

# THE COMMONWEAL

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### NOTES ON NEWS.

The great case between O'Donnell and the *Times* has come to an end, with all its "startling revelations," "sensational disclosures," and the like on the posters of the daily press. Of course it was a political affair, and is to be judged accordingly; and it must be judged by all honest people who are not rabid partisans as a disgrace even to the party politics of the present day. The part of the daily press which happens to be on the Irish side has stigmatised emphatically enough the tactics of the counsel for the Government, and perhaps to us the most interesting side of the event is the example it gives us of the enormous power of a private corporation in governing us so long as it is on the reactionary side. The *Times* is rich enough and long-established enough to do what it likes, and no dog may bark if Sir Oracle says "Nay."

What it has liked to do is to rake up the whole of its charges against the Irish Parliamentary party in aid of the apparently waning popularity of the coercionists. The English Home Rule press professes to think that the attack has been unsuccessful; and of course it could not be wholly successful in the nature of things. No person who thinks about the matter could suppose that the astute, close, and formal Mr. Parnell had written the letters in question; neither could any such person doubt that the Irish Parliamentary party was more or less in sympathy with the acts of war which preceded their alliance with the Gladstonites. But that doesn't much matter; the war-path which Parnellism and crime is on, is the vote-catching road, and vote-catchers are not dealing with thoughtful intelligence, but with impressionability to cries.

The coercionists have got their opportunity for a cry, and they will use it. All they have got to do is to treat every accusation they have made against the Irish party as a fact that cannot be disputed, to ignore the defence of the accused, and to keep on pointing out that Mr. Parnell refuses to clear himself in a court of justice—that is, to attack the *Times*, the representative of the great power of modern society, to which all that is reactionary will immediately rally, and which is inexpugnable as long as our class society hangs together. All this forms quite as good a cry as is needed, or can be got to carry on the coercionist battle, and doubtless will serve its purpose.

If you do doubt it, listen to the talk of business people, both principals and clerks coming home by the underground railway; and you must admit that the coercionists have pulled themselves together to meet the consequences of their recent defeats, and that this time they have struck a stroke.

But whatever damage has thus been done to the Irish party, it must not be forgotten that they have drawn it on their own heads by their eagerness to repudiate everything but constitutional means towards their revolution. That is the line they have gone on; they have claimed the support of the English people on the grounds of that repudiation, practically disclaiming sympathy with the enthusiasm of rebels, without which they would not have been able to obtain a hearing at all, and which could not be repressed because it was forbidden "constitutional" means of expressing itself, and which will have to express itself again when the present constitutional gentlemen have made their Parliamentary revolution; unless, which is by no means likely, they cast aside all reaction and give opportunity for every Irishman to be truly free by destroying all monopoly of land and capital. And if they do that they will at once find themselves enemies of the constitution and rebels once more.

We have got another Zulu war on hand, which seems most likely to lead to another Boer war; this is only one of the indications of the way in which our commercial needs are pushing us on to grab what we can in Africa; other nations having their special ways. The sensational paragraphs lately published about the treatment of the Mahdi's prisoners, are doubtless an indication of that preparation of the public mind which we are so used to. Again, in the House of Lords, Lord Harrowby was very anxious about the growth of the slave-trade in Zanzibar, as interfering with "British Commerce and British Mis-

sionary Enterprise" (sweet and holy couple). We know that two of a trade are apt not to agree; that is especially true of wage-slavery v. chattel-slavery; it is worth while putting down the latter in Africa if the result will be the strengthening the former in England.

Coleman, who has been in prison for assaulting a policeman on Bloody Sunday, and White, a dock labourer, "and miserably poor," says Mr. Bradlaugh, who brought the case forward, were to be further punished for the crime of poverty by being imprisoned for not paying £10 10s., the costs of the trial which they were so rash as to undertake against the police for assaulting them; and a similar punishment was to be meted out to Feargus O'Connor for a similar crime. Mr. Bradlaugh pointed out that these costs were exceptionally high, whereas in his own experience the Treasury costs were low. Probably this apparently wanton injustice is meant in kindness to the class of the poor if not to the individuals, in order to teach them once for all that they had better not indulge in the useless luxury of law, especially when a charge of offending against Law-'n'-Order has been trumped up against them.

