

THE COMMONWEAL

The Official Journal of the SOCIALIST LEAGUE.

VOL. 4.—No. 140.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 1888.

WEEKLY; ONE PENNY.

NOTES ON NEWS.

BARON BRAMWELL, the champion of the Liberty and Property Defence League, it seems, defends the present system of robbery on the grounds that the chief business of any community is to increase its "pile" at the expense apparently of every other consideration; a theory which would lead to some curious consequences if acted up to without remorse or compromise, but which no doubt is a convenient one to those who may happen to be on the right side of the hedge—rich men that is.

The others, those who are not rich, *i.e.*, the vast majority of the population will hardly, if they think about it, agree with this theory of "the whole duty of man." They will be apt to say, "However the 'pile' of the whole country increases, though we are richer per head than other countries, though we are so much richer as a country than we were 500 years ago, yet this increase of the 'pile' of the country has done us no good, we are just what we always were, labouring men, without property and without hope."

To unprejudiced people who can use their senses, it is clear that life in a poor country is much more happy for a poor person than in a rich one; *e.g.*, the peasants of Norway and of Greece are far better off than those of England or France; better off in all ways, but especially in self-respect, simply because class society has not reached the same pitch of perfection as with us. I remember when I was in Iceland, whose poverty is deeper than most English people could conceive of, being much struck with this. In conversation with my guide, an intelligent and well-read man, I could not make him so much as understand the difference of classes in civilisation; and I say without hesitation that in that wretchedly poor country the people generally are happy, because they have not a trace of the degradation which our inequalities force upon the poor of a rich country.

My Lord Bramwell, the truth is that no one in a poor country is rich enough to own slaves; and you are such a fool as to think that the ownership of slaves is necessary to the happiness, dignity, and elevation of character of a civilised man. Once more, what do the slaves think about it?
W. M.

By copies of the *North British Daily Mail* and *Glasgow Daily Mail* received from a correspondent, I see that there is still a rather warm controversy going on over the visit of the French workmen delegates to Glasgow, and their protest as to the loyal toasts. From this it appears that there was an agreement between the givers of the spread and the workmen that neither the Queen or the President should be toasted, and that the loyal humbugs broke the agreement, and tried to sneak through their little bit of kow-towing before they could be stopped; whereupon the protest. Several other things have come out as to the way the spread was prepared, and the "anything-good-enough-for-workmen" spirit displayed, and have aroused much feeling among the working-classes of the city. Oh, that our masters would always thus misbehave!
S.

The Small Farm and Labourers' Land Company has recently issued its report for the year ending Lady Day, 1888. This company has been in working for about three years. Its published purpose was to encourage a desire for the acquisition of land among the labouring classes. The *Financial News* of 29th ult., in noticing the balance-sheet, gives great praise for the exceedingly careful way the company is managed. The praise may be deserved as to cost of management, but when the *News* goes on to say that the result of the years' work is a proof of the bad times from which the landed interest is suffering, it is time to protest.

Although it may seem contradictory, the report has no bearing on the question. The Small Farms question, the Bad Times question, and the Landed Interest, although factors of one great sum are factors that have no common denominator, most certainly the company in question is not the common denominator. This can be seen from a few of the figures given. For 11½ acres and cottage in Cambs, the

lucky (?) tenant proprietor pays just £90 (!) per acre; or, throwing off £200 which would build a really good house, £72 per acre for the land only. For 150 acres near Chippenham, Lord Lansdown has agreed to take £4,500, *i.e.*, £30 per acre. At these prices whoever may suffer, it will certainly *not* be the landed interest.

It is reported that Mr. Crocker, a Californian millionaire, just before his death recently, said as the result of a tour in Europe, that he would not give twenty years' purchase for any piece of property in the civilised world. A number of landowners are coming to the same notion and the Small Farms and Allotments dodge, simply means a process of unloading land in favour of something more portable. Lord Wantage gained great kudos for his philanthropy a year or two back in getting rid of some land which is out of the way of any possible market or means of transport. Added to the excess rents which are being charged in some parts, the Small Farms movement is hampered by the legal complication which is being wound about the attempt to put labourers back on the land. Long, wordy, technical agreements, and excessive charges and stamps, and then the cry is "Farming don't pay!"

The *Pall Mall Gazette* is on the whoop again about Africa, and in the course of an article on the 31st made a suggestion which for unadulterated damn wickedness, even the *Pall Mall* hasn't equalled for some time. It suggests that the difficulty about Sir Charles Warren should be solved by promoting him to the position of Warden of the Marches of the Upper Zambesi. This is how the *Pall Mall* gives itself away every now and again, and it can only be explained by the American moralist, "That human nature's a strange onery sort of a cuss." If the column and a-half on the front page of the *Pall Mall* is always done by the same lump of human nature the moralist is proved right.

There should be no difficulty about what to do with Warren. In a state with any decent approach to even-handed justice there would be no difficulty; he would simply be put upon trial for the murder of the men Linnell, Curwen, and Harrison, and the question of his promotion could be safely left to the jury—with the sure and certain hope of a speedy ascension. Remembering the instances in history where long delayed justice has at length caught bigger criminals than even Warren and Balfour, there is some ground for hope yet.

When, however, instead of this it is coolly suggested that this bludgeoning brute shall be transplanted to Africa, so that, unchecked by even a *Pall Mall Gazette* publicity, he can develop his brutal tastes by bludgeoning the unhappy African—for his ultimate good of course, it is time to kick out. "The treasures of the land of Ophir" seem to have entered into the dreams of the *Pall Mall* "forwardist," and that these "treasures" should "pass to other owners" fairly puts him on his ear; to justify his lust after these treasures, of course the usual bosh is trotted out about "our allies and protégés being destroyed by confidence in our word." Allies and protégés to the infernal gods. Two or three rum-dealing missionaries, a magnified "drummer"—*i.e.*, commercial traveller—subsidised by a few capitalists "to explore in the interests of science," in reality to find new areas for exploitation, and there is the whole secret of our whole foreign "forward" policy; there is the whole secret of the never-ending "capitalist's wars," of which Ruskin has written in such burning scorn.

This game seemed all right when England was the only country playing at it; but now when Germany, France, Italy, and Belgium, "even little Belgium," want to take a hand in the rubber, the position is quite different. Rival traders to outpace one another stir up dissension among rival tribes of natives so as to hamper, and if possible exterminate the rival expedition. The local frictions are sent home to the respective Governments, and a wrangle between two Resident Agents or Consuls becomes a national quarrel, as between France and Italy at the present moment; as has been between England and the Dutch, England and the French, the German, the Spaniard, the American; until to-day England is the Ishmael of the world, and the march of civilization is impeded by the ever-increasing load of cannon and ironclads.