

# THE COMMONWEAL

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## NOTES ON NEWS.

The Liberal Unionists had a great field-day at Westminster on the 9th. They seem to have been very cheerful about their prospects, and if they will but admit that they are a part of the Tory party, we on our part must admit in all honesty that they have some reason to be so—for the present—now that the Gladstonite Liberals have shown that there is no fight in them.

Lord Hartington made a long speech, as a leader must in spite of the torture he may inflict on his audience, of which torture his lordship is a master. The reporter makes the unfortunate Jesse Collings say that "the great minority of the people of Ireland were loyalists." And really since it was Mr. Collings, perhaps he did say so. Lord Selborne in attacking the worship of Mr. Gladstone as a pope (with which attack I cordially agree) held up Lord Hartington as a counter pope. Mr. Richard Chamberlain, in the absence of that illustrious humbug his brother, proposed "extended organisation among the constituencies, not so much by holding meetings, as by private agency among the electors." This latter phrase seems indiscreet. Might I as an interested person (possessed of six votes) ask Mr. R. Chamberlain, How much a vote?

Lord Derby's speech deserves more respect than these weary fatuities, although there was a hole or two in his logic even granting his premises; but at least it had meaning in it, and the moderates would find some of his taunts hard to answer. Yet one may remind him that if the Southern States put up (after a terrible war) with the coercion of the North, their struggle was for the continuance of chattel-slavery, which was doomed both by the ethical and economical circumstances, whereas the Irish are struggling for federalism, the feeling for which is obviously on the increase; it is not the form which a contest takes, but the reason for it which is important.

Lord Derby seemed conscious indeed that the tide was setting towards federation: "Whatever was done for Ireland might be demanded for Scotland, certainly for Wales." "Were they prepared for four local parliaments with perhaps a federal council over all? it would be suicidal. Home Rule would lead to the absolute power of the Crown!" Well I don't see why, comparing it with what is, we should be terrified at the picture. The absolute power of the Crown would certainly lead to the abolition of the Crown, which would be a blessing, though a small one.

"Coercion in some form," says Lord Derby, "is only another name for civilisation." I think he is right; civilisation means turning the whole world into a vast prison; the destruction of all manly ideals; the attempt to substitute "comfort" so called, for happiness—the contented prisoner's ideal of life. I daresay Lord Derby would agree to that and say, "Well, what would you have?" But then, you see, he and those like him are withdrawn from the struggle like the popular gods of Epicurus. They are dull, but they don't suffer; they leave that to others.

After the Conference came the banquet at which Mr. Goschen made the conscious, and the Duke of Argyll the unconscious joke of the evening. A certain Mr. Sinclair had gone on his knees before the Unionist triumvirate—Hartington, Goschen and Chamberlain; so the midmost of those gods made the remarkable joke of picturing the feelings of those in the hall if they had the prospect of being governed by Hyndman, Conybeare and Cunninghame Graham, which to the audience of worshippers of the first trinity, seemed very funny; why, our readers can find out perhaps better than I can: I can only say that the *Standard* enjoyed it hugely, which is not much in its favour.

The Duke of Argyll's joke was better, much better. "God save Ireland! to be for many years" (how many, your Grace?) "an integral part of that Constitution which promises perfect freedom to all." Apart from a country being an integral part of a Constitution a conception which people below the degree of a duke might find it difficult to master, this is a rich joke indeed. "The promise of perfect freedom" is kept by enacting a stiffish Coercion Act in Ireland, and by doing without it in London and getting on pretty well by dint of open assault and robbery on the highway, backed up by drum-head court-martial afterwards.

By the way where is the Constitution and what is it? We hear a great deal of talk about it as a thing well known to all; but to most of us it keeps about as much out of the way as the sea-serpent. Perhaps the *Commonweal* might offer a prize for the solution of the above question—if we could only find judges to decide it.

Another of the infamous sentences of the courts of "justice" has fallen on Coleman—12 months' hard labour for asserting the freedom of the highway—the jury giving Edlin the opportunity by not appreciating at its due value the official evidence of the police, which has to be bolstered up by signs passing between the witness in the box and the coming witness. Unluckily, quite apart from the prejudice of a "respectable" jury, it has become the practice of juries simply to allow their ears to be tickled by the judges' summing-up, instead of carefully weighing the evidence themselves.

Trade is reviving—once more—perhaps. Or perhaps a ring or two are at work. Also, some person or persons interested, are working up the periodical war scare again; which is far enough advanced to have the honour of maps in the morning-papers with the position of the Russian troops marked in them. Meantime the revival has not reached everybody; "trade never so bad," is the usual answer of retailers to any questions on the subject.

The attack on M. Ferry is a droll affair—hit by three bullets and never a hole in him—what does it mean? Is he like Claver'se and others in seventeenth century story, who had made a compact with the Devil and couldn't be pierced by any baser metal than silver? This would be rather suitable to his stockjobbing antecedents too.

Linnell's death is called, as one foresaw it would be, an "accident" by the bourgeois press. Just so accidents happen when a hundred men pull the triggers of a hundred rifles loaded with ball cartridge, and other men happen to be standing opposite to them. The general attitude of the press on this business is best characterised by the word *shabby*. The shabby dodge of reclaiming the body to prevent the funeral on the 11th! The shabby attempt to prove that Linnell drank, poor man! And again, in the case of Joseph Ellis, the harmless partyless man, the exultation of getting hold of a "Socialist leader!" Shabby! Shabby!! Shabby!!! One is ashamed of having such enemies.

They are terribly powerful, though, in spite of—or rather, because of—their shabbiness. As witness the above case of Joseph Ellis: that such a piece of malignant injustice could have been perpetrated without an outcry even from the shabby classes shows how strong they feel themselves. To pass by other matters in the case—e.g., the swearing through a brick wall, so familiar to us by now—let it be remembered that Ellis was charged with hurting Livingstone, and that he was obviously hurt with a *weapon*. Well, the jury, cowed and confused let us hope, by the style in which "justice" is administered in that court, bring in a verdict of guilty; but the muddled Britons say at the same time that he did not strike Livingstone with an instrument, but with his fist: which, since Livingstone was not struck with a fist but with a weapon, is tantamount to an acquittal. After which, Edlin (I regret to have to soil these pages with his name) sentences him to 'eight months' hard labour. This is what Palmerston's once famous "*Civis Romanus sum*" has come to! This is the protection of the law! Let us add as a crowning piece of shabbiness that the *LIBERAL Daily News* omitted in its report of the trial this quasi-acquittal of the jury.

Mr. Bradlaugh has been defending his conduct in Parliament before his constituents, who, it must be said, did not appreciate his readiness for voting against his colleague in the matter of cutting down the preposterous salaries of the successful lawyers called judges. He was in favour of women working at the pit brow, and thereby reducing the wages of the men of their own households; he is shocked at women being driven on the streets, but seemingly not so shocked at men knocking about the streets workless, which clearly must result in the women supplementing their scanty pay by street-walking. He objected to Land Nationalisation on the grounds that it must either be bought or stolen! Would he object to taking his fishing-boots back from a thief on the same grounds?

WILLIAM MORRIS.