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NOTES ON NEWS.

The swearing-in of the Specials will recall to some of the older amongst us the similar panic caused by the last great demonstration of waning Chartism in 1848. But the rush into the ranks of the amateur police was much more energetic then. A certain amount of fun was poked at these heroes by the *Punch* of the period, which though bourgeois enough was both funnier and less completely flunky than it is now. *E.g.*, one drawing of Leech's exhibited an unhappy little Special about to enter into conflict with a brawny and contemptuous drayman, and fortifying his courage by saying to him: "Now, you know, if I kill you it's nothing; but if you kill me, by George, its murder!"

It is much to be hoped, by the way, that the real police, who, as we have abundance of reason to know, are in a very bad temper, will not vent any of it on their amateur brethren; that they won't look upon them as "knob-sticks" and interlopers; that they won't in consequence hit them a knock on the sly when their badges are not very visible; that they won't detail them for warm corners amongst Socialists and Irishmen, and let them take care of themselves there, to find out by experience that "the policeman's life is not a happy lot." This would be spiteful and unpleasant of them, but so natural, that we are bound to hope that it won't take place.

On the other hand are the special constables all prepared to imitate the conduct of the police, now become so flagrant to all honest people? Is Sir Frederick Leighton going to knock down a woman; to scalp a tottering old man, some relic of '48 perhaps; to beat a man on the ground wherever the baton can be got in when he is held by three or four other defenders of law and order; to thrash a defenceless prisoner in the midst of his foemen; to insult a high-spirited and brave man in the police-cell, and to beat him into senselessness if he retorts by word or look? Because all this is Sir Charles Warren's view of the duties of the English policemen at present, and as long as they have to deal with unarmed men.

I can suggest another course of action which really might come well within the four corners of the oath which these British Lions have to take before they can be trusted with the baton and the badge. How would it be if they were to translate "keeping the Queen's peace" in this way?

"If I see the police attacking a procession of unarmed men going on their lawful errands, even if I don't agree with their political opinions, I shall feel it my duty to take their side and help to defend them from the police.

"If I see a policeman knock down a peaceful defenceless person I shall feel it my duty to arrest him and call on all citizens to help me.

"If any such horrors of cowardice come to my notice as beating and insulting prisoners, either when just taken or (still worse) in the police cell, I will pursue the wretches who practice such shameful atrocities to the utmost.

"If I am told off to prevent the people from making use of their own property, I will not prevent them, but will do all in my power to help them to keep the meeting orderly.

"In short I will do my best to keep the peace and to hinder peace-breakers even if they wear blue coats and numbers."

I offer these suggestions to Sir Frederick Leighton and the other military bourgeois now invested with the badge. But I confess I am afraid that they understand that the Government has called on them to *break* the peace and not to *keep* it. Yet even so I do still call upon them to act according to some of the hints above given. At least let them determine not to strike non-combatants, and not to maul men on the ground or insult helpless prisoners, and so be honourable enemies if they must be enemies. I admit that even if they go so far as this they will run some risk of finding themselves prisoners; for they will be expected to do the worst of all these things. Indeed it is for their own sakes and not for ours that I make this appeal to them; for I cannot think that they will be a very dangerous army. I wish them to spare themselves the dishonour of going down to posterity as the most shameful set of fools and poltroons that have ever disgraced English history—scoundrels as bad as the whores and pimps of Versailles in '71, or the cold and bloodthirsty cheats of Chicago to-day.

As to the professional police, what are we to liken them to? There is a story of the Wars of the Jews, I think in the book of Maccabees, of King Antiochus their great persecutor, and how he made his elephants drunk and then set them on a defenceless crowd. Just so has the Woman-queller Warren made his elephant, the police, drunk, opened the door of its cage, and bid it run amuck; and no doubt, being

a religious man, as I hear, thanks God for the victory thus won. So I think it is not so much the unhappy drunken elephant we can hate, though we must certainly defend ourselves against him, as the king who has set him on—if indeed we can hate even him, a lump of wood and pipeclay, inspired with military duty, so-called, to take the place of intelligence and conscience. How long are we to be forced to bear the dominion of the class which in its turn has made him?

Concerning the sentences of Ingham and Vaughan at their drum-head court-martial—their stupid iniquity; the gross flunkeyism which drew from Mr. Poland an elaborate apology to Mr. Burleigh for the same offence for which Oldland had a year's imprisonment allotted to him; the collapse of the prosecution against Mr. Saunders, and its idiotic comicality—what are we to say of all this, except that it reveals even to the simple and unsuspecting the foundation on which "Society" (so-called) is built—to wit, fraud and brute-force.

Cunninghame Graham has done his utmost to wipe off the reproach of the Radical M.P.'s. His conduct will be long remembered, one would hope, by lovers of freedom; but he must expect for some time to come to be a pariah among M.P.'s. To do him justice he is not likely to care much about that. W. M.

INSURANCE AGAINST MAGISTRATES.

THE meeting held in the Memorial Hall on November 18th will do good service if the protective League inaugurated by it keeps to its promise (as I see no reason for doubting that it will) of helping all persons without distinction of opinion who "get into trouble" in their endeavours to defend freedom of speech. Stewart Headlam in his speech on that occasion said nothing less than the bare truth when he said that no poor man had any chance of obtaining justice in a magistrate's court,—in which, by the way, he would doubtless have included the Middlesex Sessions if he had had any experience of Judge Edlin. No better instance of the necessity of some corporate protection for the victims of the law could be given than what happened on the morning of the meeting, when nine prisoners convicted by Ingham's drum-head court-martial were able to appeal against the unjust and malignant sentences pronounced against them by an ancient piece of incompetence, no doubt inspired by orders from headquarters. I believe none of these poor men would have been able to appeal but for the responsible bail provided for them chiefly through the efforts of Mrs. Besant, whose untiring energy and devotion throughout the whole affair will surely win her a place in the hearts of all working men. It has been stated in these columns before, but may as well be stated again, that no one can appeal from a magistrate's decision unless he can find two sureties who will bind themselves to pay the costs of the appeal if rejected;—where can a poor man find such sureties, who may have to pay £50 in case of failure?

The struggle for mere freedom of speech (whatever it may lead to) will certainly be a long and arduous one. Even the present idiotic Tory Government will not be easy to get rid of; and though it is possible that a Liberal Government would treat us better, at least for a while, because the Liberals may be forced to take the matter up and come in on it, yet such a trifle as a mere change of ministry will not cure the gangrene of the law-courts; nor will it have much influence on the reaction which is obviously setting in and which is the necessary accompaniment to the no less obvious progress of revolutionary ideas. The struggle will be a long one, and must be carried on by us in a manner which will mean steadily and pertinaciously harassing the apparently all-powerful executive on all sides. The League which the *Pall Mall Gazette* has set on foot will, if it performs its functions duly, take up one side of the attack, and will assuredly do good service. All Socialists will be glad to see Mrs. Besant's name on the committee as an earnest of due fulfilment of its promises; and although "votes of thanks" are not in favour amongst us, it would be unfair and ungenerous not to acknowledge the great services which the *Pall Mall Gazette* has done to the popular cause throughout this agitation. Well-to-do people especially should join this League, and help it both with their money, for a good deal of that will be necessary, and also by sending in their names as persons to be relied on for bail and sureties of the prisoners taken in the war for Freedom of Speech.

WILLIAM MORRIS.