

THE COMMONWEAL

The Official Journal of the Socialist League.

VOL. 3.—No. 70.

SATURDAY, MAY 14, 1887.

WEEKLY; ONE PENNY.

NOTES ON NEWS.

THE Tory Government, it is generally said, has made a great mistake about the Privilege episode; even their own papers have blamed them for their conduct, and the whole country will endorse that blame. That may be, and certainly such are the tight places into which *stupid* lying leads most commonly. Yet after all the Tory Government is very strong against any mere constitutional attacks. It has a well-grounded confidence in the strength of party feeling, and the very common wish of the flunkey of all classes to vote for "the Gentlemanly Interest," like the innkeeper in 'Martin Chuzzlewit.' And the Liberal Unionists who hold the balance for it, are prepared to wade through any amount of dirt in defence of their "principles." The division on Mr. Gladstone's amendment moving the appointment of a select committee, and that in the teeth of the *Standard's* disapproval, shows that the Government has some reason for its recklessness, and that we shall have a Tory Government in for some time to come—a matter of small importance, since the alternative is a Liberal Government.

To return to the matter of questions in the House. Honourable members are more easily satisfied with the answers given than a believer in the benefits of Parliament would be likely to expect. Take for example Sir H. Holland's answer on May 7 about the flogging in the Hong Kong prison. Considering that we all know how little a Chinaman can live on, and also that of all scoundrelly oppressors the English colonial or crown-colony one is the vilest, does it not seem as if "the reduction of the diet, the existing scale of which was considered excessive"—prison diet excessive—O Lord!—meant an attempt to starve the prisoners to death? Yet the answer was accepted apparently as satisfactory—probably because the same thing is done here at home both in prison and out of it, and no one is called to account for it—not yet.

It doesn't, perhaps, much matter what a bishop says nowadays: yet if a bishop could have any moral sense at all, he might consider the extreme unfairness of telling lies in the pulpit, where he cannot be contradicted, as he might be at a public meeting. A bishop preaching at the Chapel Royal, Whitehall (not a bad place for lies, by the way), the other day, "urged that the logical conclusion of Socialist views would be the practical carrying out of the motto, 'I squeeze all things flat'"—in short, Mr. Bradlaugh's dull level of mediocrity. Now, there is plenty of Socialist literature for the bishop to read, and if he has read it he lied in his statement; if he has not he is an imposter for preaching on a subject of which he is ignorant. Let him take his choice of either horn of the dilemma.

Some of our Socialist friends may have noticed the attempt, which has already partially succeeded, to force the older universities to set up a new "Honour school"—*i.e.*, a new school of competitive examination—in English literature, and may perhaps have wondered why it has been taken up so excitedly by part of the press. The reason is obvious to those who know something of the universities and the higher class of literary hacks: it means the pushing of a great new *job* for all the clan of the log-rollers in literature. The dishonest and conventional twaddle which has been poured on to the public on this subject is thus easily accounted for; as the professional and other hangers-on of capital have an innate sympathy for any one who is job-hunting. All the big-wigs who have written with such portentous solemnity on the neglect of English literature at the universities know perfectly well that English literature is a thing which can be *learned* but cannot be *taught*, as language and the sciences can be; but they will not interfere

with a poor job-hunter who wishes to feather his nest out of those institutions which our forefathers founded for the education of the *people*, but which, like all other expensive things, are now monopolised by the rich classes.

W. M.

COERCION FOR LONDON.

It may be thought that the patriots who are so eager for the unity of the British empire that they want to use artificial means to make it more specially uncomfortable to live in one part of it than it is elsewhere, are taking unnecessary trouble; that the coercionists are such enthusiasts in the art of coercion that they are hunting it when they have already got it.

It is true that there is a pleasure in making a special and blatant demonstration of success, but it is a pleasure that has to be paid for by the opposition that the attempt to make it stirs up. The wise are contented with having the substance and letting the shadow take care of itself, especially if they have to fight for the shadow when they have got the substance peaceably and easily.

