

THE COMMONWEAL

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WEEKLY; ONE PENNY.

NOTES ON NEWS.

THE Mid-Lanark election has resulted in a great Whig triumph, which will surely be not altogether unpleasing to the Tories, since it is at once a triumph of respectability over poverty, and a great blow to the prestige of the Irish Parliamentary Party, whose direct interference no doubt largely contributed to the Whig majority; henceforth it will be clear to the British Labour Party that the Irish leaders are simply using the democracy in this island for their own political purposes, and there cannot fail in consequence to be much soreness against the said leaders among the British workers.

We Socialists however appeal earnestly to the workers of Mid-Lanark and others who have suffered by these servile tactics, to take a noble revenge on the leaders, by looking to the Irish people themselves, and being all the more intent on freeing them not only from the tyranny of foreign centralisation, but also from the new tyranny that awaits them when they are victorious in the matter of Home Rule; if indeed they ever will get Home Rule until they acknowledge the full force of the class struggle and the identity of the interests of the workers all over the world. Undoubtedly when there is a parliament in Dublin the struggle of the Irish people for freedom will have to be begun again, and it is just because we Socialists want to see the real struggle for freedom begin, that we will do all we can to push on this preliminary stage of Home Rule.

Home Rule by all means; but not as an instrument for the exploitation of the Irish labourer by the Irish capitalist tenant: not as an instrument for the establishment of more factories, for the creation of a fresh Irish proletariat to be robbed for the benefit of national capitalists. Our Home Rule means Home Rule for the Irish people, that is to say equality for the Irish people.

A word or two to our own Socialist friends on this unpleasant Mid-Lanark business. They have entered on this electioneering struggle with a people at their back not yet educated into a knowledge of the reasons for the wrongs which they suffer, or the remedies for them, and as a matter of course they have been defeated. Is it too late for them to change their tactics and make up their minds to educate the people in the principles of Socialism before asking them to return Socialists to Parliament? I think Socialists sometimes forget what a great distance there is between them and the mere discontented Radicals who must form the mass of the voters they have any chance of winning over. The Socialist can no more forget his Socialism than he can the elementary facts of science when once learned. So that while he continually sees before him at least the first real Socialist measures, his Radical friend sees nothing but the preliminary steps to those measures, and is, in consequence, an easy prey to the false promises of the loose-tongued Whig and the dishing Tory-Democrat.

Of one thing I am sure, that if propaganda by electioneering is practised by any body of Socialists they will have no time for any other means of propaganda: they must begin at once and think of nothing else but getting Socialists into Parliament. The direct education of the people in the principles of Socialism must be the task of other Socialists who do not trouble themselves about Parliament; and unless there is such a body of Socialists our parliamentary friends will find their task an impossible one.

The Pope has now formally banned the Plan of Campaign and boycotting. This is good news indeed, and it is to be hoped that the Irish bishops will find themselves compelled to follow suit: it will be better news still when the parish priests declare against the people. The two curses of a reactionary religion and the national sentiment which has been forced upon Ireland have been a heavy drawback on the necessities and aspirations of the Irish people.

It seems that charity is somewhat at a discount at present; there has been a great falling off lately; the Jubilee last year was bad for it, and so on. This means of course that the rich and well-to-do are determined not to lack their luxuries and comforts whatever happens. In short the more charity is wanted the less of it is to be had. In the long run this will be found out to be the case with all palliatives of our system of robbery. They cannot be applied just at the time when they are needed.

W. M.

On the 25th ult. the shareholders of Reuter's Telegram Company met in solemn conclave to discuss the past year's business and the profit thereon. The chairman lamented the poor report they were forced to make; there had not been the nice profitable war they had hoped for and so their gains were not so high as they might have been. A Mr. Maurice Grant also bewailed their bad luck in only getting a "miserable 5 per cent." "Any cheesemonger's shop in London," said he, "would give better results than that." What a pity that millions of men had not died in agony to add to these idlers' wealth and enable a lie-monger to gain more percentage than a seller of cheese!

