POLITICAL NOTES.

The past few days have brought about a change in the political atmosphere of the country. The Whigs and the Tories have started some persons; but it is not difficult to explain. The Government placed between the devil and the deep sea, have been screwing up their hearts for a Coercion Bill. This seems at first sight a simple and natural proceeding for a Tory Government, a thing which everybody would expect from them. But to pass an effective measure of coercion against such a solid opposition as the Irish nation offer to it, and to carry it out when passed, is an adventure which needs the courage of the past ages or of the future—the aristocratic period or the revolutionary one. The age of politicians in which we are now living in England cannot deal consciously with tragedy, though the actors in it can sit and watch many a farce tragedically go on before their eyes calmly enough. In fact, the Government swaggers coercion boldly enough but doesn’t mean it; all the more as it has no shadow of a Stafford to carry out the policy of thoroughness.

Meantime, the "Liberal Unionists" are preparing for a "new departure." Mr. Tremenheere has indicated that he will return to Gladstonean policy, and the greater portion of his party will follow him, since the course of events of late has convinced them the cat is going to jump in the Home Rule direction. Some of the most sanguine of the Liberal prophets are even speculating on the possibility of passing a compromise Home Rule Bill—a somewhat delicate operation.

Or possibly they will ride for a fall by bringing in a fierce Coercion Bill without any hope of passing it, and buck this by the promiscuously Land Bill to follow it, which the report of the Commission gives them an opportunity of doing. This would give them the chance of appealing to the country with law-and-order in one hand and "remedy" (of the well used delusive kind) in the other; and it is not all so sure, in spite of the Liberal rejoicings now on hand, that they would be beaten in the electorate. Yet if (they the Tories) win, what next? And how would they deal with a situation which has been bred? To which would their Land Bill amount to? These are questions which they will have to answer if they succeed, although they will certainly forget them deliberately till the moment for answering them comes.

If the United Liberal Party comes in again will its position be either an easy or a triumphant one. The Home Rule Bill must be a compromise, as such will be accepted by the Irish only as a lever to bring about the full accomplishment of their aspirations. But even before the half measure of Home Rule is gained the underlying question of land and livelihood in Ireland will have to be faced; a question which involves that of the land and livelihood elsewhere. This fact does enlighten a little even the dastardly short-sightedness of parliamentary politics, as may be noticed in Lord Salisbury’s last speech, in which he had the impudence to impugn the patriotism of the Irish, because they have found out that they cannot separate the cause of self-government from that of the livelihood of the people.

Though perhaps he was really saying what he thought on this occasion; for naturally to a Tory the mere supercession of nationality is a more important matter than the reality of the necessity of dealing with the sufferings of an industrious and honest population. This necessity will be the Nemesis that will presently overtake not only the Tories and the Whigs but the Liberals and Radicals also; unless they are found with the real difficulty. When Home Rule has been gained and the party which has been it then we if the sympathy now so widely expressed for the cottars of Glenbeigh and elsewhere in Ireland was genuine or not. If it is not extended to the dwellers in the Wiltshire village and the London slum, and if the same kind of remedies are not proposed for these latter as for the Irish cottars, it will be proved to have been a mere piece of party clap-trap got up for the occasion. We need not fear but that the occasion will be afforded for such practical sympathy: the Irish question will help to sow the seed of revolution throughout the British islands.

To be sure if the Whigs, Tories and Liberals had any foresight or any courage they would have united to stamp it out this time as they have done before. The Unionist Liberals were wise in their generation when they turned on Gladstone; they are now in coming under his wing again to exhibit themselves as fools and cowards as well as reactionists.

Happily it always happens so in revolutions; the nearer the time comes for the defeat of reaction, the more pressing its necessities grow, the more the course of the reactionists fails them, because they begin to be conscious that their cause has become a mere mass of round-about lies and helpless hypocrisies.

W. M.

WHY WE CELEBRATE THE COMUNE OF PARIS.

The "moons and the days" have brought us round again to the anniversary of the greatest tragedy of modern times, the Commune of Paris, dating from March 18, 1871, and it is time that we did the honest thing of celebrating it both enthusiastically and intelligently. By this time the blatant slanders with which the temporarily unsuccessful cause was assailed when the event was yet fresh in men’s minds have sunk into the dullest Gulf of lies, hypocritical concealments, and false deductions, which is called bourgeois history, or have become a dish but deeply rooted superstition in the minds of those who have information enough to have heard of the Commune, and ignorance enough to accept the bourgeois legend of it as history.

