

# THE COMMONWEALTH

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### NOTES ON NEWS.

MR. GLADSTONE'S answer to the unemployed was, I suppose, what the writers of the vague and quite desperately polite letter to him expected. If they did not expect such an answer they should have written a less vague letter to him, in which case they would have had no answer at all, or a very curt one. After all, the answer drawn from that venerable dodger is meant to amount to little more than staining white paper with a black pattern. There is, however, something more in it, which may fairly be translated from Gladstonian into English thus: "Unemployed, what should I know about them? They are not my business. Parliament might—but no, they have something better to do than bothering themselves about the poor of London. So look here! I will call it 'local' matter just to make you know your proper places."

The old gentleman has either quite made up his mind to ignore the fact that there are people who are discontented with the present state of society, and have learned by study of their own dreary conditions of life to know *why* they are discontented, and *how* they can alter the said dreary conditions; or else (and that really seems to me possible) he is genuinely quite ignorant of what Socialism is, and what its claims are.

One thing the unemployed may be quite sure of, to wit, that the governing classes are quite determined to do nothing for the workmen out of work except at the expense of the workmen in general. They would not if they could, and they cannot if they would, as long as the present system, that of capitalist and wage-earner, lasts. It is true that some Government, Tory-Democrat or Radical-bitten-by-Socialism, may make a show of it in a desperate attempt to win popularity, but all they can do as long as "society" is owned by the monopolists, is to shift the burden from one group of workers to another. Unless competition keeps down the wages of the mass of the employed to a bare subsistence wage, the capitalists of the country will be "ruined," that is, will cease to employ; and this glorious arrangement can only be kept going by dint of the capitalists holding in hand a large reserve army of labour. As that is absorbed into the active ranks of labour, the capitalists will be driven to fresh marvels of organisation, and fresh machinery to cheapen "muscular labour" still more, and so remain masters of the situation.

The other day we had news that at Zanzibar, which for 25 years had been free from capital punishment (*alias* judicial murder), the Sultan had begun to imitate the foul deeds of English and American courts of "justice" by striking off the heads of four of the "natives." Great indignation was expressed in our papers about this outrage, and surely this anger was but due against the wretched tyrant who was such a fool as to copy the customs of civilisation.

But what now? Who is the civilised English Government copying now?—Zenghiz Khan or Tamerlane? Scarcely even these; for these destroyers had their ideas stirred and their blood heated by the atmosphere of personal war and violence in which they lived, and at worst they were no hypocrites. But our black-coated, smug-visaged, dinner-party-giving, go-to-church "scourges of God," who have not even the spirit to plead for themselves that they *are* curses and must act after their kind, who can one liken them to? For the sake of what one cannot even call a whim—for the sake of one knows not what, they must slaughter a number of innocent persons whom they are pleased to call "the enemy."

Consider too that this Massacre of Suakim, whatever the Gladstonian party (equally guilty with the others) may say, will be heartily applauded by the average Englishman. Nay, it will be considered by the politicians who are now governing us as a stroke of good luck which will help to stay their failing fate, and will probably win them a seat or two of those that are agoing in the electoral scramble. This is the morality of the English nation, of which we have heard so

much! Indeed, I admit that it is caused more by rank stupidity than by malicious scoundrelism; though there is an element of that in it also.

"The enemy"—Yes; if they are the enemies of such a nation as ours there must be some good in them I think, since commercial patriotism has brought us to this pass. Yet, indeed, once more it is no great wonder that the rich men who are callous to the murder of misery at home should be callous to the murder of battle abroad.

A meeting of the unemployed held some days ago, at which a resolution was passed calling on the Government to set on foot relief works, was stated by Reynolds to have been held under the auspices of the Socialist League. By the instruction of the Council, the Secretary wrote to disclaim this, as the Socialist League holds that the present system necessitates the existence of an army of unemployed, and that no palliative will get rid of it; and that any attempt that a capitalist government might make to satisfy the claims of the unemployed would mean nothing more than helping labour at the expense of labour. This disclaimer was accompanied by the Manifesto on the subject published by the Council, Oct. 29, 1887; but we are sorry to say Reynolds has not inserted the letter, and thereby has refused to correct its inaccurate statement. W. M.

Mr. Gladstone seems rather sore on the subject of election promises. No wonder; no gentleman seeking the suffrages of the "free and independent electors" has made more, which he has unfortunately been unable to keep. The references to the past labours of the Liberal party, "during the last fifty years, in setting free both capital and handicrafts of all kinds both from much undue taxation and from restraints devised for the benefit of special interests at the cost of the people at large," might form a subject for laughter to the gods.

"These efforts," the honourable gentleman further informs us, "have resulted, not in a uniform, but in a very general and a large improvement of the condition of the working community." What! are there, then, no sweaters' dens? no women compelled to sell themselves for a night's lodging? no East-end filled with swarming misery? How is it, then, that with all these beneficent labours of the Liberal party that in this great city alone there are 179,000 starving men crying for "work or bread"? Here are some questions for Mr. Gladstone to answer.

But "the cares and labours of the House of Commons embrace the whole empire." That is, our capitalist masters are too busy butchering "blackmen" to trouble themselves with "a case of local even though acute distress." Is this so, Mr. Gladstone? Well, the "local though acute distress" may trouble the House of Commons if it does not take care, for the day will come when the starving will resolve to starve no longer. Then the House of Commons and respectable politicians may look out for squalls.

What a sham is capitalistic philanthropy, whether it finds expression in charity mongering or in the mild State Socialism of the modern Act of Parliament! Some time ago there was a great fuss made concerning a new Act of Parliament which, according to its admirers, would protect the poor man's small belongings from the clutches of the rapacious house-farmer.

Would you be surprised to hear that this Act is a complete sham? At Marylebone Police-court last Monday, Thos. George, a broker, was summoned before Mr. De Rutzen for seizing the tools and bedding of a poor tenant contrary to this Act. It appears, however, from Mr. De Rutzen's decision that a bedstead is not "bedding," and also that if a landlord openly defies this Act of Parliament he incurs no penalty by so doing. Delightful, isn't it? I wonder if a man who did not belong to the propertied classes helped himself to anything that wasn't lawfully his own, whether the law could find no punishment for him? But against the propertied classes law is powerless. It was only instituted to keep their slaves the workers in want and misery.

D. N.