

THE COMMONWEAL

The Official Journal of the
SOCIALIST LEAGUE.

Collection

HX
3
C 731
v. 4-5

VOL. 4.—No. 139.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 1888.

WEEKLY; ONE PENNY.

NOTES ON NEWS.

MR. BALFOUR has laid his hand on a new batch of Irish "obscure notabilities," and they will, of course, take their due share of **skill and oakum-picking**. In time to come, if there is a history published of the present time which has any truth in it, how the historian will jeer at these futile proceedings! Mr. Balfour's "plan of campaign" stamps him even among pedants as a helpless fool. What on earth does he think he will do to serve his cause by these prison batches? Two or three leaders sent to prison with much solemnity and show of judicial impartiality would have produced some effect perhaps,—and perhaps imprisoning twenty thousand Irishmen at once might have been a good stroke,—but to make the honour of imprisonment **easy** of attainment for the mere rank and file of the party, and yet not to make it so common as to deprive it of its honour, is surely the *ne plus ultra* of wooden stupidity.

The Liberal press and the Liberal meetings are still open-mouthed about the iniquity of treating political prisoners no better than "criminals," and we must agree once for all that political imprisonment should simply mean keeping troublesome people out of the way till such and such a crisis is over; and we agree to this on the grounds that it is of no use trying to "reform" a Nationalist or a Socialist; your problem with him is of the simplest. But here our agreement with our Liberal friends comes to an end; this has often been said in these columns, but one more word remains perhaps to be said. The clear insight that people are now getting into the fact that an English or Irish prison means *torture*, and the loud protest against the torture of political prisoners brings into clearer relief the distorted morality of decent modern society, which claims full permission to torture all prisoners who are non-political without questions asked.

The Caffre-queller, rider-down of unarmed and peaceable citizens, and "charming" lecturer on Jerusalem, our old acquaintance Sir Charles Warren, is beginning to get somewhat **be-mired**. His old supporter, the *Daily News*, has discovered that though he is endowed with all the public virtues which make a man a monumental hero, he is a military martinet and not fit for his place, and that **short** he had better go. It is not our business to crow over his *accidental* dismissal if he does go; the only triumph for us would be people coming to their senses, and dismissing him in disgrace as an organiser of rioters in the neighbourhood of Trafalgar Square—which is not likely to happen. But if he is dismissed we shall **have to say** that the bourgeois have not treated their champion well, **but shabbily**.

W. M.

The *Pall Mall Gazette*, however, has found a **place for him**. "In my Fathers house are many mansions." Eastern Africa just now affords an opening, it thinks; such a master swash-buckler as the present guardian of the peace of London is perhaps rather thrown away in the present lull of English politics, and Ireland is at present tolerably well manned with that kind of humanitarian.

The results of Cardinal Lavigerie's preachments would seem to be already bearing fruit outside his eminence's own fold; since the English and Scotch missionaries on Lake Nyassa are endeavouring to stir up an Arab war with the intention of **keeping the sore open** till a new war can be stirred up, which will have as its ultimate aim the "opening up" of the whole Central African region and the reduction of the native races under the grinding and ceaseless despotism of capitalism, in place of the sharp but short sufferings of the slave-hunt.

For it is acknowledged by the most enthusiastic admirers of the present crusade, as evidenced by an article from this point of view in the *Daily Chronicle* (of August 31st), in which the writer significantly enough admits that the enslaved African once settled down to his new condition, sings as joyously and appears to enjoy life as much as when tilling his own field in freedom.

Bad as all slavery is, it is well known that under Islam its evils are minimised. The Mussulman slave is in a much better condition than the "free" fellah of Egypt, not to mention his "free" brother, working his way toilsomely towards the workhouse in the English fields, or indulging in all the refinements and pleasures afforded to him by the South Lancashire factory and its surroundings.

We cannot too often impress on our readers that this sham philanthropic business is but a matter of "two of a trade" finding the street too narrow for them. Propertyless labourers are a necessity for the English capitalist, and if he can help it he will not allow the Arab exploiter to use them up. They *must* be thrown into the labour world-market. It is again a case of the big capitalist working through others swallowing up the small working on his own account. Slave hunts are bad, monstrous and cruel; but once more the new crusade aims at transforming the local slave-hunts on a small scale into a gigantic slave-hunt in the interests of embarrassed capitalism. Our speakers and lecturers should understand this question so that they may be able to deal with the conventional prejudice which glorifies the noble deeds of the pioneers of "civilization." E. B. B.

The discovery that our Secularist friends have treated Mr. Bradlaugh shabbily is surely of the nature of the (non-existent) enormous gooseberry, and Mr. Bradlaugh himself disposed of it speedily. Meantime a person with any sense of humour cannot help being somewhat tickled by the spectacle of the enthusiasm of "the Respectables" for the man they once treated as an outcast such a very little while ago. It would be unfair to twit Mr. Bradlaugh with this sudden conversion, for he has never professed to be a Socialist; but it may have something to do with the discovery of respectability that an "Iconoclast" is not necessarily a Socialist, who is the true dangerous person.

Our comrades Cores and Reynolds are in prison for committing obstruction according to Nupkins. It ought to be quite obvious to those who, though not Socialists, are prepared to defend freedom of speech in England, that this is mere persecution for opinion. The "running in" of a Salvationist at the same time is a blind, and nothing more; the fact that the police witness at our comrades' trial was allowed unchecked to spin a long yarn as to what they said on the Church Plain, shows clearly enough that "obstruction" is a bare-faced excuse for attacking opinion. In my hearing at an obstruction case (at Marylebone I think) a London magistrate stopped a police witness who was running on in this way, and told him that the defendant was accused not of seditious speech, but of obstruction, and that what he said had nothing to do with the matter. W. M.

The Trades Union Congress has been opened, and is now in full blast. One of the great annual features is always the President's opening speech; a carefully prepared summary of the situation from a Trades Union viewpoint. This year though, Mr. Shaftoe is, so far as eloquence goes, by no means up to the level of his immediate predecessors. He is obviously abreast of the times. He and those who have spoken up to the present show plainly that our work is bearing fruit; almost all leading trade-unionists have got as far as the "labour electoral" kind of business; "they now cry aloud for a labour party," said Mr. Shaftoe. If they only get out of this stage as quickly as they have got into it, the "rev" is not far off.

The *Glasgow Herald*, of the 29th, reports a case heard at the Kilmarnock Sheriff Court the day before, in which a colliery manager was tried for a contravention of the Coal Mines Regulation Act. Through sheer neglect on his part a collier had been killed. Fined £5 or 21 days. On the same day, in the Glasgow Sheriff Court, a young woman was sentenced to 6 months' with hard labour, without option of fine, for resisting arrest when drunk and assaulting the police. Contrast the two cases, and the relative value assigned to a workman's life and the comfort of a moral-miracle, and you have the spirit of law'n-order well illustrated. S.