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NOTES ON NEWS.

GLADSTONE-WORSHIP is well on now among the faithful of the Liberal party, and is carried to such lengths that one cannot help thinking that some of the party must have doleful forebodings as to its future when their god takes his departure from the earth. What will be left of Liberalism when this one old man has gone; with his astonishing physical vigour, his belief in himself, his capacity of shutting his eyes to everything that his momentary political position forbids him to see, and his keen delight in playing the political game?

However, at present, there seems little need for us to speculate on what is to happen after him, and one is tempted to think that he may out-live the present political and social system now growing so crazy. May it be so!

His Dover speech will be thought a fine specimen, I suppose, and indeed it was brisk and combative enough from his own point of view, though he announced his intention of fighting after the fashion of the pre-Napoleonic generals and keeping all rules of the game: he boasted of his doing so in the Jingo period and chuckled over the result. Well, his soft fighting was discouraging enough in those days, but after all it was perhaps good enough for the occasion, for the Jingo and Dizzy at their head, never intended to go to war; they only meant bragging—I admit that we didn't know it at the time.

After all this rhetorical oracle of the Liberal Idol, in spite of all its words, was as far removed from any practical and social aspect of things as if it were delivered in another planet: except perhaps when he touched on the Protection v. Free Trade matter, he didn't talk about what people are *thinking* about, but what they are *talking* about, and indeed that is usual with him, and with all popularity hunters: because by the time a thing has become generally talked of the thinkers have got to the next subject.

The Tories have been trying a little "dishing" in Ireland, to see if it may count for a make-weight against their "resolute" Government there; they have reduced the judicial rents in the teeth of Lord Salisbury's declaration that they were to be considered fixed. The result of their experiment is not encouraging at present; the Nationalists do not accept it as a blessing, very naturally, looking at it as at once a blow at the Plan of Campaign and a base plagiarism on it; and the Loyalists also very naturally are in a fury at it, and are pulling themselves together to claim compensation from the British taxpayer, which indeed Lord Salisbury promised them. If he redeems his promise the Tories had best arrange for the fresh varnishing of the opposition benches for their behoof.

This matter is a fresh example of the slippery muddle which our present system of property always makes; it allows a privileged class to rob the people of the means of production, asserting in high words and hard deeds "the rights of property," and then from time to time takes arbitrarily from one group or another of the privileged some small portion of the plunder it has allowed them and encouraged them to acquire; and all the while, whatever it does, insists at least upon this, that there shall always be a class of hewers of wood and drawers of water to be benefitted by this—Socialism as some sanguine people are pleased to call it.

The death of John Frost in Pentonville prison is one of those events which would let in a little light on the public as to the prison system and its administration, if people were really trying to see; but probably as it is there will be little learned by it. An obviously sick man is condemned to 20 months' imprisonment, and when he gets to the prison is treated as if he were not sick but shamming; but at last "shams" so persistently that he is clearly at the point of death, when he is taken to the prison hospital and "treated kindly," but carries on his "shamming" till he dies. No one who knows anything about our prisons can doubt that this kind of thing is common enough; only the victims don't always die in prison.

It speaks volumes for the way in which the prison officials treat the

luckless men who have fallen into their power, that the wife after "trying to see the governor and being told that he was away," in addressing herself to one of the nurses, "*softened her communication* as much as possible, so that matters might not be made worse for her husband." And that the prisoner told her "to make no complaint to the prison authorities lest he should fare worse in consequence." Do smug moral well-to-do persons, who have little more chance of going to prison than they have of being made kings, understand what that means? It is time that they should learn this amongst other pieces of knowledge, in order that they may understand what class-hatred means and what it may lead to.

W. M.

Thos. Ansell, of Deptford, 88 years old, and his wife, who was 77, were very obstinate people who would not go to "the palatial dwelling miscalled a workhouse," because of the inhuman treatment they knew awaited them. Rather than be put asunder after 56 years of love and mutual aid by the red-tape of Bumbledom, they kept on battling against increasing infirmity until they could do no more. Then "the parish" gave them "outdoor relief."

The two poor old people were accorded the princely sum of 3s. 6d. per week, out of which they had to pay 2s. rent and "live" on the balance. Ansell is dead of hunger and cold, and his brave old wife is undergoing at last the torture she avoided so long—the slow death of the workhouse. Such things add a bitter point to Cardinal Manning's attack on the present method of "relief."

Day after day, as we have been reading on the one hand of great feasting by the fortunate, and also of their loudly-vaunted "charity" to their more hapless fellows, so on the other hand have come reports of deaths from hunger, and horrors unspeakable, the fruit of poverty and degradation. At no time is the baleful effect of the present system shown so clearly as at periods like that just past, which custom has decreed a festival-tide. But the time passes by, and the lesson is unlearnt, or if learnt is unapplied. How long will it go on?

The attention of all readers is directed to the announcement in another column of the intended publication of the speeches and "trial" of our Chicago comrades. This is a work in which all should help, as it is at once raising them a monument and making good propaganda.

S.

POLICE SPIES EXPOSED.

THERE have always been found by the governments of all countries traitors ready to mingle in the ranks of every revolutionary party, including the Socialist, and by worming themselves into the confidence of the members, obtain their secrets to betray them, or by getting up dynamite plots and things of that kind, to arouse public feeling against the movement. Many other devices are there in the armoury of a tyrant, and in the days of the Third Empire they were carried, as men thought, to the utmost pitch of a devilish perfection. It has been left however for Bismark and his underlings to attain a yet higher (or lower) degree of skill and completeness of plan. Since the coming into effect of the anti-Socialist laws in Germany, 1879, police-spying, or the trade of head-monger and lie-smith, has become a recognised department of governmental work, an institution far more in vogue with the existence of the State than even in the corruptest days of Napoleon the Little. Not only does Germany look after folk within her own borders, but provides them with careful friends in every city where Socialists are to be found; thus it is really an *international political secret police* that is maintained and worked from Berlin. Our well-known co-worker, the *Sozialdemokrat* of Zürich, has always been trying to get hold of the secrets of this organisation, and has now and then succeeded in bringing facts to light, that spoiled some single plot, or exposed some spy. Of course it has had to bear the fate of the outspoken, and is often abused among a certain set as an organ of denunciation. Rather should it be praised for the courage with which it follows up a foe of the cause, and the skill with which it cuts open the disguise of a false friend, and shows the reptile underneath. *Der Sozialdemokrat* deserves the thanks of all honest Socialists for its efforts in casting light upon a hideous host of vermin, and so depriving them of their power to betray. In its issue of December 24th is given a list