

THE COMMONWEAL

The Official Journal of the Socialist League.

VOL. 4.—No. 122.

SATURDAY, MAY 12, 1888.

WEEKLY; ONE PENNY.

NOTES ON NEWS.

THE alliance of the Tories with the Pope would seem to be a serious political event instead of a piece of meaningless tomfoolery as a reasonable man would expect. It has even been said that Mr. Parnell was going to advise backing down on the Plan of Campaign and boycotting; but in his speech at the Eighty Club he simply threw the responsibility on the Catholic members, with a prudent reserve as to the Plan of Campaign not being necessary to Irish agitation; he also somewhat deprecates the Plan as having led to coercion. This all looks somewhat like hedging; as if he thinks surrender may be necessary. But surrender won't do. Whatever may be said of the Plan, the boycott is a necessary weapon to a people who cannot fight and will not yield.

And all this fuss about an old man representing a superstition all but extinct; in fact extinct everywhere except in Ireland. The once redoubtable Pope of Rome has now become a *don*, and the expression of his opinions about as important as those of the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford; or indeed of the head beadle of that reverent presence, the old gentleman in the gown and the round flat cap that used to be called the head gold-stick in my young days. Yet at least this sham of what was once a real power, dried up and effete as it is, is good enough to be used as a policeman by the reactionary party. What a desperately shabby resource to use. An innocent intelligent onlooker would say: My friend, as to the pure all things are pure, so to the shabby all things are shabby.

Anyhow this bugbear of a gold-stick has to be faced by the Irish people, and surely the sooner the better: a revolution led by an ecclesiastical hierarchy, even though the first grade is composed of the parish priests, many of whom are thoroughly good fellows individually, "is to us suspect."

Meanwhile the reaction is harping vigorously on the other string, and Mr. O'Brien is in for another three months. Of course whatever force there may be in Mr. Balfour comes of his obstinacy; he hopes to pit this quality in himself against the same quality in the Irish; and apart from his advantage that he has nothing to *suffer* in playing the game, he has an advantage in the stupid carelessness of the British nation which whether or no it be an original national quality, has been so much fostered by the commercial life which we have brought to such a perfection of degradation and cowardice.

For these imprisonments for political offences are now becoming so common that though they once shocked public opinion somewhat, they are beginning to wear it out, and people who are not put in prison, thinks Balfour, will soon cease to notice them, and then will begin their "deterrent effect" on the offenders. Certainly he is justified in having such hopes. It is the custom of the British to be much impressed, and perhaps genuinely so with some disgraceful outcome of the system which enslaves us, and to make a great outcry about it for a little time, and then, the disgrace all the time going on, and even getting worse, to drop it all, as if there had been no disgrace, and no outcry. Balfour is probably right to count on this cowardice which has become so characteristic of us.

Besides why should we not get used to a few people being punished by prison-torture for their political opinions when we are quite used to a great many people having the same punishment administered to them for the crime of *poverty*?

Nay, can we say the *same* punishment? Our political offenders whether they have worn the prison dress or protested against wearing it, whether they have performed or protested against the "menial labour" which by the way they condemn nice-looking girls to perform for them every day, when they come out of prison return to "refined" homes and the applause of at least a wide circle of "respectable" people.

The punishment of poverty is far different from that: tendencies harmless or even good in themselves perverted, inevitable degradation forced, many a weak good-natured, or self-indulgent, or hot-tempered person not worse than the average taken altogether; criminal habits forced on him, and then prison, and confirmation of the criminal habits and further degradation, and the man who might have been harmless or even useful has but one use now, and that a terrible one. He is "an enemy of society." This is the punishment of poverty, and yet

we are so used to it, that we think we are living in a state of profound peace in England! Fools that we are!

Or indeed to many thousands, what is the earth on which we live, so full of beauty and such infinite resources for pleasure and well-doing as it is, but one huge prison? Listen once more to the often-told tale, the tale we have got so used to, and which we heed so little; this time told, I must say, by a person who has developed strange opinions out of the dreadful facts that he has seen and the conventional habits of thought which have been *forced*, we will say, upon him.

