

THE COMMONWEAL

The Official Journal of the SOCIALIST LEAGUE.

VOL. 4.—No. 146.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 27, 1888.

WEEKLY; ONE PENNY.

CHICAGO MARTYRS & BLOODY SUNDAY.

"Our silence will be more powerful than our speech."

Mrs. PARSONS has accepted the invitation of the Commemoration Committee to speak at the various meetings to be held in London and the provinces next November.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 10,

A Meat Tea will be provided at St. Paul's Café, St. Paul's Churchyard, E.C., at 7 p.m. Tickets 1s. 6d. each. Tickets will be issued at 6d. each for those who cannot attend tea, in order to hear an address to Mrs. Parsons and her reply.

CUNNINGHAME GRAHAM, M.P., in the Chair.

Songs will be sung during the evening.

Arrangements have already been made to hold meetings on

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 11, at 11.30 a.m., in
REGENT'S PARK.

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 11, at 3.30 p.m., in
HYDE PARK.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 12, at 7.30 p.m., in
STORE STREET HALL.

The Chair will be taken by WILLIAM MORRIS.

Speakers:—P. Kropotkin, F. Kitz, J. Blackwell, Trunk, Dr. Merlino, Cunninghame Graham, and others, whose names will be announced next week. The whole of the Trafalgar Square prisoners released will be present at this meeting. Mrs. PARSONS will speak at Wornum Hall and Hyde Park, and probably Victoria Park.

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 18, at 3 p.m., in
VICTORIA PARK.

The following Resolutions will be moved at the meetings:—

FIRST RESOLUTION.

"That this meeting commemorates the legal murder of five men which took place on November 11th, 1887 (Parsons, Spies, Fischer, Engels, and Lingg), and the cruel imprisonment of three others (Fielden, Schwab, and Neebe) by the Government of the State of Illinois for the crime of supporting workmen in a labour struggle against their masters, and the further crime of maintaining the rights of free speech, and emphatically denounces the interference with these rights in all capitalist countries; an interference which is the natural result of a so-called Society founded on the robbery of labour."

SECOND RESOLUTION.

"That this meeting also denounces the attack on Free Speech made in London on November 13th, 1887, during which three men were killed and many sent to prison after a mere mockery of trial, and it calls for the immediate release of Harrison, condemned to five years penal servitude for being present at a political meeting which was ferociously attacked by the police."

Meantime, funds are urgently needed, and should be sent to Joseph Lane, Treasurer, at the office of the Socialist League, 13, Farringdon Road, E.C. Any information can be had by communicating with Secretary of the Commemoration Committee.

W. B. PARKER, Secretary.

NOTES ON NEWS.

So we are on the verge of the sea of quibble and evasion and smothering of truth, which is called a political *cause célèbre*. Fine times for the daily press indeed, certain copy, increased sale, and other soothing advantages for "able editors"! Fine times also for the lawyers engaged on both sides! Though that is not much, for the sun does generally shine pretty bright on their side of the hedge, however cold the weather is for others. But as to supposing that anything else will come out of it, that is all nonsense. Arrangements will be made for the *Times* to fall soft; opportunities will be given to respectable Home Rule politicians to declare their unalterable fidelity to the rights of property and law-'n'-order, and we shall then pass to the order of the day.

Mr. Cunninghame Graham's letter to the *Pall Mall*, which had been in ecstasies at the prospect of something decisive coming out of this Great Evasion, was sensible and to the point. It is absolutely true, as he says, "that the majority of the Liberal electors care not one farthing whether Mr. Parnell wrote or instigated the letters." They are now Home Rulers, just as their opponents are Coercionists, whatever Parnell has done or has not done. And really when the *Pall Mall* is driven to say "that the cause of Home Rule will be decided by the judge's decision" in this Great Evasion Case, it surely wants pulling up.

The fact is that Parliament and the Platform having been talked out on the very simple question of Home Rule for Ireland, the quarrel has to be carried on constitutionally by some other means, and the time "put in" till the blessings of a General Election fall upon us. What better means for procrastination could be found than that sire and dam of procrastination, the Law Courts?

General Gordon's statue has been unveiled with very decidedly "maimed rites," and there stands the Christian hero in all the dignity of modern realistic sculpture. Would not this be an opportunity for the revival of the plan for Hudson's Statue, which long ago succumbed to Carlyle's ponderous hammer-strokes of scorn? He might be taken, I mean, as the type of successful commerce; might be represented standing behind the soldier of Christian Commerce and pushing him on to—I was going to say victory; but that I admit is inappropriate—let us say pushing him on to thrusting his head into the hornet's nest for the advantage of "progress" in Africa.

