

THE COMMONWEAL

The Official Journal of the Socialist League.

VOL. 3.—No. 96.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 1887.

WEEKLY; ONE PENNY.

NOTES ON NEWS.

☞ The Supreme Court of the United States has refused to grant a writ of error in the case of the condemned of Chicago, and as I write there is nothing between them and the gallows except the will of the Governor of Illinois, who can, if he pleases, commute their sentence. The Press is already gloating on the preparations for their slaying with that base pruriency which is one of the most horrible symptoms of the degradation which the criminal law-court brings on civilised humanity. Before the date of this issue of the *Commonweal* the people of America will have decided upon one of the most momentous events in their history. It is a hope against hope that they will yet give themselves a chance of repairing the injustice they have already done to our friends, and that yet some ray of intelligence may pierce to the dull brains of the money-lords there; so I will yet express a hope, so likely to be falsified before this appears in print.

☞ If not, what can one say but that social crimes do of necessity bear their fruits and prepare a natural and inevitable punishment which no constitution or law can bar. I say this to the well-to-do people of America: If you are sure that henceforward the working-men of your country will live placid and happy lives then you need think no more of the murder you have committed; for happy people cannot take vengeance, however grievously they have been wronged. But if it be so with you as with other nations of civilisation, that your workers toil without reward and without hope, oppressed with sordid anxiety for mere livelihood, deprived of the due pleasures of humanity, if there is yet suffering and wrong amongst you, then take heed! increase your army of spies and informers, hire more reckless swashbucklers to do your will, guard every approach to your palace of pleasure without scruple and without mercy—and yet you will but put off for a while the certain vengeance of ruin that will overtake you, and your misery and suffering, which to you in your forgetfulness of your crimes will then seem an injustice, will have to be the necessary step on which the advance of humanity will have to mount to the happier days beyond. You yourselves will have made it necessary by making people unhappy and then punishing them for their unhappiness. You have sown the wind, you must reap the whirlwind.

The shopkeepers in the neighbourhood of Trafalgar Square are once again very angry; and under the very natural impression that the Square belongs to them and no one else, or at anyrate should do so, they are petitioning to prohibit meetings there. Before the meeting at Exeter Hall took place they are reported to have determined that if the request was not acceded to they would take other and more drastic measures for helping themselves. I don't see how they can take more "drastic" measures for helping themselves (to other people's earnings) than they already have taken; but I suppose they mean that they will hire roughs to keep the peace in Trafalgar Square by breaking heads; which may turn out rather a dangerous game for them. Perhaps they will go further, and imitate their brethren on the other side of the Atlantic, and get up another Pinkerton army here; they will find that very convenient no doubt; but it will have the disadvantages of war—in the long run the knocks wouldn't be all on one side.

In the meantime if their businesses have suffered from the meetings of the unemployed, whose fault is it? Whose, but those who raised the ridiculous outcry in the press about the dangerous attitude of the demonstrators, who were perfectly peaceable until they had to defend themselves against the police? Whose but those who hounded on the police against the peaceable people?

And yet it lies deeper than that; if there were no unemployed, no poor in short, there would be no rich shopkeepers dealing in wares that nobody wants, but for which they can manage to teaze a price out of the vacant lives of the rich who live on the labour of others.

However it is not unlikely that this Exeter Hall attack on free speech is part of a regular conspiracy of coercion, which the Government and its allies are on the point of setting on foot, irritated by their disgraces in the Irish campaign. The double arrest of our comrade Allman and the arrest of others points to this; and the morning's paragraph makes it pretty certain that so it is. "It is understood that the matter under discussion [at the interviews between Matthews and Lord Salisbury and Matthews and Warren and Howard] was the measures

which the Government are resolved to take regarding the continued assemblies in Trafalgar Square, and the use of seditious language."

We Socialists will have every reason to thank the Government if they put such a clear and simple issue before us as the freedom of speech, and we believe that we also shall find allies in this case as in the affair of Dod Street. The Tories should remember that what drew that enormous crowd into the streets was the certainty in the public mind that the police had interfered with the meetings not because they inconvenienced the public, but because the authorities did not like the opinions of the speakers at them. Since then, when we have been harassed by the police, we have been informed with all official solemnity that we were brought before the magistrates not for opinion, but for that remarkably elastic offence, obstruction. It will be a good thing if the mask is at last stripped off, and we find ourselves attacked for doing what we *must* do, telling our fellow-citizens the truths we have learned, and urging them to accept their consequences.

At first sight all this fussing and fuming at the peaceful meeting of a few hundred unarmed and unorganised men in the streets seems so cowardly and foolish as to be difficult to understand. But what we have to remember is this. It is not a riot, even a serious one, which the authorities are afraid of; they have ample force to quell it at once; and perhaps would not be sorry to show what organised force could do, and to have an opportunity of striking terror into the hearts of the discontented. It is not what goes on in the open street that is alarming our masters, but what is happening in the workshop, the factory, and the counting-house. The spectre of coming *ruin* is rising up behind the dusky procession of the unemployed, and its "still small voice" is being heard amidst their cries and the answering bluster of the lords of society. Coercion is a good weapon in the hands of a class whose business is going well, and when all is prosperous with it; but then in such times it seldom has to be used, for then the poor are helpless. When the complaint of the poor forces itself on the ears of the rich it is a certain sign that, however unconsciously, they are aiming at better days to come. The Fear of the Rich is the Hope of the Poor.

Our masters are not so much afraid of what their slaves *mean* to do as of what they will be *forced* to do. It was not the hope of the glory of conquest that urged the tribes of the North to fall on the effete Roman Empire, but hunger rather; and so it will be again. And yet in our days when the force behind the workers grows strong enough, their aim will grow clear, because they *are* the workers and must reconstruct as well as destroy; the stir amongst them throughout civilisation is as much a sign of their growing knowledge as of their growing necessity. The Government will do well to put down *sedition*, *i. e.*, the *sowing of revolt*—if it can.

☞ "Bombs have been 'discovered' in Lingg's cell," says an American telegraph, "and a revulsion of feeling has been caused against the condemned men." Indeed! Who put the bombs there? Is this not proof rather of the disgrace of the American capitalists? Does it not make it certain that there was no case against the men when authority is forced to resort to such base and clumsy shifts as this to justify its murder?

☞ Henry George approves of this murder; do not let anybody waste many words to qualify this wretch's conduct. One word will include all the rest—**TRAITOR!!** W. M.

PRISON LIFE IN ENGLAND.

In writing a short account of my experience of prison life, I do so for the purpose of showing my comrades what they may expect when it comes to be their turn to take a holiday in one of "Her Most Gracious Majesty's" country mansions. It is needless for me to explain the crime for which I was sentenced to nine months; let it suffice when I say it was for addressing an unemployed meeting in Norwich on January 14th, 1887. And I may say in passing that I hope my friends and comrades will never waste money by engaging "counsel," commonly called "*bars*," to defend me whenever I may get "run in" again. I was advised in every manner possible to "twist" and "lie" in order to get out of being sent to prison. I called no witnesses, simply because if they had spoken the truth I should have received a