

THE COMMONWEAL

The Official Journal of the Socialist League.

VOL. 3.—No. 84.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 20, 1887.

WEEKLY; ONE PENNY.

NOTES ON NEWS.

"My losses," said Universal Provider Whiteley referring to the fire at his establishment, "amount to £525,000"; and a few months back a poor carter was sentenced to imprisonment for taking a few articles of paltry value, his defence being that his wages, about 11s. per week, were too small to support himself and family. Does "my gross losses" include some unpaid labour?

It is a moot point whether it is fair of us to kill and eat our fellow-lodgers on this earth—sheep, pigs and oxen. Archdeacon Farrar likes meat, so does his family; but, says his Reverence, "grave social problems are before mankind for solution," and hence he attends a vegetarian feed and says in fact that the solution will be arrived at by the "poor" consuming raw and cooked vegetables; and the vegetarian establishment for whom he delivered this advertisement, proceeds to solve this great social problem by selling tea and coffee at 3d. per cup, and draw attention to their "special rooms for ladies."

Such are the saviours of society. There are places in London neither infested with Archdeacons nor troubled with grave social problems, where for the same sum a working man could get a breakfast or tea (four slices of bread and cup of tea or coffee) and be thanked for his custom.

Whilst old and infirm human beings are working their aged limbs in pain to procure food, or being driven to the workhouse torture, our humane "upper" classes are stricken with sorrow for the sufferings of aged and infirm horses. Mr. S. Sutherland Safford and Miss Linde have established a home for aged and sick equines and the supporters are highly influential people. It would be interesting to know how many human beings are being worked to death to keep these idlers and their horses. The chief result of their efforts as yet is seen in the depressed condition of the cats'-meat trade and the ruined position of many vendors of pussy's meat, the supply of which is restricted owing to the society's interference with the law of supply and demand.

F. K.

The Midland strike has failed ignominiously, if appearances can be trusted. This was to have been expected from the first, inasmuch as there was little or no organisation, no mutual trust, and no safeguard against "rats." When the strike took place against a change, grasping and cynical as could well be conceived, there was a large number of men who did not come out. No efficient measures were taken to convince these of their error in acting treacherously to their comrades. A vigilance committee of strikers should have at once endeavoured strenuously to bring these "men" to a sense of their position.

Even now a little *gentle expostulation* might bring them to repentance!

All through the affair the men have shown a praiseworthy regard for the rights of property which forbid them to earn a reasonable livelihood: they did not use all the power they had to paralyse the whole Midland system. By their "self-restrained demeanour" they have earned the Thanks of the Directors and the Admiration of Law-abiding Citizens.

TIME: a few months hence. SCENE: a driver's cottage. PERSONS: Driver and Wife.—Wife: "Well, I wish you fellows had had the pluck of them Yankees, and shown the directors you were in earnest and that you wern't the white-livered, whining curs they took you for; and then I shouldn't have to slave my life out to keep the kids clean, and take in washing besides to make ends meet!" Driver: "Oh, but then we should have broken the law!"

Over at Elton, co. Limerick, there has been little heed paid to the law this last week. By long and dire experience the Irish people have found that it does not pay to win landlords' praises and rent-collectors' compliments. An ounce of rent retained by a tenant is worth a ton of soft-sawder laid out by a landlord.

But how many of the English workers are not tickled to death when an exploiter compliments them on their "law-abiding" ways? Even those who have courage enough to equal the Limerick labourers, and face rifle and bayonet armed with a pitchfork, would succumb forth-

with to the syren voice of Law and Order if it called them "Law-abiding British Citizens."

Meanwhile it is easy to see how rapidly grows the power of Socialism in this country. Only last week *Reynolds*—a paper which, however disinterested it may be, dare not go "beyond its market"—came out with a displayed leader calling in plain terms for the communalisation of the means of production without compensation. S.