The claims of General Gordon, apart from his private character, to the worship of the centre of the empire of commerce are these: He served as a soldier of fortune in China, where he helped to put down what could scarcely be otherwise than a righteous rebellion against Chinese bureaucracy. He then "got religion," and became that most dangerous tool of capitalistic oppression, the "God-fearing soldier"; in that capacity he allowed himself to be used to drive the wedge of profit-mongering into barbarous Africa, and was quite prepared to do all that a man must do in such a service if he is to earn the name of a good servant. As, for instance, his orders for the cutting down of the fruit-trees of the people whom he had come amongst as a benefactor. He might have remembered that the "barbarous" Arab Calif Omar (who surely was as clear of his message from God as any modern "Christian soldier" could be), in his instructions to his warriors, expressly forbade them the wanton damaging of the fertility of the earth and the cutting down of fruit-trees on any pretence.

The *Pall Mall* says that "Gordon's whole soul would have risen in revolt" against Sir C. Warren's proceedings last year. Would it? That is a very rash assumption. I cannot help thinking that if he had any fault to find with his companion "Christian soldier," it would have been that he did not repress "popular excesses" in a sharper way than he actually did. Studying Gordon's face by photograph and also by Mr. Thorneycroft's very good portrait of him, I see in it the modern soldier—nothing more; and his actions tell us whose soldier he was—the piratical capitalist's soldier. The centre of the accursed capitalism may well worship him, and say to others: "Go thou and do likewise!"

Meantime a certain Mr. Manning has been holding up to our example the much-abused Portuguese, who have been making a railway from Loanda to Ambaca (distance 225 miles, but called part of a very ambitious scheme). Mr. Manning is of opinion that this will do more to open up and civilise the country than formal missionary enterprises; though considering what missionary work is going on in other parts of Africa, and that the rifle is the principal tool used in it, that seems doubtful.

The *modus operandi* of the capitalists thus engaged in benefitting humanity is described with a *naïf* simplicity which leaves nothing to be asked for. The Portuguese Government have guaranteed 6 per cent. to the shareholders during construction for five years. The contract was let to a Portuguese contractor, who in the first year of the work sublet it to an American—who sublet portions of it to other contractors—some of these again sublet smaller portions to small contractors. These men engaged their own labourers, *did the work* (italics mine), and received a lump sum on the completion of the work to the satisfaction of the engineer of the chief contractor.

Whether the labourers who did the work for the “small contractors” who *did the work*, were satisfied is another matter. It seems that the chief difficulty is scarcity of labour. “So long as the native can get enough to live on by cultivation or trade he will not do manual work”—for other people. Unreasonable black dog!

Though the Japanese have been for long running after the foul skirts of our modern civilisation, and doing their best to lay hold of the filthy thing, they have not come up to us in the matter of prisons: not being afraid apparently of the competition of prison labour with “free” labour, and not being under the spell of the fiendish stupidity of “philanthropy,” which forces us to torture our prisoners by every respectable means (*i.e.*, any means which doesn't make blood flow and bones break), they set their prisoners to doing work which pleases and amuses them, and even teach them to do interesting work if they are capable of it. Only 29 out of 2,000 men in the prison visited by the *Pall Mall* Commissioner were set to the lowest work of breaking stones, and a great many were producing works of art. The Japanese after all have much to learn in the ways of civilisation. May they be long about it!

It is asserted by those who are proposing the great coal trust—that is to say, a monopoly which will have the whole public in its power—that its effect will not be to raise the price of coal. This is rather a big pill to swallow; for how is the greed of the monopolists to be controlled? But the very fact that such an assertion can be made shows once more how the confidence in limitless competition is being shaken: for the contention is that the entire margin of profit would come out of the avoidance of waste, and that that waste is caused by the hurry of *reckless competition*.

The following quotation, however, does not quite bear out the sanguine anticipations of the defender of the attempt to form a coal-trust: “The oil trade in this country [America] is [owing to the “trust”] in a more *satisfactory condition* than it has been in for some years. *Prices are higher*,” etc. In point of fact the “more satisfactory condition” almost always does mean higher prices, and it is to this that all these combinations of capitalists are directed. They do not trouble their heads about anything else; for business men, like politicians, take care not to forecast matters for more than six months or so ahead—if even that.

W. M.

LABOUR'S TRIANGULAR PROBLEM;

OR, MEN VERSUS MACHINES.

(Concluded from p. 330.)

ALL these companies are great users of machinery, are constantly trying to get improved machinery, so as to dispense with manual labour. A great monopoly in any trade means, therefore, monopolist control of all employed in making machinery to be used in that particular trade. A sole controlling monopoly in any trade can afford to give the very highest premium conceivable for any machine needful to the purposes of the monopoly, or can starve the machine-builders into accepting the very lowest subsistence wages; more than that, having at last made the monopoly complete, can afford any price it likes to buy up and finally crush out any machine or method not desired to be put into use. Improved methods and machines have repeatedly been bought up by established manufacturers, for the sole purpose of *not* being used. Under the trust system this can be carried to any extent desired by the monopolists, for they can recoup by famine prices any sum which they expend to maintain their sole control.