One is compelled by recent events to look on the subject from this point of view. Ireland is to have an extra dose of coercion, but London has already got enough for all practical purposes. A Bill is being put forward and opposed, with great fervour on each side, which, when it becomes law, will enable any *two* magistrates in Ireland to sentence any one who is brought before them and whose looks they don't like to six months' imprisonment. In London, any *one* magistrate has already got that power, and is on occasion not ashamed to exercise it.

It is perhaps worth while to tell over again a short story of the manner in which the coercion machine in London is set a-going, as it can be done in so much fewer words than the Langworthy case.

One Sunday there were, as usual, Socialist meetings going on in Hyde Park near the Marble Arch, during and after which various salesmen were proposing, as usual, to sell Socialist papers outside the park (selling inside being forbidden). The police had for some time past hustled and bullied, and even run in, these Socialist salesmen, although the sellers of other newspapers were not interfered with. On the occasion in question, after the Socialist meetings were over, the crowd, much increased by the news of the high-handed proceedings on former Sundays, poured out through the gate close by, being as a matter of course largely composed of mere Sunday strollers attracted to the Socialist platform—non-combatants, most of them, in the battle of opinion between Socialism and Bourgeoisdom. Well, these people, who would else have gone about their business quietly, were immediately set upon by the police *à la* Donnybrook, and a rough-and-tumble ensued, of the kind which the timid citizen of to-day looks at with pleasure—from a window, and in which you may find yourself half-throttled on the way to the police-station without being conscious of what has led you to that expedition, otherwise than that a policeman tried to knock you down and that you tried to stand upright: such an entertainment being obviously a good occasion for any one of an inventive turn to exercise his capacity for romance as a police-court witness.

The result of this police battue was a pretty good bag, although the police acted rather as the foreigner in Leech's woodcuts, who shoots the foxes and the owls instead of the pheasants, and got hold of more of the above-mentioned non-combatants than Socialists. These "rioters" being brought up before Mr. de Rutzen, were prosecuted by the Government jackal Mr. Poland, the farcical nature of whose opening speech no one, now Dickens is dead—more's the pity—need attempt to render.¹ The farce was continued by various policemen giving what is facetiously called "evidence," and more accurately "swearing the leg off an iron pot"; and Mr. Rutzen, in virtue of his position, wound up with the grand joke of the whole entertainment by saying that since Mr. Poland did not press the case as one of riot, he would treat it as a mere assault on the police, and would be so kind as not to send the accused for trial, but would— Fine them 10s. and caution them, thinks the unsuspecting "cultivated" person, rejoicing in the security of property and person in this civilised and "free" country. No—sentence them, two Socialists (one of whom had not been present in Hyde Park) and five non-Socialists, to six months' hard labour!

This was the end of the first act of the farce called "Justice" in this

¹ I don't know, though: the author of 'Cashel Byron,' though he wouldn't do it with the richness of Dickens, might deal with such a case—why doesn't he?

happy land: though such a finish of the Hyde Park Sunday saunter might well be looked on by the luckless persons who were rash enough to try it as a tolerable tragedy in its way.

However, the farce is not done yet. The convicted persons may appeal to a bench of magistrates—if they can. That is, if they have money, or friends with money; otherwise they must bear the six months' torture of an English jail as well as they can: even if they have been convicted of assaulting the police when they were miles from the spot.

Two of the Socialists, our friends Williams and Pole (which last was the absent man), appealed at once and found bail; and two of the non-Socialists subsequently appealed, one of whom, at least, found bail. The other three must lie in prison for six months, unless Mr. Matthews extends his "mercy" to them—(a lawyer's mercy!)

"But why didn't they also appeal?" says the well-to-do inhabitant of a "free" country. Because they must find bail for their appearance at Westminster on July 16th. Not so difficult, you think? Yes, but the bail *must be liable to the expenses of the appeal if it is rejected*, which in plain terms means that if an ordinary working-man is arbitrarily convicted by a magistrate and sentenced to such a terrible punishment as six months' hard labour, no matter how preposterous the behaviour of the magistrate may be, the working-man *cannot* appeal. The rich man *can* defend himself, the poor man *cannot*.

This is the meaning of there being the same law for rich and poor, of justice never being sold in this country, and the like damned hypocritical twaddle. Justice is *always* sold in this country.

