

THE COMMONWEAL

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NOTES ON NEWS.

THE agitation against the Coercion Bill is going on quite as briskly as might have been expected; but of course it is not the kind of opposition which will prevent a parliamentary majority from passing the Bill. Whether the Government will venture to put it in force when passed is another matter. The popular opposition, respectable as it is, does not seem to be of that volume and energy which implies a threat of consequences beyond the ballot-box; and as to the vote, the agitation is discounted by the Tories because they know that a very large proportion of the agitators have not got it, in spite of the assertion of our "light and leading" friend the *Spectator* that "every man has the vote or could have it if he would,"—an assertion, by the way, which those who do not know that estimable journal might suppose to be either a joke or a deliberate lie, but which I may assure our readers is made in good faith, and in the exercise of that curious fatuity which is the chief characteristic of that "official organ" of the Prigs.

This much may at least be said about the anti-coercion agitation (no doubt it has been said often already, but may well be said still oftener), that the wall which parted the Irish from the English democracy has been thrown down. Here at least, if no otherwise is, *union*—that kind of union which comes of men respecting each others' rights.

Nor should the Tories hug themselves too much on their majority. There are not lacking signs that the pendulum will swing Gladstone-wards at the next election. The defeat of the Unionists on the Birmingham Caucus, Mr. Trevelyan's anti-coercion letter, the "raising of Cain(e)" at Barrow, and so forth, are the kind of things that go before the fall of a big parliamentary majority. Of course it goes without saying that a great many Liberal M.P.'s—those chiefly who are not marked for office—will be bitterly disappointed at their success. If only the Irish would turn tail, and accept some "compromise," and then never be heard of again, how glad would these gentry be! Liberalism might then be purified of its last taint of reality.

The way in which the coercionist press tries to belittle the quite successful Easter Monday demonstration is a good example of the by-ways of party guidance. The *Standard* may be taken as the type of these optimists, or rather would-be optimists, whose fury betrays the fact that they are miserably disappointed with our success. One point is worth noting which is expressed in the following sentence in the *Standard*: "The preponderance in the huge crowd of the class which needs no oratory, honest or dishonest, to whet its animosity to law and order was a sinister symptom." Now not even amidst its foaming-at-the-mouth-disappointment can the *Standard* pretend to take exception to the behaviour of the very orderly crowd of Easter Monday: it is agreed on all hands that there was an entire absence of the horse-play which generally winds up these Hyde Park demonstrations. So what the *Standard* means is that the revolutionists and their sympathisers were in the majority there; and the whole coercionist press makes a handle of this fact against the Gladstonites.

Well, well! times are changed, it seems, since the last Hyde Park demonstration which I attended—the Franchise one—where the banner of the Labour Emancipation League was destroyed, and our comrade John Burns hustled by a Radical mob, because he had said a few words of blasphemy against Mr. John Bright. Would the Easter Monday crowd have hustled any one who had taken the trouble to call in question the infallibility of the Quaker pope?

It is much to be hoped that all friends of freedom will rally to our meeting in Hyde Park on the 24th, to sympathise with the Northumbrian Miners. A stronger case for sympathy and help could scarcely be put before the public, as the readers of *Commonweal* must already have noted. It would be shame to us in London indeed if working men here were to allow the political prize-fight to absorb all their attention, when such worthy men as these are suffering so unworthily, and struggling so hard against the tyranny of our idiotic system of sham society.

The *Pall Mall Gazette*, while it has done good service in some directions is certainly curiously inconsistent. It has most vigorously sustained the battle against coercion in Ireland, and apparently is prepared

to go on doing so; nevertheless in the very same issue which contains an attack (most justly deserved) on Mr. Chamberlain for his newly-developed love of the fairly complete form of "freedom of contract" known as the Crimes Bill, contains also a letter, printed with all the honours and obviously with editorial approval, from Madame de Novikoff, the acknowledged agent for quite the completest form of coercion yet known in this world—the modern Government of Russia. This is really rather too grotesque.

On the other hand I read in the *Daily News* that the whole Russian press condemns the Coercion Act!!! It really is too quaint.

Mr. Baggallay asked Mr. Labouchere if he was prepared to repeat in the House his saying in Hyde Park that the policy of the Government was one of the ruffianism of Bill Sykes. "Beyond all question," quoth Mr. Labouchere. This is a pleasant hearing, after the usual explanations and eating of words which are the custom of the House. But then Mr. Labouchere has been always careful to show that he is not a fool; as careful as most M.P.'s are to show the contrary—though certainly they need not labour hard at that business.

Apropos of this subject, Mr. Conybeare should learn to understand that a man should not be too greedy of humble-pie if he wishes to retain any respect from those who in any way profess to be fighting the popular cause. Explanation on the top of apology is— Well, we really want Sam Weller to characterise this excess in the banquet of humility!

WILLIAM MORRIS.

SOCIALIST CAMPAIGN IN THE NORTH.

FOR some weeks the readers of the *Commonweal* have been informed of the progress of Socialism in Northumberland—how we have been holding large meetings in Newcastle and in the villages in the neighbourhood, and how eagerly the people have bought pamphlets and papers that they might study our doctrines at their leisure. In order to bring the agitation to a point it was resolved to hold a demonstration in the centre of the colliery district and to put resolutions to the meeting pledging the men to adopt the principles of Socialism. On the morning of Easter Monday the Socialist missionaries from London proceeded from Newcastle to the colliery villages, and addressed meetings and organised the processions. At every one of these places they were received in the most hearty manner. One thing was very striking—namely, that the strongest supporters of Socialism were usually the most respected men in the villages. It is usual for Cockney journalists to call our supporters a pack of lazy discontented ne'er-do-weels; but the press here admit that we have got hold of the very best of the people. After the local meetings were over, the processions were formed and the march began. In many cases from six to eight miles had to be travelled to reach the meeting-place. Fortunately the weather was of the most favourable kind, and the fresh air and bands prevented the marches being tedious. At the meeting-place, which was a field lent by a kindly farmer, Mr. Hardman, the Socialist League had a representative distributing broadcast the manifesto of their Strike Committee, which was eagerly read by the men. At about two o'clock the processions came in sight; from all points of the compass the banners were seen floating in the air, and the sound of the miners' bands greeted the ear. Some four or five constables put in an appearance, but they looked rather sheepish. They felt, no doubt, that they were a little out of place, as it was hard to see what five policemen could have done against ten thousand determined men. A large waggon was borrowed from a neighbouring farm, and this served as platform. It was immediately boarded by a troop of reporters, who pretty nigh took up all the room. Fielding was appointed chairman, and as soon as he stood up the meeting became quiet and attentive, in which state it remained until its close. An amusing incident however took place with regard to the reporters. The crowd did not know who the army of eminently respectably-dressed men were who were in the waggon beside the speakers. But the moment Fielding opened, out came the note-books, and the reporting business got under weigh. The crowd stopped the proceedings to turn the reporters out. On these gentlemen remonstrating, the spokesman of the crowd stated that the reason they wanted them out of it was because they gave in bogus reports; but he said if the reporters would faithfully promise to give a full and accurate report, or none at all, they would let them