NOTES ON NEWS.

The Opposition having struck the "very wise and very bold" stroke we heard so much of last week, seems to have exhausted the arrows in its quiver, and no doubt hopes that the country will be satisfied with its last invention in the do-nothing business, and will henceforward turn for the bolt out of the blue which is to pulverise the Tories and raise the hopes of all those who may happen to be watching for the first time the going out of one party and the coming in of another. The hopes of those who have seen this process before will remain pretty much where they were.

Then there was what may almost be called a non-party debate and division on the Channel tunnel. The "person from another planet" would have supposed that the scheme would have been discussed on its merits; that the subject-matter of debate would have been as to whether the tunnel was wanted; whether it could be safely made; how much it would cost, whether the expense of making it would be worth the advantage to be gained by it; and so on. The other planter would have been disappointed; pretty much all that was taken out was whether or no the French would be able and willing to invade us by means of it. Here we are again under the horrors of war!

Anyhow it seems clear enough that a French or other hostile army who should be rash enough to trust itself to such a means of transit, would soon know as much of the horrors of war as "the man who invented them." The truth is that the whole pretence of fear of invasion through the tunnel is nothing but a pretence; it means opening up an opportunity to be used at some future time for pressing forward an increase of the army.

Lord Randolph Churchill was so candid as practically to admit this, and said that he voted against the scheme because if gone on with, it would give occasion to a claim for more money for the army, which wouldn't suit him as he has taken a brief for economy just now. Which means in short that we must not consider whether the tunnel is possible or desirable because if we do the jobbers will directly get their fork into us! O, British nation, wonder of the whole earth for your practicality and business-like habits, what a bragging, twaddling fool you be!

Government, determined to help its friends the publicans a little, has insisted on withdrawing its Sunday-closing clauses from the Local Government Bill. In spite of our friends the testotellers, we must say that all this is a dismal and empty business. Really it is of so much importance whether a man determined to get drunk, performs that function on a Saturday or a Monday instead of a Sunday? After all, this is a clear case of a palliative that is useless and takes as long to get itself accepted as a condition of things which would not drive people to drunkenness as their only excitement, or as a mere drowning of their wretchedness for a little.

Mr. E. D. Lewis has had his answer at last from those two pillars of Law & Order, Mr. Justice Wills and Mr. Justice Napkins—I ask pardon, Grantham—in the matter of Trafalgar Square, and the answer is just what might have been expected. Trafalgar Square was created by statute, and any right of meeting there must be similarly created. That is the gist of their answer. Of course if it had not been created by statute, common law would have forbidden meetings on it. Their lordships say that the right of public meeting is beyond discussion. On these terms it certainly is in a public meeting. You may meet in public whenever you please; only you can't meet here, nor there, nor at the other place. Where is the grievance if you are starving and want to tell your rulers so, you had better buy a few acres of land: rents are going down in London now we believe.

The lamb going to law with the wolf is a curious spectacle to behold. The lamb must put up with it as long as he is a lamb. Perhaps evolution will change his wool into chain-mail and his feeble little shoulders of mutton into arms and fists with a chopping-stick in them one of these days. But evolution is a long job, thinks Mr. Justice Napkins.

At the annual meeting of "The National Association for the Promotion of State Colonisation," or, as we should call it, the Society for the Punishment of Poverty by Transportation (at which it appears that the working classes were represented by Mr. Maudsley, of the Salford Traders' Council), there was much rejoicing at the progress of the "work" (which, by the way, if it means anything, means that people are desperately hard up just now). A Parliamentary committee of 100 M.P.'s to help them (my word!): £10,000 wanted by Government for getting rid from their own land of those inconvenient persons the Highland crofters, and all the rest of it. In short, these noble and gentle patriots, who love their native country so well that they want it all to themselves, were very happy, and their trade's union ally no less so.

