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WEEKLY; ONE PENNY.

NOTES ON PASSING EVENTS.

MR. JUSTICE GRANTHAM, in charging the Grand Jury at Norwich, apropos of the events which so unhappily delivered two of our comrades to the tender mercies of that strange specimen of humanity, the Special Fool in a high place, sung a song of triumph over that glorious institution, the workhouse. Oddly enough, in the issue of the day before of the same paper that gave us the solemn wisdom of this genius, there is printed a paragraph which is a good commentary on that blessing of modern times—that refuge for the unlucky which, according to his lordship, affords such a firm and satisfactory stand-point from which to aim at the conquest of health and wealth—the workhouse. We give the passage in full:

“WANDSWORTH.—CASUALS AND THEIR FOOD.—James Harding and George Wright were placed in the dock charged with refusing to work while casual paupers in Wandsworth workhouse.—George Cheshire, the superintendent, said the prisoners were admitted on Saturday night, and that morning he set them to work. Both refused to work.—The prisoner Wright said he could not work on the food given to him. He had dry bread, and was put in a place where he was perishing with cold all night. He would not do it for the Queen of England.—The superintendent said the wards were heated. The food consisted of eight ounces of bread for breakfast, half-a-pound with 1½ ounces of cheese as dinner, and eight ounces of bread with hot water to drink for supper.—Mr. Bennett: Not any cocoa, nor anything of the kind?—No, sir.—The prisoner said he had a pail of hot water and dry bread. A pail of hot water was brought in as if to a horse.—The witness stated that the diet was given by direction of the Local Government Board.—Mr. Bennett said if the prisoner had any ground of complaint he must go to the Local Government Board.—The prisoner said he might as well go to Buckingham Palace, and knock at the door and ask for the Queen.—Mr. Bennett committed the prisoners for seven days.”

The only comment on this paragraph that is possible is to ask if there is not some mistake in the report that the prisoners were sent to prison for seven days?

Mr. Justice Nupkins (we ask pardon, Grantham), being in a jovial and joking humour apparently, was so pleasant as to say that certain persons who misled the people and told them they were badly treated—to be sure: badly treated when going to the workhouse they can get their water hot: hot water, the drink at present of the more refined among the “cultivated classes”—that these persons told the working-classes that they ought to have money whether they worked for it or not. Setting aside Mr. Justice Nupkins’ confusion of ideas about the working-classes who don’t work, which is of itself pretty to behold, his lordship has only to attend a few Socialist meetings (he might draw up his carriage at the edge of the crowd) to hear those who want to have money without working for it pretty sharply denounced by these very misleaders of the working-classes. He would there learn that the living on other people without working is the very thing we demand to be abolished, though it must be admitted that at present it is the very foundation of that society of which his lordship is so starting an ornament.

It was announced last week that the Government were going to make a new departure in coercion, and would bring forward a regular gagging Bill, which would serve for arranging Irish affairs at present, and would also be available for dealing with English, Scotch, or Welsh discontent, as it was to be made applicable to the whole of the United Kingdom. Socialist organisations, we were told, might expect to be particularly honoured by the notice of this new Act.

This news seemed from the first almost too good to be true; but it seems it was true for the time, and that the Tory Government, on the look out for something to damage their really strong position, had hit on this device as a satisfactory one. But unluckily it is almost impossible for them to go on with the gagging enterprise, as it would stir up the vigorous opposition of the Radicals, and even the Liberals would be shamed into voting against such a measure. Accordingly they are now backing down: are going to begin with the bill on procedure, and will *only* make their gag for Ireland, though even on these terms they have very little chance of getting it through Parliament.

Mr. Goschen is carrying on his candidature for Liverpool merrily, and in spite of the result of the last election, in which the Liberal candidate was successful, he will probably get in, owing to the servility of all parties towards “a distinguished official,” “a man of so much importance,” and so forth. Meantime this light of intellectual finance has introduced himself by making a long speech down there which was

really remarkable for emptiness, dullness, and twaddle, even among election speeches.

Apropos of Members of Parliament, the following story told by Mr. Labouchere at Spalding on Thursday week is too good to be lost. He said:—

“The atmosphere of the House of Commons does not seem to agree with Radicals. They soon want to become fine gentlemen. He remembered a case in one of the divisions with regard to the admission of Mr. Bradlaugh. About ten minutes before the division a highly respectable gentleman on the Liberal side of the House came to me and said, ‘You know I have been thinking this over, and my conscience won’t allow me to vote for Bradlaugh.’ I replied, ‘I have not got time enough to talk about your conscience—what do you want?’ The Member said, ‘What do you mean? I am not that sort of person’; whereupon I said, ‘Do you want to be made a knight?’ and the gentleman replied, ‘No, you are entirely mistaken.’ I next asked him, ‘Have you got a wife?’ and he answered, ‘Yes.’ ‘Well, do you get asked to those crowds, those receptions, at the Foreign Office?’ The hon. Member admitted that he and his wife rather complained that they had not, and then I said, ‘You go in and vote, and I’ll see that you are asked to them in the future,’ and in about ten minutes afterwards I polled that patriot in.”

Walpole, in the good old bribing days, would have been happy if he could have bought his votes as cheap as that.

The Commission on the Depression of Trade has issued its report. It will be criticised hereafter in these columns in some detail, so that it may go for the present with a few words. It is a matter of course that the Commissioners try to put the best face possible on the state of things commercial, though they do not succeed very well in the attempt. They say, “There can be no question that the workman is in this country, *when fully employed*, in almost every respect in a better position than his competitors in foreign countries.” The italics are our own. Will the Commissioners pretend that they do not know that even in good years the great mass of working-men in and about London are unemployed for four months out of the twelve? that the workmen of the great industries have to “average” their wages, have to insure, so to say, against the months that they are “at play,” from strikes and lock-outs and the like? Will they say where in Europe or Asia they can find a workman more miserably pinched and resourceless than the south-west country labourer with his income of 10s. a-week when things are going well?

Or need one keep one’s patience any longer with those miserable fools and liars, paid to lie and paid to be dull by a blind society amidst its last corruption? It is true that they are not paid to be imaginative; but a little imagination is necessary to most men, if only to keep their bodies from stinking in default of salt. Let them, then, bring their imagination to bear upon facts, and try to picture their noble and cultivated selves reduced to the condition of those workmen whose lot they are so contented with. Let them think of themselves as living and keeping a home together on 10s. a-week in a Gloucestershire cottage, or worse still, on 16s. in a London slum; and if they have really tried to do so and have any honesty left in them, if they can do nothing else, at least let them hold their tongues and live silently on the proceeds of the perpetual robbery which habit has made them look upon as a holy right and the cement of society.

WILLIAM MORRIS.

MEN VERSUS CLASSES.

THE well-intentioned, kind-hearted gentleman who perspires philanthropy all over at the bare thought of the working-classes, is often shocked at the fact that modern Socialism starts from the idea of an irreconcilable class-struggle. “Look at me,” he says, “and others like me; we are middle-class men, and yet we have a profound sympathy with the people. It is surely unreasonable to attack a whole class in the way you do when it contains such excellent and noble-hearted representatives.” Now, irrespective of the genuineness of the particular person in question or his friends, there is undoubtedly a point touched on here which to the neophyte in Socialism requires elucidating.

Socialists attack the middle-class as the root of all evil. The neophyte knows that he daily comes in contact with middle-class men whom he respects, nay, who may themselves be working for Socialism. On the other hand, he finds that there are plenty of men belonging to the working-class whom he cannot respect. Now, here is a problem for the Socialist! What is the solution?