

# THE COMMONWEALTH

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## NOTES ON NEWS.

The Irish members the other night abstained from voting on the Coercion Bill, and thus took the step at last which they ought to have taken at first; but the ugly words "too late" will pursue them; the mischief is done, the time for a great demonstration is lost, and at the cost of great trouble and expenditure of energy, they have been playing into the hands of the Tories all this time. Once more the moral: when you are in Parliament you must play the parliamentary game, even if you know you are throwing away your hand by doing so.

The Federation of Radical Clubs having met and discussed the advisability of holding another great demonstration against the Coercion Bill, has decided to forego it. This sounds disappointing enough; but they were probably right; at the best such a demonstration would not have come up to the Easter Monday show; and even if it had surpassed it, it would have been little use unless the agitation could have been kept up and gone on increasing, and developed into threatenings of something more serious than Hyde Park and Trafalgar Square meetings. For all this the Radicals are not prepared; so they must take the Tory rule quietly, and will probably have plenty of opportunities for the exercise of the useful virtue of patience.

The Unionist chuckers-out at the Kensington Town Hall, who like the honest bravo of past times who insisted on killing his man when paid for it, even when his employer had changed his mind, thought that they were bound to give value for the money received, and chucked out chiefly the wrong persons, have had a narrow escape from gratis lodging in a public building, but are quit for the fright. One of them in his account of his secondary use of a brass curtain rod, embellished the story unnecessarily; but it must be admitted that it is not easy to get clear evidence of what has happened at "a rough and tumble." At the same time one can't help thinking that if they had been Socialists accused of rioting, much clearer evidence would have been forthcoming in all due abundance, and the jury would not have been so scrupulous as to the identity of the rioters.

The frightful sea-tragedy that has just come before the public is miserable and depressing to hear tell of; an under-manned ship and overworked men were probably at the bottom of the slaying of the Malay. But from the first I couldn't help asking myself if the crew would have treated in the same way an English shipmate who from drink-madness or other madness had become dangerous to them? Isn't the jingo spirit which has given us much bigger horrors, from blowing mutineers from guns down to flogging a whole village because one of the villagers has foolishly allowed himself to be shot by a British officer, responsible for this last wretched piece of sordid misery on the high seas?

The tribe of Nupkins seems to be increasing, and the last specimen brought forward (by himself) for exhibition is certainly not a pretty one. One can judge by the behaviour of Nupkins-Newton in this "mistake" which he has made, what his usual conduct is to poor girls who are not "respectable," and who are guilty of the crime which under various names is almost the only one punished by our robber-society—poverty to wit.

It is a curious characteristic of the present day that the stiffest defence of the rights of private property is blended with attempts towards crude State Socialism not merely in the same society, or in the same assembly, but even in the same man. Here is Mr. Bradlaugh, for instance, the doughty champion of the rights of monopoly in one form of the means of production, bringing in a Bill to force people to use their land in the way which he thinks that it ought to be used, or else give them up and be "compensated" for it. It doesn't matter that such a Bill is not likely to pass and would not be effective if it were passed; the intention at any rate is to *compel* people to give up something which they call their property and don't want to give up. It seems not unlikely that Mr. Bradlaugh and Mr. Henry George will presently be running in the same coach. After that we shall see.

The improvement in trade that many persons were so cock-sure of

a few months ago, has gone to join the majority of prophecies now it seems. As gauged by the railway returns we are pretty much where we were last year. Most of those who have anything to do with business, either as employers or employed, will make rather a worse tale of it than that. We were promised a miracle and it hasn't happened. There will be plenty more of that before we have done. W. M.

## THE "LIBERTY - TO - PLUNDER DEFENCE LEAGUE."

THAT the above title befits the L.P.D.L. far better than their own, few can doubt who read the record of their work issued by themselves, or the circular sent by them to M.P.'s and others, asking for opposition to sundry Parliamentary measures. The L.P.D.L. is on the side of "personal liberty;" the "autonomy of the individual" is much too sacred to be interfered with even for the defence of the whole community; Liberty (*and* property) should not be touched by legislative enactment, or anything else indeed; and the L.P.D.L. is just *the* most enlightened, just, magnanimous, and civilised body of people on the face of the earth. Hence the L.P.D.L. feels itself bound to remove as much of the strain as it can from legislative brains, and so steps forward with a tabulated alphabetical scheme of rejection, generously free of charge, that will enable any lawmaker, to the satisfaction of all concerned, without any trouble of argument *not* to make laws. This is very nice for the M.P., who can ask, "Is it on the list?" and so record his vote dumbly; but it may be that in their laudable ambition to "stay the tide of revolution," the L.P.D.L. have unwittingly told the truth too plainly, and thus their curses after all may be blessings in disguise? Suppose even that they may have betrayed themselves as unscrupulous and sordid advocates of legalised plunder and chicanery?

"Your opposition" is "earnestly requested" to a Bill, the object of which is to prevent the payment of any portion of his wages to a farm-labourer in beer, cider, or other alcoholic drinks. Other proposed enactments as to wages that rouse their wrath are: That which amongst other things provides that miners' wages in Devon and Cornwall shall not be withheld from them longer than 14 days; that they shall be paid by weight and have power to appoint their own check-weigher; and that which forbids coal-miners being paid in public-houses. Does not such opposition imply that "liberty" is wanted for employers to pay wages when and how they like, and "liberty" for the workers to take them or—?

"Your opposition" is also asked to two Bills which would render penal the fraud of passing off oleomargarine on the public as butter; fixing penalties, and appointing inspectors. These wicked Bills provide that butter shall be labelled butter, and oleomargarine so marked, and that tyrannical officials shall look to see that it is done. Another proposed measure would compel quarry-owners, lessees, or occupiers, to fence in all quarries, in use or abandoned, for the public safety. To the unregenerate mind the question rises: Does Liberty (*and* property) interfere in the interests of a people frantically desirous of eating oily-margarine for butter, and of dashing itself down quarries? Or, is the sacred name of Liberty (*and* property) invoked on behalf of those who desire to have their hands freed for the reckless and brutal spoliation of all who by ignorance, poverty, or accident are delivered into their hands?

"Your opposition" is of course asked to a measure which enjoins the providing fit and proper means for raising and lowering miners; for supervision of mine ventilation; for precautions in the use of explosives; for covers to cages in the shafts and flanges to the drums; for fencing machinery and fitting boilers with safety-valves and water-gauges; for the keeping of stretchers and bandages. "Your opposition" is requested to the enactment that railroad companies shall adopt the block system; provide for interlocking points and signals; furnish passenger trains with continuous, and goods and mineral engines with powerful brakes; affix to all vehicles such couplings as shall render it unnecessary for men to go between them; provide efficient communication between passenger and guard; adopt a safe standard height for passenger platforms; make monthly returns to the Board of Trade of all men who have been on duty for more than 12 hours at a time or without an interval of 9 hours rest. "Your opposition" is asked to a Bill for the sanitation of London; to provide for the building of healthy houses and the prevention of unhealthy