

# THE COMMONWEAL

## The Official Journal of the SOCIALIST LEAGUE.

[REGISTERED FOR TRANSMISSION ABROAD.]

VOL. 5.—No. 189.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 24, 1889.

WEEKLY; ONE PENNY.

### 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 politeness 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" like some judicial persons do; deeds that we *do* see must be taken as interpreting motives that we *don't* 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 a-going the modern doctrine of the "superior pusson," and that in his published writings he has practically declared himself an enemy of the people. It is frightful to think of such a man wielding that abuse of our criminal procedure, the judge's summing-up.

The dock labourers' strike is one of the signs of the times, so fruitful of strikes 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 whatever 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? Strikes, 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' unionism revived 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 armies of paid and lukewarm 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 these 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 slowest capacity; and it 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 fulminate and enforce the necessary 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 as yet, but if they have the hearts of hares or half the prowess of guinea-pigs, they will resist payment of the obnoxious impost 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 pupil-teachers' examinations that "the papers seemed to be done more 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 "stocks" as being "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 starveling 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? They are exploited by charity-mongers and professional philanthropists, and by others passed by in stony silence. Without remedy, and without remorse, the politician puts them aside as insoluble mysteries, dispensations of providence, or what not. And the people, with a patience that endures all things, endures this also, though to some of us it seems as though it could not be for much longer. S.

There is a long criticism in the shape of an article in the *Daily News* of last Saturday upon a recent novel, 'Captain Lobe,' 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 inhabitants in the East-end slums than with 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 of 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 were in the habit of stunning their audiences with such words as "environment." I have spoken in the East-end for some 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.