The answers to questions asked in Parliament have enriched the farce with other good jokes. Mr. Matthews had the boundless impudence to declare again (for he has done it before) that he did not know what part the Government had taken in the prosecution—he is a useful article at the price certainly!

Mr. Stuart Wortley refined on the Jorkins business in a manner that shows his fitness for office in the most satisfactory manner, and in short, the answers to questions on this matter illustrate the great leading farce of Parliament as well as need be.

It would be unfair also to leave off without complimenting the so-called labour representatives on their "masterly inactivity" in this matter. Years ago, before the possibility almost of labour representatives was thought of, what an advantage their presence in the House would have been considered! What a row one would have thought such men would have made about such treatment as De Rutzen's of men of their own order!—and now, mum is the word. A London middle-class member, Mr. Pickersgill, and a Scotch landowner, Mr. Cunninghame Graham, have taken upon them the duty of Messrs. the Labour Representatives, who should have made the row—such a row that they ought by this time to be all sitting in the Clock Tower.

Space fails me as to the progress of the affair at Kennington, but it is all a part of this same Coercion Campaign; and no doubt it is well thought of by the magistrates to refuse protection to harmless citizens against hired roughs, since all Socialists are not athletes, and there is a double danger in carrying deadly weapons. The preposterous charge against a physically weak man, like our comrade Blackwell, of attacking the police violently, is seemingly the sort of thing that Socialists must expect to meet with at present.

In conclusion, grieved as we must all be at the torture to which innocent men are being subjected, no Socialist can help reflecting that these fools, Matthews, Poland, Warren, and Co., are doing good propagandist work for us. People generally have some idea of fair play, and the spectacle of such blatant injustice as has been recently exhibited, has to my certain knowledge moved to indignation people not particularly favourable to Socialism. It is still more important that the working-classes should have a further instance of what law means under our system—a cunning instrument for the oppression of the poor by the rich.

WILLIAM MORRIS.

THE IRISH QUESTION.

IV.—RENTS, ETC.

MANY people believe that the Land Act of 1881, to at least a great extent, solved the social problem of Ireland. And, indeed, it is difficult to convince them that such is not the case. It is generally thought that when a Bill becomes law that it must and does accomplish all the good predicted of it. But such is not the case. And this will be clearly seen when I come to deal with that measure and the decisions of the courts with regard to improvements.

Another difficulty arises with reference to valuations and rentals. Even Sir James Caird (p. 97) places the rental lower than the valuation. Whereas the rental is far above the valuation. Even King-Harman stated in the House of Commons a few days ago that the valuation settled in 1854 was 25 per cent. below the letting value of the land, the total valuation being stated at £10,182,681. Yet Sir James puts down the rental in 1857 at £8,747,000, and in 1875 at £9,293,000. At the latter date the rental was estimated at over £16,000,000, and in 1879-80 at over £17,000,000. In many cases the rents were more than three times the valuation. Take the following as an illustration, from county Kerry (*Standard*, Nov. 16, 1880):

Landlord.	Tenant.	Valuation.	Rental.
T. Taylor ...	Thomas Gain ...	£7 10 0	£27 0 0
	Phil. Foley ...	10 6 0	37 0 0
	M'Gowen & Sullivan ...	12 9 0	40 0 0
	Peter Leary ...	9 16 0	36 0 0
Four holdings ...		£40 1 0	£140 0 0

Take four more cases of the same date and same authority, Kerry county.

Landlord.	Tenant.	Valuation.	Rental.
E. H. Downing ...	F. Gain ...	£8 8 0	£27 0 0
Rev. G. Godfrey ...	J. Mansfield ...	53 0 0	130 0 0
R. Oldwell ...	P. Warren ...	7 10 0	22 0 0
"	T. Murphy ...	6 10 0	17 0 0
		£75 8 0	£196 0 0

The great rise in rents was from 1870 to 1879. In some cases the rents were more than doubled in seven or eight years. The following will illustrate this:

Parish.	Rental, 1872.	Rental, 1879.
East Ower ...	£57 7 6	£130 3 0
West Ower ...	57 7 6	133 5 0
Laragan ...	26 6 10	65 1 0
Warm Hole ...	28 7 5	62 0 0
Gurthmore ...	48 0 0	98 10 0
Five parishes	£219 9 3	£488 19 2

The *Freeman's* commissioner, in October 1879, gave a list of twelve holdings, the total of the old rent being £486, 15s., and the rents in 1879 being no less than £1158, 17s. 6d.—far above 100 per cent. increase.

