

# THE COMMONWEAL

The Official Journal of the Socialist League.

VOL. 3.—No. 51.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 1, 1887.

WEEKLY; ONE PENNY.

## POLITICAL NOTES.

THERE is naturally great commotion in political circles about the resignation of Lord Randolph Churchill, and speculations about the result; as far as we Socialists are concerned we need not trouble ourselves much about it. It emphasises the idiocy of our Parliamentary struggle, that the resignation of a man who is looked upon by every one as a mere trickster, who openly repudiates the folly of having principles to trouble himself with, should be a matter of such mighty importance. Further, it is an indication of the disintegration of parties which is caused by the shadow of advancing Socialism, and which has been going on at such a great rate recently.

But although it is really a sign of this decay of party government, it is probable enough that its first results will be the uniting of the Liberal party on the basis of the surrender of the Gladstonian Liberals. Mr. Chamberlain's speech at Birmingham had a tone of confident triumph about it which is somewhat justified by the situation. The Liberals are quite prepared for this act of ratting; indeed, Mr. Gladstone himself has given the signal for it by letting it be known that he too condemns the "Plan of Campaign." The Jonah of Home Rule once thrown over, nothing prevents the Union of the two sections of the Liberal Party, who can then set to work about the business which the more enlightened of them see to be their true function, of widening the basis of exploitation in these islands in various ways. The attempt at the creation of a new lower middle-class to stem the torrent of Socialism will be the serious business of this new party (for in spite of names it will really be new), of which the two brothers-in-arms, Churchill and Chamberlain, are such distinguished leaders.

Mr. Chamberlain's very clear statement on the necessity of turning the Irish tenants into owners of their holdings was very significant of this aim. As far as Ireland is concerned it must be said that dismal as is the prospect which the realisation of his views would put before that luckless country, the turning of the Irish tenants into peasant proprietors is only too likely to take place, whatever political party may get the upper hand. It is the new misery which Ireland is bound to go through, unless the new social order is realised in civilisation generally in time to prevent it. Nor is it by any means unlikely that the promise of such a change may break up the Irish Parliamentary Party, and leave the New Liberal Party free to do its work in Parliament. That party will be the then Intelligent Reactionary Party, the great enemy of progress expressed by Socialism. But so fast are things moving that its great men will not be the Hartingtons and Goschens, who were once called Liberals and are now mere Tories, but the Radicals old and new, among whom, I suppose, we must now rank Lord Randolph Churchill.

But meantime what is this ominous sound in the air? War is threatened again, and this time more determinedly and clearly than ever. On all sides one hears that this time it is certain, and that spring will see murder afield on the monstrous scale of modern times. How will our English parties deal with this horror if it comes? Will it afford a last chance to the old Tory party to do one more injury to the world before it departs for ever? Or will the Tories unite with the Intelligent Reactionary Party in one great flood of Jingoism?

At first sight, indeed, it would seem a mere act of madness for Bismark and Co. to provoke a hurly-burly which may very well make an end of his firm and its aspirations. But one must remember that they are hardly their own masters in the matter. The monster of

Commercial Militarism which they have created must be found work for or it will destroy its creators; and there comes a time when all must be risked—even revolution *behind* the invading armies.

Meantime, if war really becomes imminent our duties as Socialists are clear enough, and do not differ from those we have to act on ordinarily. To further the spread of international feeling between the workers by all means possible; to point out to our own workmen that foreign competition and rivalry, or commercial war, culminating at last in open war, are necessities of the plundering classes, and that the race and commercial quarrels of these classes only concern us so far as we can use them as opportunities for fostering discontent and revolution; that the interests of the workmen are the same in all countries and they can never be really enemies of each other; that the men of our labouring classes, therefore, should turn a deaf ear to the recruiting sergeant, and refuse to allow themselves to be dressed up in red and be taught to form a part of the modern killing machine for the honour and glory of a country in which they have only the dog's share of many kicks and few halfpence,—all this we have to preach always, though in the event of imminent war we may have to preach it more emphatically. Also, since if any English government allows itself to be dragged into war it will as a matter of course be on that side the triumph of which would mean reaction—*i.e.*, Bismark and Co. we may have to protest specially and definitely against such a proceeding, and probably we should have to put ourselves forward somewhat prominently in such a protest, from which respectability of all kinds would be very apt to hang back.

WILLIAM MORRIS.

## THE WORKHOUSE; OR, JOHN POORMAN'S REST.

THE Science, industrialism, economic doctrine, and philanthropy of the 19th century find their architectural expression in the railway station, the gasometer, the factory, and the workhouse. The two latter as distinctly characteristic of our civilisation as the Pyramids of Egypt, the Parthenon of Greece, or the Cathedrals of mediæval times were of theirs. One tells the story of the marvellous increase of productive power which our age has received, the other shows the share of that increase the worker has obtained. The one is the place where the worker pays the master two-thirds of his hours of toil for permission to possess the results of the remaining third, the other is the refuge appointed for the close of life when there is no longer left to him strength from which "profit" can be wrung.

At present it is only of the workhouse, known in Chartist speech and Corn Law Rhymes as "the Bastile" (sic) that I can speak. To the close connection with the place of labour of this place of rest, I can only incidentally refer. Inside and out the place is wholly unlovely, and there is nothing of romance in its story to bewile your ears, and yet, for the sake of its many inmates, fellow countrymen and women of ours, I dare to ask you to give me all your attention as I try to explain what English State charity really is.

The workhouse and the Poor Law System, of which it is the expression, are quite modern things. They belong wholly to our country and are the outcome of its industrial conditions. Long ago there was a time in this England of ours when poverty, as we now understand the word, was unknown, when toil was wholesome, and life was glad and fair. So much ignorance prevails on this matter that I must ask leave to dwell a little on it so as to remove all doubt about the fact. If some Bible-wise man should quote against me the text ascribed to Solomon (Ecc. 7, 10): "Say not thou, What is the cause that former times were better than these? for thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this," I must remind him that the words are those of a voluptuous scoundrel who squandered in shameless debauchery the hard earnings of the Judean poor. The advice of such a counselor is to be followed by the rule of contrary.

In his just-published admirable 'Introduction to the History of the Factory System,' Mr. Cooke-Taylor says, speaking of the 15th century: "Paradoxical and almost unaccountable as it may at first sight appear,