The Government are taking credit to themselves for their Allotment Bill; and Mr. Jesse Collings, ex-Radical and now coercionist, has been buttering them all over for this "popular" piece of legislation. Sir William Harcourt has nothing better to say about it than to twit his political opponents with inconsistency, reminding them that when a similar measure was talked of before, its furtherers were called Socialists. "But now," says he, "it seems we are all Socialists." Really this is very poor stuff; it will not be the last time by a great many that the Government, Liberal or Tory, will bait their hook with similar pieces of "Socialistic" legislation. All one can hope is that those whom they are fishing for will learn to suck the bait off the hook without touching the latter, like wily old carp, if it is any use to them.

But as to this allotment scheme, J. S. Mill said all that was necessary when he said it was simply allowing the labourers to work to pay their own poor-rates. The bill is really in the interests of the employing farmers and the rack-renting landlords.

Mr. Bradlaugh, lecturing at the Fulham Liberal Association on "National Economy," is reported to have said "that working-men were quarrelling about a small percentage on wages while they allowed this monstrous war-expenditure to eat up the bread-and-cheese that should be in their cupboards." Yes, doubtless, the war expenditure is monstrous. Don't let workmen believe that supposing it were put an end to they would be any better off while labour and its earnings is forbidden to any one who cannot find a capitalist who can employ him. If the war-expenditure were stopped it would be necessary to find some other means of wasting the working-man's labour that would put money into the capitalists' pocket; and meantime, until that other means was found, trade would be the duller for it. Under the idiotic system which oppresses us, all destruction of wares, all consumption of them, however consumed, is temporarily "good for trade," advantageous to the actual producer in the lump.

But, after all, it is impossible to get rid of war expenditure or of war as long as all Society is based on war, commercial war; it is the struggle for the market that arrays the battalions in the field; the necessities of the capitalist is what brings on war now-a-days.

As to "the working-man quarrelling over a small percentage of wages," if he did not do so, if he had not been doing so ever since the birth of commercialism, bread, or rather skilly without the cheese would have been his roast meat by this time. Commercial war compels the capitalist to cheapen production to the utmost, the method of cheapening it is to reduce the amount of human labour to the utmost; the ensuring competition among the workmen for employment (for since they are slaves they cannot employ themselves) keeps down wages. Any combination among the workmen checks this tendency, and is good as far as it goes; but the partial combination of trades' unions and the like *must* develop into general combination, which will at last assuredly destroy the war of classes which is the foundation of our Society of waste, strife, and robbery—at last—might the workers but see it at once and set on foot that great combination before the pinch of utter misery which will come of the breakdown of our short-sighted system of commercial war, a war which Mr. Bradlaugh looks on with complacency, although, as aforesaid, it is the parent of the open war which he has (very rightly) been denouncing.

The *Daily News*, commenting on the meeting of the S.D.F., which demanded the release of Pole, is really a trifle too absurd even for a bourgeois print on a Monday morning. It admits the strong case of the Socialist, but says, alluding to the hanging of Endacott in effigy: "If they had asked for it in another way, the appeal must have commanded wide-spread attention." In other words, according to the *Daily News*, the justice or injustice of the sentence on a citizen de-

depends on the good or ill manners of certain other citizens who demand his release, and not on his own conduct. Really, is the *Daily News* then to be made responsible for Lord Salisbury's Coercion Act? or are we to be made responsible for the Monday morning fatuities of the *Daily News*? Here is solidarity with a vengeance!

WILLIAM MORRIS.

WOODEN LEGS.

WE have had our Bank Holiday; the clerk is back to his bank or shop stool, the factory hand and seamstress to their machines, the hodmen and labourers all over our happy islands to their general drudgery. They think, perhaps, of the advantages of the single day's festivity, of cheap trains and omnibuses to carry them into towns, or out of them, into such country as is left.

