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NOTES ON NEWS.

It is assumed by the speakers at a party meeting that the audience will stand anything, partly because as a rule if they are thorough partisans they only listen to certain party catch-words and cheer them; but in one of Mr. Balfour's late speeches he must have tried the "thorough" party quality of his friends somewhat, and probably rather disappointed them, in spite of the loud and prolonged cheering which followed the remark, which we may assume was caused by the fact that the Under-Secretary spoke loud at this point of his speech.

Said Mr. Balfour: "If it were true that the Union could only be maintained by taking away the civil rights of the Irish people, by putting in prison people who are innocent, by attacking those who are guilty of no other offence than that of differing from us in political opinion, I would not lift a hand to maintain the Union. I would rather that it were sacrificed, and that the greatness of this Empire were sunk in the dust, than that we should soil our hands by the political methods of which we are accused by our political opponents! *But it is not true.*"

How is that for high? One can imagine the fervour with which this flower of rhetoric was fired off at the heads of the Tory audience, and no wonder that they cheered. But on the whole it was probably *not* so much because Mr. Balfour spoke loud that he was cheered, but because his audience must have felt that they had come to the climax of the entertainment, and that no bigger lie could be told them that day. What Mr. Balfour says he would *not* do under any circumstances is an accurate description of what he *has* done.

After all, why should Mr. Balfour be so earnest in disclaiming his acts, or trying to put another colour on them? It is his business as an officer of the Executive of our "Society" to put his enemies in prison, and the legal accusation to be brought against them is a very insignificant detail of the matter. They are his enemies, that is enough.

In fact, all this business of careful discrimination between "crime" and "political offences" and the like is beside the question. What Mr. Balfour does with his Irish enemies "Society" in general does with its enemies, only with far more cant and hypocrisy, since it feels itself safe in the absence of responsibility which its corporate quality gives it; and no doubt decent people are apt to feel as Mr. Balfour feels about Mr. Mandeville and others, that if they suffer in the process of slow torture, and sometimes die of it and sometimes go mad of it, so much the worse for them; that comes of their being our enemies.

For instance, when Judge Stephens the other day gave four lads fourteen years each for an act of brutality and robbery committed against an old woman, whatever enjoyment he might have had in the surprise of his victims, and the shrieks of their female relatives, which the reporter tells us rang through the Court, all that was by the way. As a judge (apart from the fact of his being Stephens) he had to make the accused feel that they were enemies, and were going to suffer the "woe to the vanquished," which is so old a story. It was not the brutality which he was set to punish, but the inconvenience to that abstraction, "Society," in which things are everything, persons are nothing, and to which Balfour sacrificed so recklessly in that prize lie of his.

Can we venture to hope that when the Irish have got Home Rule, and before they have attained to social freedom, the memory of Balfour's prison and its tortures and injustices will make the then rulers of Ireland inconsistently merciful to those other enemies, the enemies of "Society," who may come under their hands, that they will rather remember the suffering inflicted on persons, than the damage done to things? We can almost hope that it will be so with such a quick-witted and impressionable people, and that during the space that intervenes between the attainment of Home Rule, and the realisation of True Society, Ireland will be noted for the lightness of its sentences on "criminals."

The Foresters have given a snub to American exclusiveness as to colour by cancelling the Constitution of the subsidiary High Court of the United States, which refused to withdraw the exclusive word "White" which had been put into the clauses of its rules. This decision and the enthusiasm with which it was done are creditable to the Foresters; but are they going to stop at condemning the exclusion of "men of colour" from the advantages of Society? Won't they now protest in some form against the exclusion of "men of labour" from these advantages? Surely this is their business if nothing else is.

Lord Salisbury has had at the Mansion House the usual opportunity of uttering a manifesto on behalf of the Ministers, if they have one to utter, and in any case of blowing their trumpet before the fools who allow themselves to be governed by them. His speech was not surprising, but it is worth noting as giving a fair summing-up of the aspirations and covert fears of the stupider part of the middle-classes, of whom Lord Salisbury, in spite of his surface cleverness, is a good representative.