And after all Mr. Matthews has turned tail; the three men in question appeared in the police-court in answer to the summons, there was no one to support it and therefore the case had to be dismissed; which it must be said would certainly not have been the case if Mr. Bradlaugh had not tackled Mr. Matthews.

Meanwhile, it does seem at first sight another instance of the way in which the Great Shabbiness of the rich robbing the poor dominates every incident of our society; it struck our friend Cunninghame Graham that way. "He repeated that it gave him personally the greatest possible satisfaction that this case had come up, because it was calculated to emphasise that growing hatred between the rich and the poor, without which no true reform was possible." "It would, he hoped, serve to show that our British justice, like our Christianity and our morality, was a gigantic fraud."

His audience, since they were educated men and "gentlemen," naturally laughed at his expression of both these truths; feeling probably that the consequences of that terrible growing hatred between rich and poor, which they could scarcely deny would be long in coming, and their useless lives would have come to an end before the crisis came; and not caring for any consequences not personal to themselves of the antagonism of classes which is the foundation of the society amongst which they—stink.

Yet did they ever hear of the Welsh triad of the Three Laughters of the Fool? It is worth quoting: "The fool laughs at that which is bad, at that which is good, and that which he cannot understand." All this the gentlemen of the House of Commons have often done; there remains to them the other laughter—on the wrong side of the mouth. May we all live to see that! W. M.

### THE REVOLT OF GHENT.

(Continued from p. 210.)

HAVING thus very briefly told you as to the political and social condition of the great Flemish towns, I must now get to my story, as given us by Froissart.

I have mentioned the English alliance with James van Artevelde, which took place at the very beginning of the war with France; this went on till at the siege of Tournay by Edward III., James van Artevelde sent sixty thousand men to help that king; and in the year 1346, Edward III., lying at Sluys, we find van Artevelde using his influence to get the Prince of Wales acknowledged as "Lord and Herytour" of Flanders; but the Councils of the towns hanging back on the ground that "there should no such untruth be found in them as willingly to disherite their natural lord and his issue to enheryte a stranger." But we can easily imagine that though glad enough of Edward's help against France, they may have been shy of handing themselves over to such a powerful King as the lord of England then was.

Anyhow, the negotiation came to a tragical end with the death of James van Artevelde himself. He was slain in a tumult at Ghent as a

tyrant and robber of the public treasure, after having been practically King of Flanders for nine years; and it may be supposed that there was some genuine indignation against him for pressing on the people the doing fealty to the English king, though on the whole the affair reads as if it had been the work of the French or loyalist party.

The Flemings after his death sent in terror to Edward to excuse themselves, and suggested, says Froissart, the marriage of the King's daughter to Louis the young Earl. Edward agreed to this readily enough; but Louis had another offer of marriage alliance from the Duke of Brabant, his next neighbour, which naturally he much preferred, since it would not cost him the friendship of the French king, on which, as aforesaid, it was the natural policy of the Earls of Flanders to lean. The Councils of the towns as naturally stuck to the English marriage, and urged it on the Earl who had trusted himself to Ghent. "But ever, he said, that he wolde not wed her whose father had slain his, though he might have half the whole realm of England." (His father was slain at Crecy.) The Flemings thereon put on the screw by holding him in "courteous prison." He pretended to yield, and met Edward, who was mighty civil to him; but watching his opportunity he managed to escape from his guards at a hawking party and fled to the French king, by whom he was well received. This may be considered the first act of the struggle between the Earl and his subjects.

The curtain rises again on Edward, an old and worn out man, and the English Alliance dimmed by bickerings between the seafarers of both nations, ending at last in a good stiff sea fight between them off the coast of Brittany, in which the Flemings were defeated. Edward threatened regular war; but the Flemings craved for peace, and the treaty was renewed.

After this interlude Froissart settles down with great enjoyment and not a little pomp to tell us the story of the great revolt in all detail.