A person not quite so happy, and whose share in her native country was but small, appeared before a magistrate next day with the following tale—"To-day, at Dalston, a poor woman asked the assistance of Mr. R. W. Bros to get her son back from Canada. He and another lad, both about seventeen, had been sent out by the East-end Emigration Society on a pretence that they would have plenty of work. The magistrate: You had better go to Captain Hamilton, the secretary; but I should think there are many other lads who would be glad of the opportunity to get to Canada. Applicant: Yes, sir; if there was plenty of work, as they said; but my boy and his friend can neither get work nor food. The magistrate: I cannot give you anything. Go to Captain Hamilton." The worthy magistrate did not add "or hell," perhaps because he thought that the poor woman there was already, as certainly her unlucky son was. It is almost a pity that this woman did not apply to the chairman of the meeting held the day before.

It probably would have done little to check the flow of their spirits, though, which were exuberant, as may be gathered from the speech of Mr. Maudsley, the trades' unionist, who said: "The opposition proceeded chiefly from the Socialists, who knew that, if successful, the movement would cut the ground from under their feet." Now, as the Resolution discards the intention of sending out purgers or well-do-wells, the movement must mean the transportation of thurifer and industrious workers. Anyone but a very stupid person, one would think, ought to be able to see that if this is an advantage to the country, the country must be in a bad way indeed, and sorely in need either of Socialists or of persons who have some better scheme than getting rid of its producers of wealth. In fact, what these people really want to do (and they would say so if they durst) is to get rid of all elements of discontent, that is to say, those whom they and their idleness have made poor and helpless. A Holot-hunt, again, they said. We cannot recommend, but it is what would suit them best. If they could kill one-third of the working population, it would for a time "cut the ground from under the Socialists' feet"—but not for long.

The only way, Mr. Maudsley, to get rid of discontent is to remove the cause of it. Transportation of units of discontent is like the flea's funeral—a hundred more come to it. The abolition of the monopoly in the means of production, the freest of labour, which the Trades' Council are doing their best to prevent, is the only thing that will cut the ground away from the feet of the Socialists, because it will make true society possible, and so make an end of our name of combat.

That friend of the working-man, Mr. Blandell Maple, has been disporting himself before the Sweating Commission again, and after some further glorification of his firm, was "recalled" on his departure, and coming back said "that he had seen the memsahibs as to matters of fact, but there were other matters which he wished to go into." So he went into "these other matters," that were not matters of fact, at great length. Some of these are old friends of ours, which we must admit are to be classed as Mr. Maple classed them, if the report of his evidence, once more, is correct; such as, for example, that the working-men earn as much as ever they did, although the prices of
The revolt of Ghent.

The events of which an account is here given took place towards the close of the thirteenth century, among the people of Flanders, dwelling not many hours' journey (as we travel now) from the place where we dwell; and yet to us are wonderful enough, if we think of them.

Few epochs of history, indeed, are more interesting than this defeated struggle to be free of the craftsmen of Flanders: whether we look upon the story as a mere story, a true tale, of the Middle Ages at their fullest development, rife with all the phenomena of the age exemplifying their manners and customs, the forms that their industry, their religion, their heroism took at the time; or whether we look upon it, as we Socialists cannot help looking upon it, as a link in the great chain of the evolution of society, the incomprehensible failure of instruction, in the class-struggle which we have now recognised as the one living fact in the history of the world, since civilization began, and which will only end when this class-struggle is transformed into something else. It is to the story of the Revolt of Ghent that we are here glad to turn, and it seems to us that we look upon the Revolt of Ghent as a story of the past as or as a part of our own lives and the battle which is not wasting, but using them, it is one of the pages of the world's history.