He plumed himself on the passing of that piece of humbug, the Local Government bill, and had the effrontery to hope that it would be *final*. In dealing with the matter of Ireland he had the further effrontery to hint (he durst not do more) that the opposition of the Irish was slackening. He said that the disease of Ireland was its poverty; and surely he might have added of England also, or else it is a delusion that the Government has been driven to hold a Commission on the sweating system (in London not in Ireland) and the resistance of the match-girls to the horrible shabbiness of the pious Bryant and May, and their poor little gain is a dream. He crowed over the diminution of boycotting in Ireland: but we Socialists can answer for it that it has not diminished in England; only here it is the boycotting of the oppressed by the oppressors and not of the oppressors by the oppressed. The hymn that he sung to the sacredness of "free" contract no doubt was echoed in the breasts of his hearers, who rejoiced in believing that heaven would never sanction the abolition of *their* monopoly.

Then came his own subject, foreign affairs: "Popular passion or popular feeling" may "drive the vast force of nations" into war, "but the object of the rulers of the world is to secure uninterrupted peace." This seems intended as an insult to the people; but he is not thinking of them; his "popular feeling" one can see means the feeling of the bourgeoisie only—the others—what others are there to this most noble man? For the rest he is right; "popular passion," *i.e.* the necessities of the competitive market may bring on war, and most bitterly will "the rulers of the world" regret that they cannot help it, for who knows but that "the popular passion" of the real people may then change the aspect of affairs.

Egypt, he said, is happy; that is, its accursed exploiters are: "it is going on up to and beyond the utmost wishes we can have formed?" Yes, and what wishes can its luckless peasants have formed? I fear not much. I am sure that though Lord Salisbury has heard of them, he only thinks of them as a fact in the lump, and has practically entirely forgotten that this fact is composed of many thousand persons, each one of whom is a sufficiently complex fact in himself or herself. He said also that it was not the annexation of territory (in Egypt) that was desirable. Just so. To sneak a thing is much more convenient than boldly robbing it: besides, we have done that already: why steal it twice?

But enough about this grievous twaddle! The real thing to note in it is the complete ignoring of all but the middle-class and its rulers: the Marquis sneers at that middle-class, as his hereditary position and politics compel him to do; but he is devoted to its interests, is its faithful servant; is, in spite of his sneers, an integral part of it, a result of its holy dogma of "free contract." Below that he knows of nothing but a machine which sometimes creaks inconveniently.

The *Daily News* says that the strike in Paris is a political one: that means in other words that the Paris workmen understand by this time

what their true position is; that it is not a mere rise of wages that they need, but a change in the basis of Society. The *Daily News* further opines the strike and the "riot" (*i.e.* the police attack on the citizens) at the funeral of Eudes are the results of Boulangerism—cause and effect with a vengeance! If the *Daily News* goes on like that it will presently credit the General with being the cause of the Revolution of 1798—or in the long run of Noah's Flood. There is abundance of cause for a "political strike" or an insurrection in Paris as in London. Slavery is cause enough for any amount of "disturbance"; and we need not go from the grimly sublime to the loathsomely ridiculous by picking Boulanger out of the mud in order to account for it. After all, herein the *Daily News* is like Salisbury and ignores all classes but the Bourgeois, and thinks Society is composed of that—plus unreasonable, inscrutable disturbances.

W. M.

THE REVOLT OF GHENT.

(Concluded from p. 250.)

