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NOTES ON NEWS.

MR. COMMISSIONER KERR deserves to be long remembered for the language of his sentence on our friend Gough. Mrs. Gamp at her best could hardly have achieved a greater success than this remarkable production: that is, as regards its manner: as to its matter, Mr. Commissioner Kerr finds it extraordinary that anyone, still more several persons, could be found to swear that the police were—well, mistaken—in asserting that the prisoner committed an assault on a constable's—helmet. Amazing indeed that any citizen should venture on such boldness as flying in the face of police evidence after all that has passed during the last three months! I remember being rather surprised when a policeman who shoved me in the Thames Street Police-court swore that I hit him; but I was not much alarmed, because I thought that a serious citizen's word would weigh at least as heavily as that of an excited policeman. We have changed all that now, and witnesses who contradict police evidence had better nerve themselves against indictment for perjury.

At the same time our comrade Gough must be congratulated for not being tried by Edlin, who would probably, after praising him for his good character and admonishing him for his rashness, have given him six months. Considering the times we are in, he probably thinks himself lucky in getting off with a month for *not* hitting a policeman. Great are the blessings of law and order certainly, yet it is now as in the days of David, "The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel."

This morning (Feb. 18th) the Government of the British Islands won a great and notable victory: the friends of two citizens who had been imprisoned for trying to speak on a piece of public land proposed to meet them and greet them at a tolerable early hour as they came out of prison, the hour being the usual time for such release and at which it was announced that they would be released. By a stupendous exertion of strategy the prison officials thrust out the prisoners an hour and a half before the appointed time, so that many of the friends aforesaid missed seeing the prisoners, and, triumph of triumphs, John Burns had to wait about the neighbourhood of the prison for his wife for some time! Such preposterous shabbiness shows how low prison life will bring the officials connected with it: the poor devils have to spend their days in carrying out the multitudinous petty tortures of the place, whose aggregate makes up a severe torture enough, and one can scarcely wonder at any shabbiness that they may perpetrate. But just to think of all the elaboration of officialism, the wheels within wheels, the whole force of army, navy, and police, not to mention the judges, lawyers, etc., brought to bear upon such a shabby little trick! For indeed it takes all that to do it.

Ireland has carried the day in eloquence at least, and the speech of William O'Brien will be long remembered as a mark in the record of her rebellion. Mr. Balfour must receive the kind of praise for moral courage and self-restraint for not answering him the same evening, which a duellist does who manages to walk away from the field of honour without drawing his sword; it was almost *too* courageous. Doubtless he thought it well to wait till the effect of O'Brien's speech had worn off a little, but the alternative was not very happy after all, and the effect of O'Brien's speech remains.

The Liberals have at last won an undoubted victory in the big majority in Southwark; but the big majority still remains against them in the House of Commons, and they may chasten their exultation by remembering that Disraeli pulled the string of the shower-bath upon him owing to the encouragement which the Southwark bye-election of that year gave him.

In any case how will they spend the time between the time of the hope of office and its fulfilment? Probably in thinking of nothing political except electioneering; as for other matters they will go on hoping that "things will come round and be all square." If they were wise (as they are not), they would reflect that though the relief from the very worst to something not quite so bad will give them a chance of popularity, yet the present period of resolute government has bred discontent that is gathering hopes and ideas, and that a com-

promise with the Irish demands, followed by masterly inactivity, will not satisfy those hopes or smother the ideas; so that they also will have their own crop of discontent to deal with.

The reception of the prisoners of liberty on the evening of the 18th was most enthusiastic, and the meeting was in every way remarkable. It is needless to say that both Burns and Graham spoke heartily and to the purpose, though their voices had been thinned down by "prison discipline." Mr. Blane, M.P. (condemned to four months for the usual "crime"), made a very favourable impression on the meeting by a speech full of friendliness and good feeling, which was far more advanced and less national than the conventional Irish member's speeches are wont to be. The tremendous cheers that greeted him on rising, however, were obviously given to him as a rebel. It is worth noting also that while the cheers for the rebels, both Irish and English, nearly took the roof off the hall, Mr. Gladstone's name was only cheered by a small minority of those present, and that when the said minority seemed inclined to persist an ominous booning arose, which did not cease till the cheering ceased.

The meeting held on Monday to welcome Graham and Burns was a very remarkable one, and in most respects very satisfactory. But whatever differences of opinion there might be between different sections of the audience, some of them need reminding that a meeting assembled to defend freedom of speech should allow a hearing to any one who may differ from them, and that though they had a right to express their disapprobation of Hyndman's speech, they had no right to prevent other people hearing him. For the rest the fact to which he drew attention was obvious enough; it would have been strange indeed if the meeting had separated without noting that the Liberal and Radical members were conspicuous for their paucity,—if nobody had called attention to the conspiracy of silence on the part of the orthodox party (which aspires to be popular) on the subject of the Tory dragooning. Hyndman's indignation was felt by many other persons who had no opportunity of expressing it. W. M.

The reported secret understanding between this country and Italy, by which Lord Salisbury is said to have pledged the English navy to defend the Italian Court in the event of war, is, if true, as fraught with import for the fortunes of the Government as the Coercion Act itself. Should war break out, and France be involved, as she probably would be in the long run, the Briton might easily find the second navy in the world arrayed against him, and French gunboats and ironclads in unpleasant proximity to his "island home." A French invasion in the shape of a landing is a thing hardly to be thought of, but it is by no means unlikely that open coast towns like Brighton or even Liverpool might receive a few shells, sufficient in any case to make the "brass-headed jewesses" of the Queen of Watering-places and the self-made men of the northern metropolis feel a little queer. They doubtless only require to realise this fact in order to discover that a change of administration is indispensable to the interests of the country. E. B. B.

PRISONERS FOR LIBERTY.

THE days of receptions here in England are only just beginning. We have had a whole week of them, beginning with Sullivan and O'Brien, and ending with Burns, Graham, Culwick, Leggett, and others. The gathering together of thousands of workers to greet them is a greater assurance that their labours are appreciated than the presentation of any number of illuminated addresses by political hacks ever could be.

There has been a most remarkable oneness of purpose about these magnificent demonstrations. Cunninghame Graham, on Saturday night "called upon every man, whether he called himself Radical, Socialist, Liberal, Communist, or even Tory, to take his part in the great Battle of Freedom which had commenced." And such an heterogeneous body as this has been fired with one purpose (the last-named element perhaps only to a very small extent)—the determination to secure, if not that full freedom for which Socialists labour, at any rate that out of which it must grow, namely freedom of assembly and freedom of speech.

Burns, Graham and others, have attempted to secure this small measure of freedom, and for so doing have been sent to prison, one of them with his skull cracked. Monstrous as this is, we are reminded