The other day I was in the drinking bar of a village near to the Canadian Backwoods. There was sitting there a sturdy-looking man with his back leaning against one end of a bench; he had a rough cloth lying across his knees, and all that I could see of his legs as they lay extended along the bench, was that they were very short and ended in wooden stumps. I began to express sympathy for the calamity from which he had suffered. "Calamity is a strong word," said he, "I hardly think they were worth so much." I admired the bravery with which he looked on his loss, and asked him how it had happened. "Why," said he, "I had been working all alone at clearing a place out in the forest, and at sunset just as I was about to leave work a tree toppled over, and one of its branches catching me unawares knocked me down and the trunk fell across one of my legs." "How horrible!" said I. "Horrible is a strong word," said he, "I was not so bad off as that, for I had my axe with me. So seeing there was no chance of help in that out of the way place and at that time of night, I just chopped off the leg that was held fast by the tree-trunk." "Brave, bold man!" said I. "Bold is a strong word," said he, "it did not need much of that, but only a straight chop with the axe." I sat in amazement, but said nothing. "I got up," he continued, "and tried to walk, but found it awkward work with one short and one long leg. So I just put the long one across a log, and my axe soon made it as short as the other. I got on famously after that. It shows what an advantage it is always to have your axe by you." I grasped his hand and cried, "Heroic man! Scaevola was nothing to you; he put one hand into the fire, but you smile at the sacrifice of both legs." He stared and said, "Well, captain, I don't know what you are at with your bold men, and the fellow who burnt his hand, but if chopping through a bit of stick is thought so much of in your country I shall stop here." Slightly abashed, I said, "What an advantage to have wooden legs for trees to fall across!" "Ah!" said he, "they told me what an advantage it was to me that my legs and not my head were in the way of the cannon-ball at Gettysburg. I don't think much of that, but I'd rather have my natural feet to stand on, and to help me out of the way of danger."

The advantages which we now enjoy seem to be of the wooden leg kind. The Sewer Railway, and the other stuffy means of locomotion in and about London, are an advantage perhaps in so widespread a desert; but it would be better that our towns should only be so large that we might easily get from end to end of them on our own legs.

The labourer is said to be now in a more advantageous position. He can ease himself by means of the "free breakfast table" and of the free trade supply of margarine for butter. If, however, he had his own natural powers of mind to help him, instead of the artificial substitute of prejudice and custom, whereby he is caught under the heavy hand of the master, he would be still better off. His reason would tell him that free interchange between all peoples should be an instrument to increase the general good, and not merely a weapon to cut one class free from the oppression of another.

The most wooden-legged of our advantages is our system of instruction, and in particular of technical instruction. The barbarian as he makes a drinking-bowl, a sword, or a temple, puts his fancy into his work, and may be young in heart when grey in head. The Christian child has the thirty-nine articles of usury, ten per cent. profits, and national envy rubbed into his very marrow at a College or a Board School. Under this influence he grows old before he is a boy, and is in a fit state to receive technical knowledge, to learn the art of making things in such a way as to get the better of the foreigner. Well, if the freshness of the heart and mind is to be crushed under the war of competition, it is an advantage of a kind to be instructed in the use of the weapons. But that is the very degradation of education; this should give us an instrument, not of war against our fellows, but to make a clearing in the dense thicket of ignorance and sectarian jealousies.

C. J. F.

PROGRESS?—In addressing the British Medical Association, Sir Thomas Crawford argued that in spite of the boasted improvements in sanitary arrangements, there is an unmistakable deterioration in the physique of the "lower" class. The evidence adduced seems to fully bear out this view. From 1860 to 1864 32,324 men wishing to join the army, were examined by the army surgeons and out of this number the rejections were 371.67 per 1000. From 1882 to 1886 132,583 men were similarly examined, and the proportion of rejections had risen to 415.8 per 1000. Sir Thomas maintained this was good proof that during the last twenty-five years the general physical vigour of the people had very much fallen. A peculiar eye disease due to vitiated atmosphere resulting from overcrowding is very common although quite preventible. The recruits drawn from the towns gave the largest number of rejections.—J. L. M.

FEUDAL ENGLAND.

