NOTES ON NEWS.

The Daily News, after a considerable amount of shilly-shally in the matter of the Maybrick case, has set itself to publishing a lot of meaningless polemics towards Mr. Matthews and the white-washing of Mr. Justice Stephen’s “conscientiousness.” This is all very well, and we don’t want to go into people’s motives. But some practical persons do; deeds that we do see must be taken as interpreting motives that we do not see; and the sentence on Harrison is the measure for us of Mr. Justice Stephen’s “carefulness and conscientiousness.” Nor can we forget that he was one of the first to set up, against the modern doctrine of the “superior passion,” and that in his published writings he has practically declared himself an enemy of the people. It is foolish to try to fight an army yielding that abuse of criminal procedure, the judge’s summing-up.

The dock labourers’ strike is one of the signs of the times, so fatal a strike of late, and at last of strikes among the unskilled. It must not be forgotten, however, that this kind of strike if successful (and, of course, every honest man must wish these poor fellows success) owes its success to the fact that public opinion is powerful in great centres of population, and that public opinion cannot help being on the side of these poor men, whose oppression touches even the sluggish imagination of the ordinary middle-class man. In places or under circumstances where overwhelming public opinion cannot be brought to bear, such strikes are doomed to certain failure; as, indeed, are most strikes.

Since then we are amidst such a period of strikes, and since what ever may be the effect of such strikes it is clear that they are inevitable, is it not the time to press on the workers general combination in this matter of the regulation of wages? Nay! Once more, are generally defeated now because the strikers are only acting in a scattered and skirmishing way, and can be crushed in detail. But suppose the inert and languishing body of trades’ unions revivified by a “plan of campaign,” which would mean the whole mass standing shoulder to shoulder in all strikes (and much increased in numbers as it certainly would be), surely that would be worth a heap of parliamentary legislation, and scores of paid and unpaid inspectors. Every strike, I say, should have the whole weight of the organised workers at the back of it.

Again, if we have found strikes useful towards the revolutionary propaganda, it has been because in three days of widespread Socialist agitation they tend to enlighten the workers on their real relation to the masters, and to show them that the position of antagonism between the two taken up at a time of strike, is not an accident to the system of capital and labour, but an essential of it; that the masters as a body, and whatever may be the good will of any individual, are at enmity to the men; and that that enmity must take an obvious and practical form as soon as any group of the workers attempt to be anything more than mere passive tools in the hands of their employers.

Now surely, if the labour struggle were carried on by the workers organised in combination, this fact of the necessary opposition of the interests of master and men would no longer be hidden from the workers. That would be understood that whatever gains the workers made could only be made at the expense of the masters, and when that was understood surely the step would not be long to the clear understanding that the masters are (at best) a mere useless clog on the workers, to be got rid of as soon as possible; and under these circumstances it would very soon be possible to get rid of them.

W. M.

Over the muzzling of dogs the first real conflict between the London County Council and the Government has arisen; so far it has gone entirely in favour of the Council. The Council was made responsible for superintending the execution of the dog-muzzling orders of the Government, and was requested to draw up regulations for the police to carry out. Not having any control over the police, they refused to do so; it was none of their business, they said, to “regulate” where they could not control. As representatives of the people of London they would assume no responsibility for expenses, the incurring of which they were not competent to check or over-see. Now the Government has appointed an officer to fulfil with, and enforce the edict “by and at the expense of the London County Council.” It remains to be seen what the latter will do, for the matter is by no means closed yet, as if they have the hearts of hares or half the presence of mind, they will continue on in whatever import until actual compulsion has wrung it out of them. Strength to their elbows and straightness to their backs!

A few nights ago, in the Pall Mall there appeared a column of extracts from the school-inspectors’ reports for 1888, which was well worth reading for side-lights on modern education. One examiner says of the pupils’ conduct: “This is a matter which can as well be done by the light of nature than of study”—a statement which in one sense of it is entirely borne out by a definition, quoted as bad, but which is assuredly a stroke of true inspiration—that of the candidate who described “reptiles” as “the money borrowed by a Government which it never means to repay.”

A shoemaker, last week, made of himself the thirtieth suicide from Clifton Suspension Bridge. Only twenty-four years old, he had found life a failure, and leaped into the unknown. The jury called it “temporary insanity. Plain people called it another name as they read of the wretched starving desperately tramping on a miserable search for the work that was not for him, and how the sordid horror of it all closed in upon his path, until there was but one outlet. A vulgar tragedy, attracting no particular attention amid the rush and hurry of great affairs, but yet one of those things that need every now and again to be forced into people’s notice as a sign of what goes on around them.

Where is the “platform” that will touch these things? Or the politician who will take them up? These, by the by, are the questions by the lie of the modern agitator who, if defeated, will be sold in the East-end for some money borrowed by a Government which it never means to repay.”

There is a long criticism in the shape of an article in the Daily News of last Saturday upon a recent novel, “Captain Lobo,” which is supposed to deal with the work of the Salvation Army in the East-end, and has for its hero a captain in that valuable force. But as the writer of the article explains, it deals more with the condition of the inmates in the East-end slums than the religious theories and practice put forth by the disciples of General Booth.

The writer appears to have, as far as an outsider can tell, some notion of the work of Salvationists, of which course, as the book is written by a pious person and issued by a religious publishing firm, it gives a highly idealised picture; but it must be admitted that he is rather out of it when he proceeds to make an attempt to deal with the Socialist agitation in the East-end.

The book is among other things, according to the writer of the article, “a cry against the Socialists for their petty jealousies and the emptiness of their agitation.” As to the emptiness of the agitation, we could agree with the author if it were true that Socialist speakers are in the habit of flattering their audiences with such words—words—have spoken to them in years, and have heard others speak, and have never yet heard any Socialist orator make use of such a word. No, no, Mr. Author, with very few exceptions, Socialist speakers endeavour, like other popular orators, to render their words in as plain and simple fashion as they can to an audience that needs simplicity.