The Crofter Commissioners are proving over and over again, if that were needed, how villainously the poor folk have been exploited. An average reduction of 57 per cent. is a very excellent proof, and when we see that 83 per cent. of arrears are struck off also, the whole thing is pretty clear. "The Highfield estate, near the Muir of Ord, has the distinguished honour of topping the list so far," says the *Pall Mall*. "The Brahan estate reductions average 52 per cent., and pass into the second place. The satisfaction of the crofters with these decisions may be readily imagined, because nothing nearly so extensive and sweeping had been expected, though the need for revaluation was evident. The Duchess of Sutherland has been fortunate in escaping the censure implied in a very severe reduction. Thirty per cent., however, as matters go in Strathpeffer Spa will be heartily welcomed by the crofters, and 34 per cent. of arrears will perhaps imply a good deal more. The crofters question is now in a fair way of settlement. It needed heroic treatment, and nothing less would have been of any service." S.

THE REACTION AND THE RADICALS.

THE other day a friend was remarking to me that the ordinary Liberal and Radical of the Parliamentary type was very slack in his resistance to the Tory supremacy in these days; and in spite of the brags of the Gladstonian press, it must be admitted that this is true, after making all the allowances that can be made for the apparently brisk conflict over Irish matters: for that conflict is really in the hands of the Irish themselves; Mr. Parnell's causing the Irish vote to be cast in favour of the Tories in 1885 forced Mr. Gladstone's hand. Up to that time the Liberals had reckoned on the general support of the Irish Parliamentary Party, but after it they understood that that support must be bought by the yielding to Irish demands; that is in the main the plain story of the Gladstonian conversion. And the terms of the bargain so made have to be kept, as the Irish are at hand to enforce them, and Mr. Gladstone himself as usual puts considerable energy into the work which lies ready to his hand. Hence the appearance of a stout battle between the Ins and Outs in Parliament, which, however, as has often been said, is by no means to the taste of the greater part of the Liberal Gladstonites. They will be heartily glad when it is over, especially if, as is probable, and as Lord Randolph Churchill's conduct the other night indicated, it ends in a compromise.

But the Irish matters shelved for a time and the Liberals get free from their bargain, what is to follow as the immediate future of that respectable party? Who can answer that question that believes in the continued existence of a Liberal party in Great Britain? Mr. Gladstone has in all probability taken his last forward step in politics; and Mr. John Morley, who is considered (Lord help us!) to be the leader of the advanced (respectable) party, has already pretty much declared himself for the sign-post of democracy as it was understood twenty years ago. In fact the future, or indeed the present, of the Liberal party is now prefigured by those uninteresting sea-shores on the south coast of England, where the land having grown wheat and marigold and turnips, and having fallen into inferior pasture, is at last nothing but a flat waste of sand with a few tufts of useless herbs dotted here and there upon it, and so goes dwindling down into the sea in an undramatic inglorious fashion. Having performed mechanically the part that has been forced upon it in the Irish struggle, there is an end of it in mere barren officialism and the hopes of another term or two of do-nothing government. The great obstructionist party will swallow it up, regretted by no one.

Meantime, what about the few Radicals who at present hang on to it, and can hardly be called a party, since so many of them have gone through the same proceedings with the Liberals as the latter have done with the Tories, and been swallowed up by them? Well, the few that can still be called Radicals—that is, men who really wish to move

forward if they only knew how—are being paralysed by the approaching death of the Liberal party, the tail of which they have hitherto formed. Their hope in that direction has vanished, and their occupation has gone with it; what have they to turn towards? Whether they are conscious of it or not, they are waiting for Socialism to take up the work of progress. They are not convinced Socialists; many of them probably have never taken the trouble to understand what Socialism means; but they are nevertheless waiting for its approach, and that is the reason why they are so unenergetic in the face of the Tory reaction, which reaction—a real thing enough—means the absorption of the Liberals into the party of obstruction: an obstruction which is modern and suitable to its date, and therefore does not put persons of cultivation and intellect, “superior persons,” to shame; which differs by the compulsion of surrounding conditions from the old compulsion, but not at all in spirit.

Well, these Radicals turned languid in action because of the circumstances in which they find themselves, are very decidedly waiting: they are still Radicals, and in theory can see no further than the old shibboleths; but they instinctively know that in practice all that is no longer of any use, and they are consequently expecting orders from Socialism. Their position is, that they wish to go on being Radicals, and to do Socialist work if they can only find out what is, without declaring for Socialism.