"The Rev. W. Adamson, Vicar of Old Ford, stated [before the Commission of the House of Lords] that his parish had a population of 11,066, and contained no middle-class. He said that the sweating-system had always existed, but had become aggravated from the results of civilisation, competition and early marriages, and necessarily from that [which?] overpopulation. Large builders, though forbidden in their contracts, practised sweating by subletting at a mere fraction of the contract price. In the making of match-boxes $2\frac{3}{4}$ d. per gross was paid until the Salvation Army came into competition [the Army denies this] and reduced the price to $2\frac{1}{2}$ d. And now the making of the boxes was sublet for $1\frac{3}{4}$ d. per gross, the workers finding their own paste. A woman assisted by her children, when at home from school, could earn from 4s. 6d. to 5s. per week. Early marriages arose from the two sexes herding together in the same rooms [What does *that* arise from?], from men marrying in order to be partially supported by their wives' earnings, and from men and women thinking [poor souls!] their united wages would be better, though poor, than single wages."

Mr. Adamson then discussed as to whether clergymen are bound to marry people before the age of twenty-one, as though "marriage" were necessary to breeding, and then gets on to the "foreigner" question. "He agreed with other witnesses that the immigration of paupers had an appreciable effect, and that the foreigners were at least as moral, and more sober than the English [what a curious concatenation!]; but they neglected sanitation, and might in that way be the means of spreading infectious disease." (But then, according to the Arnold White theory, in this respect they ought to be useful in helping forward "the elimination of the unfit," because people die of infectious diseases pretty often.)

More sweating details: silk mantles made for $7\frac{1}{2}$ d., sold (with the silk, such as it is, I suppose) at from 16s. to £1; asked if these were of the best class, thought they were the same mantles as were sold at £5. "He disapproved of the present system of education, because it fitted boys to be clerks; 200 of them would apply for a boy clerkship, and some would offer to take it for nothing in the hope of getting eventually a few shillings a-week. [Yes, even education, the good thing we are all crying out for, is turned into a curse, when robbery is the foundation of society.] Girls learned only the theory and not the practice of domestic work, and therefore went into factories or were compelled [note the word] to lead an immoral life." (Yes, people forgetting the merest elementary arts of life, as to my certain knowledge they are doing, in the country as well as in the towns: this is "civilisation"—*i.e.*, a reversion to an inferior kind of savagery.)

"As an instance of extreme poverty, he gave the case of a person who sold 6 fibre bags for 6d., and out of that spent 3d. for new material, 1d. for coals, $1\frac{1}{4}$ d. for bread, $\frac{1}{4}$ d. for milk, $\frac{1}{4}$ d. for tea, to make a meal for four persons,"—and so on, and so on. (Remember, this is why Mr. O'Brien's rations will be so scanty; the prison must try not to compete in attractions with the workshop.)

"He admitted [?] that the middleman saved the principal a great deal of trouble, because the latter might not wish to have a number of poor persons about his premises. Teaching boys and girls to work for their own living might check the competition of unskilled labour [how? in the name of wonder!], but would have no great effect so long as over-population [*i.e.*, unregulated slave-breeding] existed. In this utilitarian [say thievish and murderous] age, the sweeter wished to get his work done as cheaply as possible, and did not care whether it was done by horse, ass, or man."

Now for the remedies: "He would impose a poll-tax on foreigners, and would inflict a penalty on men marrying before twenty-one and girls before eighteen years of age"!!!

This is certainly a wonderful result to come out of all the ~~reverend~~ gentleman's experience, if he has not been misrepresented by the newspaper reporter, which after all is very possible; in which case the general journalistic conscience must bear the burden. In any case the "remedy" means once more that we are engaged in slave-breeding, and have overdone it, and can now see nothing to be done but trying to regulate the slave-breeding, and if we possibly can, reducing the number of the slaves to the limit of profit to us. We have got used to these horrors, and since they do not happen to ourselves, we find we can bear them pretty well— But patience! something will take place as a result of them which *will* be hard to bear, if we do not find better "remedies" than Arnold White and Co. suggest to us: nor can we find any remedy, as long as such lives as these are necessary to the lives of those who are ordained to live on the labour of others.