Says the old chronicler: "When the tribulations first began in Flanders, the country was so wealthy and so rich that it was marvel to hear; and the men of the good towns kept such estate that it was wonder to hear tell of. But these warres first began by pride and envy that the good towns in Flanders had one against another, as they of Ghent against them of Bruges and they of Bruges against them of Ghent, and other towns one against the other. But there was such resort that no war could arise among them without the Earl of Flanders their lord did consent thereto; for he was so feared and beloved that none durst displease him. . . . For always he had lived in great prosperity and peace, and had as much his pleasure as any other Christian prince had; but this war began for so light a cause and incident, that justly to consider and speak, if good will and sage advice had been in the lord, he needed not to have had any manner of war."

In short, the English Alliance had grown cold; the Earl, backed by the power of the French King, had crept into power, and was using the jealousy of the great towns, and especially of Ghent and Bruges, as an instrument of his own advancement, and by this time now felt himself very strong. The fire was only smouldering, and "the light cause and incident" was soon ready to hand to make it blaze up heavens high.

Froissart sees the cause of quarrel in the feud between two "lynages," those of John Lyon and Gilbert Matthew, both of whom belonged to the gild of the Mariners, and represented families long at feud together.

Once again, as in the case of James van Artevelde, we are coming across rich and powerful men, not belonging to the feudal aristocracy; and I feel pretty sure that whatever gild of craft they might have belonged to, they must have been families surviving from the old municipal aristocracy.

John Lyon was a favourite of the Earl, and head apparently (for Froissart is somewhat vague here) of the Mariners' Gild. Gilbert Matthew lays an elaborate plot to overthrow him; he advises the Earl to lay a new tax on the mariners. The Earl takes the bait readily; tells John Lyon, who demurs somewhat, what is toward, and calls a "Parlyment" to see to the matter. At the said Parlyment, Gilbert Matthew puts up his brothers to speak against the new tax; John Lyon backs them eagerly, for says Froissart, "he would to his true power mayntain them in their old franchises and liberties." The Earl in a rage turns out John Lyon, and puts Gilbert Matthew in his place, who get him his tax levied, but henceforth John Lyon becomes a popular leader.

The next cause of quarrel was between the towns themselves, egged on doubtless by the Earl. "The devil who never sleepeth awakened them of Bruges to dig about the river of Lys to have the easement of the course of the water, and the Earl was well accorded to them, and sent great number of pioneers and men-at-arms to assist them. Before that in time past they would have done the same, but they of Ghent by puyssance brake their purpose." Clearly the Earl setting on the Brugeois to pick up an old quarrel with Ghent.

"The tidings of these diggers increased. So it was, there was a woman that came from her pilgrimage from our lady of Bolayne (who was weary), and sat down in the market-place whereas there were divers men, and some of them demanded of her from whence she came. She answered, 'From Bolayne, and I have seen by the way the greatest mischief that ever came to the town of Ghent, for there be more than 500 pioneers that night and day worketh before the river of Lys, and if they be not let they will shortly turn the course of the water.'"

The townsmen hunt up John Lyon, who has been keeping very quiet since his quarrel with the Earl, and after the due amount of pressing he gives them the following advice: "Sirs, if ye will adventure to

remedy this matter, it behoveth that in this town of Ghent ye renew an old ancient custom that sometime was used in this town, and that is that ye bring up again the White Hats, and that they may have a chief ruler to whom they may draw, and by him be ruled.' These words were gladly heard, and they said all with one voice, 'We will have it so, we will raise up these White Hats.' Then were there made White Hats which were given and delivered to such as loved better to have war than peace, for they had nothing to lose."

You see this points out to an earlier time in the history of the city, and the raising of a sort of emergency corps; perhaps originally a kind of bodyguard of the municipal aristocracy.

John Lyon is made Captain of the White Hoods, as we should translate to-day *Chaperons Blancs*, and their first job is to make an end of the digging of the new canal by the Brugeois and their pioneers, who "left their work and went back again to Bruges, and were never so hardy to dig there again"; but the White Hoods and their captain hold together as a regular insurrectionary force.