FROISSART goes on:—

"In the mean time that the Earl was at his lodging, and sent forth the clerks of every ward from street to street, to have every man to draw to the market place, to recover the town. The Ghentois pursued so fiercely their enemies, that they entered into the town with them of Bruges; and as soon as they were within the town, the first thing they did, they went straight to the market place, and there set themselves in array. The Earl then had sent a knight of his, called Sir Robert Marshall, to the gate, to see what the Ghentois did; and when he came to the gate, he found the gate beaten down, and the Ghentois masters thereof: and some of them of Bruges met with him and said, 'Sir Robert, return and save yourself if ye can, for the town is won by them of Ghent.' Then the knight returned to the Earl as fast as he might, who was coming out of his lodging a horseback, with a great number of cressets and lights with him, and was going to the market place; then the knight showed the Earl all that he knew; howbeit, the Earl, willing to recover the town, drew to the market place; and as he was entering, such as were before him, seeing the place all ranged with the Ghentois, said to the Earl, 'Sir, return again; if we go any farther, ye are but dead, or taken with your enemies, for they are ranged on the market place, and do abide for you.' They showed him truth. And when the Ghentois saw the clearness of the lights coming down the street, they said, 'Yonder cometh the Earl, he shall come into our hands.' And Philip van Artevelde had commanded, from street to street as he went, that if the Earl came among them, that no man should do to him any bodily harm, but take him alive, and then to have him to Ghent, and so to make their peace as they list. The Earl, who trusted to have recovered all, came right near to the place whereas the Ghentois were. Then divers of his men said, 'Sir, go no farther, for the Ghentois are lords of the market place and of the town; if ye enter into the market place, ye are in danger to be slain or taken: a great number of the Ghentois are going from street to street, seeking for their enemies: they have certain of them of the town with them, to bring them from house to house, where as they would be: and sir, out at any of the gates ye cannot issue, for the Ghentois are lords thereof; nor to your own lodging ye cannot return, for a great number of the Ghentois are going thither.'

"And when the Earl heard those tidings, which were right hard to him, as it was reason, he was greatly then abashed, and imagined what peril he was in: then he believed the counsel, and would go no farther, but to save himself if he might, and so took his own counsel: he commanded to put out all the lights, and said to them that were about him, I see well there is no recovery; let every man depart, and save himself as he may. And as he commanded it was done: the lights were quenched and cast into the streets, and so every man departed. The Earl then went into a back lane, and made a varlet of his to unarm him, and did cast away his armour, and put on an old cloak of his varlet's, and then said to him, 'Go thy way from me, and save thyself if thou canst, and have a good tongue, an thou fall in the hands of thine enemies; and if they ask thee anything of me, be it not known that I am in the town.' He answered and said, 'Sir, to die therefore, I will speak no word of you.'

"Thus abode there the Earl of Flanders all alone; he might then well say that he was in great danger and hard adventure, for at that time, if he had fallen in the hands of his enemies, he had been in danger of death: for the Ghentois went from house to house, searching for the Earl's friends; and ever as they found any they brought them into the market place, and there without remedy, before Philip van Artevelde and the captains, they were put to death;¹ so God was friend to the Earl, to save him out of that peril; he was never in such danger before in his life nor never after, as ye shall hear after in this history.

"Thus about the hour of midnight the Earl went from street to street, and by back lanes, so that at last he was fain to take a house, or else he had been found by them of Ghent; and so as he went about the town he entered into a poor woman's house, the which was not meet for such a lord; there was neither hall, palace, nor chamber; it was but a poor smoky house; there was nothing but a poor hall, black with smoke, and above a small plancher, and a ladder of eight steps to mount upon; and on the plancher there was a poor couch, where as

the poor woman's children lay. Then the Earl sore abashed and trembling at his entering said, 'O good woman save me; I am thy lord the Earl of Flanders; but now I must hide me, for mine enemies chase me, and if ye do me good now, I shall reward you hereafter therefor.'