In short, the old democracy, whose watchword is the fullest liberty of “free contract,” is finding out that before its theory could be worked out to the utmost, Socialism has come upon it and thrown it out of date, although the obstructionists of the old type are still making a show of attacking it, as if it were yet alive. Radicalism proper can live no longer than the life of Toryism proper; when the obstructionists cease to attack “the freedom of contract,” or rather when they make it their own standing-ground, as they are now doing, the Radical loses his reason for existence—his function is at end.

The obstructionists or Tories represent personal and political slavery, which was once, but a very long time ago, a necessity for progress; the Radicals represent the economical slavery of a class, joined to political freedom, which was also once a necessity for progress, but not so long ago; the Socialists represent progress itself with no temporary veil distorting its features.

WILLIAM MORRIS.

THE BLARSTED FURRINERS.

(Concluded from p. 131.)

It is an almost laughable proposition to suggest that a system which is based upon competition should be protected in some particular instance from competition, and is moreover a fine comment upon the consistency of the preachers of *laissez-faire*. As I write I have before me a work, ‘Problems of a Great City,’ written I should say, after long perusal, to save the skins of the “classes” by the before-mentioned Arnold White; and as a desperate defendant once saved his case by simply asking the judge to “look, only look” at the plaintiff’s witnesses, so I will ask the readers to study the book of the pseudo working-man’s friend. After deploring the fecundity of the “lower orders,” especially criminals, he hungers for the surgical operation which shall effectually sterilise those whom he elects to judge “unfit.” In eastern countries this matter could be discussed with greater ease, he says; English convention forbids the discussion of detail, which would otherwise be desirable; but a Parliamentary vote to meet the cost of shutting up for life confirmed criminals, cannot bring a blush to any cheek.

This scheme of life-long segregation is hideously cruel. Society is to hide away its victims in penal establishments where the bodily torture of the past is replaced by slow refined cruelty which presents us ever and anon with the corpse of a starved ill-treated prisoner. The criminal of the lower class is sinned against by Society. Born into evil surroundings and a system under which it is impossible for all to work honestly, he is punished by Society for the crime which Society has itself created.

A consensus of opinion could be quoted, even Arnold White against himself, to show that the lower class criminal is a product of the horrible conditions, for which the higher criminals, on whose behalf Arnold White holds a brief, are responsible.

In dealing with the question of the unemployed he says, “Fed and clothed into fitness and decency they quickly become as other men are.” The Socialist holds the same concerning the criminal. Spread the people over the land, clear your cities and towns of the slums and stews, erect the labourer from being a wage-slave into a member of a Co-operative Commonwealth, and your paltering rubbish about segregation and castration will read as nonsense. Crime is purely relative. At present the evictors of Glenbeigh and depleters of Skye claim the right to punish the foreign sweater and native pickpocket.

Perchance a Social Revolution may soon clear the atmosphere, and change the aspect of affairs. A different jury would then be installed before which the land robbers and doctrinaires of wholesale expatriation and sterilisation of the unfit would be arraigned, and what they would be “fit” for would constitute, I think, one of the most difficult ‘Problems of a Great City.’

Both the book and this criticism of it were written before the institution of the House of Lord’s Committee anent the sweating and foreign pauper business, and therefore this quotation from page 9 is instructive: “Religion has become a thing of words and buildings. Religion endowed so that the carriage of the cross is oft-times the

means to win high place and high comfort, has converted the Narrow Way into a path to the House of Lords as well as to the Place of a Skull. Were Christ the teacher to return to London (*sic*), how long would he remain aloof from an attack on the ‘Problems of a Great City?’ and may I as a Socialist be allowed to conjecture what he would say to Arnold White and his book, wherein cant about the “sweet lines of the Sermon on the Mount” is jostled with suggestions for the sterilisation, segregation, and expatriation of the unfortunate victims of land robbers and capitalists. On page 204, he says a great impulse would be given to the sterilization of the unfit if the idle man were allowed to die unpitied in the street, which seeing that thousands cannot get employment is an eminently humane utterance; and he further quotes the Old Book, “If a man will not work neither shall he eat.” Our author would let poor idle men starve to death, but if the oft-mentioned Christ were to return and visit the House of Lords, he would go on a totally different errand for which Arnold White betakes himself before its “select” committee. Armed with the cords he used to drive the thieves from the Temple, he would apply the scriptural injunction to the idle rich thieves there assembled. He might with justice accuse the land-robbers, evictors, and rent-mongers with driving a disinherited people to herd in the cities and towns, and being native spoliators beside whom the sweater is an angel in comparison.

