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NOTES ON NEWS.

MR. BRADLAUGH'S Oaths Bill has been carried at length, and Radicals are jubilant. That can hardly be wondered at, but the triumph looks a good deal smaller when it is remembered how the Social Question has come to the front during the five or six years that have passed since "Iconoclast" was flung out of the House by thirteen stalwart moral miracles, and how it has relegated to the background those forms and ceremonies over which men used to fight so.

Property needs all the aid it can get now to resist the onrush of "Spoliation"—otherwise resumption by the people of their own—and the vote of an Atheist is worth as much on a division as that of an Archbishop.

A delightfully old-fashioned air was given to the debate by some speakers, among them Mr. Sydney Gedge, who objected to the Bill because, among other reasons, "the common people were not afraid of a subsequent and problematical prosecution for perjury, but they were afraid of being damned; and it was to their interest to encourage this salutary fear of future punishment." We are used to this policy, but it is not often so frankly avowed.

When one remembers the Radical jubiliations over the Allotments Act, and the way in which our criticism was resented, it is interesting to note that our words are being found true. A meeting of agricultural labourers was lately held at Spalding, to consider the possibility of taking further action to put the Allotments Act in force in the district. The speakers stated that labourers had repeatedly and vainly applied for allotments to the local authorities and individuals. The meeting appointed a committee of six labourers to act on their behalf, and they have since addressed a letter to the Allotments Association declaring the Act a delusion and a sham, and expressing satisfaction that Mr. Jesse Collings, "who combined with the Tories to pass the miserable sham," had been removed from the chairmanship of the association.

Sir Charles Russell, leader of the English Bar and Liberal Attorney-General, who prosecuted Hyndman and others for their share in the riot of February 1886, is now so much further on as to demand that the State should undertake the responsibility of maintaining all the aged poor. Here are his words: He claimed that it was the duty of the entire community that had received the benefits of the youth and manhood of the men who ultimately became the subjects of relief, to recognise as an obligation resting upon them relief of those who had in their day and according to their measure, worked for the general good of the community; and further, that there should be no degradation or humiliation accompanying the receipt of relief out of the public taxation of the country; and also that such should have their full share of the help to which they had become entitled.

Of course, his utterance may mean anything or nothing, according to the way in which the political wind blows, but that the wily lawyer should speak so plainly marks which way it is blowing now. It is one of the straws that show how fast the Socialist movement is pushing along the people of all parties.

At the Middlesex Sessions on Saturday 10th Major Borrowes was found guilty of having assaulted Lord Howard de Walden, causing actual bodily harm. He was ordered by Mr. Injustice Ed'in to pay a fine of £400 to the Crown, to pay costs and expenses of the prosecution, and to enter into his recognizances in £500, and find two sureties each of £250 for keeping the peace, especially towards Lord Howard de Walden, for twelve months.

It may be as well to recall the fact that what he is punished for is protecting a woman's life against her husband, who is in the "eye of the law" her proprietor and "natural protector," even when it happens that he is a drunken ruffian. The "sanctity of the marriage tie" must be preserved!

Contrast with this the "justice" meted by two Liverpool magistrates on the 16th to a woman for cruelly illtreating an orphan child aged thirteen. The girl had been an inmate of the Kirkdale Industrial Schools up to about eight months ago, when she was taken out by the

defendant, who kept a stationer's shop. After she had got into defendant's service, defendant began to beat her in the mornings, and send her out with papers.

One morning the girl got up at half-past five o'clock and opened the shop, but having been late up the night before, she fell asleep on the sofa, and the defendant beat her about the face and head, kicked her, and broke her arm. She ran out of the house, and a police-officer took her to the hospital. The medical evidence was that, besides the broken arm the child had two black eyes, and bruises on the head and various parts of the body. On paying £5 compensation to the child, and the costs, the magistrates allowed the defendant to leave the court.

You see, it was only an orphan pauper, and she a servant, so that while interference with vested rights in a woman's body must be atoned for by a heavy punishment, interference with the poor liberty of life and limb of a pauper may be cheaply paid for!

An exception to the general rule of ineptitude and brutality among those who "adorn the judicial bench" seems to be Mr. Justice Matthew, who in charging the Bristol grand jury, endorsed Mr. Justice Day's opinion that for minor offences against person or property sentences of long imprisonment were inexpedient. "They were unjust to the individual and impolitic from a public point of view. He trusted that the remarks falling from the bench generally on the subject would be attended to throughout the country."

Afterwards, in sentencing an old woman to one day for petty larceny, he said, "she had been frequently convicted for small thefts, and had been sentenced to seven and eight years' penal servitude for little offences. These sentences were unjust and absurd." We cannot hope that his brethren will follow his example, but it is interesting to note that he classed "person and property" together, and further that it was a theft he gave the small punishment for.

Most of his "learned brothers" give thrice the punishment for a theft that they do for a brutal assault, and reckon a dead worker at less than a stolen turnip.

Socialists who smoke cigarettes should look up a small society established by workmen for cigarette-making at 157 Houndsditch, E.C., about a year and a half ago. I smoke a pipe usually, and cigarettes very rarely indeed, and fear I must wait a good while before I can find a co-operative smoking-tobacco manufactory, and so feel that no capitalist is making a profit on my favourite weakness. S.

There is a sort of feeling of expectation in the air of something to happen in Germany, now that the ignominious old man who has so long filled the joss-seat has gone. Some hope that the new Emperor will go further than merely doing his best to keep the peace of Europe unbroken; that he will inaugurate "reforms" in Germany itself, relax the oppressive laws just re-enacted against the Socialists. An article in the *Pall Mall Gazette* dwelt on the solemn position of the Emperor Frederick, placed as he is between the new throne and probable speedy death, and seemed to think that his acts would be the more conscientious and beneficent for that reason.

I don't know: I cannot help thinking that he will rather feel himself an *ad interim* Emperor whose business it is to do nothing. Besides, I doubt the effect of illness as a stimulus to action: it seems to me that people who are ill and drawing near their death are rather apt to think more about their illness than anything else. It is from those who are vigorously alive that one expects vigorous action.

And after all, is it to be believed that it will be so easy for this one man and the clique in the Court that follows him to break through the strength given by the long years of the Bismarkian policy?

Finally, in no case, even if Kaiser Frederick lives and inaugurates the reign of reform, will it be good for the cause of the people or bad for it. May it not bring about a state of things not better but only more plausible? a state of things like that which we have so long "enjoyed" here; in which people are free—to starve; free also to speak—so long as their speaking does not annoy their masters too much. These are questions which we cannot help asking ourselves.

W. M.