The next scene is the arrest by the Earl's Bailiff of a mariner at Ecloo, a town half way between Ghent and Bruges, and within the jurisdiction of Ghent. The townsmen claim their burgess back from the Bailiff, who is as high-handed as if he were Sir Charles Warren in person, and answers, "What needeth all these words for a maryner? . . . I have puyssance to arrest, but I have no power to deliver."

The Ghentmen now send an embassy to the Earl (who is lying at his manor of Male near Bruges) to claim their burgess. The Earl promises to have him released, and also to maintain their liberties,—but always on condition of the disbanding of the White Hoods. However, the prisoner is released, and the dykes of the new canal filled up; the Earl apparently trusting to the Matthews for getting the White Hoods disbanded. But when John Lyon hears of this condition, "he spake and said: 'All ye good people that be here present, ye know and have seen but late how the White Hats hath better kept your franchises than either red or black hats have done, or of any other colour. Be ye sure and say that I said it, as soon as the White Hats be laid down by the ordinance that the Earl would have, I will not give for all your franchises after, not three pence.'"

In short, the answer John Lyon makes is to set to work to organise his White Hats, and bid them be alert.

Then the Earl retorts by sending his said Bailiff, Roger Dauterne, with his banner and 200 men to Ghent to arrest John Lyon and five or six others. John Lyon acts with most praiseworthy promptitude, gathers 400 White Hoods, throws down and tears the Earl's banner, and slays the bailiff in a very orderly and peaceable manner: "they touched no man there but the Bailey; and when the Earl's men saw the Bailey dead, and the banner all to torn, they were greatly abashed, and so took their horses and voided out of the town." The Matthews flee and their houses are sacked. The White Hoods are masters of Ghent.

Then "the rich and notable merchants," very much scared, send off to the Earl twelve men to crave for peace. But meantime John Lyon, who was at the Council where this embassy was arranged, musters the White Hoods and those of the crafts who were on his side, outside Ghent in a plain called Andreghem, close beside which was a castle of the Earl's, newly built, and doubtless meant as a garrison to overawe the town. At this review this said castle is first sacked and then burned by 'an accident done on purpose': John Lyon remarking, in the true manner of a mediæval joke, "How cometh yonder fire in my Lord's house?"

The news reaches the Earl while the embassy of rich men are craving peace of him; and as he was particularly fond of this house, one almost wonders that he respected the safe conduct he had given. One can imagine the to-do there was; the embassy of course was driven out ignominiously (which of course was John Lyon's intention in allowing the fire to come into my lord's house), and the Earl declares war.

John Lyon, clearly a very able and resourceful man, immediately marches on Bruges with nine or ten thousand men, and gets in without any actual fighting, the "rich man" being cowed by the aspect of the lesser crafts; and the Brugeois enter into alliance with Ghent. Courtray has already come in, and Ypres is thought to be friendly; so that Flanders seems won from the Earl.

But just at this crisis John Lyon dies at Damme, the port of Bruges; poisoned, hints Froissart, which, considering the hatred of the rich men of Bruges, is likely enough. The Ghentmen, however, are nothing daunted, but go on organising themselves for war. They chose for captains John Pruniaux, John Bull, Rafe of Harselles, and Peter du Bois,<sup>1</sup>—the last a very clever and wily captain and leader, who outlived all the leaders of Ghent and died in England.

The Ghentmen march on Thorout and Ypres, where, through the help of the mean crafts (weavers and fullers), they win the towns, in spite of the opposition of the Earl's garrisons; and now being masters of the greater part of Flanders, the rebels besiege Oudenarde. To give you the measure of the strength of these communities of craftsmen, I must tell you that at this siege they mustered a hundred thousand strong.

The Earl finds after all that he is not strong enough to resist this union, and before the town is taken he makes peace with the towns through the means of the Duke of Burgundy. This peace may be said to end the second act of the story.

WILLIAM MORRIS.

(To be continued.)

<sup>1</sup> I take the names from Lord Berners' translation (Henry 8th) of Froissart. The two between them make a sad mess of the names of languages they do not understand.