

THE COMMONWEAL

The Official Journal of the Socialist League.

VOL. 3.—No. 88.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 1887.

WEEKLY; ONE PENNY.

NOTES ON NEWS.

THE affair at Mitchelstown is bad enough, but just what must be expected; quite apart from any design, from any intention on either side, such wretched murders are sure to spring out of the present state of affairs in Ireland. The people will meet together in spite of the Coercion Act, or even because of it; the police have orders to disperse them on some excuse or other. You can't disperse a gathering of excited men (and women) by mere politeness, and policemen, under the circumstances, knowing their position, don't waste any time in trying to do so, but throw themselves on the crowd, and hustle and hit and knock about in a way that would irritate a crowd of Jobs to resistance; and patient and over-patient Irishmen have shown themselves, the Irish peasant is a traditional hard hitter, and understands hand-play. So the police get their share of knocks, and get driven off perhaps, as on this occasion; and then comes the next act, which is more likely to turn the affair into a tragedy in Ireland than would be the case in a similar affair in England.

For in England, if the police were beaten off the red-coats would come on the stage, if sharp shot and cold steel were to be used or threatened; and as they would be fresh men unexcited by a preliminary contest of dry blows, they would feel their responsibility of firing on an unarmed crowd far more than men who had already come out of a rough and tumble, in which their official pride and *esprit du corps* had been humbled. In Ireland, on the other hand, the event is likely to happen which happened at Mitchelstown; the beaten police come back as soldiers, armed with deadly weapons, to take their revenge on the people, who for their part, unarmed and unorganised, feel the full force of the fierce words of the Gothic King before Rome, when he was warned of the huge mass of people he had to deal with, "The thicker the hay the easier to mow."

And that all the more, by the by, if the police shoot from behind the shelter of their walls, as they did at Mitchelstown.

As to the government that allows this sort of thing to go on, bystanders can see, if they cannot, that they are not strong enough to go in for a series of new Peterloos. Probably the Irish will stand it without breaking out into open insurrection, because, as has often been said before, they have no opportunity of setting a serious rising on foot. But general public opinion in England is not in favour of government by massacre, whatever the passions of a few landowners and their backers may urge them on to. It is not difficult for an English Radical to conceive of himself in a similar position to that of the Irishmen at the Mitchelstown meeting; and he would at least be ashamed of himself if in such a case he had not gone about as far as the Irishmen did in resisting the first attacks of the police; and under the orders which the constabulary now have in Ireland from the government, it seems that murder may be expected to follow the exercise by peaceably assembled citizens of a little manliness in resisting outrage.

But the Government may say: "Did we not pass a Coercion Bill? And does not Coercion mean killing in the long run? What are we to do?" One is driven to answer the last question by saying: "Well, gentlemen, I must say it is difficult to point out to you any course of action which would at once satisfy your desires and ours. Perhaps the least harmful thing you could do would be to hang yourselves. But even then there would still be so many fools left in this country that there would still be a government; and that government, after having performed the deeds of the new broom with applause for some time, would presently be in much the same mess as you are in, or indeed, maybe worse; for it perhaps would not have the Irish Question conveniently at hand to take people's attention off the affairs of the whole working population of these islands."

Meantime, once more the Tory Government will soon find out that a Peterloo policy can only be carried out by the thoroughest of the thorough.

The terrible calamity at Exeter, which has taken up so much of public attention lately, is simply the outcome of the commercial system as applied to the construction of theatres: it is just of a piece with the wreck of a ship sent to sea for profits' sake unseaworthy and under-

handed, or with an explosion in a mine ill-ventilated for the same reason. Profit-grinding has murdered all those unfortunates, just as certainly as it murders thousands every day by the slower death that at every step besets the life of wage-slaves, of those who allow masters to muddle away their lives for them, who allow the hurry and heedlessness of irresponsible gamblers to settle for them how they shall live and how they shall die.

The orthodox Liberal *Daily News* has been rather amusing in its utterances on the Trades Union Congress. It began by an article in which it made what was no doubt intended to be a serious hit at the Socialists: told us that the theory that we hold of the rank and file of the trades' unionists looking doubtfully at their leaders, and beginning to consider their real position, was a delusion; that they were all of the orthodox faith,—and in short, the usual good-boy patronising exhortation. But then came the resolution of the Congress to set on foot a Labour Electoral Committee, and the *Daily News'* good boys had to have a little lecture read to them on their foolishness, in taking this very mild step towards choosing their own "representatives," of separating themselves from "the two great parties."

Not very wonderful if the workmen are at last beginning to find out that the "two great parties" are like "the two great parties" that form up in a field before a football match—to play the game! The only pity is that they do not let them play their game all by themselves, and form their Labour Party without reference to the football-field called Parliament.

Meantime it may be said for the benefit of those readers of the *Daily News* who may also read the *Commonweal* and who do not know much of Socialism, that Socialists are not hostile to trades' unions, but to those who wish to prevent the trades' unions developing with the times. Their real enemies are those who would crystallise them into mere societies for the guaranteeing of the privilege of capitalism, and recruiting grounds for "the great Liberal party"—that is, Whig vote-preservers. This would be an ignominious end to such an important association of workers; but it need not be dreaded. The trades' unions will develop, even if in doing so they have to change their old form and be no longer recognisable by their once enemies, now their anxious allies, the Whig politicians.

WILLIAM MORRIS.

THE TRADES' UNION CONGRESS.

I.

THE twentieth annual Trades' Union Congress met at Swansea on Monday September 5, and continued its sittings daily during the week. 156 delegates were announced as being present, and the number of members of the various societies represented was given as 674,034. This Congress was looked forward to with perhaps greater expectation than on any previous occasion, not only on account of the unstable condition of some of the unions themselves, but also from the severe criticism directed against trades' unionism, both from within and without, as to its inability, in its present form, to adequately cope with the labour problem; and also the hope on the part of many of its friends of seeing some indication of a new departure. Two years ago, the president in his address declared the present to be a critical period for English trades' unions, and that the time had come when they must either lead or follow—they must form the nucleus of the Labour Party of the future, or they must sink into insignificance; and to this those who have been watching the development of the labour struggle must give in their adhesion.

To those who hoped to see any great change the results of the Congress just concluded will probably bring disappointment; but nevertheless, comparing it with previous meetings, there is evidence of considerable advancement, and that the workers are daily becoming better acquainted with the causes of their degradation and are bringing a greater amount of intelligence to bear in their removal.

The first day's proceedings commenced with the now customary welcome by a local dignitary, who in this case was Mr. Yeo, M.P., mayor of Swansea. The only noteworthy points in his speech was his hope that the future choice of men who in the House of Commons shall especially be leaders and representatives of the working classes would be men of the same type and calibre as the present ones—a hope we do not reciprocate—and his opinion that the future prosperity of this