Let it be remembered that the petty depredaters, by accentuating social misery, lay the seeds of social revolt and jeopardise the greater swindlers. They are like the clumsy burglar whose noisy movements endangers the gang; and hence the land-thieves will adjudicate upon the case of the labour-thief, and if necessary cast him over as a Jonah.

The cry against the foreigner serves to hide the doings of men who are depleting the fields of these islands of population, and seeking to expatriate them to South Africa. They desire to colonise the lands of the despoiled savage with the despoiled whites. A consistent line of conduct, truly, for those who cry out against foreign immigration here! Read in this light, their eulogies of those Christian extirpators of blackmen, Warren, Gordon, and Stanley, as their patron saints, are intelligible enough.

In this criticism I have shown that the enemy of the foreign immigrant is not consequently the friend of the native poor. If by penuriousness or fraud the once pauper immigrant becomes affluent, he would secure the fulsome flattery of those who abuse him now. His foreign blood would not bar him from even the mayoralty of London. If a Rothschild, a Bleichroder, a Goschen, or a Disraeli, he can govern the lives and destinies of myriads of human beings by the power of purse, which knows no country.

The foreign sweater, oft-times sweated himself, simply takes advantage of commercial conditions as he finds them. With a commercial system which is nothing if not international, and her soldiers forcing her goods at the point of the bayonet into fresh markets, England’s outcry against foreign competition is absurd. If she had sought the happiness of her people instead of the world’s market, and colonised her own fields instead of strange lands, she would not now be afflicted with the same inconvenience which beset Rome before its downfall.

F. KITZ.

REVOLUTIONARY CALENDAR.

WEEK ENDING MAY 12, 1888.

6	Sun.	1862. H. D. Thoreau died. 1867. Reform Demonstration in Hyde Park. 1882. Phoenix Park murder.
7	Mon.	1716. Septennial Bill passed.
8	Tues.	1873. J. S. Mill died.
9	Wed.	1800. John Brown (of Harper’s Ferry) born.
10	Thur.	1857. Indian Mutiny broke out. 1831. Bradlaugh ejected from House of Commons.
11	Fri.	1796. R. T. Crossfield tried for treason. 1860. Landing of the Thousand at Marsala. 1866. Commercial Crisis and Stoppage of Banks. 1878. Hodel’s attempt upon the Emperor William.
12	Sat.	1539. Suppression of Monasteries in England. 1641. Strafford beheaded.

Death of Thoreau.—Henry David Thoreau, or Thoreau of Walden, author of ‘Walden, a week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers.’ This man, lecturer, poet, philosopher, naturalist, land surveyor, pencil-maker, whitewasher; and, more than all, Bohemian and gipsy vagabond, in my humble opinion is a man eminently worthy of study by Socialists. In the study it seems exceedingly possible to meet with that magic flux which shall render possible a junction of those great dissimilars, the perfection of Socialism and perfect Individualism. Henry David Thoreau was a descendant of John Thoreau, a native of St. Heliers, Jersey, who about 1773, left the Channel Island and sailed for New England. It was in the village of Concord, Mass., about twenty miles north-west from what the natives call the “Hub of the Universe,” Boston, in a district allowed by all who have described it to be one of the best representatives of old-time beauty possessed by that painfully brand-new country, on July 12, 1817, that Henry saw light. His father, who had once possessed a small estate, was earning a living at pencil-making, a lucrative business in those days. The home of the Thoreau’s was well known to Abolitionists and fugitive slaves, a sure sign that both mother and father were of no common stamp, for to be the friend of the slave was to be a sure mark for insult and often outrage. Attended school and looked after the cows, studied Greek rather closely, and at age of sixteen went to Harvard College and graduated. The woods and the fields were his favourite studies; about the age of twenty he collected for Agassiz the naturalist. He gave his first lecture when only twenty; though for twenty years Thoreau devoted himself to authorship, his income was too scanty to provide for the wants even of one of such austere parsimoniousness and simplicity of living as Thoreau, who adopted poverty like a piece of business. “For more than five years I maintained myself solely by the labour of my hands, and I found that by working about six weeks in a year I could meet all the expenses of living. The