But it will be said under the Land Act of 1881 all this has been altered. The evil has been modified, not removed. And when we come to the question of improvements this will be seen. Take also the following, from county Clare:

Clare Co.	Valuation.	Rent, 1879.
A ...	£32 0 0	£84 0 0
B ...	32 0 0	108 0 0
C ...	27 5 0	69 0 0
D ...	27 13 0	54 10 0
E ...	42 0 0	108 0 0
F ...	191 0 0	324 0 0
G ...	160 0 0	450 0 0
H ...	86 0 0	170 0 0
I ...	83 10 0	200 0 0
J ...	78 0 0	160 0 0
10	£759 8 0	£1727 10 0

In consequence of the severe depression in agriculture in 1879, and especially in Ireland, commissioners were sent out by almost every London daily paper, and from their reports samples of rack-renting might be given from every county of Ireland. As a rule, rents were high—double and treble the valuation in the south and the west, while in the north and the east they averaged from 30 to 40 per cent. above the valuation.

It is often contended that the judicial rents are the rents that really ought to be paid; but in most cases the rents as fixed are far above the valuation. Take the following eight cases on estates in Kerry:

Tenant.	Valuation.	Old Rent.	Judicial Rent.
T. O'Sullivan ...	£12 3 0	£20 0 0	£20 0 0
W. Potts ...	10 1 0	17 10 0	15 15 0
Eliza Sully ...	4 12 0	7 10 0	6 7 0
Catherine Coppey ...	16 10 0	30 12 0	25 15 0
John Coppey ...	10 15 0	17 4 0	17 4 0
Tim. Sugren ...	8 8 0	14 5 0	13 5 0

These are tenants of the noble Marquis of Lansdowne. In October 1884 forty-nine tenants of Lord Charles Beresford went to the court and had their rents judicially fixed, and the total reductions averaged 1s. each. We must bear in mind, too, that not one-third of the holdings have yet been dealt with. Taking the Parliamentary Return, 1881, of the different classes of holdings, we find the total 660,185 in number; and taking the return just issued, which brings up the operations of the Land Courts and Civil Bill Courts to March 31 of the present year, the total number of rents fixed was 90,088; the total number settled out of court, 90,134—total, 180,222, leaving over 479,000 yet to be dealt with. Again, out of a total number of applications to the courts, 137,810, 24,728 cases were dismissed, so that it is not every one who applies to the court that gets a judicial rent. Up to the close of 1885 it was calculated that the total reductions averaged about 12½ per cent.; and that the reductions last year averaged nearly 30 per cent.; and that the aggregate of reductions reached £600,000.

How is it then that the Act of 1881 has proved a failure? How is it that the hopes held out by Gladstone have not been realised, that the "Healy Clause" has proved a dead letter? Everything depended on the question of the ownership of the improvements. The Healy clause reads as follows (Sub-section 9 of Clause 8): "No rent shall be allowed or made payable in any proceedings under this Act in respect of improvements made by the tenant or his predecessors in title, and for which, in the opinion of the Court, the tenant or his predecessors in title shall not have been paid or otherwise compensated by the landlord or his predecessors in title." Gladstone, arguing on the great principle involved in the above sub-section in the House, Aug. 9, 1881, said: "The main ground on which I stand is that we do not recognise the principle of compensation by enjoyment for a certain length of time, either as respects the landlord or the tenant. It is much better that those who make the improvements should have the whole benefits of the improvements." A number of test cases were decided, and the decisions of the Courts finally gave the value of almost all the improvements to the landlords. From the *Standard* of October 14, 1881, I take the following as one of the test cases. The tenant claimed £710 as compensation for the following improvements: