

THE COMMONWEAL

The Official Journal of the Socialist League.

VOL. 3.—No. 57.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 1887.

WEEKLY; ONE PENNY.

NOTES ON NEWS.

PARLIAMENT has offered us a sort of stage-battle over the Egyptian rascality. No one, of course, thought that anything would come of it, though 97 members voted in favour of immediate withdrawal; some of whom perhaps would not have done so if they had thought that their vote would have had any influence in bringing about a withdrawal.

Some of the Radicals were, though they knew nothing would come of it, rather afraid of pledging themselves against our piracy wholly; and moved another amendment, substituting the Yankeeism "in the near future" for "immediate." This raised laughter from the Ministerial benches, as it well might; though probably it would be found that "immediate" would have the same meaning as "in the near future" in the mouth of any capitalistic government.

One of the mediæval Joe Millers tells of an inn which bore the following inscription: "Good wine given away for nothing *to-morrow*." Of course when the sanguine toper who had seen the promised blessing on Monday called for its fulfilment on Tuesday, he was told that *to-morrow* was still ahead. So it will be in Egypt till the bayonet of some other robber is applied to the rear of the British Christian.

A modern American traveller in Persia, after giving an account of the arbitrary and violent acts of the rulers of that strangely long-lived kingdom, which are of the sort with which students of ancient and mediæval history are familiar, and after saying of the peasant, "that if he produced upon land so rich that it easily produces enough to meet his humble wants, any more, it would be simply to render him the victim of extortion," goes on to say, "the people of Persia are as happy as the average of other people!"

This fact, which is borne out by the observation of travellers among peoples under similar conditions, is not so difficult of explanation as the bourgeois observer sometimes thinks it. The Persian labourer works lazily to supply his humble wants, and then stops, *knowing* that anything more he produces will be taken away from him. But we have got our labourers into better order than that. We make the English labourer work industriously *after* he has supplied his humble (very humble) wants, and thereby make him supply our own not so humble wants. The Persian labourer *knows* that everything that can be taken away from him will be taken away, and therefore doesn't vex the kind earth and his own body too much. The English labourer is in exactly the same position of being robbed of what he earns; but then he does *not* know it, and so he sweats away and tries to keep out of the workhouse. Fraud is out and out a better weapon than force, it does the cleaning-out job so much cleaner, let alone its being so much safer—till it is found out.

Among the advantages offered by emigration agents, a free passage to Davy Jones' Locker should figure prominently. Yet it will not be long before the horrible murder of the Kapunda will be forgotten by all classes just as dozens of other like cases have been. Nevertheless, while it is remembered (if it is still remembered by those not directly interested in it) let us ask what it was that drowned all those poor souls without remedy, and the answer must be Commercial Profit!

No one who thinks about the event can doubt that it was possible by spending more money to have contrived that the ship should not sink in a few minutes without any chance of getting her boats out; and if people will think a little more they will have to come to the conclusion that in these matters as in others the one thing sought after is "profit." Ships must be made safe enough not to frighten freight and passengers off them, and also not to make them uninsurable, or to risk too much loss if they are not insured. Outside these necessities "applied science" will not be *applied* to the making of people's lives as safe as it knows how, but to making of the owner's profits as safe as it knows how; and if you please, as those profits are made on the *average* of ships and voyages, the loss of a cargo of human beings now and then can be borne by the enterprising owners without their purses or capitalistic lives suffering much. But what fools *we* are to bear it!

In the first of the debates on the subject "Is Socialism Sound?" between Mrs. Besant and Mr. Foote, Mrs. Besant sustained her part

well. Mr. Foote threw no new light on the objections to Socialism, and, as often happens with a clever anti-Socialist debater, he made too much use of the *argumentum ad hominem*, a very feeble weapon if applied to anything more important than a Parliamentary debate.

It was curious to see Mr. Foote in his quality of Land-nationaliser so very bitter against Socialism; in him the lower middle-class prejudices and shibboleths seemed to unite readily with the acceptance of Mr. George's nostrum. Mrs. Besant's exposition of the fallacy of detaching the land from the other means of the fructification of labour was very clear and satisfactory. She also made her position as to the relation between Socialism and Communism clearer than it is in her pamphlet, and I should say had advanced from that position. Mr. Foote, of course, twitted her with this, but not very fairly. Socialists will follow with much interest the progress of this debate.

WILLIAM MORRIS.

"Even Englishmen, in a factory or elsewhere, would be demoralised if their earnings and their status, their lives, in short, depended on the caprice of some employer who could be at one time coaxed and at another time coerced into concessions, and who by occasional cruelty provoked their wrath. What legislators, therefore, must aim at is the elimination of the personal element from the control of the soil. The right of raising rent indefinitely was too great a power to lodge in the hands of a man who might be driven to extortion by the pressure of his own debts; and when the addition was made because the tenant had been industrious the result was robbery, however legalised."—*Daily Telegraph*, Feb. 4, 1887.

The above extract does not look out of place as a note in a Socialist paper. Yet it is cut from one of the most rabid bourgeois journals, and is, therefore, significant as a sign of progress. S.

PROFESSOR FLINT ON SOCIALISM.

SOCIALISTS are entitled to congratulate themselves on the attention their creed is attracting among all classes of the community. The Cause has certainly passed through that period in the history of many another cause, when "few men heed it." Free discussion is before all things desired by the lovers of truth, and this is what Socialists seem to be in a fair way of getting. Confident of the final triumph of truth, we always welcome criticism, whether it be fair and intelligent, or the reverse. If our opponents are bitter and prejudiced against us, unwilling to present our views in any light but an unfavourable one, we gain by the reaction which most certainly sets in when a faithful and clear exposition of our principles is laid before the people. If on the other hand they are honest, impartial, and well-informed, but slow in perceiving the truth of our doctrines solely in consequence of their peculiar training, we reap the fruits of the good seed they are unwittingly sowing.

In this way good work is at present being done for us in Edinburgh. Dr. Flint, Professor of Divinity in the University, is delivering a series of five fortnightly lectures on Socialism to crowded congregations in the Tron Kirk, and a good space in the daily papers has been devoted to reports of the two already over. Taking, in the first one, a general view of Socialism in theory and history, he regarded it, as opposed to individualism, an exaggeration of the claims and rights of society. In his opinion its principal feature is the excessive intervention of the state, the private and personal being absorbed by the public and collective. The statement of a superficial view like this is likely to lead people to imagine that life under Socialism will closely resemble life in a huge, well-regulated prison. But any one who has studied Socialistic literature closely and sympathetically, must admit that such a state of things cannot possibly result if society is reconstructed in accordance with our principles, and that Socialists would be the first to rebel against such irksome and debasing conditions of life. We would build up the new society on the old principles which the Professor, I presume, himself believes in, that it is our duty to bear one another's burdens and to love our neighbour as ourselves. We are fully persuaded too, that not only is it possible to do this without encroaching on individuality or liberty, but that the masses will be enabled to enjoy such freedom and happiness, as they cannot have any conception of in the present age, crushed as they are by the despotic and merciless power of landlordism and capital. As we have often pointed out, the workers in these days