"The poor woman knew him well, for she had been often times at his gate to fetch alms, and had often seen him as he went in and out a-sporting; and so incontinent as hap was she answered; for if she had made any delay, he had been taken talking with her by the fire. Then she said, 'Sir, mount up this ladder, and lay yourself under the bed that ye find thereas my children sleep.' And so in the mean time the woman sat down by the fire with another child that she had in her arms: so the Earl mounted up the plancher as well as he might, and crept in between the couch and the straw, and lay as flat as he could; and even therewith, some of the ritters of Ghent entered into the same house, for some of them said, how they had seen a man enter into the house before them; and so they found the woman sitting by the fire with her child; then they said, 'Good woman, where is the man that we saw enter before us into the house, and did shut the door after him?' 'Sirs,' quoth she, 'I saw no man enter into this house this night; I went out right now and cast out a little water, and did close my door again; if any were here, I could not tell how to hide him; ye see all the easement that I have in this house; here ye may see my bed, and here above this plancher lieth my poor children.' Then one of them took a candle and mounted up the ladder, and put up his head above the plancher, and saw there none other thing but the poor couch, where her children lay and slept; and so he looked all about, and then said to his company, 'Go we hence, we lose the more for the less; the poor woman saith truth, here is no creature but she and her children'; and then they departed out of the house: after that there was none entered to do any hurt. All these words the Earl heard right well where he lay under the poor couch: ye may well imagine then that he was in great fear of his life: he might well say, I am as now one of the poorest princes of the world, and might well say, that the fortunes of the world are nothing stable; yet it was a good hap that he scaped with his life; howbeit, this hard and perilous adventure might well be to him a spectacle all his life after, and an ensample to all other."

If you are anxious about the fate of the Earl, I may tell you that he escaped. For my part, I have always felt more anxious for the fate of the poor woman and her children, and can only hope that they came to some good by the wild changes that were going on round about them, though, alas! I doubt it; and I ask you to look upon them as a kind of symbol of the lowest order of the people; of the proletariat, of which in the Middle Ages we know so little, and of which in modern times there are many people who would be pleased to know nothing, but whom we have got to look on now as the friends who are to turn war into peace and grudging into goodwill.

The Ghentmen bore their victory well; there was no pillage of Bruges, and they took pains to distinguish friend from foe, sending, indeed, five hundred of the notablest burgesses as hostages to Ghent, and levelling the walls, but doing no more harm there to persons and things.

Almost all Flanders fell to the victors at once; and if the Flemish victory had happened twenty years before, it is probable that Philip van Artevelde might have ruled Flanders longer than his father did. But while the craft-gilds and the emancipated serfs were growing in wealth and prosperity, and the former at least into corruption, the spirit of monarchical bureaucracy was growing also, and had to hold out a hand to the corruption within the crafts in order to make an end of the communistic spirit which had sustained itself throughout the earlier period of their struggle, while the workman were all real workmen. Once again it is clear to me that the presence in our history of the great burgesses who led this revolt, their power and riches are signs that the corruption of the gilds had begun: and in no case could a true social revolution have been won in the Flemish mediæval cities. The valour and conduct of the gildsmen of Ghent was indeed a link in the revolution of the middle class whose final triumph is so recent, and they could no more have sustained a set of quasi-republican municipal republics lying between Germany and France, than the Jacobins of the French Revolution could have sustained their ideal republic of property for some, happiness, peace, and virtue for all, as a result of the ultimate corruption and fall of feudal privilege.

Yet the extinction of the revolt of Ghent is a sad story, and I will hurry through it in a few words.

I have said that in better times Ghent might have held her own for long: Van Artevelde was undoubtedly a man of conduct or something more: an alliance with the English king and some yielding to the French one, might have staved off war and ruin. But England was tired of the French war, a fool sat on her throne, surrounded by factious nobles; and above all, her gentlemen had just been terrified themselves by the peasant revolt, to which this one of Ghent was clearly akin: no effective English alliance was to be had. As to France, apart from the jealousy of neighbours, Paris also had been alight while Ghent was burning, and the Host of the Mallets had driven away king and court to Meaux in Brie. It was time, thought the French king, that gentlemen should help gentlemen; so a huge French army took the field, and the fatal day of Rosebeque, where twenty-five thousand Flemings and their leader Van Artevelde were slain, extinguished the sovereignty of Ghent for ever. This took place in November 1382.

Peter du Bois had his usual luck, though, and escaped the slaughter of Rosebeque. Entering into Ghent he found the gates open and the people too much dismayed to make any defence; but a few words from

¹ Later on Froissart gives us quite another account of the behaviour of the Ghentois, and tells that they acted with great moderation.