W. M.

FRANCE IN 1848--1888.

WHEN, in 1848, the Republic was proclaimed, the people thought that all was accomplished that was necessary to their salvation. They thought of the great changes that took place during the revolution at the close of the last century, and they expected changes equally great to follow the proclamation of the Republic of 1848. But during the fifty years, great economical changes had taken place, and a powerful financial aristocracy had taken the place of the old nobility. The clergy, too, had regained their influence in the rural districts, while the mass of the rural population had become peasant proprietors. In 1848 the people of the towns had to deal with new conditions and with evils that did not exist at the close of the last century.

The proclamation of the Republic in 1848 found the revolutionary forces in an immense minority, and the reaction began from the day the Republic was proclaimed. The Provisional Government inaugurated on February 24 was itself reactionary, the majority being royalists; the small trading classes being represented by two and the labour party by two. The agitation that led to the revolution was organised by the small trading classes against the great capitalists and the stock exchange, and their demand was for parliamentary reform; but one of the first decrees adopted by the Provisional Government was to pay the fund-holders of the public debt their dividends six months in advance. Then it was clearly seen that the oppressed peoples of the Continent looked to France to aid them in their struggles for freedom; but Lamartine, as minister of foreign affairs, issued his famous (or infamous) dispatch, recognising all existing governments. The first of these measures destroyed the revolution in France, the second gave confidence to the despotisms of the Continent, and destroyed the hopes of the peoples.

When the Constituent Assembly met, it was found to consist almost exclusively of royalists, clericals, and friends of the financial aristocracy. The reaction was triumphant. The vote of the millions had not saved the people. To the rural population the Republic had brought increased taxation. The rural voters therefore returned men who were opposed to the Republic. The revolution threatened the supremacy of the clergy. The clergy therefore organised the ignorance of the population against the revolution. The proletarians demanded the emancipation of labour, and the capitalists replied by throwing hundreds of thousands idle on the streets. Public works were organised, chiefly of an unproductive kind, while the workers were paid out of the rates; this punished the small trading classes for their share in the revolution, and set them and the workers by the ears. The workshops were closed and the June insurrection followed. The reaction was now triumphant in the streets of Paris, and the Republic only a sham; its existence only a question of time. Henceforth the task of the reaction was an easy one, to repress the revolutionary spirit at home and discredit the Republic abroad.

It is not necessary to refer to the measures against the liberty of the press and the freedom of association. Nor is it necessary to refer to the brutal suppression of the Roman Republic and the re-establishment by force of arms of the power of the Papacy, the effects of which are even yet felt in the relations of France and Italy. But let us come to the year 1850.

On the 10th and 28th of March that year a number of by-elections took place, and 21 Socialists or Red Republicans were returned, including three for Paris. These three were returned by very large majorities, the numbers voting for them being—for De Flotte, 126,982; Vidal, 128,439; and for H. Carnot, 132,797. A large number of the small trading classes had again joined the proletarians. The rage of the reactionists knew no bounds. It was not the Republic that was in danger, but the very foundations of society. The press demanded the revision of the Constitution and the purification of universal suffrage. The workers were condemned as "savage barbarians." The *Patrie*, a Government evening paper, declared, "We are surrounded by cannibals. If they remain in their lair they must be *extinguished*; if they come out they must be *cut to pieces*." In the Chamber Montelembert declared in the most emphatic manner, "I say it is necessary to undertake against Socialism which is devouring us a Roman expedition at home. War was made by France against the Roman Republic. God blessed the undertaking. You are precisely in the same situation by Socialism at home. There only remains for us war—war carried on energetically and by every means."