THE Norman Conquest found a certain kind of feudality in existence in England; a feudality which was developed from the customs of the tribes with little or no admixture of Roman law; and also even before the Conquest, this country was slowly beginning to be mixed up with the affairs of the Continent of Europe, and that not only with the kindred nations of Scandinavia, but with the Romanised countries also. But the Conquest of Duke William did introduce the complete or Romanised Feudal system into the country; and it also connected it by strong bonds to the Romanised countries, but thereby laid the first foundations of national feeling in England. The English felt their kinship with the Norsemen or the Danes, and did not feel their conquests when they had become complete, and consequently mere immediate violence had disappeared from them; their feeling was tribal rather than national; but they could have no sense of co-nationality with the varied populations of the provinces which mere dynastical events had strung together into the dominion, the manor, one may say, of the foreign princes of Normandy and Anjou; and as the kings who ruled them gradually got pushed out of their French possessions, England became conscious of her separate nationality, though still only in a fashion, as the manor of an *English* lord.

It is beyond the scope of this article to give anything like a connected story, even of the slightest, of the course of events between the conquest of Duke William and the fully developed mediæval period of the 14th century, which is the England that I have before my eyes as Mediæval. That period of the 14th century united the developments of the elements which had been stirring in Europe since the final fall of the Roman Empire, and England shared in the general feeling and spirit of the age, although from its position the course of its history, and to a certain extent the lives of its people was different. It is to this period, therefore, that I wish in the long run to call your attention, and I will only say so much about the earlier period as may be necessary to explain how the people of England got into the position in which they were found by the statute of labourers enacted by Edward III., and the Peasant's Rebellion in the time of his grandson and successor Richard II.

Undoubtedly, then, the Norman Conquest made a complete break in the continuity of the history of England. When the Londoners after the Battle of Hastings accepted Duke William for their king, no doubt they thought of him as being much in the same position that the newly slain Harold had been; or at any rate such a king as Knut the Dane, who had also conquered England; and probably William himself thought no otherwise, but the event was quite different, for on the one hand not only was he a man of great character, able, masterful, and a great soldier in the modern sense of the word, but he had at his back his wealthy dukedom of Normandy, which he had himself reduced to obedience and organised; and, on the other hand, England lay before him, unorganised, yet stubbornly rebellious to him; its very disorganisation and want of a centre making it more difficult to deal with by merely over-running it with an army levied for that purpose, and backed by a body of house-carles or guards, which would have been the method of a Scandinavian or native king in dealing with his rebellious subjects. Duke William's necessities and instincts combined led him into a very different course of action, which determined the future destiny of the country. What he did was to quarter upon England an army of feudal vassals drawn from his obedient dukedom, and to hand over to them the lordship of the land of England in return for their military service to him, the suzerain of them all. Thenceforward, it was under the rule of these foreign landlords that the people of England had to develop.

The development of the country as a Teutonic people was checked and turned aside by this event. Duke William brought, in fact, his Normandy into England, which was thereby changed from a Teutonic people (theod) with the old tribal customary law still in use among them, into a province of Romanised Feudal Europe, a piece of France in short; and though in time she did grow into another England again, she missed for ever in her language, her literature, and her laws, the chance of developing into a great homogeneous Teutonic people infused usefully with a mixture of Celtic blood.

However, this step which Duke William was forced to take, further influenced the future of the country by creating the great order of the baronage, and the history of the early period of England is pretty much that of the struggle of the king with the baronage and the church. For William fixed the type of the successful English mediæval king, of whom Henry II. and Edward I. were also notable examples. It was, in fact, with him that the struggle towards monarchical bureaucracy began, which was checked by the barons, who extorted Magna Charta from King John, and afterwards by the revolt headed by Simon de Montfort in Henry III.'s reign; was carried on vigorously by Edward I., and finally successfully finished by Henry VII. after the long faction-fight of the Wars of the Roses, had weakened the feudal lords so much that they could no longer assert themselves against the monarchy.

As to the contest between the Crown and the Church, two things are to be noted: first, that at least in the earlier period the Church was on the popular side. Thomas Beckett was canonised, it is true, formally and by regular decree; but his memory was held so dear by the people that he would probably have been canonised informally by them if the holy seat at Rome had refused to do so. The second thing to be noted about the dispute is this, that it was no contest of principle. According to the mediæval theory of life and religion, the