrs. Linton usefully reminds one of what *can* be done. The worst of Mrs. Linton's opinions is that they are correct. As long as the commercial system lasts every profession must be subservient to it. As long as we have a profit-grabbing Society, the chief end of women's education will be and must be to fit them to grab like the rest. Any higher education will only unfit them for their surroundings.

A Conference of Delegates of 20,000 Tyneside workmen has been held, and a movement for an Eight Hours' Working-day begun. Of course, tradesmen are right in making the best of the present system, but it is to be hoped that the next working-class movement entered on by the trades' unions will be of a more comprehensive kind. Do they intend to include the sewing-women of London, etc., in their agitation for a shorter working-day? The great fault of these petty agitations is that they are only for the benefit of a *section* of the workers. Even a reformatory movement would do good if it aimed at uniting all parts of the working-class for a common object; indeed, if the workers of all kinds could be got together and well organised for any purpose it would be a great step in the right direction. For, once get them together and make them feel a real singleness of purpose and interest, and their way to Socialism will be clear and easy enough.

The winter will produce its crop of associations for relieving the distress. All sections of opinion, from the amiable idiocy of the promoters of "mother's meetings," who think to reform the world with a few basins of soup, to the fanatical dynamitard who thinks to revolutionise Society by smashing a few panes of glass. The former are undoubtedly the greatest nuisance, while the latter are, after all, perhaps only a few sharp-witted glaziers who are trying to carry out the teachings of orthodox political economy.