Once more it is our duty to raise the whole story out of these glooms and bringing it to the light of day, so that on the one hand those who are not yet touched by Socialism will see there was a principle which animated those who defended revolutionary Paris against the mingled drags of the woeful period of the Second Empire, and that that principle is still alive today. The Commune was the result of many thousands of workers throughout civilisation, and year by year and day by day is growing in strength and in the hold it has of the disintegrated masses of our false society; and on the other hand that we Socialists may soberly note what went on in this story, and may take both warning and encouragement from its events. I have heard it said, and by good Socialists too, that it is a mistake to commemorate a defeat; but it seems to me that this outlook means looking not at this event only, but at all history in too narrow a way. The Commune of Paris is but one link in the struggle which has gone on through all history of the oppressed against the oppressors; and without all the defeats of past times we should now have no hope of the final victory. Neither are we yet sufficiently removed in time from the events to judge how far it was even possible to avoid the open conflict at the time, or to appreciate the question as to what would have become of the revolutionary cause if Paris had tamely yielded itself up to the perils of Thiers and his allies. One thing, on the other hand, we are sure of, that this great tragedy has definitely and irreversibly elevated the cause of Socialism to all those who are prepared to look on the cause seriously, and refuse to admit the possibility of ultimate defeat. For I say solemnly and deliberately that if it happens to those of us now living to take part in such another tragedy it will be rather well for them than ill for them. Truly it is harder to live for a cause than to die for it, and it injures a man’s dignity and self-respect to be always making noisy professions of devotion to a cause before the field is strained, on which he is to fight in the body. But with the chance of bodily sacrifice close at hand there come also times of trial which either raise a man to the due tragic pitch or cast him aside as a useless and empty vapourer. To use a transparent metaphor, on the march to the field of battle there are a plenty of opportunities for the faint-hearted to fall out of the ranks, and many will do so whose courage and devotion were neither doubted by others nor by themselves while the day of actual battle was far distant. So such times of trial are good because they are times of trial; and we may well think that few indeed of those
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If we consider now the order of heinousness in the respective classes of crimes enumerated, we must admit that the first, those against property, since they spring directly from a rotten economic condition, must be regarded as having a charter specially gravitating towards the most entitled to consideration. It will be scarcely necessary, however, to controvert the absurd notion put forward by a certain section of Anarchists, that the mere individual appropriation of the property of others is a crime—that that property which the Anarchist heroes, Stellmacher and Duvall, has anything whatever to do with Socialism, and the expropriation it advocates. On the contrary, property is of the first importance in all forms of society. The change of individual possession of property does not affect the matter in the least. One can very well exonerate the poor man who steals to satisfy his wants; but when a man who has merely satisfied a personal desire of his own at the expense of another person, seeks to cover this individual act with the mantle of principle, an element of hypocrisy enters into the case which tends considerably to exasperate our opinion of him. Yet, in his case, there can not be an act of devotion to any cause. This, however, by the way. The fact remains that theft and its allied offences are the immediate result of current economic conditions. It is natural that men should seek to obtain the necessaries and comforts of life, legitimately if economic conditions allow them, if not, illegitimately.

The second class of offences named, those connected with sexual matters, from rape onwards, may be viewed from two or three different points of view and are complicated with matters of a very difficult of discussion in a journal—well, not exactly intended for "family reading," for to that level I trust the Commonweal will never sink—but for promiscuous circulation between the sexes. Here, as in the last case, viz., theft or robbery, we must be careful in considering such offences, to eliminate the element of brutality or personal injury which may sometimes accompany them, from the offence itself. How it is that the word of one of the class remains so not so obviously as the last, springs from an instinct legitimate in itself, but which has been suppressed or distorted. The opinions of men of science, modern and ancient, on such matters, are so coloured by the unconscious survival in their minds of sentiments derived from old theological and theosophical views of the universe, that they are not of much value. This is partly the reason, I take it, why there has been so astoundingly little of prostitution on the one side, and so much of the animal craving—lust. Until people can be got to discuss this subject in the white light of physiological and pathological investigation, rather than the dim religious gleam of theological emotion, but little progress will be effected to a due appreciation of the character of such offences referred to.

The two last orders of crime named differ from the preceding, in that they do not have even a basis in natural or social instinct as such. They are, therefore, mere criminal absurdities which have no defence (or under immediate and strong provocation) is purely and simply inhuman—criminal without having any direct palliation in the facts of economic conditions, like crimes against property, or in physiologic conditions, like crimes against the body (such as murder, defence, infanticide). Brutality and cruelty so far outweigh in enormity the last two as to seem almost to swallow them up. For instance, in cases of robbery or murder, there is at least some interest on the part of the personal victim accompanying the substantive crimes which natural conscience, and so, the social conscience, more properly so, although it is the latter of which the bourgeois law primarily takes cognisance. Any crime causing bodily injury or suffering of any sort, we can comprehend as the most deserving of condemnation at the hands of society.

What may be said of false accusation of crime, an offence which is now classed together with others much less serious, under the absurd name of Perjury, the idea being that its gravamen consists not in the injury done to the innocent but in its insult to the majesty of the law. The unpunished vice could scarcely conceive of any crime more monstrous than this, and yet it is one which is frequently passed over lightly, with the view possibly of not discouraging prosecutions and thereby injuring the legal interest. By being classed under the head of perjury we are not far from regarding murder and the more perjury being a thing recognised and practiced in the best social circles, where the co-responder in a divorce case has been committing adultery a whole lifetime, without any regard to the fact.