Our national life for years past has been depending on the improvements in and development of the trade in machinery, and yet there can be named no particular interest which could not in two years from now be controlled by ten or a dozen English or American capitalists. Take our railway interest; it represents a nominal investment of some eight hundred millions, a real value of less than four hundred millions; it is not a very extravagant idea, seeing what has been done in America, to conceive of our whole railway system managed by a board of millionaires owning the whole controlling power. The very first result of

this would be the equalisation of all fares, and the throwing out of employ of thousands of booking and checking clerks; for just as we to-day buy toffee and almond rock, cigarettes, cigars, matches, post-cards, and pocket-books in every railway station, so we should then help ourselves to our railway ticket from an automatic. This may seem to some as mere joking, but it is meant in sober seriousness, and in face of the developments in machines during the last thirty years, is not to be lightly set aside. How many “try-your-weight” boys has the automatic machine put out of a job during the last two years? and every day brings forth some new supply box; and the apprentice of Old London who stood outside his master's shop crying “What d'ye lack?” to-day appears in an automatic machine screwed to the door-step or window-frame.

Every day produces some fresh and astounding development in machinery. Even while writing, there arrives some notes on a new method of making sugar by electricity, which if true will totally upset the whole labours and negotiations of some of the 'cutest business men and politicians of the day, who have for months past been dealing with the sugar bounty question, and who, having made careful arrangements to spoil the public, find themselves outdone by a totally unexpected development in manufacture. And so the game goes on—more and more spoil to the spoiler, more and more of suffering to the mass, until, as Ruskin puts it—

“Day after day your souls will become more mechanical, more servile: also you will go on multiplying, wanting more food, and more; you will have to sell cheaper and cheaper, work longer and longer, to buy your food. At last, do what you can, you can make no more, or the people who have the corn will not want any more; and your increasing population will necessarily come to a quite imperative stop—by starvation, preceded necessarily by revolution and massacre.” (“Fors” 44, 172.)

Daily more money spent to manufacture idle men, despite the fact it is “mere insane waste to dig coal for our force while the vital force is unused; and not only unused, but, in being so, corrupting and polluting itself. We waste our coal and spoil our humanity at one and the same instant”; and let this be borne in mind, “Your idle people, as they are now, are not merely waste coal beds. They are explosive coal beds, which you pay a high annual rent for.”¹

Just a short while longer and these increasing beds of explosives will go off, and the explosion will be such as will put even Sho-Bandai-San to shame as puny; it will not be the mere question of moving a mountain and leaving a wilderness of mud, it will be as complete as that of the American miner, who, reporting a mishap with some new blasting compound, said when the smoke was gone there wasn't even a hole left. A million of starving people, with another million on the verge of starvation, represent a potential of destructive force to measure which no dynamometer has yet been made, but which will, if suddenly liberated, assuredly and absolutely destroy every vestige of so-called nineteenth century civilisation; will destroy it more completely than time has destroyed the traces of human society of Nineveh, Babylon, Greece and Rome, or even of Mexico.

For the especial benefit of some critics, perhaps it may be well to say in conclusion that no word here placed is to be taken as against machinery and improvements; rather I believe in more and more. I rather like to run back over the history of machinery, the romance of improved methods, and, on the data of what has been done, speculate on what is possible and probable in the future. Although I fail to see what use some of the “saved time” will be after it is saved, yet I would give free rein to every one desired to make time-saving improvements. Ruskin analyses this detail in his ‘Fors.’ You may keep on making “time-savers” till there is absolutely nothing to do but to make a machine to use up the spare time; but to that the only answer is, if the human mind can occupy itself only in invention of machinery, why let it, and be hanged to it. The only thing to be claimed is the most perfect freedom for every individual to do the same; total denial of the claim that any small section of society shall dominate and exploit the great mass by monopolising the accumulated results of the whole course of time.

And so I pass on, dreaming of and working to realise the dream of the Chartist prison poet:

“Mind writ in every face; books million-fold
Multiplied; galleries with breath-shapes hung
Raffaello might worship, or Apelles old;
Groups from great Shakspeare's world or Chaucer's song
In bronzed or marble life, seeming upsprung
From some new Phidian realm of earth beneath
To gem the populous squares; music's full tongue
Telling to millions what Mozart in death
Enraptured heard, but could not the boon-sounds bequeath;

And all for ALL! Rank, class, distinction, badge
For ever gone! Labour by Science made
Brief recreation—not by Privilege
Avoided, nor its thrift in name of Trade
Or Commerce filched. To give a brother's aid
To brethren, and enlarge the general bliss
From knowledge, virtue, health, beyond parade
Of pomp or gold—affording joy. I wis,
When Truth doth reign, earth shall be such a Paradise!”

(*Purgatory of Suicides*, Book viii.)

THOS. SHORE, jun.

¹ “We can never control the working-man until he eats up to-day what he earns to-morrow.”—*Congressman Scott*.

¹ Ruskin: ‘Queen of the Air.’