An "Electoral Reform Bill" was introduced, for which urgency was voted on May 21, by 462 to 227. The Bill soon became law. The number of electors on the register was 9,268,449. It was proposed

to restrict the vote to those who could prove a three years' residence, which would disfranchise the great bulk of the working classes in towns. Second, to those who paid personal taxes to the amount of twelve francs per annum, numbering 6,009,420. That clause would disfranchise over 3,200,000 electors. There were many other restrictions. The effect of the measure was to disfranchise close on two-thirds of the electors. Every deputy who voted for that Bill was guilty of treason—treason against the Constitution, and treason against the people. The very first article of the Constitution read as follows: "The sovereignty resides in the universality of French citizens: it is inalienable and imprescriptible. No individual, no fraction of the people, can assume the exclusive exercise of it." Article 55: "All Frenchmen, twenty-one years of age, and enjoying their civil and political rights, are electors without any conditions of qualification." The words of the Constitution were clear and precise. The Electoral Reform Bill was a violation of that Constitution. Nay, it was a violation of the rights of the people, which are antecedent to all Constitutions. It was an act of war against the people, and if every traitor had been seized and lynched in the streets of Paris, he would have received the just reward of his treason.

The treason of the Assembly, supported by the bloodthirsty Order-mongers of every country, prepared the way for the treason of Louis Napoleon. That Assembly had destroyed the liberty of the people; it had declared war against the interests of the proletarians; and its authority rested on usurpation. It had dishonoured the very name of the Republic abroad, and its words inspired no confidence. And when Napoleon swept it away, it only received at the hands of a bloodstained usurper what it ought to have received at the hands of the people.

Of the reign of that red-handed scoundrel it is not necessary to dwell. Suffice it to say, that in 1851 the taxation of France was £50,000,000; in 1869, over £85,000,000. In 1851 the debt was rather over £220,000,000; in 1869, £570,000,000. The cost of the war of 1870 to France was another £560,000,000, which brought the debt in 1871 to over £999,000,000, the yearly charge of which was over £39,900,000. Nor have things improved since then. In 1882 the taxation was over £142,000,000, and the debt is still over 900,000,000.

And look at France to-day. She is still the victim of the gods of finance. The vampires of usury are still bleeding her at every pore. After three revolutions and numberless insurrections, with parliamentary action for four generations, the financial aristocracy are still supreme. Everywhere the people are crushed to the earth. Nowhere does the Assembly inspire confidence. Everywhere the royalists and the reactionists again demand the *revision* of the Constitution. And another would-be dictator is in the field, boldly demanding the extinction of the Assembly and the Constitution. True, the present Government may rally around it the revolutionary forces to some extent. True, it may attempt to ameliorate the condition of the proletarians. But let us not be deceived. The royalists and the reactionists once more fear the spread of revolutionary ideas; they once more fear the spread of Socialism; and they again mean war, war against the people, war against the principle of eternal justice. And they will grasp the hand of any pretender, they will give their support to any usurper, who will guarantee them in safety the continued plunder of the people.

As to the proposed "revision" of the Constitution, what will it be when it comes? Will it be more favourable to the royalists, or will it be more democratic? The Royalists and the Napoleonists, and the friends of Boulanger all demand the revision. The revolutionary parties also want the revision. The present Constitution gives far more power to the reactionary than to the revolutionary parties. All classes, except the Opportunists, want the revision. The revision, therefore, is sure to come; the question is, What will come next? As for the great Boulanger, he wants to be all things to all men. He is the great mystery man of the present day; but above all he is a military man, and represents the military element. It is true France may think that she requires a military genius to save her from extinction, but is she right? Instead of a Dictator, France requires honest men who can raise up the masses, who can inspire the millions with the love of liberty, who can raise their aspirations upward, and lead them onward to the conquest of the Social Revolution.

But look at the number to-day interested in supporting the financial aristocracy. Holders of French National Stock—

Year.	No. in thousands.	Average sum.
1810	146	£480
1830	195	1,230
1850	846	350
1860	1,074	395
1870	1,254	360
1880	4,630	170

Here we have over four million six hundred thousand interested in upholding the present system. What can free her from the rule of the traitors; what can liberate her from the grasp of the usurers; what can raise her to liberty and dignity, and the people to freedom and prosperity? The revolution alone can do this. But the revolution means war to the death against every form of treason, against usurpation in all its shapes; war against usury through all the ramifications of society. And let us hope that the people will be equal to the work before them, equal to the task imposed upon them.

J. SKETCHLEY.

Over 3000 emigrants left Queenstown last week for America, a number exceeding those of any week this or last year.