The greatest of good fortune also is this, that, as Horace says, it has not lacked a sacred poet. As the tale is here told, its incidents, often the very words, are taken from the writings of one of those men who make past times live before our eyes ever. John Froissart, the canon of Chinchay in Halfant, was indeed but a hanger-on of the aristocracy; he was in such a position as would in our days have prevented him from principle from admitting any good news from whom he was beholden to or being friendly to. But class-laying was not the fine art which it has since become; and the simpler habits of thought of Froissart's days gave people intense delight in the stories of deeds of arms, whether of those who themselves were called by Froissart. The aristocracy; added to which, one domain for the cultivation of historical lies was not available in the Middle Ages, since, owing to the form feudal society had then taken, what we now call patriotism was not yet a national passion; the nation-ran very thinly. English, Scotchman, Fleming, Spaniard, Frenchman, Gascon, Breton, are treated by John Froissart as men capable of valour, their deeds to be told of and listened to with interest, the knowledge or dispraise of which might be good for education; and it is to Froissart that we are glad to turn in the story of the Revolt of Ghent.

First very briefly to the political position of the country. Living in the fourteenth century, and then with more or less to I get you my story and introduce you to John Froissart, who has given me as much pleasure as he did to any one of the lords, ladies, knights, squires, and sergeants who first heard him read.

First very briefly to the political position of the country. Lying so close the two great cities of Flanders and Halfant, and the power they could not fail to acquire, made the feudal lord of the country but a weak potentate, and he himself a mere shadow of what one might have supposed the power of the French kings in his position would be. The result of a low standard of nobility is that French封建主的 low standard of nobility.

New to the condition of the Flemings. Manufacturing by handcraft pure and simple, without division of labour, was carried that they saw their workman's friend taken down this trying to bring back the merest shadow of the feudal system, especially in the Netherlands. The English, who had developed there, accompanied by a complete municipal system, democratic and social, as far as the interests of the people were concerned, being the exclusive aim of their efforts. It is said of them that they, as a group of men, were the only people in Europe, it must be remembered, who were not especially cities, sovereign bodies with definite polity like those of the ancient classical world. The privilege of the Flanders, the agricultural district, the land that gave subsistence to the class, the whole question of the affairs of the community; the first towns were not in Greece and Rome, the sacred spots of the tribal ancestor, but placed cities. In the thirteenth century Flanders had made the population the city or the urban part of the district. These as they grew kept their territory, and developed at last within themselves an aristocratic and oligarchic government.

But as these towns changed from being mere centres of an agricultural population, into being places of resort for handcraftsmen and merchants, and as the associations for the organisation of industry, that the guilds, grown up amongst the former, a new democratic feeling rose up which opposed itself to the remains of the old tribal band of freemen, now become a mere exclusive oligarchy, who considered the practice of handcraft a disgrace.

The new democracy triumphed at last, and by the end of the thirteenth century the guilds, the actual workers, were the masters of the great towns; under the feudal lords, however, to whom they owned homage and fealty.

Within the guilds themselves there could be no capitalists or great men, because the power of the guilds was framed to prevent the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few, the masters were master workmen and were kept so by the guilds.

I suspect, however, that there were remains of the old municipal aristocracy (the lineages, as they were called in Flanders) still in existence in the towns, otherwise it would not be easy to account for the aristocratic and oligarchic government. Of the decay of the guilds, which was identified with the decay of the city aristocracy of the crafts was forming, as is apparent in the fact of the jealousy between the greater and the lesser craftsmen, so that if the development of commerce joined with the rise of the bourgeoisie, the townspeople, and the captains of industry, the struggle between the municipal existence and the guilds would have been repeated in the fifteenth century in social form.

Meanime, one thing is to be noted, which is specially interesting to us, and that is the visible existence of strong Communist feeling among those who composed the development of the guilds.

In the popular literature of the epoch one comes across passages whose medieval quaintness gives a pleasant sense of surprise and freshness to aspiritations and denominations which are familiar enough to us Socialists to-day, and, so to say, at once make us free of the brotherhood of the old guildsmen. The two following centuries obliterated this feeling, or rather drew a dark veil of misery and degradation over all the feelings of the people. The gradual improvement of days soon to come can look back cheerfully to the time when the craftsmen citizen of the great towns had his hope also, which hands over to us across the lapse of the drearier days.

William Morris.