

THE COMMONWEAL

The Official Journal of the Socialist League.

VOL. 3.—No. 58.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 1887.

WEEKLY; ONE PENNY.

NOTES ON NEWS.

SIR CHARLES WARREN (no doubt in self-defence and defence of the police) has given a blow to contemporary history as written by the daily press, by a sudden demolition of the very rapidly grown myth of the *Wicked Socialist and the Heroic Butcher*, which is, after all, perhaps the very latest example of the solar myth. The bright and ruddy hero dispelling the murky crowds of the cloudy night with the shooting forth of his bright rays must be, according to the solar theory, what is really typified by this apparently historical incident. Mr. Andrew Lang perhaps could tell us what it might signify according to the explanation of the "customary" theory of myths.

To one person it must have signified victuals and drink, temporarily at least; to wit, to the ingenious gentleman who produced the detailed and dramatic "Siege of a Butcher's Shop" in the *Daily News*. I hope I have all due professional sympathy with our injured contemporary, but I really cannot help saying with Mr. Boucher in 'Hard Times,' "We are waiting to hear what apology you are going to offer us for going about the country express with no other luggage than a story of a cock and a bull!"

The *Pall Mall Gazette* gave us lately the account of interviews with various business men as to the present condition of trade. The views of these gentlemen were mostly what under the present circumstances may be called optimistic, that is they all seemed to think that things were mending a little. But, after all, what they said amounted to little more than that the public were getting rather eager for investments, which fact may mean nothing more than the beginning of a brief swindle-period.

Judging by the condition of production, which is indicated by the plain statement of facts given in the columns of our own paper under the heading "The Labour Struggle," this seems to be all that it does mean. The hunger-riots of the Scotch coal miners also do not point to our nearing a period of plain-sailing prosperity.

Mr. Bright "is at it again." He really does seem as if he were determined to show that his claim to have been a popular leader was mere moonshine; it would be difficult for any enemy of his to be as successful in this demonstration as Mr. Bright himself.

The *Daily News* the other day was righteously indignant with the sentence of a country magistrate on a labourer, convicted of the terrible offence of setting traps to catch wood-pigeons, for which in the upshot the poor man got two months' imprisonment. Probably, however, such sentences are as common as frosts in winter, and not nearly so much noticed. Our own experience has taught us that, since neither the *Daily News* nor any other bourgeois paper made any comment on Judge Nupkins-Grantham's sentence on Mowbray and Henderson; the *Pall Mall Gazette* joining in the conspiracy of silence, although when convenient it can say a good deal about the doings of one section of the Socialists.

The Chiswick poisoning mystery has been explained, say the daily papers: "the Government analyst has failed to detect any traces of irritant poison of the contents of the stomachs of the two children . . . having regard to the fact that the mother and six children slept in a single bed in a room only measuring 8 ft. by 9 ft., and that the cold and the scanty covering on the bed and the clothing generally in the house compelled them to huddle together to keep themselves warm, shutting out at the same time all ingress of fresh air into the room where for hours there had been a lamp burning, he has, it is reported, come to the conclusion that the cause of the death of the two children was vitiated atmosphere." Misery is a shorter word than vitiated atmosphere, and yet a more explanatory one. I suppose these victims of vitiated atmosphere will not be set among the record of those who were starved to death? (I have not patience to remember the euphemism for that), but starved to death they were.

In his first debate with Mrs. Besant Mr. Foote affected (surely it was affectation) scorn at those who distinguish between competition and emulation, and asked what was the difference between them. Mr. Foote knows well enough that competition, as we use the word in English, means seeking one's own advantage at the expense of one's

neighbours (compare the French *concurrence*). As to emulation, judging by the tone of his attack on Socialism, it is probable that he does not understand what that means, as it is certainly a generous quality. To give the difference between the two shortly, emulation means making the *best* of one's own capacity; competition, making the *worst* of one's neighbour's.

Mr. Bradlaugh was enthusiastically cheered at a meeting held on behalf of the crofters for saying amongst other things "that we had no right to pauperise the crofters by law and then send them into other lands to die." Most true; but how strange that Mr. Bradlaugh should object to the substitution of the word "working-men" for crofters! He has been lately taking some trouble to attack those who are trying to show that we have no right to pauperise, not the crofters only, but all workers, by forcing them to yield to "capital" a tribute for leave to work—that is, to live. How utterly illogical it is in him to attack also a small section of the monopolists of the means of production!

They have exactly the same "rights of property" as every one else has, neither less nor more; and those rights leave them free to use or *abuse* their property according to their own will. If the abuse of their property should be interfered with, why not other abuses of property? And is it not an abuse of property to employ it as a mere means of compulsion to force other men to work for the compeller—or privileged thief? How can it matter whether the instrument of violent robbery is called "land" or "capital"? W. M.

One of the signs of the times is the manifestation of decadence in the superstitious reverence for "law" which was afforded several times during the debate on Mr. Parnell's amendment. Two lawyers, one the son of the Lord Chief Justice, led the attack upon "law-in-itself," and put very plainly and well the position that a "law" is an absurdity and a crime unless "approved by the moral sense of the community at large." Mr. Holmes, the Attorney-General for Ireland, was—and the *Spectator* laments it piteously—in despair over ever again getting people to obey laws in which they do not believe.

Mr. John Morley put into a phrase the other day the history of the people everywhere. It was much more than "the history of Ireland in a nutshell" that he called it. "Unredressed grievances, moral wrongs without a legal remedy, and then the resort to illegal acts to secure justice." S.

THE CRIMINAL CLASSES OF THE FUTURE.

A RETROSPECT AND A PROSPECT.

THE persistent preaching of Socialist principles had leavened men's minds with new ideas, and the old prejudices against the poorer inmates of our jails and convict establishments had given place to a feeling that they were more sinned against than sinning. Bad training amidst filth, squalor, and manifold temptations, were held as (outside the judicial bench) excuses and condonation of offences against property. There, on the contrary, as the feelings of the people became more liberal, the harshness of their decisions became more marked. Shameful sentences and gross partiality were the order of the day. Prison discipline bore the marks of the haters of the people, and the brutal tortures of the past were replaced with refined cruelties. That made a sentence of imprisonment, in many cases, a sentence of death. Pitiful cases of half-starved desperate men sent to jail for stealing food, with the brutal comments of the well-fed magistrate ringing in their ears, of paupers ill-treated with impunity by workhouse jailers, and of myriads preferring to lie and die by the roadside rather than accept the brutal charity of a corrupt Society, were the order of the day. The mass of unemployed workmen were insulted by the paid hirelings of the affrighted bourgeois with schemes of dietetic reforms, sterilisation, etc., etc. It seemed that the old saying that those whom the "Gods seek to destroy they first make mad" was having its illustration in Old England. Alternating with the insults as to raggedness, laziness, and depravity heaped upon the dispossessed, were demands for bludgeons and coercion; and the Russian legislation, hitherto confined to the sister island, was made applicable to the whole kingdom. The police, acting on the cue of their employers, changed their tactics of petty spydom for wholesale arrests, and plots smacking of the "Woolf and Bondurand" flavour were common discoveries.